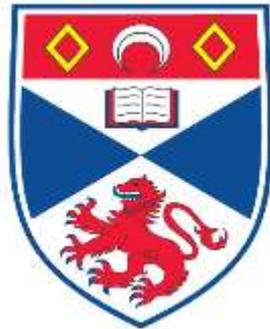


RELIGIOUS MEN AND LITERACY IN BERTI SOCIETY

Abdullahi Osman Eltom

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews**



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RELIGIOUS MEN AND LITERACY IN BERTI SOCIETY

By

ABDULLAHI OSMAN ELTOM

To my country, to the Berti and to my parents.

DECLARATION

I, Abdullahi Osman Eltom, hereby certify that this thesis which is approximately 100 000 words in length has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

date 5/11/1983 signature of candidate 

I was admitted as a research student under Ordinance No. 12 on the 5th of June 1980 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D in Social Anthropology on the same date; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St.Andrews between 1980 and 1983.

date 5/11/1983 signature of candidate 

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate to the degree of Ph.D. of the University of St. Andrews and that he is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

date 18 October 1983 signature of supervisor



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Abstract

The thesis examines the use of traditional literacy promulgated by the Koranic schools among the Berti in the Northern Darfur Province of the Republic of the Sudan. This literacy is restricted both in the scope of its use as well as in its social distribution, which remains limited to religious specialists - fakis. Instead of leading to a change in the traditional mode of thought, Berti literacy contributes considerably to maintaining the homeostatic tendency supposedly characteristic of oral societies.

Literacy plays an important role in the Berti religious life. The words of God contained in the Koran and other books widely used by the fakis are considered to be sacred, and an important aspect of Berti religion is their internalisation in the form of memorisation, drinking of erasure and the retaining of amulets (hijbat). The repetition of sacred words is used as a means of invoking God in communal rituals and the rites of passage. Literacy underlies book divination practised by the fakis and its literate origin is the ultimate sanction of sand divination which is primarily practised by the illiterate Berti.

In their use of the sacred words in healing, divination, communal rituals, rites of passage and the preparation of amulets and erasure, Berti fakis impose their own meaning on the Koranic text which differs considerably from its theological meaning.

The thesis includes translation and analysis of over 50 original texts pertaining to erasure writing, amulets, book divination and communal rituals. Photocopies of 25 original amulets are presented in the thesis and the majority of them are translated and commented upon.

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this thesis was carried out in the Sudan from June 1980 to June 1981 and was funded by the University of Gezira, whose financial as well as moral support are gratefully acknowledged. My thanks are also due to various governmental officials in Darfur province for their help with transport and to the staff of various clinics in the Berti area for allowing me access to their documents.

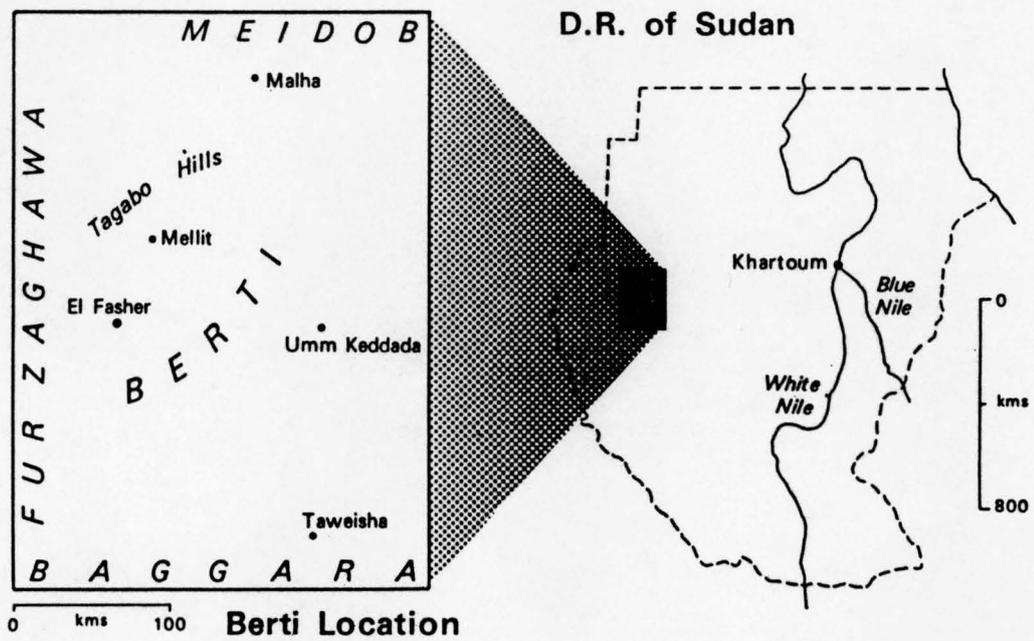
The Berti showed great tolerance towards my inquisitiveness and overwhelmed me with their generosity and friendship. They are too numerous to express my debts of gratitude to them individually and I can only pledge to dedicate myself to joining them in their struggle for advancement.

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor, Dr Holy, and his wife Alice, for their warm friendship and hospitality. My supervisor's contribution to the completion of this thesis is incalculable. He has not only inspired my work in a profound way but has initiated me into anthropology as a career.

I owe a debt to Catherine Cobham for correcting my English. When doing so, she has aptly interpreted numerous Berti concepts which are alien to English thought and which would otherwise remain obscure. Her dedication and deep knowledge of Arab-Islamic culture were an invaluable encouragement to me.

Chapters 2 and 6 of the thesis were read at the weekly Social Anthropology Seminars at the University of St. Andrews and the comments of the members of staff and of the students were of great help to me in writing the final draft. Dr. Riches offered valuable comments on Chapter 2 and Dr Fardon helped me with the translation of a number of French articles relevant to Chapter 6. I am grateful to them both.

My thanks are also due to my fellow research students G. Bastera, N. James and S. Gardner, for the lengthy discussions I have had with them and for their comments on a number of issues. Lastly, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. S. Harvey, Mr. G. Gibb, B. Bremner and Mr. G. Sandeman of the Geography Department for their help with the photocopies and with the map.



PAGE

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C H A P T E R 1

The Berti, Islam and fakis

There are roughly 60 to 80 thousand Berti in the Northern Darfur Province of the Democratic Republic of the Sudan. Their land extends approximately from line 13 44' to 14 34' N. and from line 25 16' to 56 17' E. The vegetation and the annual rainfall change gradually as one moves from one side of the zone to the other. The grassland of the dry savannah in the north merges into the light woodland savannah of the south. The average annual rainfall increases from around 200mm in the north to around 500mm in the south. The traditional Berti homeland is in the northern part of their present territory. It is an upland plateau at 700 to 1000m above sea level. The plateau is crossed by the Tagabo Hills chain which consists of sandstone and volcanic mountains the highest of which is 1500m. The extension of Berti territory to the south of the plateau is a recent phenomenon dating back to less than two centuries ago. It is due to the migration which occurred in response to the pressure from the northern neighbouring tribe, the Meidob. Other smaller Berti groups have established themselves in other parts of the Sudan. The biggest of these groups is in Um-Ruwāba and the Gezīra Aba in central Sudan and in the Gedarif region in eastern Sudan.

Nowadays, the Berti speak their own dialect of the Arabic language. Several generations ago, they spoke their own language which belonged to the Middle Sahara language group and was probably close to the existing Zaghawa language.

The Berti of Darfur operate a mixed economy and combine hoe cultivation with animal husbandry. Millet and sorghum are their main crops. They also cultivate okra, sesame, water melon, hibiscus, cucumber, pumpkins and little tomatoes. Peanuts are intensively grown in the southern part of their territory as a cash crop. They keep goats, cattle, sheep, donkeys and camels; chickens provide an additional source of meat.

The harvest of the staple crops, millet and sorghum, is at constant risk, especially in the north. Both these crops are grown there in sandy soil with less than the sufficient level of humidity. Inadequate distribution of rainfall, too little rain or too much of it can all lead to a bad harvest. The rainy season, which starts in the north from June to September, is hardly long enough for successful millet cultivation as this crop requires 100 days to ripen. To obtain the maximum use of the humidity available, the sowing commences on the day of the first heavy rain of the season. The sown seeds grow then together with wild grass in the field. The wild grass competing with the millet is later eliminated by weeding which starts four weeks after sowing and continues for about six weeks. Any weeding done after this time is useless since the millet and sorghum will already have been overtaken by the wild grass. Other crops mentioned above need a shorter humidity period and are therefore sown some time after the millet and sorghum.

The recent period of drought, which started in the late sixties, has produced considerable adaptive changes in the Berti economy. The advantage of animals over land as a mobile form of capital is successfully exploited in the northern part of the Berti area. Goats are preferred over other animals because their favourable grazing pattern. They are also a better means of cash as they can be sold more easily in the local markets. If one or indeed a few of them are disposed of, this does not deplete the main herd as it would a herd of cows. Gum trees were a considerable source of cash before they were eliminated in the recent drought. The fall in the international price of gum and the increase in the local price of millet have led to the axing of gum trees to provide fields for the staple crop. Animal husbandry has come to be a vital link between the livelihood of the Berti on one hand, and national as well as the international trade on the other. A similar link is maintained in the southern Berti territory by the production of peanuts. The Berti economy is therefore rendered responsive to international trade through the price of these two commodities. Animals can be consumed locally in the event of a drastic decline in demand outside the Berti area. The production of animals also requires a relatively longer time and is therefore less sensitive to short term price fluctuation. On the other hand, the peanut is mainly a cash crop with limited consumption at the local level. Its production requires a relatively short time. Peanut production is therefore more sensitive to the international market and a fall in the price of peanuts considerably reduces the size of land allocated to their cultivation. As the same land can be used for producing

peanuts and millet, the price of millet can also influence the production of peanuts.

The Berti are not self-sufficient in their production. They frequent weekly markets which are often situated at water centres (wells) to purchase or exchange items which they do not themselves produce.

A few of the items sold in Berti markets are produced locally. These include saddles, mats, pottery and ironwork. All agricultural surplus including millet and sorghum is occasionally sold to obtain cash. Many other goods produced outside the Berti area are imported to the Berti markets. Basic goods consist of onions, dried tomatoes, dried okra, salt, sugar, tea, oil, red peppers, matches and cloth. A few luxury items are also sold in the markets. These are perfume, soap, tobacco, kerosene and glass beads. Cash is not only needed to pay for the above goods, but also to cover the payment for bride-wealth, government taxes, damage fines, etc. At the production level, cash is vital to mobilise communal help and for the purchase of animals as a means of capital investment.

The Berti live in small permanent villages with around 20 households in each. The majority of household heads in each village are close members of the same patrilineal lineage. A typical Berti household starts with a husband, a wife and a child. A household of such a nuclear family consists of a single conical roofed hut made of millet stalks and wood, a rectangular shelter of the same material and an outer fence, about two metres high, protected by or

substituted by thorny branches. A few other huts and shelters are later added when the family expands. Children reside with their parents usually until the birth of their first child after marriage, after which they move to form their own independent households. A man can have up to four wives, but most men are married to only one wife at a time. Marriage between children of two brothers is regarded as ideal and patrilocal residence is preferred. A man's first marriage is strongly influenced by his parents' decision, the second marriage is relatively a matter of individual choice. The second wife is usually left to reside uxorilocally in order to reduce tension between her and the first wife.

Traditionally the Berti had a centralized and pyramidal political system. Its structure consisted of a number of homestead heads under a sheikh, a number of sheikhs under an omda and a number of omdas under a paramount king who was based in Melit town. The office of the king was abolished by the present Sudanese government and its functions were delegated to a regional council. The omda is now the highest traditional official directly subordinate to the regional council. The sheikh is administratively the most important figure in a Berti village. He summons his subjects and accompanies them to the local courts, settles minor disputes jointly with village elders, informs his people about governmental decisions, and, more importantly, collects the annual animal taxes from his followers. The office of sheikh is hereditary but the successor can be denounced by his followers in favour of another man. In practice this is exceptional and aggrieved followers often secede to a new or a different village. Being a sheikh does not give a man authority

over land allocation. Land is traditionally "owned" by lineages and is divided into territories called "axes" which correspond to sublineages localised in individual villages. The term "axe" (fās) is derived from the notion of the axe as the main tool for clearing fields for cultivation and for slitting trees to obtain gum. The office of "master of the axe" is hereditary and is occupied by a direct descendant of the original founder of the village. The "master of the axe" disposes of land for use in return for tithes which are traditionally shared with the omda. The tithe was abolished soon after independence but is still paid on a voluntary basis. The "master of the axe" is often the village sheikh at the same time.

All the Berti are Muslims and religious heresy is virtually unknown in their society. Like all Muslims in northern Sudan, they follow the Maliki school of Islamic law but this categorisation is known to very few of them. Public sacrifices (karāmas) carried out for many reasons and to commemorate various occasions are a regular feature of Berti village life. There are health sacrifices, rain sacrifices, misfortune sacrifices and sacrifices accompanying many public celebrations. No immediate reason is necessary for making a sacrifice and indeed if one has not been made for a long time this in itself is a sufficient reason. The technical religious knowledge required for these rituals is catered for by the local religious officiants called fugara (sing. faki). Fakis are the graduates of Koranic schools of which there are quite a few among the Berti.

I will be referring later to some practices and rituals which are not found in orthodox Islam. A notable example which may be mentioned here is the annual offering made at wells to satanic snakes believed to live in them and to influence the availability of water. Many of the practices and rituals which are alien to orthodox Islam are integrated in various ways in Berti Islam. Others are regarded by the Berti as non-Islamic in origin and explained as customary rites inherited from previous generations. Local religious leaders occasionally attack these practices but often prefer to ignore them (for more details on this section see Holy 1974, 1980, 1983 and Osman 1979/80).

The Meaning of Islam

The year 1317 A.D. was a turning point in the history of Christianity and Islam in the Sudan. The Muslim king of the hitherto "Christian Nubian Kingdom" had converted to Islam. The conversion was officially launched by changing the state church into a mosque (Yusuf 1973:125). This incident was not the start of the infiltration of the Arabs into the Sudan but a result of it. The influx of Arab nomads and traders was sanctioned by the non-aggression pact (652 A.D.) between Muslim Egypt and the Nubian Kingdom (Yusuf 1966:114-5). It was, however, not until the fourteenth century that the penetration of Arabs into the sultanate of Darfur was reported (O'Fahey 1980:5). This report took the form of an official complaint to the Muslim king of Egypt (Ibid). It may be assumed that there were many unofficial and individual

infiltrations of Muslims into Darfur before this time.

The sultanate of Darfur (1650-1916) also attracted many migrants from Muslim West Africa. Its position on the route to Mekka was significant: many migrants did not proceed beyond it, while others settled there on their way back from Mekka. The number of settlers of West African origin has been recently estimated to be as high as one third of the entire population of Darfur (Ibid:4). The new religion was adopted first of all by the sultans of Darfur, probably as a basis of legitimacy for the ruling dynasty and then began to spread downwards. The process of the early islamisation of the dynasty is expressed by the legend of the "wise stranger" who came and married into the ruling family:

"... the supersession of the Tunjur by the Keira is ascribed to Ahmed al-Maqūr, Ahmed "the hamstringed": an Arab from North Africa. ... Ahmed was hamstrung by his brother after a quarrel over the latter's wife, but was rescued from the desert and taken to the Tunjur king, Show Dorshid. Show is portrayed as a mysterious and tyrannical ruler, feared by his subjects; Ahmed won his favour and his daughter by introducing new and more civilized ways - for example of eating" (Ibid:123).

The myth is not unique to the Fur tribe. Fairly similar versions are reported from among the Sudanese of the Nuba Mountains (Trimingham 1968:135) and they exist among the Berti (see below), as well as among many other African Muslims. The wise stranger of the

Berti is Mohammed Yanbar (also Janbar), the ancestor of the Basanga lineage. This lineage has provided Berti kings until the abolition of the kingdom more than a decade ago. Yanbar is said to have been dispatched from Mekka specially to convert the Berti pagans single handed. The Berti were then ruled by the giant Namudu. Close to the borders of the Berti territory Yanbar secluded himself for seven years meditating in the desert. Having successfully strengthened himself by seclusion, he resumed his journey to meet his host, the giant Namudu. He won his favour by demonstrating his wisdom in introducing many new good practices and values, for example, by changing the existing method of eating. At meal times, the Berti used to wait for the dishes of food to be brought from different houses in the village. Each time a dish was brought, the people rushed and consumed the food and waited for the next dish to arrive. As a result the meal was interrupted by periods of waiting, the food was not blessed and the villagers remained hungry. Yanbar did not like the habit and eventually intervened. He first asked everybody to wait until all the food was brought from the different houses. He then taught everybody to say "in the name of Allah" before the meal started and to eat politely without hurry. The advice made a lot of difference. Everybody was satisfied for the first time and plenty of food was left at the end. Namudu was very impressed by Yanbar. He thought he would make a good chief (hākīm). He eventually made him a chief over all his subjects and offered him his daughter in marriage. It is here that we are told how Yanbar refused the daughter before a sunna marriage i.e. the existing Muslim system which is believed to resemble the prophetic practice. He thus introduced the sunna marriage to replace the

previous practice of abduction. He also opened the first Koranic school and taught his new converts the Islamic creed. In short, he introduced Islam. But Yanbar's mission did not end here. His main target was to drive the tyrant giant away and to establish justice. To achieve this objective, he also resorted to his religious power which he had employed before. It was not very long before the giant conceded defeat and was forced to evacuate the area. He moved to the west, perhaps to the very same mysterious destination that he had originally come from.

This Bertí mythical story shows remarkable parallels with the one circulating among the Fur. Despite the differences in names and local context, the structure of the "myths" is the same. In both, there is a wise and just intruder coming to replace a savage and unjust local tyrant. The place of origin of the wise man is Mekka with all its symbolic attributes: holyness, lack of ambiguity and association with the east which is the most auspicious direction for the Bertí (Holy 1983). Namudu's place of origin on the other hand is ambiguously located somewhere in the west. The intruder belongs to the "appropriate" religion while the host is an unbeliever with all the connotations of the term. The intruder has a definite genealogy, while the origin of his host is obscure and mysterious. The intruder is armed with religious authority while his host depends on physical repression for his power. Lastly, the newcomer succeeds in eliminating the hunger which has dominated the reign of his predecessor.

The intruder is assimilated into the society of his hosts in two basic ways: firstly, the values of the wise man such as those regarding eating, marriage, learning Koran, prayers, etc, prove better and are therefore adopted by his hosts.

Secondly, the pedigree of the wise man is adopted and his marriage into the ruling family enables him to be claimed as an ancestor. Again the marriage of the wise man into the ruling lineage is important in at least two respects: firstly, it provides the ruling lineage with legitimacy and therefore with the reverence afforded to a dynastic royal family. Such is the case with Keira of the Fur (O'Fahey 1980:123) and the Basanga lineage of the Berti. Secondly, it gives Islam a strong hold which favours its adoption by the subjects. There is indeed ample evidence of kings enforcing the spread of Islam. The fact that Islam became the religion of the ruling elite made the new ideology more acceptable to the masses.

Islamisation of western Sudan went hand in hand with the Arabisation of the people. This dual process is far from being unique to the western region of the Sudan and is common to many areas of the Northern Sudan (see Yusuf 1966:122, 1967) where many tribes have been incorporated into the Arab tribal system despite the limited size of Arab immigration into the country. Many tribal leaders have gone further to obtain written pedigrees in order to authenticate their Arab origin. Among the Berti, the claim to Arab ancestry is more or less open to its alleged 99 lineages. Many Berti claim to have copies of written pedigrees but I managed to

obtain only two different pedigrees belonging to the members of the Basanga and the Sharafa lineages. Some members of the latter lineage stress their relation to the Berti through marriage "without fully belonging to the tribe". The members of the Sharafa lineage are particularly concerned with their written pedigrees and probably have more copies in circulation than any other lineage in the area. Their name indicates their claim to be Sharifs, i.e. related to the prophet Mohammed. The Basanga similarly claim to be Sharifs though they rarely stress it as their "cousins", the members of the Sharafa lineage, do. This perhaps relates to the position of the two lineages in the Berti political structure. The two lineages are believed to have had an old agreement which was designed to reduce tension between them. The agreement gave the Basanga full authority over political affairs in return for their withdrawal from religious leadership while the Sharafa were accorded full power in the religious domain on condition that they would not interfere in the political leadership of the Berti. The Basanga appear to stress their Bertiness, while the Sharafa emphasize their Prophetic origin. The written pedigrees support the version of the oral story that the Basanga and the Sharafa share a common ancestor (see Appendix 1). Yanbar of the Basanga is said to have been accompanied, or elsewhere followed, by a cousin called Sharif Dawazēn (also Dawazēd); the ancestor of the Sharafa. Dawazēn is located only 8 generations above the present one in the Sharafa pedigree. A gap of a few generations occurs when we compare this with Yanbar who is placed in the genealogy 11-13 generations ago. The common ancestor in the two pedigrees is four generations above Yanbar and only one generation above Dawazēn. Above this point, the

two pedigrees merge together into the same line of names. They are, however, far from being identical and a few names are either added, omitted or differently spelt. The pedigrees connect the living men with the prophet 34-37 generations above. My reference to only two different pedigrees should not imply that other similar documents do not exist in the area. Moreover, many Berti support the claim to Arab ancestry in the orally transmitted accounts of their history. This of course indicates a strong correlation between Islamisation and Arabisation. Indeed the Berti often speak about the two phenomena as if they are synonymous. This can best be shown with reference to their conceptualisation of circumcision. The practice was introduced in the Sudan by the Muslim Arabs and is understood by all Berti to be an Islamic custom (cf. Lewis 1966:52,68). Alternative terms used for circumcision could be translated as: "to Arabize" (yaārib) or "to bring them into sunna" (yidakhilhum fi sunna).

Islam as a universal religion has not created uniformly Muslim societies. Various societies we refer to as Muslim exhibit only a few characteristics in common (see Geertz 1968). The degree of Islamisation appears to be even more varied in Muslim black Africa than elsewhere in the Muslim world. The Islamic religion in African societies is a fusion of orthodox beliefs and practices and elements belonging to the indigenous pre-Islamic religious system (see Morsy 1978:109). Islam and the pagan cults form a dual axis constituting different recipes for social action. The dual options remain open for reference by the members of the society at the appropriate time. Despite the strength of pagan cults in these societies, we

will be inclined to see them as Muslim so long as these societies regard themselves and want to be treated as such (see Trimingham 1968:47). It should be borne in mind that in all Muslim societies there exists a gulf between Islam as an ideology and Islam as a practised religion. The Islamic orthodoxy we speak of then remains a universally fixed reference existing only at the notional level. It is therefore a matter of mere theoretical interest to locate various Muslim societies in relation to the universally fixed reference, i.e. Islamic orthodoxy.

In Berti society adherence to Islam is emphasized more at the collective than at the individual level. Islamic rituals are enthusiastically performed when they are collective in nature: festival prayers, rituals accompanying marriage, rituals accompanying rain, death prayers, to name but a few. At the individual level, Islamic rituals are grossly neglected. This is clear in the case of the Muslim daily prayers and ritual ablutions. Only a handful of individuals in each village, mostly old men, perform their daily prayers. In sharp contrast to this, the annual festival prayer is attended by the whole adult sector of the population. This is despite the orthodox rule which grants the individual daily prayer higher importance than the festival prayer. The former is enforced by the Koran and theologically classed as farad, i.e. an obligatory religious ritual. The latter is a mere imitation of the practices of the prophet (sunna) and is not obligatory. The proclaimed adherence to Islam sometimes involves reinterpretation of certain religious rules. The majority of Berti villagers live on home made millet beer which forms the greater part

of their daily diet. Most of them are prepared to go into elaborate details justifying the status of this beer with reference to Islamic laws. Some argue that the alcohol forbidden in the Koran belongs to the category of the locally distilled spirit and does not include the beer. Others see its lawfulness as contingent on its legal production and acquisition; in other words, it is perfectly legal when it is procured by lawful means. It is also argued that the process of its production includes the cultivation of millet which is in itself seen as a religious practice. Again some see the consumption of beer as legal so long as it does not induce the drinker to cause trouble to other people. As the beer contains a low level of alcohol, it is often assumed that it rarely causes drunkenness anyway.

The Berti have to some degree adopted the Islamic lunar calendar. Nonetheless, their system of time reckoning is still cyclical since it is only the month and not the year which is known. The fast of the month of Ramadan is enthusiastically observed, especially by men. Non-observance of fasting is believed to invite misfortune on the whole community. Fasting is thus given a collective feature. The attribution of a collective status to an individual action can also be noticed in the case of homicide. It is normally settled by a collective payment of dīya (for Berti dīya see Holy 1972). The dīya represents a collective acceptance of the responsibility which should according to orthodox Islam fall on the individual killer (Lewis 1974:108). The payment of religious dues (zakāt) and alms (sadaga) are more or less observed by the Berti. Failure to pay them is believed to decrease wealth as well as to

incur the inevitable punishment after death. To withhold them is not only a crime but a sin.

The last part of the Islamic creed enjoins upon believers the obligation of the pilgrimage to Mekka if they have sufficient means. The Berti have little enthusiasm for making the pilgrimage compared to the West Africans. Unlike the Berti, the West Africans do not accept the distance to Mekka as an excuse. Even though a pilgrim acquires a title and a status for himself when he fulfils the duty, this is much less of an incentive for the Berti than for the Muslims in West Africa. The pilgrimage to Mekka is often substituted by a visit to a local shrine or tomb as is generally the case in northern Sudan and some other Islamic areas. There are no famous tombs in the Berti area and few Berti make the effort to visit shrines in other parts of the country. There is, however, an insignificant number of local shrines which are visited by some people. Most of these shrines are of unidentified saints.

The sex division of religion whereby men are more Muslim and women are more pagan has been noted in Black Africa (Trimingham 1968:46). This holds true to a very great extent also for the Berti. Women do attend the prayers performed for the two annual festivals. Their attendance is, however, poor compared to that of the men. They neither attend the rain and misfortune rituals, nor do they participate in burials, death sacrifices or marriage prayers. As regards the individual daily prayer, they are the least proficient in performing it. In theory, girls are welcome in the Koranic schools. Their number in the Koranic schools is, however,

comparatively low and confined to those below the age of ten. Women are also the main reservoir of the pagan cults which prevail parallel to Islam. These are mainly the rituals classified by the Berti as customary rites (āda) or even superstition (sanam). These rites are performed at various stages of millet cultivation and "life crises". They are however of no concern to this thesis (for details of some of these rites see Holy 1983). Lewis in his work among the Somalis regards the attraction of women to these cults (for example zār) as a form of response to their exclusion from other public rituals (Lewis 1966:64). An interesting duality exists in the administration of divination and the treatment of illness by the Berti. The Islamic geomancy (sand divination) co-exists side by side with other methods of divination, notably, the use of cowry shells and possession. Koranic treatment performed by fakis is a mere alternative to herbalism practised by illiterate rootmen. The confinement of women to the backyard, a feature identified with Islam, is observed by the Berti to a much lesser extent than in many other Islamic societies. Still Islam has left its mark on Berti house architecture. There is always a separate area for women in a house. Yet their separation does not exclude them from the majority of social activities. They cannot be regarded as socially dead in the way Gilsenan describes the Lebanese women he studied (Gilsenan 1982). Women work jointly with men in fields, markets, at wells, etc. Premarital pregnancy is frequent and does not create the stigma that is attached to it among the Arab Bedouins. An illegitimate birth is certainly regretted but the child's illegitimacy is soon ignored or even forgotten. In contrast with Islamic code or practice, a fine and an oath are sufficient to

settle cases of adultery.

The Fakis

Islam is disseminated and taught and its rituals are presided over among the Berti as well as among other Northern Sudanese societies by the religious man called faki (pl. fugara). The term faki is a corruption of the word fagīh, "a jurisconsult", or fagīr, "a sufi medicant" (Trimingham 1949:140, 1968:61 and 130, Yusuf 1975:116). It may be useful to mention here that the word fagīr also denotes "a dedicated property-less person" as described among the Swat Pathans (Barth 1959:57). Scholars working in the Sudan have used a number of terms to translate the term faki: a holy man or religious leader (Hussey 1933:35); a native doctor (Abdal Halim (1939:27); a local religious sheikh (Al-Tayib 1955:147); a local clergyman (Trimingham 1949:140), etc. Variations in the translation of the term arise from the multiplicity of roles played by the faki coupled with the varying interests of the researchers. In general, fakis may be identified as healers, religious leaders, diviners, teachers and also protectors of the whole community as well as of its individual members. I will therefore use the term faki in the course of the discussion. In this thesis I will examine Berti religious activities in relation to the roles played by the fakis. It is important to note here that a number of Islamic prescriptions and practices have already been internalized in Berti culture and therefore form a part of the folk knowledge. Some of this

internalized knowledge has intermingled with traditional culture and indigenous lore. The result is the assumption by the illiterate Berti that every value and practice must be contingent on Islam and must be mentioned somewhere in the Book. I have already offered an example of how the cultivation of millet is accorded a religious status.

The transmission of the new knowledge is severely restricted by the nature of Islam as "a book religion". As a result, part of this knowledge inevitably remains confined to the literate professionals and, in consequence, the services of the faki become indispensable. This thesis demonstrates, among other things, the intensive use of literacy in undertaking various activities. Exceptions to this are sand divination and some parts of the death and rain rituals. The activities which do not require reading and writing are performed by non-fakis. Even though such activities are described in the texts used by the fakis, they are left almost entirely to the "folk" to undertake and transmit to successive generations.

A faki undergoes an apprenticeship after several years' attendance at Koranic schools. The apprenticeship may last for more than ten years and during this time the pupil may move several times from one master to another. Those who manage to continue their apprenticeship for such a long time succeed eventually in memorizing the entire Koran. There is, however, a number of practising fakis who have had a training of only a few years. Fakis with limited training are attributed a lower status, and they rarely acquire the label of "a good faki". It is difficult to say exactly how a

professional acquires the reputation of being a "good faki". Long training, often exceeding ten years, is obviously a vital condition for the title. A prolonged journey to the famous Fur Koranic schools is equally important for enhancing the reputation of the practitioner. Most of the fakis mark the end of their training by making a big sacrifice in their own home villages. People from various neighbouring villages are invited to attend. The gathering initiates the candidate into the profession as a faki and serves as a publicity occasion. The standard achieved by the candidate is informally announced during the sacrifice with stress on "how many times he has committed the Koran to memory", i.e. on how many times he recited the Koran. As the Koran contains a vast number of chapters (114), the student is liable to forget what he had previously memorized. It therefore becomes necessary to refresh his memory by repeating the entire task a few times (three times is the best). The new faki is required to live up to his acquired knowledge. He will have to demonstrate it when he joins other fakis in rituals (see the final chapter) and of course to give evidence of his commitment to a relatively strict religious life. How successful the faki has been in his services to his clients is also of considerable importance in his bid for recognition. The memorisation of at least a part of the Koran and the ability to copy texts are the minimum necessary conditions for a faki's apprenticeship. However, they are not sufficient to qualify him as a faki. A faki also needs to know which part of the text is appropriate for which activity. Moreover, a part of what constitutes the professional knowledge of the faki is not taught in the Koranic schools. Only a small part of the knowledge guiding the

faki's practice can be designated as "folk knowledge" and is therefore easily accessible. The details of the secrets of the profession are transmitted by the teacher only to his favourite students. Nowadays, the candidate can buy various printed books in the market to consolidate what he has learnt during his apprenticeship. Most fakis keep a small library consisting of a few books and some handwritten extracts (see the books in appendix 2). The handwritten extracts are made into a book which is subject to continuous future modification. Extracts from printed books and extracts copied from handwritten books of other fakis are perpetually added to it. The private collection of such extracts forms what is called umbatri. The term umbatri means "that which mentions everything", i.e. everything required by the faki in the course of his profession. The umbatri is a collection of handwritten papers very often of different makes and sizes. It is held together in the form of a loose-leaf book bound by a string. It includes many articles, the length of which varies between a single paragraph and several pages. Each article is a separate entity and can be moved to any position in the umbatri. The lack of page numbers in the umbatri makes it a tedious job to keep in order the articles consisting of more than one page. I would note here that the difficulty is accentuated by two factors: firstly, each page may contain parts of different articles and, secondly, the extracts which are in the process of being copied are separated from the book every time the faki does some copying. The faki therefore needs to rearrange at least the long articles every now and then. The problem is sometimes resolved by rewriting the first word on each page at the bottom corner of the previous one. This is not

required when the whole article occupies only a single page and it is rarely done in any case.

An umbatri is usually immense, although its size depends on the preoccupation of its compiler. In general it covers descriptions of religious rituals, divination and the use of many Koranic formulae for various purposes. The umbatri, unlike other books, is an ever growing unit. Its size increases over time so long as its owner remains professionally active. Every time the faki comes across a new secret, he copies it into his collection. If his son later becomes a faki and inherits the umbatri, he follows the same method. This continuous addition to the umbatri accounts for the variation in the size, quality and types of paper, handwriting, ink, etc. In most cases the faki copies from books which he himself has not obtained. It is quite common for itinerant fakis referred to by Trimmingham as "wandering friars" (Trimingham 1968:60) to exchange materials with local colleagues. The books and extracts brought by the itinerant fakis are valuable because they are not available locally. During my fieldwork, many of my religious books were borrowed several times by fakis for the same purpose. The method of collection and organization of the umbatri makes each one unique and different from other copies.

The average Berti faki has a personality which is different from other members of the society. His position in the community can at best be characterised as ambivalent. The prolonged period of study which the fakis spend outside their home area seriously disrupts their socialisation into a typical Berti way of life.

This, however, occurs only in the cases of the well reputed fakis who have spent several years, including a part of their childhood, in foreign schools. The result is often an over-religious personality which does not fit easily into the Berti community. Berti society itself exerts some pressure on fakis to lead a particular way of life. In response, a faki feels obliged to withdraw from a number of social activities such as traditional dances, beer parties and sitting with women. Successful fakis who are relatively rich often avoid "hard manual work" like weeding in the fields or watering animals. Although their profession might prove to be a considerable source of cash income, it offers no investment potential. The surplus cash obtained by the fakis is, therefore, invested in agriculture and animal husbandry. The return from such an investment might eventually outstrip the income from their services as fakis. Rich fakis often emulate the life style of Berti Merchants. They entrust the weeding of fields and watering of animals to hired labour. This enables them to retain their religious profession as a supplementary economic activity. The Berti conceptualise the faki's "writing" as a difficult and hard work. They also conceive of it as a valuable service to the community that deserves Godly rewards. At the same time, they detest the richness of the few better off fakis. The possibility of the use of the Koran for "sorcery" makes the rich fakis in particular more prone to criticism by other people. Their wealth is often seen as something which has been obtained at the expense of other people.

C H A P T E R 2

The Koranic Schools

Introductory remarks

All Berti fakis are trained in Koranic schools which are traditional village institutions common throughout all the Muslim parts of the Sudan (Al-Tayib 1964, Beshir 1969, Yusuf 1975, Ibrahim 1979, Bruce 1980 among others). Relevant studies have also testified to their existence in Muslim West Africa (Greenberg 1946, Goody 1968, Wilks 1968, Hiskett 1975 and Donald 1974), as well as North Africa (Wagner and Lotfi 1980). The main objective of the Koranic schools is to teach their students to memorize at least a part of the Koran and to equip them with the knowledge of the fundamentals of Islamic law and practice which is necessary for membership of a Muslim society. The education provided by the Koranic school is usually referred to as "informal" or "traditional" education (Beshir 1969:2). The terms "informal" or "traditional" are not used to denote any lack of discipline or an absence of an organized method. Rather, they are used simply to identify these schools as separate and distinct from the Western type schools run and centrally planned by the government.

The Koranic school is referred to by the Berti as a khalwa or a masīd. The first term is derived from the Arabic verb ikhtila, to seek seclusion, privacy or retreat for mystical meditation (Al-Tayib 1964:12, Beshir 1969:6, Yusuf 1975:177, Ibrahim 1979:129 and Bruce 1980:2). The term khalwa is also used by the Berti in referring to the hut where seclusion may be sought for specific purposes, or to

any hut that is relatively isolated from the rest of the household. The connection between seclusion and the Koranic school is suggested by Al-Tayib:

"...as the Quran teaching and all literacy education became associated with the fekkis who practised seclusion and asceticism in one way or another, the word Khalwa came to mean the Quran school" (Al-Tayib 1964:12).

The second term i.e. masīd "(standard Arabic masjid) usually refers to a place for prayers where one must remove footwear, but may also be used for 'religious schools' or a place where pupils gather to study their lessons" (Bruce 1980:2).

Although very few villages have Koranic schools, one rarely comes across a Berti village which does not have a masīd. Its building consists of a flat roof made of millet stalks and wood supported by a number of posts and enclosed by a low fence of thorny branches. The masīd is normally located at the centre of the village. It is a place for prayers, specifically the communal ones, but it also serves as a club in which secular activities take place (Abdal Gaffar 1974:51-53). The masīd is communally owned and it is exclusively reserved for use by men; women are not expected to visit it except when young girls join to learn the Koran. The masīd is used by men as a place for entertaining guests, discussing collective village affairs, undertaking religious rituals, making communal sacrifices or simply for chatting. While houses are

retained for individual or private household activities, the masid provides an arena for activities of a public nature.

The Koranic school can also operate in the faki's house where children gather behind a wind screen and learn the Koran by the light provided by an open fire. Yusuf (1975) seems to regard the term masīd as referring to a place for advanced religious studies while he reserves the word khalwa for the "primary" Koranic school discussed in this chapter.

The Berti and other Western Sudanese use the term muhājir (pl. muhājerīn) for a student of a khalwa. The word muhājir means "migrant" or "immigrant" and has associations with the migration (hijra, flight) of the Prophet and his friends from Mekka to Medina or that of the Sudanese Mahdi from Aba to Gadir. Both of these "migrations" are divine and so, though to a lesser degree, is the journey undertaken by a student to learn the Koran. The concept of khalwa students as migrants implies the scarcity of khalwas or their association with the distant areas to which the majority of the students must migrate or immigrate (the term hijra means both) in order to have access to them. In northern Sudan, the term huwār is used instead of muhājir; this indicates a person who is highly submissive to his superior, in this context the faki. In its non-metaphorical sense, huwār means a young camel which continuously follows its mother (Al-Tayib 1964:14, see also Beshir 1969:6).

It is difficult to ascertain the history of the Koranic schools and trace it back to the time of their establishment in the area. Identifying the Berti with northern Sudan would allow us to assume that Koranic schools might have spread to them from north and central Sudan. The first Koranic school in northern Sudan is believed to have been established towards the end of the 14th century A.D. (Bruce 1980:2). Ever since that time Koranic schools have assumed the role of furnishing individuals for membership in the Muslim societies of the northern Sudan. Looking at history from a different perspective, the Berti believe that the Koranic schools date back to the era of their mythical ancestor, the giant Namudu, and to the time of the arrival of his contemporary, Sharif Mohammed Yanbar, the ancestor of the Basanga lineage. The arrival of the latter from Mekka took place 13 generations ago according to some Berti genealogical records, a date which has to be taken with caution, as it is inappropriate to construct history from mythology (Riches 1982:7-13).

More recently, Koranic schools were encouraged by the kings who ruled the Berti and other Western Sudanese tribes before the colonial expansion (Abu Salim 1975:16). The schools also provided the driving force for the Mahdist revolution (1885-1898) which claimed large territories in western Sudan. In turn, the Koranic schools were themselves subjected to such severe scrutiny from the Mahdist regime that only those supporting the Mahdist teachings could then flourish (Bruce 1980:3). Due to the political role played by Koranic schools in the Mahdist movement, the colonial

government was anxious not to allow such institutions to create fanaticism and stimulate further uprisings (Yusuf 1975:123). Its suspicion of them was justified by the disturbances which occurred between the year 1901 and 1916 in northern Sudan and of which at least 16 were related to the activities of religious fanatics (Beshir 1969:23-24). With respect to education, the colonial regime (1898-1956) maintained a policy of reconstructing the formal schools whose foundation was laid during the Turko-Egyptian rule (1821-1885). This new alternative education which was primarily designed to provide junior administrators to assist the colonial staff was retained after independence to create the trained manpower required for running the country. At the same time, the independent governments reluctantly assumed a policy of limited subsidies to some Koranic schools, mostly those located in cities and big towns. Some of the famous khalwas in northern Sudan provided a nucleus for a government organized system of education based on the masīd method and running parallel to the modern schools. Successive grades of these schools form what is termed "the minor branch" (Yusuf 1975:130), "alternate current", or "parallel current", in relation to the modern schools (Bruce 1980:4), with Omdurman Islamic University at the top of the ladder. The majority of the Koranic schools in the rural areas are, however, entirely left to the local people to maintain. The Berti khalwas fall within this last category being mostly in rural areas and having no connection with the government system of education.

Types of khalwas and their methods of teaching

Among the Berti, there are generally two types of khalwa: a day or a non-boarding one where pupils attend for a single evening session while they are living with their parents, and a boarding one where the pupils live in a building provided by the faki. In the first type, the single session starts every evening with the exception of Thursdays. Pupils usually gather for learning in the open or behind a windscreen built of millet stalks. In rare cases the public masīd described earlier may be used instead. There is no age limit for pupils joining either of the two types of khalwa. However, most of the pupils are between the ages of 5 and 19. In a few cases there are some adult students but they are often debarred by their excessive responsibilities from being regular attendants. The single session usually starts shortly after sunset. The pupils sit on the sand forming a crescent shape and facing the faki. Light is provided by a woodfire lit and attended by the pupils. The process of khalwa learning commences with the pupil receiving a few Koranic verses from the faki who reads them out while the pupil repeats them in a loud voice after him. The whole exercise is repeated several times until the pupil is able to recall the verses from memory. After that, he repeats them continuously for several hours on his own while the faki attends to a different pupil.

The recitation of the Koran in the khalwa can start with any number of pupils and those present at the beginning of the session do not wait for the latecomers. Each pupil repeats his assignment of the previous evening in a loud and rhythmic voice. The faki has to listen to different voices, each one chanting a different text. He must correct individual pupils without interrupting the rest of the class. Whenever the chanting flags, the faki raises his cane as a threat and the pupils respond by making their voices louder and louder. When the faki feels that a certain pupil has fully committed the assigned chapter to memory, he gives him his next assignment. Sometimes he calls such a pupil in front of him but in most cases the student remains in his place and receives his new text. A pupil who gets stuck at a certain verse will just go on repeating the last verse known to him/her and wait for the faki's attention. The faki will soon turn to him/her and shout the forgotten verse. The task is repeated several times until the pupil proves capable of resuming his recitation without further help from the teacher. This process is very much facilitated by writing on a wooden slate (lōh), where writing is used. Chanting the Koran continues for slightly more than two hours. Roughly between 8.00pm and 8.30pm, the faki claps his hands announcing the approaching end of the lesson, although the session is still by no means over. After the clapping, the pupils fall silent and wait for an instruction from the faki. A pupil may be asked to come in front of the others and practise the standard ritual washing required before Islamic prayers, using the faki's water vessel. The other pupils watch him, eager to shout their corrections if he makes a mistake.

Instead of the ritual washing, a pupil may be asked to say the standard Islamic prayers while the faki comments on his actions. The faki's comments are necessary for the junior pupils who have as yet no knowledge of the prayers. On the other hand it seems that most of them learn by imitation rather than by following the comments, to which they pay little attention while they are concentrating on the actions of their classmates. As an alternative activity, the pupil may be asked to chant the names of the 25 prophets starting with Adam and ending with Mohammed, the prophet of Islam. The 99 names of God may serve as an alternative to the names of the prophets. This action is done collectively and all pupils are expected to participate in a loud recitation. While some recite, others who have not yet committed the whole text to memory merely pretend to do so. The enumeration of the "Pillars of Islam" can also be collectively recited at this stage. These are the Islamic creed, the saying of prayers, the payment of Islamic tax (zakāt), the fasting in Ramadan month, and the pilgrimage, limited to those who can afford it. Towards the very end of the session, a pupil is singled out to give the call to prayers. This is the call heard from every mosque throughout the Islamic world. Notable differences occur in different countries in rhythm and intonation but not in content. The assigned pupil stands up, faces East, blocks his ears with his thumbs and shouts the text. Shouting the call to prayer is done every night, perhaps by different pupils, and it marks the end of the session.

In the second type of khalwa, pupils are able to devote more time to learning. Several sessions are held during the day and the students are almost full time. It is mostly in this kind of khalwa that reading and writing are introduced, although the pupil still starts by memorizing the shorter chapters of the Koran for several months before he is taught his first letter. Normally, a pupil is taught only one letter a day. On the top of one side of his wooden slate, the letter is written several times disconnectedly by the tutor. On the other side of the slate, the same letter is repeated and joined together to form a single long mnemonic. The pupil has then to copy these two lines until both sides of the slate are full. When the copying has been examined by the tutor, the pupil's lines are washed off with water. The instructor's two lines are left there to allow further copying. The pupil is required to repeat the task until the tutor is satisfied with his performance, after which he will resume his memorization until the next day when he receives another letter. After completing the 28 Arabic letters, the pupil will start at the beginning of the alphabet again. This time the emphasis will be on the position of the letter (initial, medial and final), a subject which has already been introduced at the first stage (see Bruce 1980:6). It is at this second phase that the vowel signs are introduced, leading to the forming of short words composed of more than two letters. Teaching of the alphabet is mostly done by one or two senior students, of course under the supervision of the teacher. Fakis insist that it is difficult to say how long it takes a pupil to learn to write or indeed to copy properly. Some may spend six months learning to write but some may

spend years without being able to produce a perfect copy of a single short chapter. The erasure resulting from washing the letters written on the wooden slate is never drunk by the students; this is done only when full verses or chapters are erased. This is not because of the secularization of the alphabet at this stage, but because what is copied is not yet the "words of God". As the short suras are clustered at the beginning of the Koran, writing becomes crucial for students who want to proceed further in their learning. A chapter or a part of it is either dictated or written by a tutor or the faki depending on the level of learning which the student has reached. The piece is then repeated several times until it is fully memorized. The process may take a whole week, depending on the length of the text and the ability of the candidate. Perhaps sometimes it also depends on the size of the wooden slate and the density of words and lines on it. The whole Koran is divided into four parts and each quarter consists of seven subdivisions. The subdivision is called sharāfa (honour) which designates a stage in the progress achieved by the student who succeeds in memorising the assignment (Al-Tayib 1964:13). Each sharāfa is identified and referred to by the final chapter in it. A candidate who achieves a sharāfa by finishing a subdivision is entitled to lead his classmates in a "begging procession". He decorates his wooden slate which contains at least a part of the last Koranic chapter in the subsection. The procession goes from one house to another in the village; the house owners are obliged to donate gifts, ranging from bits of raw or cooked food to a few coins. As the pupils approach each house, they chant a special song translated as follows:

Oh our Lord,

Do not deny us your favour
Love your neighbour;
Even if he is unfriendly.
And the stranger;
Even if he is an atheist.

The pupils continue repeating the phrases at the door of the house until someone comes out to meet them. Donors normally inquire about the leader of the procession and the kind of sharāfa he has obtained. Most of the villagers cannot judge the levels of different sharāfas but they often praise those who lead the processions more frequently than the others in the group. The food which has been collected is consumed communally at a feast in the khalwa. The surplus is supposed to be handed to the faki although this in fact rarely happens.

In these types of khalwa, as in all others, there is no rigid timetable comparable to that in the formal schools. The morning session starts around four o'clock when a senior student gives the morning call to prayers. All the students respond by rushing to join the prayers which are led by the faki. Chanting is resumed afterwards around a wood fire until about six o'clock. Then tea is served and everyone is freed from learning until the afternoon session. It is at this time of the day that certain non-learning tasks may be allocated to some students. In one khalwa I attended, two students were assigned to accompany the members of the faki's family and help them in watering the animals kept in the compound. The faki kept his main herd elsewhere, attended by hired herders. In his compound he kept only the weaker animals and a few others

necessary for providing milk for the family and the few boarding students. The two students dispatched to the wells also brought water for their own use in the khalwa. A third student asked for permission to participate in fetching water since he wanted to do some washing normally done at the wells. It struck me that a number of students longed to be chosen for the water task despite the fact that it could take them over eight hours to accomplish the job. However, the stronger students stood a better chance of being chosen. I also learnt that one of the students went regularly to the water centre every third day to help his family water their animals. Services expected from students also included fetching the animals back at sunset. This task did not take a long time since grass is abundant around the village for most of the year. A student was assigned earlier in the day to discover where the animals rested from the afternoon heat. This was to ensure that none of them was missing, and to predict their movements afterwards. In addition, the students also provided the firewood which was normally collected once or twice a week.

The second learning session in the khalwa starts with the afternoon prayers. Because of the sort of activities mentioned above, not all students may be present at the beginning of this session. Those who are available on the campus respond quickly to the call to prayers and rush to stand in a straight line behind the faki. Chanting is soon resumed, and this is the time when most of the dictating or copying takes place. Writing is better done at this session because there is more light during this time, compared to that provided by the wood fire. In the khalwa I visited during

my fieldwork, two senior students helped two juniors write their chapters, which were then checked by the faki at a glance. The other pupils were left on their own and were reciting their previously written texts. One pupil in the latter group was admonished by the faki for his failure to memorize his assignment in a reasonable length of time. The faki described him as lazy, and as a person who did not work without being punished. The student concerned promised to recite his chapter from memory at the end of that session though he never did. The mentioning of the punishment by the faki was, in fact, a warning for all. Everyone responded by adjusting his position and by raising his voice.

The afternoon session ends around five o'clock, not without some instructions for non-learning tasks. The third session of the day starts with the sunset prayers. The students sit in a curve facing the fire and chant their chapters. The faki watches and listens carefully to them. Occasionally he shouts a Koranic verse without specifying a certain reciter by name. The relevant student immediately picks up the verse and repeats it after the faki several times. Most of the corrections are related to the vocalisation and pronunciation of classical Arabic words. Every time the voices drop too low for the faki's satisfaction, he pretends to be looking for his cane. That is enough to make the voices as loud as possible. I was told that occasionally the faki picks up his cane and punishes the whole row indiscriminately. All the evening sessions I attended ended shortly after eight o'clock with the last prayers of the day. On one occasion the faki gave a general warning to his students not to attend a traditional dancing party being held in a neighbouring

village. The dance was in progress when the faki referred to it, as was evident from the singing which could be heard in the khalwa. Students could indeed be punished for misbehaviour in non-learning contexts. In one case, a young boy in a khalwa was mercilessly caned all over his body after his mother complained to the faki that her son had shouted at her.

Supper follows the third session and porridge is served. In most cases the faki eats with his students from a number of big basins brought from his house. The students of the boarding khalwa certainly represent a corporate group similar to that which Holy identifies as a household or a domestic group characterised by co-residence (Holy 1974:1-47). They all, with varying intensity, act to meet the production necessary for the physical existence of the members of the khalwa group. By virtue of being a member of such a group, an individual is entitled to share what is allocated for consumption. The faki, acting as the head of the group, has ultimate control over the savings and the reinvestment of the surplus. The household tasks that the students perform for the faki are his main form of remuneration as a teacher, and students are not expected to pay any fees for their tuition. In the case of the non-boarding khalwas, students do not reside with the faki. They do not form a domestic group and thus do not cater jointly for their physical existence. However, the fakis' remunerations are in this case derived from the many other roles they play in their villages which will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Besides, the faki also receives occasional gifts from parents of his pupils, and from his ex-students, including those living in different areas.

As I mentioned earlier, khalwas are left exclusively to the local people to run. The government does not contribute to their establishment and their maintenance. The only exception to this is a single incidence worth mentioning here. Recently, a primary school with a boarding house was built in one of the villages. The place was favoured because of the availability of water all through the year. The local people had a fair say in the running of the school because they contributed towards its building by a self-help fund. This was a unique situation, since the establishment of rural schools is normally decided solely by officials in the urban centres. The situation gave rise to the idea of hiring a faki who would run a khalwa next to the school. Pupils who had enrolled in the primary school would automatically become pupils (muhājerīn) in the khalwa. Thus they would attend the school during the day and join the khalwa in the evenings. Of course such an idea could only be accepted reluctantly by government officials. My host in the area, who talked enthusiastically about the plan, mentioned that government officials had already agreed to regard the faki as a full time government employee. He was to be treated either as a member of the teaching staff or as one of the school caretakers. In either case he was to receive a regular salary in addition to a monthly payment of 25 pt. by the parents of every pupil. The faki soon resumed his work in the newly established khalwa despite the failure of the government to fulfil its financial promise. Commenting on the position of the khalwa, a teacher in the primary school said the plan worked simply because there was only one class in the school (the first level). At this level the pupils have plenty of time to

devote to the khalwa learning. Moreover, the Koran as taught in the khalwa is also taught in the first year of the formal school where it forms almost a third of the syllabus. The teacher in fact said that many pupils were well ahead of the formal syllabus in the formal school. However, he appeared sceptical about the future of the plan when the pupils move beyond the first level. The pupils will certainly need more time for their homework, he thought, and at this stage in their education the Koran memorised at the khalwa also loses its relative importance. Whatever the case, the incompatibility of the two systems which he claims exists, remains mere speculation. During my visit to the area, the school was having its vacation and so was the khalwa. This is unusual since the khalwa does not usually have holidays like the formal schools. In this case, it was clearly forced into it by the closure of the school and the disappearance of the pupils.

The Berti believe that formerly there used to be more khalwas than nowadays and the reason they give for the decline in their number is the establishment of the formal schools. It might of course be true that there were more khalwas in the past than at present. Stories about the past mention that every village had at least a single khalwa at some time in its history. These khalwas were established at different times and very few of them lasted long enough to make an impact on the whole society. At present, the Berti have extremely few khalwas. In the seven administrative areas I visited during my fieldwork, there are only 11 khalwas located in

11 different villages out of 94. The formal schools established recently provide new opportunities for those looking for education. This certainly reduces the enthusiasm for the traditional alternative as well as the esteem and prestige conferred on khalwa graduates. However, this does not imply that there are enough places for Berti children in the currently available formal schools. In the year 1980/ 81 only 243 children were admitted to six primary schools out of 461 who were actually brought forward by their parents.

The children start to attend the khalwa usually at the age of five or six years, and the age structure of the khalwa students thus puts the Koranic school in a favourable position as a socializing institution. The Berti acknowledge that it has this role to play and expect it to be an environment where strict discipline is enforced and good conduct demanded. It is therefore not uncommon for a Berti to entrust his son to the khalwa to learn the Koran and the rules of good conduct. A case in point is reported by Al-Tayib about a northern Sudanese woman. In presenting a boy to the khalwa she addressed the faki: "Beat him if he tells lies. Teach him manners. The Koran is a fortune given by God's destiny". This case indicates that "... the khalwa for the majority who did not intend to get through the entire Quran and later on follow a religious career, meant a term of formal character training" (Al-Tayib 1964:14). I noted above the incident when the faki was asked to punish a pupil for misbehaviour which occurred outside the khalwa. The khalwa here works hand in hand with the family in order to achieve the common objective of socializing the youngster. By

introducing the novices to new ideas not provided by the primary socialization within the family, it serves as an extension of the family as a socializing agent. By teaching the boys and girls to practise their prayers regularly, to observe the fasting month, to respect their elders, etc., the khalwa develops in them what are perceived as good habits and at the same time provides them with their chance for spiritual salvation (Beshir 1969:8; Bruce 1980:2). Chanting the Koran itself is regarded as a rewarding religious ritual which protects the whole village. It is often said that a village without a khalwa where the Koran is chanted, is "dark" and haunted by jinns and satans. This indicates that the khalwa is believed to purify the village by driving away evil and by alleviating misfortune. For the same reason, a faki chants the Koran in the early morning regardless of whether he teaches in the khalwa or not.

Many scholars, in referring to the khalwa working time, have pointed to the absence of a rigid timetable, presumably in comparison with the formal schools. Each khalwa is an independent body and it decides separately its own convenient time of work. The khalwa is primarily a village institution where clock time is irrelevant, if it is ever known. It is, therefore, irrelevant to speak about the khalwa as lacking a "rigid timetable". From our earlier description there appear to be some methods of timing on which the members of each khalwa agree. The timetable is punctuated by the calls to prayer, and/or the movement of the sun, the former itself being determined by the latter. The Muslim call to prayer from the mosque fulfils the same function as the bells in the

Christian church; they are both time regulators of rituals. Similarly, the call to prayer regulates the work in the khalwas, while the bell does the same in the schools formed on the Western pattern. In comparison with the formal school, a khalwa is much more flexible in the age structure of its members and is open to any individual who is willing to learn and capable of attending the classes. Girls can, however, only attend up to the age of ten approximately. The notion of seeking knowledge at any age certainly has its Islamic origins. The prophetic instruction: "seek knowledge from the womb to the grave" is proverbial among Muslim literates and is probably known to khalwa graduates all through the northern Sudan.

The khalwa and memorization

I mentioned earlier that the main aim of the khalwa is to facilitate the memorization of the Koran. The methods used in the khalwas are entirely geared towards this goal. The heavy emphasis on memorization of the Koran takes place at the expense of its theological understanding. The Koranic exegesis is regarded as secondary, at least at this stage. Where writing is introduced, its function is to help the student to achieve the memorization, rather than to replace it. The method is thus characterized by what is termed as "rote" learning (Wagner and Lotfi 1980) with its concomitant mechanical transmission of knowledge. To understand this emphasis on memorization, it is important to relate the khalwa to the society in which it operates or more precisely from which it emanates. The Koran is conceptualized as a static entity that has

to be preserved in the form in which it was revealed several centuries ago. Its perfectness is absolute and probably beyond the full comprehension of any individual. For it to be effective, it is necessary to memorize it exactly as it is revealed and to reproduce it from memory whenever it is needed. There is little room for thinking or commenting about it. The learned man (ālim) is the one who is able to recite the Koran rather than one who is able to discuss it. Furthermore, the learned man is the person who is able to reproduce the Koran from within himself by reciting it from memory rather than recalling it from outside himself, i.e. by reading it from a book. This is the same notion which underlies the idea behind drinking the Koran. As has been mentioned before, the khalwa students wash their texts and drink the erasure after they have memorised them. The same practice is followed in different contexts for purely medical reasons. Drinking the Koran erasure is tantamount to internalizing it in the body (Goody 1968:230; Bruce 1980:19). Beshir appears to conceive of the khalwa in a similar way:

"The Khalwa,, was a product of a certain view of society which held that society is stable, unchanging, and governed by fixed principles of law and morality. The main purpose of education, therefore, was to transmit these principles from one generation to another, and this was done through the memorization of the Koran. Reading and writing were taught as a means to this

end" (Beshir 1969:7).

The memorization of the Koran which is given priority in the khalwa does not imply, however, that an understanding of the Koran is regarded as useless. Nor should the absence of an organized method of clarifying its meaning indicate that the memorized Koranic verses are meaningless to the pupils. Despite the sophisticated style of the Koran as pointed out by Hiskett (1975:134), the khalwa graduates seem to find the verses meaningful enough to use them in a variety of daily activities. In response to my enquiry about the neglect of the exegesis of the meaning of the Koran in the khalwa, a faki said to me: "We teach (nallumūhum) them the Koran only, and if they get interested in its meaning afterwards, let them look for it elsewhere". In this context, the word "teach", seems to mean "to help to memorize". Moreover, there is an implicit dissociation between the Koran and its meaning. The latter, being constructed by a "person", seems less valued than the "words of God" of which the Koran consists. This notion limits the role of the khalwa to memorization only. Those who want to go beyond this stage can certainly seek the company of men of higher learning, mostly in towns and distant cities. There are some advanced khalwas in the Fur region geared to further studies after the memorization stage. To my knowledge, these advanced khalwas recruit only those who have already memorized the Koran. Although their teachings include some branches of Islamic sciences which are thought relevant to village life, the major emphasis in them is laid on what they call "the secrets of the Koran", which implies its "magical" power. None of the Berti fakis has been to these advanced khalwas and they

therefore lie outside the scope of this thesis.

There are two main pedagogical approaches identified by educationalists. The first one is termed "the critical pedagogical approach" and it focusses on training the students to look critically at the reality they are studying. The second type, the adaptive approach, is associated with what is labelled "the banking method of education": the teacher is the depositor while the student plays the role of the depository (Chance 1972; also Freire 1970). Not without some reservations on presenting the two approaches as distinctive types, I would consider the khalwa system as being nearer to the latter type, associated with the banking method. Relations between students and their faki are marked by absolute obedience and the flow of knowledge takes a one way route only. Beshir refers the nature of this relationship to Islamic traditions: "This was in accordance with the tradition of Islam that `learned men are the inheritors of the prophets´ and `whoever teaches me a word I become his slave´" (Ibid:7). These sayings are certainly not known to the average Berti and yet the notion is common. Accordingly the muhājir is not expected to argue with his faki or even to ask questions. Instead, he is supposed to be a mere recipient who follows the instructions and devotes all his time to memorization. It is this aspect of "rote" learning and its possible impact on the cognitive abilities which has attracted criticism from many educationalists who argue that the student is given a chance to promote his memory faculty at the expense of his critical thinking ability (Wagner and Lotfi 1980). In the absence of an objective measuring tool for the evaluation of these faculties, we can only

rely on the experience of those actually involved in the educational process. I have already quoted before a teacher of a formal school in this respect. As his experience has shown, pupils who start at a khalwa and then join a formal school, do better than those who started their education directly in a formal school, at least in their first years. Bruce reports a similar claim by an informant elsewhere in northern Sudan:

"{that} attendance at a khalwa for one or two years, enabled the pupil to adjust more easily to the classroom situation once he entered the first grade of the Western school, and that in fact the brightest first-year pupils were those who had previously attended Koran schools" (Bruce 1980:33).

What is certain about the khalwa is that it introduces its pupils to the learning situation. With the emphasis on memorization, it seems to be particularly conducive to the development of the memory faculty. Recent studies have shown that khalwa students develop a variety of mnemonic techniques that are not available to typical formal school students (Wagner and Lotfi 1980:243). The question of course remains as to what extent the training of the memory affects, if at all, the development of the critical thinking capability. Wagner and Lotfi ask a similar question: "are we certain that memory displaces critical thinking?" (Wagner and Lotfi 1980:247). This problem has not been empirically tested and it is, therefore, not possible to conclude that the intensive memorization encountered in "rote" learning inhibits the

development of the "critical thinking" ability or affects it in a negative way. The issue of the development of the critical thinking ability is related to the presupposed need for the modernization of the traditional societies:

"The more students store up deposits of knowledge, the less likely they are to develop critical thinking skills. The more students adapt to existing " reality ", the less likely they are to engage in transforming those features of society they feel are in need of change"
(Chance 1972:181)

Although improvements in the field of health, education, water resources, etc., are the ambition of every Berti villager, few seek a fundamental change in their society. The tendency towards the maintenance of the established systems of beliefs in African societies has been discussed by Horton (1967) who argues that these systems are encapsulated in their closed predicaments which are characterised by the lack of awareness of alternatives and the anxiety about threats to them. It could therefore be concluded here that "critical thinking" is simply irrelevant in the traditional context and that khalwas in consequence do not aim at encouraging it. In this context they play a vital role in fostering the Berti social system.

Order and discipline

I mentioned earlier that physical punishment is used as a means of social control in the khalwa school. This method is regarded as effective and often recommended by the parents of the children. The local proverb "to us belongs the bone, to you the flesh" (Al-Tayib 1964:14; see also Yusuf 1975:119 and Bruce 1980:27) indicates that the faki is allowed to beat the child without endangering his life. Corporal punishment which is found to be prevalent in almost all literate cultures (Henry 1960:298) is also used in the formal schools in the Sudan. Recently, some educationalists in the Sudan, like their Western counterparts, have assumed critical attitudes towards it. In an effort to understand the role of corporal punishment in education, a distinction is made between order and discipline:

"Order is definedas a state in which a person is oriented toward social goals, while discipline refers to methods used to prevent disruptive behaviour. An orderly person is essentially a thinking person highly motivated toward social goals; while in the present context a disciplined individual is one who is merely controlled in his outward conduct" (Henry 1960: 298).

Discipline then does not create order and this is the core of its alleged ineffectiveness. I would argue that both discipline and order lead to the same end, that is achieving the social goals, whatever they may be. Discipline may not create the motivation but it creates the environment in which the ultimate objective can be achieved. The social control in the khalwas is indeed maintained by both of these forces. The use of corporal punishment neither signifies the absence of order in the khalwas, nor does it prove that it is lacking in "almost all literate cultures" where discipline is found (Ibid). However, when order is threatened in the khalwa, discipline operates to prevent disjunction i.e. the state of mental withdrawal (Ibid:274), and to restore a suitable atmosphere for learning. The khalwa discipline seems to be of Islamic origin: the early Arabs defined the teacher a "the one who brandishes the whip" (Goldziher 1912:204). To understand fully the role of corporal punishment in the khalwa, we have to consider the khalwa in the wider context of the society in which it operates. Corporal punishment is a common method used by the Berti in primary socialization. This can start as early as when the child is about three years old and continue until early adulthood. The responsibility for disciplining a misbehaved youngster does not lie only with his/her parents but with all elders. As the faki is an elder and a resident in the village, he has the full right to punish the misbehaved child outside the khalwa domain, a collective responsibility he shares with other elders in the village. In addition to that he is directly responsible for disciplining the students within the khalwa setting in his role of a person

particularly authorized to impart the religious teachings. In this respect, the faki's position is considerably different from that of the formal school teacher. The latter is normally only a temporary resident in the village and in most cases he is younger than the fakis; he does not qualify as belonging to the father's generation and he certainly does not count as an elder. Consequently, he does not have the same right to discipline youngsters outside the school domain as the faki has. The Berti entertain a further notion which is important in relating discipline to early socialization. A common proverb says that "fear softens the head" (al-khōf belāyin al-rās). It conveys the idea that a disobedient child has a hard head (rāsu gawi). The discipline which fills the youngster with fear is expected to soften his head and consequently makes him obedient to the elders, who possess more wisdom and experience. The notion carries the implication that once the fear is introduced by initial discipline, a need for further punishment may not arise or at least that only the threat of discipline may prove sufficient in further instruction. Thus, it is preferable that the child should be introduced to discipline at an early stage in order to implant some fear. While punishment is administered for misbehaviour, satisfactory achievements are publicly rewarded. I mentioned before that a student who accomplishes his assignment is honoured by leading a procession for donations. Though only the leader of the procession is accorded the privileged status of a successful pupil, donations are shared by the whole khalwa community. Individuality seems to be undermined in at least two ways in the sharafa system: Firstly, the whole village community shares the interest in the achievement of the student as is evident from the rewards people

offer. Secondly, the whole khalwa group shares the material benefit by consuming the donations collectively. As the collective responsibility for the achievement of the individual is expressed in the system of rewards, so it is occasionally also expressed through the administration of punishment: the whole class may be punished for the failure of a single class mate to act appropriately, as I mentioned before.

Acculturation or enculturation?

Questions normally asked about the school setting or education take the form of inquiring into whether they enculturate or acculturate (Foley 1977:317) the concerned individual and thus what effect they have on forming his personality. In trying to apply these questions to the khalwa, a few points have to be borne in mind. Firstly, very few Berti get the chance to join a khalwa and only a small proportion of these remain in it long enough to be regarded as fakis. Secondly, the impact of the khalwa operates to a varying degree on different individuals. Thirdly, the khalwa is not the only socializing institution to which a pupil may respond. Although very many of the beliefs and practices learnt in the khalwa are clearly part of the Berti culture, other elements of knowledge which are external to Berti culture are also transmitted. The majority of the khalwa graduates stop their study after only a short period of learning. During this period, they learn the parts of the Koran which are necessary for them to be able to participate fully in every domain of ritual (see Chapter 7). They are perfectly socialized only in the sense that they do not become over religious

and are, therefore, flexible enough to accommodate those parts of Berti culture which might, otherwise, appear contradictory to Islamic orthodoxy. The other category of students (mainly fakis) who remain in the khalwa for a longer time come out with personalities that are different to or at least not typical of the average Berti. We have already encountered a case where the faki's teaching appeared to be in disagreement with Berti belief. The faki regarded Berti traditional dancing as incompatible with Islamic doctrine and accordingly he ordered his students not to join in it. A considerable number of Berti fakis do not drink the local beer. This is in contrast to the majority of the Berti who regard beer as different from the alcohol forbidden by God and thus not sinful (harām). However, even if we could show that the khalwa produces a personality which is not typical of the average Berti, this is not sufficient to condemn it as an acculturating institution. It simply produces a different personality of a kind already prevalent in and perhaps required by the society. On the whole, one can look at the khalwa as a positive institution in the Berti community. The khalwa students are not merely taught religious activities but are at the same time kept within Berti secular life. In labouring for the faki, the students participate in working the fields, taking care of the animals, building houses, etc. All these activities are necessary for the survival of the whole community. The khalwa students, by being trained in these activities, are not alienated from the traditional social setting to the same extent as the pupils of the formal schools are. The latter, especially after joining higher schools in towns, are completely deprived of participating in the village life. In addition to this, their training is not geared

towards participating in it after completing their education; they are trained to fill governmental jobs in cities.

Financial rewards of the faki as a teacher

It is difficult to assess the financial gain of the faki as a khalwa teacher. This is not because his gains are not measurable in terms of cash, though this may be true in many cases. The difficulty arises from the multiplicity of roles he plays in the society and from the fact that he is separately remunerated for the various services he performs. A notable exception to this rule is that of the faki whose khalwa was attached to a formal school where it was agreed that a monthly payment of 25 pt. was to be made to him by the parents of the children. This khalwa was not a village khalwa because it was a part of a formal school, and the formal schools are characterized by having a paid staff; the situation in which the faki was paid in his role as a teacher was thus an exceptional one and it does not apply to other Koranic schools. Khalwas are always important institutions in the villages in which they are established. A number of scholars working in northern Sudan suggest that the khalwa teacher receives no fees at all (Al-Tayib 1964:13 and Beshir 1969:7) and that also applies to the Berté khalwa teacher who receives no direct payment for his teaching. This is probably related to the early Islamic proscription on payment in return for the spread of the divine knowledge (Goldziher 1912:207). Instead, the khalwa teacher occasionally receives gifts from the pupils' parents, particularly when they live near the khalwa. The pupil himself may give gifts to

his teacher; this is a practice which continues long after his graduation. When the khalwa teacher is accommodating the students, he is entitled to make use of their labour in his field or in any other domestic work (Wilks 1968:171, Beshir 1969:7, Bruce 1980:7-8 and Donald 1974:73). There are other benefits which accrue to the faki in his role of khalwa teacher. In addition to teaching, he also renders other services to the village community for which he receives a small part of the harvest. Moreover, the prestige which he enjoys in the village enables him to mobilize other people for his personal benefit, mostly through communal help (naḥīr).

Khalwa and literacy

The existence of khalwas in the Berti area and, indeed, in most rural parts of the Sudan, has led to some form of literacy. The effects of literacy and writing on previously oral societies have been summarised by Goody and Watt in the following way:

"...writing, by objectifying words and by making them and their meaning available for much more prolonged and intensive scrutiny than is possible orally, encourages private thought; the diary or the confession enables the individual to objectify his own experience, and gives him some check upon the transmutations of memory under the influences of subsequent events" (Goody and Watt 1963:339, 1968:62 and 1973:56; see also Goody 1968:1, 1973:45 and 1977:37,44 and 109).

The Berti literacy is, however, restricted by several factors and seems to fall short of promoting writing to an independent mode of communication applicable to all spheres of life and capable of generating syllogic thinking (Goody 1977:11 and 44). Neither the promotion of "literacy" in its wider sense, nor the encouragement of private thought can be seen as a khalwa's objective. The literacy which the khalwa promotes is fairly restricted by being confined to very few people and by being limited primarily to religious use. There is only a small number of the khalwas in the area and, more importantly, writing and reading are regarded in them as secondary objectives. What is valued is to learn the Koran by heart although the majority of the students leave the khalwa after they have memorised only that part of the Koran which is relevant for some of their daily activities. Any further study ceases to be their priority. As the shorter suras can be memorized without resort to reading, only the ambitious students who remain for a longer period in the khalwa are introduced to writing. The writing practice of these students consists entirely of copying the Koran or other religious books. They receive no training in writing secular sentences and they do not apply their writing ability beyond the religious texts. The function of writing here is reduced to assisting memory and that only in the religious domain. In consequence, khalwa graduates, including the fakis, develop a tendency to limit the use of writing to religious affairs. They are often reluctant to use writing in their secular life, which only rarely requires the use of writing anyhow. But when writing has to be resorted to, it is done by those who have learnt it in the khalwa

only when there is no formal school graduate in the village. Such restricted secular use of writing includes the composition of lists of donors in communal feasts and sacrifices, writing of letters to relatives in distant areas and, occasionally, composition of genealogies.

The religious setting in which writing is taught has its permanent repercussions on the literacy which is thus created. This "restricted" literacy is fairly similar to that encountered in other Muslim societies where modern schools have made little impact. It is best summarized by Goody in the following way:

"The nature of religious literacy inevitably placed certain limitations on its effectiveness; it was restricted literacy both in terms of the proportion who could read and the uses to which writing was put. Moreover, its religious basis meant that a major function was communication to or about God. They were concerned with writing as a means of communicating with God and other supernatural agencies, rather than as a means of social and personal advancement" (Goody 1973:41).

A major feature of Berti literacy is the suppression of private thought. The teacher himself enjoys some form of sanctity due to his piety and knowledge of religion. What he offers his student, be it the knowledge of the Koran or any other religious knowledge, is not subject to argument and "critical thinking". The student, on

the contrary, is trained to be a mere recipient since it is only the bad student who argues with his teacher. This is obviously due to the unquestioned sanctity of what is transmitted, coupled with the fact that the memorization of what is transmitted is itself a prime objective. We have already indicated that memorization of the Koran is a form of its internalization into the human body. The value of the memorization of the Koran and hence its internalization derives primarily from the belief in its eternal power. As will become apparent in the course of the thesis, the Koran is considered to have immense power which contributes to the general welfare of those who acquire a knowledge of it. It does not only protect the individual against various evils but can also ensure the satisfaction of various human aspirations.

The obsession with the commitment of the Koran to memory, however, has been at the expense of developing an understanding of it in its students. There is no organized method of transmitting the theological meaning of the memorized text in Berti khalwas. That is delayed to a later stage and is rarely done anyhow. Most of the teachers themselves do not know the theological meaning of some of the texts and may have only vague ideas about them. This, however, should not imply that what is memorised conveys virtually no meaning to the student. What is memorized, although devoid of its coherent theological meaning, is intelligible enough to allow its application in Berti daily life. The fields in which the acquired knowledge is applied are, of course, determined by many factors, the most crucial of which is the shared notion as to which spheres of life require the use of such knowledge. I hope it will

become fairly obvious that at least some of what is memorized is used effectively in various rituals which are seen as the basic requirement for the survival of the society. The khalwa also fosters an unquestioning reverence for Muslim values epitomised in the perfect absoluteness of the Koran. At a purely secular level, the khalwa consolidates the socializing role of the family by furthering the training of the student in agriculture, animal care, building, etc. Earlier discussion has also shown how attendance at a khalwa can improve the performance of the student if he is later taken to a formal school.

C H A P T E R 3

Erasure (mihāi)

General remarks

The writing equipment used by fakis consists of a wooden slate (lōh), ink made of a fermented paste of soot and gum (dawāi), and a sharpened millet stalk used as a pen. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that wooden slates are used in the khalwas to write on. In this chapter, I will examine another of the fakis' activities which involves writing: Koranic verses or sometimes whole chapters of the Koran are written on both sides of the wooden slates and the written text is washed off with ordinary clean water which is collected for drinking. The water is regarded as containing the previously written Koran and is therefore holy and useful in many respects. Its consumption is a form of Koran internalization in many respects comparable to its memorization. When this mechanical consumption of the Koran is not feasible, other symbolic practices are used (see Erasure 10 and 11). People refer to the collected water by the term mihāi (from the verb yamha: to erase) which I translate as "erasure" (for the term see Al-Safi 1970:30; cf. Sanneh 1979:208). Erasure cases presented in this chapter are mere examples, as a comprehensive survey of all the verses used for erasure is rendered impossible by many factors: limitation of time allocated to the fieldwork, fear of repetition, frequency of erasure taking, etc. Even so, I hope that the cases mentioned provide sufficient foundation for analytical generalisation about erasure preparation and consumption.

It is difficult to find out exactly how frequently the Berti drink erasure. There are quite a number of people who take it at least once a year and a few certainly take it more than that but I have come across only one person who orders it every three or four months. Though it is regarded as a good thing to drink erasure frequently, people who have not taken it for a long time are certainly not decided for it. The decision to ask the faki to prepare erasure may be triggered off by disease, starting a business, getting involved in a bitter dispute, setting out on an unpredictable journey, etc. There are, indeed, countless situations which might create a motive for consuming erasure and different people are obviously motivated by different reasons. This variation does not emanate merely from the unique psychic constitution of each person but also relates to his or her biographical experience.

In the course of my fieldwork, I came across many situations which led to the ordering of erasure and I will briefly outline some of them here. One man ordered erasure simply because he had not taken it for a long time. But it became evident from my inquiries that he had in fact taken erasure just a few weeks before, and so it seems that he must have merely got into the habit of drinking it every three or four months. His move to talk to a faki was finally determined by the free time he had immediately after the harvest. He also arranged erasure for his son because the latter had fled his home several times in an attempt to lead an independent life. His father was convinced that some evil forces must have destabilised him.

A young herder ordered erasure because his animals failed to increase in number and he was convinced that some malicious forces were at work. He also frequently felt sick though not during the particular time when he arranged to have erasure.

I came across two young men who asked two separate fakis living in their village to prepare erasure for them before they migrated to Libya for temporary work. The journey across the desert is dangerous and full of obstacles. The uncertainty of the trip is further aggravated by the difficulty of finding a job which pays enough to ensure the possibility of saving, and the lack of risk-free investment opportunities at home. Many migrants come back with a reasonable amount of money but only a few manage to establish themselves by creating a sizeable herd.

A young child was sick and was said to have screamed in his sleep. The sickness was diagnosed by his father as being due to an evil force and a faki was hired to prepare erasure.

A primary school pupil who was sitting his final exam was offered erasure by a faki who had previously prepared some for him. The pupil accepted the offer although he had failed his previous exams despite the erasure which was prepared to guarantee him success.

Writing of erasure normally takes a few days. In rare cases the whole operation may be completed in a few hours, or at the other extreme it may take several weeks depending on the amount of material to be written. As erasure is given to the client in small portions, he has to consume his measure before he gets the next one. There is no strict timing for taking it. Erasure is normally received in a small bowl or sometimes in a bottle. The client is left free either to drink the whole lot at once or to take it in small doses during the course of the day. The next day the client asks the faki for more until the whole prescription is drunk. Erasure can be prepared for and shared by more than one client and it is quite a common practice to order one erasure for all one's children. Despite the worry about the exact number of times each Koranic verse must be copied in the erasure, sharing the erasure takes place in a more relaxed manner and no effort is made to ensure its equal distribution, which would easily be possible if, for example, tea cups were used for measuring it. The erasure is taken from the same container by a number of people in exactly the same way as ordinary drink and food is consumed. During the time when he is taking erasure, the client must refrain from committing adultery and according to some people from sexual intercourse and from drinking beer. In spite of their views that drinking beer does not contravene any Islamic proscription, the Berti believe that if beer and erasure are taken on the same day, the latter will not be blessed by God and will consequently cease to function. The rule was said to have been misobserved in one case which came to my knowledge. I have already referred to a young man who was said to

have fled his home several times. Erasure was then arranged by his father to stop him fleeing again. It was rumoured that the young man was taking his erasure while he was regularly drinking beer. Though he himself denied this, the rumour itself is important as a social mechanism enforcing such a rule. The story goes on to justify why he had beer together with erasure. As the boy was still determined to flee his home and live independently, he was not interested in erasure carefully designed to destroy his ambition and he opted for spoiling its effect with beer instead of refusing it altogether.

Consultation of a faki can take place wherever a private dialogue is possible. In most cases the client visits the faki in his house where complete privacy can be obtained. The consultation can also occur in public places with the faki and his client moving aside from other people. The kind of erasure prepared is mostly decided by the client. This means that the client not only diagnoses his case but is also in a position to specify the appropriate verses to be written. In other cases the client may describe his situation, leaving the choice of the appropriate verses to the faki. This should not imply that all the chapters employed in erasure writing are thoroughly incorporated in popular knowledge. Only a few of the most common Koranic chapters are known to the non-professional Berti. As knowledge is unequally distributed in any given society (Holy and Stuchlik 1981:17-18), we may expect those who are in close contact with fakis and their clients to be better informed than other Berti and therefore to know more than them about the Koranic verses used for erasure. Berti

women are particularly ill-informed as they show comparatively little interest in these matters. The following list indicates the chapters which are usually known to the non-professionals. The titles of the chapters are followed by short comments on their use:

Exordium chapter (al-fātha)

Good for travelling, gaining wealth and success, commencing new activities. The chapter is described as being capable of "opening the doors of the worlds" i.e. ensuring success in this life and the life to come.

The Unity chapter

Good for protection of people and property against misfortune caused by the evil eye. The chapter can also be used to pardon sins.

The Throne Verses (ayāt al-kursi)

The verses are believed to be useful for the protection of people and their property threatened by evil entities, i.e. devils (shītān and ārid).

The Mankind and the Dawn chapters

Both of the chapters are of medical value for treating unknown illnesses, especially those inflicting young children. They are also seen as efficacious for protecting people and their property against sorcery and, according to some, against the evil eye.

The above mentioned chapters are known to non-professionals because they are used more often than other verses in erasure. With reference to disease etiology or indeed misfortune in general, the evil eye, sorcery and devils are seen as major causes. Chapters or verses chosen are to be written a certain number of times. The numbers 7, 41, 100, 313 and 1000 are repeatedly specified in each umbatri. This is in addition to the number three which is confined to the introductory verses and does not apply to the main texts. But why are these numbers used more often than others and why should a verse be efficient only when it is repeated a certain number of times? Indigenous interpretations stress these numbers as good (samhīn) or lucky (bukhāt) (see Chapter 5) in comparison to others. They are thus more appropriate to use if the objective is to be attained.

The number 7 is regarded by the Berti as lucky and ritual actions are either designed to coincide with the seventh day or elsewhere repeated 7 times. In trying to account for the importance of the number seven, the Berti mentioned to me that seven is the number of the days of the week; a child starts losing his first

teeth at seven years of age; it took God seven days to finish creating the world; there are seven layers of earth below us and seven layers of skies above us, and there are seven grades of heaven and an equal number of fires (hell) reserved for the Day of Judgement. The second justification is derived from nature while all the others are based on religious knowledge and originate mainly from the Koran.

The number 41 is also described as ominous. In trying to explain its importance, the fakis often mention that a man attains full maturity at the age of forty, after which his strength starts to decline; the importance of the number forty-one thus derives from the fact that it marks the beginning of a new era in human development. This notion is certainly borrowed from the Koran:

"At length, when he reaches
The age of full strength
And attains forty years,
He says,..." (Ali 1938:1370).

A biographical fact about the prophet Mohammed known to many Berti fakis is that he had his first revelation as a prophet at the age of forty. Like seven, forty is another number which guides Berti ritual actions. The death sacrifice is known as "the forty days sacrifice" (karāmat arbaīn). There exists a certain ambivalence as to which day is appropriate for it to be made. Some believe that forty days should elapse after the death before the the sacrifice is made. Others argue for holding the sacrifice on the 40th day for a dead man and on the 41st for a woman. After giving

birth, women are secluded in their houses also for 40 days. On the 41st day the woman is ceremonially taken with her newly born baby outside her house for the first time. It is only after this ceremony that she is allowed to leave her home freely.

Little exegesis of the "goodness" of the numbers 100, 313 and 1000 is offered by the people. But the number 100 is undoubtedly a significant one in Berti culture. Informants often reiterate that there are 99 Berti lineages. This number is upgraded to 100 by adding a Meidob lineage (Urdāto) to the list. The Urdāto are related to the Berti through their ancestress who was a Berti by origin. A different upgrading of the number 99 to 100 occurs in prayers consisting of rosary bead counting (see Chapter 7). When praying, the worshipper whispers the name of God several times and he uses his rosary to count his utterances. Sometimes he is required to repeat the name of God several thousand times. Each time a person does a full round of the rosary, he notes down 100 though the actual number is 99. We may assume that this method of changing the actual number of rosary beads is aimed at avoiding a complicated mathematical multiplication; it is of course much easier, especially for an illiterate, to multiply hundreds than ninety-nines. The first example, however, provides better speculative ground for the relative importance of the number 100 in comparison to 99. Though the Berti are patrilineal and regard themselves as distinct from the Meidob tribe, they still find it necessary to include the Urdato in the list of their lineages. I would therefore be inclined to attribute this to the differential status of the two numbers. The number 99 is more likely to be at

least less auspicious than the number 100.

313 is said to be the number of prophets sent by God. To my knowledge, this statement cannot be substantiated in the light of Islamic theological culture.

1000 is said to be the number of "angels", which is also difficult to verify according to orthodox Islam. However, the number 1000 is repeated more than 15 times in the Koran (Flügel 1842:12) while the number 100 is mentioned 9 times (ibid:179) and the number 7 appears 25 times (ibid:179). On the other hand, the number 41 is not mentioned at all in the Koran and 40 appears four times only (ibid:77). If we accept the repetition of these numbers in the Koran as a proof of their auspicious character as claimed by the Berti, we are confronted with another problem. The number 3 appears more than 20 times in the Koran (ibid:40). Nevertheless, it is often referred to as an unlucky number in Berti as well as in Arab culture generally. On the other hand, it is often treated as auspicious not only in the context of erasure but in many other contexts as well. It is often reiterated that the Islamic creed is "3" i.e. has to be repeated three times in order to be approved by God. The notion is dramatized in a different context by young Berti boys when they fight against each other. As a method of warning, a boy says to his rival: "No god but God". His rival is obliged to respond and he often does so by automatically saying: "Mohammed is the apostle of God". This is a warning which is regarded as complete only when it is repeated three times after which either a compromise or a fight obtains. Divorce also is seen as final only

after its third statement. The ritual washing before prayers involves washing each organ concerned three times. In the standard Islamic prayers, a person recites certain incantations three times, and finally, the mourning after death is relaxed after a sacrifice has been performed on the third day.

The inauspiciousness or the ambiguity of the number three contrasts with that of the number seven. Seven is regarded by all Berti as an auspicious number and it is, therefore, widely employed in various ritual actions. Death and marriage rituals are probably the best examples for contrasting the significance of the two numbers. The main death sacrifice marking the abatement of mourning (raf al-furāsh: lit. lifting of carpets on which the mourners sit) takes place on the third day following the death. On the other hand, the main sacrifices marking the height of the ceremonies and celebrations are held on the seventh day after the event in question. Celebration for happy occasions, particularly marriages, is referred to as subū (lit. seven days celebration). The term itself is derived from the word sabā (seven) and it implies that the festivities will last for seven days.

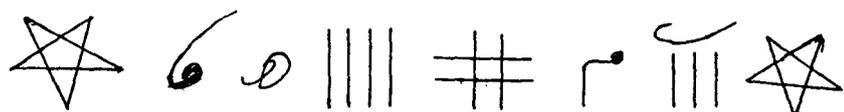
When erasure is used for treating children, it is sufficient to write the appropriate verse seven times only. For the treatment of adults, the verse has to be written down at least forty-one times. If symptoms persist, the number is increased to a hundred (cf. Erasure 9). Two general points can be drawn from this: firstly, children require less powerful medicine than adults, and secondly, the power of the verses increases with the increase in the number of

times they are written. The first point raises a problem of its own. The Berti ascribe the illness in adults and the illness in children to the same causes and yet the verses chosen for adults and children afflicted by the same cause vary merely in the number of times they are written. This clearly indicates that the Berti see a negative relationship between human physical strength and the intensity of the affliction: as children have weaker bodies, the disease agents attack them less violently than they do adults.

Layout of erasure writing

All erasure writings start with the verse: "In the name of God the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful". This verse appears at the beginning of all chapters of the Koran but one. The verse or a part of it is frequently uttered by the Berti to ensure blessing, to avoid bad luck or to ward off any malevolent influences; it is uttered, for example, to start eating, drinking, travelling, weeding or any other similar activity. In erasure writing, it is usually followed by another sentence: "May God Who hears and Knows all things materialise our intention". The term "intention" relates here to the purpose for which erasure is prepared. This sentence is repeated three times. In rare cases it may be written again three times at the end of the main verses.

Almost all erasure writings are concluded by the following signs:



These signs are regarded as a single unit referred to as khātim (finger ring, stamp or seal) or khātim Seleiman i.e. (Solomon's ring or seal). The shape is also known by the phrase "The name of God, the Almighty", directly borrowed from Arab literature. The relation between the finger ring and the stamp or seal is derived from an old practice, which still prevails on a limited scale, whereby uneducated bearers of authority, like sheikhs or omdas, usually have their names engraved on their finger rings and use them to stamp their names as a form of a signature. Even though most finger rings used in the area do not bear any names, the term khātim came to mean the ring as well as the stamp. The term is also associated with ending or accomplishing a piece of work, generally of an important nature. The Arabic word for conclusion is khātima which is of the same root. The expression "Solomon's seal" refers strictly speaking only to the stars at both ends of the signs but is often used to refer to all the signs as a unit. The signs appear in almost all books used by fakis in the area (Saḥūsī N.D.: 60-61 and 93; Al-Tūkhi B. N.D.:45 and 109-111; Al-Sayūti 911 hij: 147,150,239,240 and 276; Al-Tūkhi 1961:55; Al-Bōni 622 hij.: 89-93; Ibēd 1973:61 and 90). The information on the signs contained in these books is purely descriptive and it is concerned merely with their use. The theological meaning of the verses as well as the signs and the reasons why they exert power over various forces are as a rule not elaborated in them. There is indeed a lot of confusion in explaining these signs, a matter which is acknowledged by the Arab writers (Al-Tūkhi {b} N.D.:109-110). There is also a

disagreement as to whether the signs count as a single unit or a collection of several independent entities. A special poem has been composed to help to commit the form and the order of the signs to memory (for a complete version see Al-Bōni 622 hij.:90-91). Al-Bōni treats the signs as consisting either of 13 units (five from the Koran, four from the Gospels (Ingīl) and four from the Jewish Torah) or of 16 units (five from the Koran (☸), five from the Bible (☩) and six from the Torah (☩ ☩ ☩ ☩ ☩ ☩)). The indigenous view regards the whole drawing as consisting of 17 units, a number which is arrived at by counting the stars as two separate units. According to this view, the signs are conceived as equivalent in their numerical value to the seventeen letters in the verse "No God but He" and, accordingly, each letter in the verse is seen as corresponding to a unit in the signs. Yet it is not claimed that each unit in the signs shares its meaning with its corresponding word in the verse.

In the Arab literary sources, it is recommended that the signs be used for a variety of purposes. They are described as being highly protective against all forms of misfortune and as being helpful in achieving different aspirations. A limited explanation is given about some of the signs. The star (☸) is believed to contain in its centre "some secrets which for certain reasons cannot be revealed". The signs (☩) are described as fingers pointing to whatever one may aspire to. (☩) is a ladder capable of taking the individual to whatever his ambitions may be. Lastly, the sign (☩) is a horn, presumably similar to that used for medical cubbing, and it contains great but unspecified secrets. Ironically and yet to

the point, a warning is given against any scepticism about the efficacy of these signs. The writer adds that he has mentioned only what was permissible and what "he was (divinely) ordered" to make known. The reader in turn is instructed to guard the secrecy of the "holy signs" (Ibid). A certain amount of the knowledge thus seems to be "secret" and should not be released to the "public". It is certainly beyond the scope of this thesis to go into the details of Arab culture which, anyhow, cannot be equated with Berti cultural knowledge. The most important point which concerns us directly here is that the prophet Solomon is believed to have used the signs to protect himself against a certain class of a female jinn called umalsibiān. The term means "mother of the children" and is associated with subversion, disease, abortion, sterility, or generally bad luck (Al-Safi 1970:10 see Chapter 4). The story tallies well with the Berti reference to the stars at both ends of the signs as Solomon's seal. The Berti believe that Solomon's seal has a protective power but they do not see it as helpful in any other way. It is also known to all adult Berti that the prophet Solomon spoke the languages of all non-human beings. He was, therefore, able to communicate with birds, insects and animals, but more importantly, with devils, jinns or other superhuman beings. In the Berti view, Solomon was assisted by the divine power which he possessed by virtue of being a prophet. He was also empowered by his knowledge of the "languages" of all non-human beings some of whom are exceptionally mischievous. His ability to communicate, particularly with malevolent beings, gave him authority to influence their actions and discover their ill-intended plots (cf. Tambiah 1979:178). The Berti notion concerning the advantage of knowing a

foreign language seems to stretch to include those of non-human beings. This notion is either derived from or enforced by a parallel in Arab culture which is contained in the proverb: "a person who knows a language of a foreign people guarantees his safety against their evils". The seal, being devised by someone who knew the languages of non-human beings, is taken to exert great influence on them. By virtue of his lack of knowledge of these languages, a Berté is bound to take the signs as beyond his comprehension and is effectively prevented from entertaining any doubts about their efficacy. In any case, the literature from which the knowledge of the signs derives and with which almost all Berté professionals are familiar, discourages investigation and suppresses scepticism (cf Horton 1967). The material which it contains is veiled in an aura of sacredness that makes scepticism and any possible investigation of it potentially heretical and to be scorned by other people.

Examples of Erasure Verses

The first five erasure examples are related to the concrete cases which I confronted during my fieldwork; the remaining erasures (6-12) were given to me by different fakís from their private umbatris.

Erasure 1 (the Throne Verses)

This erasure consists of the Throne Verses which are believed to be effective for protection in general. The client ordering them was not sick and was not confronting any specific misfortune during the erasure taking. His aim in ordering the erasure was to retain his good health and to avoid any unforeseen misfortune in the near future.

" God! There is no god
But He- the Living,
The Self-subsisting, Eternal.
No slumber can seize him
Nor sleep. His are all things
In the heavens and on earth.
Who is there can intercede
In His presence except
As He permitteth? He knoweth
What (appeareth to His creatures
As) before or after
Or behind them.
Nor shall they compass
Aught of His knowledge
Except as He willeth.
His Throne doth extend
Over the heavens
And the earth, and He feeleth

No fatigue in guarding
And preserving them,
For He is the Most High
The Supreme (in glory)" (Ali 1938:102-103).

As far as I know, only these verses were repeated 41 times. Their writing was concluded by the signs drawn on the line at the bottom of the wooden slate. These verses are counted as among the most powerful in the Koran. Ghazali, the Arab philosopher, treated them as a single verse which he referred to as the "chief" of the Koranic verses (Quasem 1977:75-78). They demonstrate the ultimate power of God, His superiority and His constant alertness which is neither disrupted by fatigue nor terminated by sleep. God infinitely knows everything and nothing can occur to his creatures (including the client) without His will. Misfortune, including sickness, is conceived of as issuing from malignant acts which are not blessed by God and the client here is taking refuge with God to protect him from such malevolent disturbances.

Erasure 2 (the Exordium chapter)

This erasure was prepared for the two young men who were migrating to Libya. They were advised by their parents to seek special erasure from a faki. It was already decided by them that the "Exordium chapter" was appropriate in their case. The writing was commenced by the usual introductory sentences quoted above. The

main chapter follows:

"In the name of God,
Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
Praise be to God,
The Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds;
Most Gracious, Most Merciful;
Master of the Day of Judgement.
Thee do we worship,
And Thine aid we seek.
Show us the straight way,
The way of those on whom
Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace.
Those whose (portion)
Is not wrath,
And who go not astray" (Ibid:14-15).

The writing was ended by the word "Amen" which is not a part of the Koranic chapter but is always added by the people to it. It is difficult to conceive the relation between the words of the chapter and the activity for which it was used. The meanings conveyed in the chapter include acknowledgement of various attributes of God, a testimony ensuring the ultimate adherence of the individual to Him, and an invocation to Him to lead the person along the path of the people whom He favours. The chapter has no direct reference to material benefit which is the sole purpose of the migration. The only term which the Berti might relate to prosperity is "grace".

In the Berti language the word nīma (grace) has much wider connotations than its English equivalent. It implies a gift of God which can include any privileges an individual might wish to have: children, wealth, social standing, power, etc. The word necessarily implies that the favour in question is given by God. The word is also used in its verb form yanāma (graces, favours). It is often said that God "graces" or favours an individual with wealth, children, etc. However, the theological meaning of the word "grace" in the verse refers merely to the spiritual guidance of the individual (along the straight way). The Berti do not in any context correlate material prosperity and spiritual salvation as in Calvinism (Weber 1930). Neither is the Berti conception of the people "graced" by God near to Geertz' finding that the marabouts (people fastened to God) are endowed with blessings (baraka) that include material prosperity in addition to other attributes (Geertz 1968:43-44). Although I would not want to go as far as to suggest that the Berti conceive of material prosperity as incompatible with spiritual salvation, they clearly express the opinion that the richer a person is, the more prone he is to being diverted from the godly "straight way". The point to be established here is the absence of a clear link between the material benefit which is the main objective of the migration and the guidance called for in the chapter. The implication of this is that the wording of the chapter is not an important reason for its being chosen. But the question still remains as to why this chapter should be seen as appropriate in this situation. The main clue to answering it derives from its ritual use in most situations of transition, like

marriage, reconciliation, long journeys, pilgrimage, death, etc. When the chapter is recited to protect an individual during the new phase upon which he is entering, all present raise their hands "open" in front of their faces. After reading the chapter, they say "Amen" rubbing their hands on their faces. This practice is also referred to as al-fātha. The efficacy of the chapter in this respect derives from its being the opening introductory to the whole Koran which is conceived of as incorporating every sphere of life. The title of the chapter is often translated as "the opening chapter of the Koran" (Ali 1938:14-15) which is synonymous with the Berti meaning of the word al-fātha. The al-fātha chapter is described by the faki as capable of "opening the doors of this world and the next". "Opening the doors" is a prerequisite for succeeding in any undertaking. The chapter is, therefore, regarded as betokening a good start in any change of status or new activity. Although migration to Libya is a fairly recent practice, travelling for the sake of material gain is by no means new. The Koranic chapter is not, however, merely used to ensure material gain but the realisation of all possible aspirations such as an easy journey, sound health, quick job-finding, etc.

Erasure 3 (The "Mankind and the Dawn" chapters)

The second consultation of the faki who attended to the two migrants to Libya was with his hired herder. He was not sick during the consultation though he occasionally felt his "whole body" aching, a symptom often heard of in the Berti area. That was

coupled with his failure to establish his own herd, despite his reputation as a hard worker. There was a number of reasons suggested for the slow increase of the animals and the occasional physical discomfort felt by the herder. The evil eye, sorcery, ārids (highly subversive devils), etc., were cited as possible causes of his troubles. When the assumption is made that the herder and his animals must have suffered because of these causes, he himself is effectively freed from any responsibility for the decrease in his capital. The "Mankind" and the "Dawn" chapters of the Koran, which are particularly effective for protection of self and property against these particular likely causes, were selected in this instance:

Mankind:

"Say: I seek refuge

With the Lord

And Cherisher of Mankind,

The King (or Ruler)

Of Mankind,

The God (or Judge)

Of Mankind,-

From the mischief

Of the Whisperer

(Of evil), who withdraws

(After his whisper),-

The same who whispers

into the hearts of Mankind,-

Among jinns

And Among Men" (Ali 1938:1810).

The Dawn:

"Say: I seek refuge

With the Lord of the Dawn,

From the mischief

Of created things;

From the mischief

Of those who practise

Secret acts;

And from the mischief

Of the envious one

As he practises envy" (Ibid:1808).

The erasure was meant to protect the herder and his property against the malicious forces in the present as well as in the future. The two suras stress taking refuge with God from the malignity of evil forces, and the mischief of the one who whispers in the hearts of people or the mischief of all created things including human beings as well as jinns and devils. They also mention taking refuge from those who practise secret acts, a phrase which may immediately connote sorcery to a Berti, and from the mischief of the envious, which could be directly related to the Berti conceptualisation of the casting of the evil eye as being triggered off by envy (cf. Shilob 1961; Morsy 1979). For the Berti, the verses thus clearly specify the recognized causes of illnesses: evil forces (created things), sorcery (secret acts) and the evil eye (envy). Most Berti fakis are familiar with the Arabic

literature which recommends the use of these verses for medication and they know that the prophet Mohammed once suffered as a result of sorcery and used these two chapters to defuse its effects (Athīr al-Dīn 16th. hij.:530) though, unlike the Bertī fakīs, he read each of them only once. The reason why the fakīs repeat them more than once to arrive at a similar result derives from the notion that in preparing erasure, the incantation is addressed to God and unless He accepts or blesses the efforts the erasure will not yield any benefit. The prophet occupies a favourable position vis a vis God and he thus needs to use the verses a limited number of times. The Bertī faki who in comparison to the prophet occupies a distant position in relation to God must repeat the verses many more times. The number of times one uses the verses, then, increases or decreases with the power of the user measured by his distance from God.

Erasure 4 (the Unity chapter)

The third client was a young boy who suffered from wirda (fever) for one night during which he screamed several times in his sleep. He was instantly given some tablets bought in the market and by the morning he was feeling well. The sickness coincided with his and his mother's visit to a crowded market on the previous day. Everybody agreed that he might have suffered from an evil eye cast on him there. For this reason, his father consulted the faki in spite of the fact that the boy had recovered by the morning. The father suggested a hijab which was rejected by the faki who argued

that a child did not know the value of a hijāb and might mistreat it. He suggested erasure instead. It consisted of the "Unity" chapter (al-ikh̄lās):

"Say: He is God,
The One and Only;
God, the Eternal, Absolute
He begetteth not,
Nor is He begotten;
And there is none
Like unto Him" (Ali 1938:1806).

It is accepted by most of the adult Berti that this chapter is effective against the evil eye. If he meets someone reputed to be a witch, a Berti may recite this chapter to avoid being bewitched by him. Those who do not know the whole chapter may repeat only the first two lines of it, which are known to most Berti including the illiterate adults. Any illness which coincides with being in a crowded area is likely to be diagnosed as caused by the evil eye. The symptomatic features of the illness are very much secondary factors in the diagnosis. It is a general rule in Berti etiology that the same force (e.g. the evil eye) may cause different illnesses with different symptoms while the same symptoms may be attributed to different causes (cf. Ackerknecht 1946:469). The words of the chapter do not refer specifically to the evil eye but refer to and confirm certain attributes of God and His unique power. The evil eye can be a direct cause of many ailments but it is God who is

identified as the ultimate cause without whose permission no disease can affect a person. Or to put it another way, God, the ultimate cause, has the power to render the direct cause of a disease harmless. Dealing with God, the ultimate cause, instead of the evil eye which is the direct cause is a safety valve against misidentification of the direct cause. Nevertheless, to discover why the Bertî use different verses for different ailments while they conceive of the ultimate cause as being always the same remains a problem. I will return to this point later.

Erasure 5 ("Verses of Understanding")

This erasure, referred to as ayāt al-fihīm (lit. verses of understanding) was prepared for a primary school pupil in an effort to help him pass his final exams. The faki had prepared it for him in the previous year but the pupil failed and had to repeat the year. The second time the initiative came from the faki himself. He claimed that God had not accepted his efforts the previous year and it might be better to try the erasure again. The faki claimed to have a good reputation and experience in making this kind of erasure. Some people in the village supported him in this claim as he was known to have helped many students to success in previous years. He cited a few students who "had done well in the school" -including myself- and some who had got good governmental jobs. The main verses of the erasure were:

"Proclaim! And Thy Lord

Is Most Bountiful,-
He Who taught
(The use of) pen,-
Taught man that
Which he knew not" (Ali 1938:1761-2).
"To Solomon We inspired
The (right) understanding
Of the matter: to each
(Of them) We gave Judgement
And knowledge;.." (Ibid:839).
"Verily this is
The Supreme achievement" (Ibid:1198).

A general problem of translation is its distortion of the impression given by certain words in the original text. The word "proclaim" in the first line is a translation of the term igrā, which literally means "read". In a different interpretation of the Koran, Khan translated the word (igrā) as "recite" (Khan 1981:624), and Ali whose translation is used in this chapter, translated it, though in a different Koranic verse, as "read" (Ali 1938:1671). For the Berti, this is directly associated with "learning" which is also known as girāi (reading). The word "taught" appearing in the same verse is a translation of the term allāma from which the word talim ("education") is derived. The word "understanding" (fihim) is the key word from which the title of the Erasure is derived. The third verse as a whole also creates a certain problem of translation. The last vowel sign in the Arabic word "lahuwa" (lit. truly it is or

truly he is) is omitted by the Berti fakis and the word is transformed into "lahu" (lit. for him or for it). Ignoring the grammatical structure and the theological meaning of the verse, we can reconstruct it according to the meaning it conveys to the Berti: "The supreme achievement (triumph) will be secured for this person". In discussing the use of this verse in understanding Erasure, a faki used the word "lahu" ("for this person") to imply the pupil for whom the erasure was prepared.

Unlike most of the other examples presented before, the Koranic verses here relate directly to the subject for which the erasure is prepared. Teaching, the use of the pen, knowledge of the previously unknown (first verse), right understanding, gaining of judgement and knowledge (second verse), are all related to notions that are relevant to education.

In the first verse, it is God who teaches a person the use of the pen and the knowledge of what the person does not know. In the second verse, the right understanding is also inspired by God and so is the judgement and knowledge. In the third verse, though to a lesser degree, the achievement is secured by God. As a whole, the verses used reflect a fatalistic attitude towards education which is seen more or less as an endowment from God, rather than simply as an individual achievement.

The explanation given by the faki for the previous failure of erasure was summed up in his phrase: "God did not accept it". Such an excuse is always final for a Berti since it is believed that God may not need any reason for not accepting an invocation and a man should not question God's motives. So long as the faki has been successful in the past, the explanation offered suffices to guard his reputation. Acting as a typical secondary elaboration (Evans-Prichard 1937), it effectively protects the belief in the efficacy of the erasure from any possible questioning (Horton 1970:162).

It might be legitimate to mention here my own personal experience with the erasure for "understanding". As has been implied above, the same faki prepared some erasure for me when I was at school. The way in which I was instructed by the faki to consume the erasure is of some relevance to the current discussion. The faki insisted that the erasure should be combined with the heart of a hoopoe, locally called faki widwid (Arabic Hudhud) (cf. magical ingredients of medicine, Boston 1971). The hoopoe is a colourful crowned bird which moves its head continuously up and down. The movement of its head is associated by the Berti with Muslim prayers and is considered as being indicative of its piety. The faki cited the occasional "prostration" of the bird as the reason for using it. In a different context, the hoopoe is seen as a bird of high intelligence, wisdom and caution. This is evident from a proverbial story often quoted by local rootmen operating as healers. A certain root capable of "magnetising" plants is said to be known only to

this bird. The bird nests in holes dug in trunks of trees and when the entrance to its nest is blocked by grass, it clears it by using this root. If the rootman wants to get hold of the root, he blocks the hole of the hoopoe's nest and waits for the bird to bring the mysterious root. After the hole has been reopened by the bird, he abandons the "magnetic" root which the rootman then collects. The root is used for medical purposes, mainly for pulling thorns out of the human body. A few fakis also believe that a hoopoe acted as a messenger for the prophet Solomon, who was believed to have maintained the legendary rapid communication system in his kingdom with the help of hoopoes.

I was told that the best way of eating the hoopoe's heart was to swallow it while it was still alive, i.e. immediately after killing the bird when its heart was still warm. The first sip of the erasure was supposed to follow immediately after swallowing the heart. Because of the difficulty of getting the bird, it was considered acceptable to find the bird first, extract the heart and cook it before the erasure was prepared. That was simply because the erasure does not stay fresh for a long time. It was the latter option which I managed to execute. When I mentioned this story to the faki and thus tried to suggest that the erasure possibly did not work because it was not combined with the hoopoe's heart, he claimed that it was difficult to get the bird nowadays. He stressed that it would be better to supplement the erasure with the heart of the hoopoe but that it was not really crucial for the efficacy of the verses. The link between the hoopoe and "understanding" is not difficult to comprehend. By eating its heart, a person is believed

to acquire its attributes (cf Frazer 1922, Leach 1976) i.e. piety, wisdom and intelligence. The relevance of the last two attributes to education is clear. Nevertheless, the relation between piety and education may require some clarification. Until very recently the only education known to the Berti was that provided by the Koranic schools. Even now, the modern schools are largely confined to the urban areas. Those who stay long enough in the khalwas to commit the whole Koran to memory are often more religious than those who do not. This¹ has led to a correlation between knowing the Koran and being religious. The two attributes, i.e. knowing the Koran and piety are closely linked so that the existence of either one of them is taken as indicative of the existence of the other. As it is considered that piety can be gained through eating a hoopoe's heart, it follows that this may also lead to knowing the Koran, which is the main purpose of the traditional education.

Erasure 6 (For unknown diseases)

The following verses are prescribed for acute diseases, the direct causes of which are unknown.

"... Who created me, and
It is He Who guides me;
And when I am ill,
It is he who cures me;"
(Ali 1938:956).

".. And whose help I need

On the day of judgement,
Oh, My Lord! Bestow on me
The wisdom of the Prophet
And the righteous people"
(my translation).

" By the Sky
And the Night Visitant
(Therein).....
Surely (God) is able
To bring him back
(To life after death)"
(Ibid:1719-20).

41, 100 or 1000 times+

ا ب ا ط ا د ا

ا ن ا ه ا ج ا

ا و ا ا ا ح ا

(+) i.e. to be written either 41, 100 or 1000 times for the patient.

Responding to my inquiries about the choice of the above verses, the faki referred to the phrase "It is He Who cures me" as the main reason for selecting the first verse (Who..). The second sentence (And..) was described as a Koranic verse which in fact it is not. Its relevance to the erasure could not be spelt out by the faki. The last verse (By...) was used because of its reference to the ability of God to "bring him back to life". In the course of our discussion, the faki substituted the word (him) by the phrase "sick man". The verse was understood as referring to God's power to bring a person who is very ill and hence almost dead back to life. The verses have been manipulated in a certain way to suit the occasion. The first two lines of the Erasure ("When ... guides me;") stand in the Koran as verse 79 and are connected in the Erasure with verse 80 ("And .. cures me;"). to form a single structure. Verse 79 ("[He] Who gives me food and drink") is omitted as it is irrelevant in the context.

The second paragraph translated by myself is a collection of words taken from different Koranic verses. The most dramatic change is made in the last line. The original verse reads as follows:

O my Lord! bestow wisdom

On me, and join me

With the Righteous; .." (Ibid:957).

The word translated as "righteous" is sālihēn and it reserves its classical Arabic meaning in Berti colloquial Arabic. It is mostly used to describe dead people who have led a highly religious life and who have been promoted to the level of saints. Copying the

verse as it stands in the Koran would imply for a Berti a call upon God to allow the sick person to join "physically" the "dead" righteous people. The words "join me" are omitted to avoid such an impression. Despite the change, the phrase keeps the form of a Koranic verse in meaning and rhythm, so that few people in the area would have been able to spot it as a "forged" verse.

The last line in the third paragraph exhibits a deviation of the Berti understanding from the classical meaning conveyed by the Koranic verses. The Berti sometimes refer to the recovery of very sick people as them virtually coming back from the dead. Unlike the indigenous interpretation, the classical meaning refers to recreation after death in the next life, and not in the present one as the faki wanted to understand it. The indigenous interpretation explained here is made possible by an imprecise understanding of the original text.

The table at the end of the example is certainly the most popular one used by Berti fakis. According to Marzūgi (n.d.:22) it was designed by Imam Al-Ghazālī (Died 505 hij.) and it is believed to contain valuable secrets useful for multiple purposes. The table appears in the above form in many locally circulated books (Al-Sayūti 911 hij.; Ibn Sina n.d.; Sanusi n.d.; Al-Tūkhi {a} n.d.; Al-Tūkhi {b} n.d.; Al-Tūkhi 1961; Marzūgi 1970 and Ibēd 1973). In most of them it is recommended for medical use but it also appears in connection with the so called "black magic".

Erasure 7 (For inducing pregnancy)

The following extract may be written for a woman who has failed to bear children.

"He it is who shapes you
In the wombs as He pleases.
There is no God but He,
The exalted in Might,
The Wise" (Ali 1938:122-123).
To be written 41 times

The example typifies the Berté theory of fertility according to which only the wife is blamed for the couple's inability to produce children. The verse recalls the power of God with regard to conception. There are also special verses for the woman who encounters a difficult delivery. The erasure can be prepared during pregnancy. If the woman has suffered during her previous delivery, the erasure could be prepared for her during her next delivery. It can also be instantly prepared during the actual delivery if complications arise or are expected:

Erasure 8 (For difficult delivery)

An erasure can be prepared when difficult delivery is expected or sometimes even during the actual delivery.

No God but He
The Almighty, full of honour.
"...There is no God
But He!- Lord of the Throne
Supreme!" (Ibid:984).
No God but He,
Lord of Earth and Heavens.
".. There is no God
But He!- Lord of the Throne
Supreme" (Ibid)
"The day they see it,
(It will be) as if they
Had tarried but a single
Evening, or (at most till)
The following morn" (Ibid:1685).
41 or 100 times

My queries as why these particular verses should ease delivery drew little response from the faki. However, he spoke about the last verse, specifically the phrase "the day they see it" as if what is seen is the baby being born after a shorter and easier labour than anticipated. The faki who explained this seemed unaware of the classical meaning of the verse which predicts the Day of judgement,

equated here with the baby. The case excellently illustrates the incompatibility of the Berti and the Arab interpretation of the same sentence. The relevance of the previous lines might reside in the praise of God and the recognition of his power.

Erasure 9 (For sore legs)

The following verses are administered for sore legs (or feet; the Arabic term rijl̄en means both). In the umbatri from which this particular erasure comes, it is stated that the verses are to be written 41 time upgraded to 100 if symptoms persist and it is added that "the patient will recover by the will of God".

"And the servants of (God)
Most Gracious are those
Who walk on the earth
In humility, and when the ignorant
Address them, they say,
`peace!`;
Those who spend the night
In adoration of their Lord
Prostrate and standing;

Those who say, our Lord!
Avert from us the Wrath
Of Hell, for its Wrath
Is indeed an affliction grievous,

Evil indeed is it
As an abode, and as
A place to rest in";
(Ibid:941-942).

The verses are obviously selected for their reference to walking. At the same time, they portray the patient as humble, peaceful and as a person who spends the nights praying. Prayers are normally associated with the physical movement of the body in which legs are central. The selected verses give the impression that legs are either incapacitated by excessive prayers or that they are required to be restored to health to allow the resumption of religious practice.

Erasure 10 (to inflict leprosy)

The purpose of the following verses is to inflict leprosy on an enemy. The verses are to be written either 100 or 1000 times and in the manuscript from which they have been copied, the figures "100" and "1000" are written in front of each verse.

"Didst thou not
Turn thy vision to those
Who abandoned their homes
Though they were thousands
(In number), for fear of death?
God said to them: "Die"

(Al1 1938:97).

"That it should be caught
In a whirlwind,
With fire therein,
And be burnt up?" (Ibid:108).

"God has heard
The taunt of those
Who say: `Truly, God
Is indigent and we
Are rich!` We shall
Certainly record their word
And (their act) of slaying
Their prophets in defiance
Of right, and we shall say:
"Taste ye the penalty
Of the scorching fire" (Ibid:170-171).

"If thou couldst see,
When the angels take the souls
Of the unbelievers (at death),
(How) they smite their faces
And their backs, (saying):
`Take the penalty of the blazing fire`"
(Ibid:428).

"They said, `Burn him
And protect your Gods,

If ye do (anything at all)!~"

(Ibid:836).

| 4 | 9 | 2 |

| 3 | | 7 |

| 8 | 1 | 6 |

The faki from whose private papers the verses are copied claimed that he had bought the manuscript from the market and stressed that the verses were not from the umbatri he had inherited from his father who was also a faki. He insisted that he neither used the material nor intended to do so and he secured a promise from me not to write "on my papers" that it was he who gave me this information. The verses are entitled: harēg / jidhām. The term means generally "fire" or "burning" and in this context it refers to leprosy as the mutilation caused by this disease is equated with burning. Ironically, the term has no such connotation in classical Arabic nor is it connected with disease in the Koranic verses quoted. The term jidhām refers to leprosy in the Berti dialect as well as in classical Arabic. I should add that the disease is almost eradicated in the Berti area and is no longer a common menace.

The above verses are not simply used to inflict leprosy on an intended victim. Rather, it is the death of the enemy which is aimed at as leprosy is conceived of as a disease which ultimately culminates in the death of the sick person. As it is also stated in the manuscript, the above verses are washed in water. A hole whose depth is measured with a length of an arm is dug and the erasure is poured into it. The hole is then filled with straw which is burnt and buried. In another fairly similar copy, it has been mentioned that the straw must be old and come from the grass which grew during the rainy season before the last one. A number of verses which contain the word harēg and which relate to punishment, suppression, or death are selected from the Koran. Since killing is an illicit act, the whole operation is designed in a way that does not require any physical contact with the victim. The erasure is poured in a hole which obviously symbolizes a grave, and the burning of the old straw can be seen as symbolizing the burning (mutilation) of the body caused by leprosy. The old straw stands in another symbolic relationship to death. When sowing, the Berti always use fresh seeds from the previous harvest because the old grain which has been stored in an underground pit usually does not germinate. Since the growth of plants is directly related to life, the lack of growth can be seen as symbolically associated with death. The old straw is perhaps used in the erasure because of this symbolic connotation. There may be, however, other reasons. As old straw is comparatively more inflammable than the new grass, one might speculate that what is being brought into a symbolic association is the speed of the straw fire and the spread of the disease to the various limbs of the

victim.

The verses end with a table with the centre square left vacant for the name of the victim. We have already examined a similar table in Erasure 6. The only difference here is the substitution of the Arabic letters by their corresponding numerical values. The table is well known in this form and it appears frequently in fakis' books (see references cited in Erasure 6 and also Al-Bōni 622 hij.). What is new here is the insertion of a name in the centre cell. This is borrowed from Arab culture (Ibid) though there is no reference to the name of the mother's brother (see Chapter 5).

Erasure 11 (Against slander and calumny)

In the umbatri from which this erasure comes, it is introduced in the following way: "Write the following verses seven times each. Wash them and pour the water in a hole. Fill the hole with straw. Burn the straw and bury the hole. The calumny will disappear even if it is about a homicide. This is true and has been tested before":

"....Every time
They kindle the fire of war,
God doth extinguish it,.."

(Ali 1938:264).

"And say: `Truth has (now)
Arrived, and Falsehood perished:

For Falsehood is (by its nature)
Bound to perish" (Ibid:718).

" We said: `O Fire!
Be thou cool,
And (a means of) safety
For Ibrahim !
And they sought a stratagem
Against him: but We
Made them the ones
That lost most" (Ibid:837).

"Will not the Unbelievers
Have been paid back
For what they did?" (Ibid:1707).
" truly strong is the Grip
(and power) of the Lord" (Ibid:1716).

"And when ye exert
Your strong hand,
Do ye do it like men
Of absolute power" (Ibid:962).

| | | |
|-------|---|---|
| ----- | | |
| 4 | 9 | 2 |
| ----- | | |
| 3 | | 7 |
| ----- | | |
| 8 | 1 | 6 |
| ----- | | |

The word "fire" which appears in some of the above verses is taken metaphorically to mean "slander", a substitution which is often heard in the Berti language. The Berti refer to the slanderer as "the person who lights a fire between friends", i.e. sets them against each other. Conflicts caused by the slanderer are referred to as nār (fire).

I have come across another copy with the same title and almost the same verses. It differs from the one above in that the name of the enemy and the name of his mother's brother are entered in the centre of the table.

In the Berti system of naming, a person's name (first name) is followed by the name of his father. The mother's brother's name is used instead of that of the father if the child is illegitimate; even if the genitor is known, his name is never attached to that of the child. The mother's brother's name is used because the mother's brother is generally expected to adopt his sister's illegitimate child. With regard to the table in question, it is the name of the

enemy which is written in it and one may speculate whether the enemy is not deliberately "bastardized" by entering his mother's brother's name. Such speculation is, however, difficult to reconcile with situations where the names which are attached to the mother's brother's names are not those of the enemies but of the clients themselves (see Chapter 5).

The status ascribed to the client in the quoted verses contrasts very well with the portrait of his enemy. The first verse (.. Every time) presents the enemy as an instigator of war while it is God who protects the client by extinguishing the fire of war. The second verse (And say..) gives the impression that the client is abiding by the "truth" while his rival is founding his position on the falsehood which has perished. In the third verse (We said..), the client's position is equated with that of the Prophet Ibrahim, while the position of the enemy resembles that of those who were plotting against the prophet. The client is thus assured of his innocence and of the divine protection against a losing foe. The enemy is equated with an unbeliever who is basing his assault on falsehood for which he will eventually pay (see the verse: Will not..).

After the erasure has been poured in the hole, the nest of a migratory stork locally known as kiljōy which must come from a hajlīd tree is burnt in the hole. A person filling in the hole should do it with the back of his hands and must be facing east. He also has to repeat the name of God ya gāhīr (O irresistible; lit. the humbler of the mighty) several times, or, as it is

sometimes stipulated, the name of God should be repeated 4000 times on all the four sides of the hole (east, west, north and south) during the burial. There is a close association between the ritual of burial and the way in which slander erasure is disposed of, in that the hole is filled in from all four cardinal sides exactly as the Berti fill in graves. In digging a grave, the sand is heaped at all four sides and after the corpse has been placed in the grave, the sand is pushed into it from all sides in a certain order which need not be explained here. When the slander erasure has been poured into the hole, the hole is also filled from all four sides. When burying a corpse, the actors murmur their blessings during the action. This is substituted in the slander burial by uttering the word "o irresistible" continuously throughout the action. "Irresistible" is one of God's 99 names (e.g. Irresistible, Kind, Forgiving, etc.) each of which indicates a slightly different aspect of the divine character. When uttering any one of these names, people invoke that aspect of the divine power which is embodied in it. As far as the meaning of the name "Irresistible" is concerned, it has a negative connotation for the Berti which its English translation does not fully convey (see the literal meaning above); for the Berti, it indicates the divine supremacy in inflicting punishment in the form of death, suffering, etc., though with no implication of injustice.

The bird whose nest is also placed in the hole normally nests on trees inside homesteads or villages and it keeps returning to the same nest every year. It is classified as inedible and its return to the nest is spoken of as a pilgrimage to the same house. Some

Berti stress their protection of the bird during its return (pilgrimage), a matter which is closely related to the concept of pilgrimage and the safety required for its performance. From the Islamic perspective, the month of the pilgrimage is referred to as muhārram (the holy month; see Cawan 1976:172) and it indicates the termination of feuds or any action which might infringe the safety of the pilgrims.

When the village is deserted, the bird moves to a different inhabited site. Destruction of the bird's nest may perhaps symbolize the desertion of a house which normally occurs after death, war, famine or epidemic.

The slanderer dealt with by this erasure is someone who spreads news liable to defame the client. From the client's and also the faki's point of view, the information spread by the slanderer is either false or it is undesirable that it should be made known. For example, the news being spread could be about the client's committing of adultery, theft, etc. Such news (calumny) is bound to spoil the relationship between the client and other people and in consequence is likely to disturb the harmony of the community. The action of the faki and his client constitutes a performance of black magic which can nevertheless be viewed as an effort to suppress conditions which are conducive to conflicts within the local group. Bearing in mind that the magical act might achieve its intended result (see Lieban 1973:1034; Tambiah 1979:361), it should be viewed as an alternative option to retaliation for the client. As the client certainly believes in the effectiveness of magical acts, he

might regard the service of the faki as sufficient revenge against the slanderer. Thus, the prospect of retaliation through black magic may restrain him from resorting to a more overt kind of counter-assault, like an open act of aggression (see Lieban 1973:1053).

Erasure 12 (To gain love mahābba)

Certain words are to be written 1000 times each for the person wishing to secure the love of a sultan or a woman. These words are: ya fattāh which means "O You (God) who opens the gates of all things", ya mannān i.e. "O You (God) who confers favour or grants all things", Ya wadūd meaning "O you (God) who is full of love and kindness". A very similar topic also appeared in a different umbatri which I have come across. It is located under the title "To gain the love of sultans, kings and women". The word ya wadūd alone is thought to enable the client to obtain his wish. The following table is drawn at the end of the writing with the name of the king, the sultan or the woman in the empty square at the centre:

| | | |
|-------|----|----|
| ----- | | |
| 18 | 23 | 16 |
| ----- | | |
| 16 | | 21 |
| ----- | | |
| 32 | 15 | 20 |
| ----- | | |

The three words used refer to God rather than the person whose love is sought: the words wadūd and fattāh are known as being among the 99 names of God; the word mannān is used also in referring to God in this context and might have been learnt from the Koran where the word and its derivatives are occasionally used (see Flügel 1942:187). The word fattāh can be related to the notion of feeling that emanates from or is centred inside a person's heart. To get to his or her heart is the precondition of winning a person's favour and this can be done only when the person whose love is being pursued is willing to "open his heart"; God is invoked here to open the heart of such a person. The word wadūd is a call for God to fill the heart of such a person with love and kindness towards the client. It is then God who opens the heart and makes it full of positive feeling towards others for God is the cause of every thing; the king, the sultan or the woman are treated as objects of God's manipulation.

The table drawn at the end of the text is probably taken from Al-Bōni (622 hij.:179). With minor differences, all the religious books recommend the use of this table to obtain the love of other people. The number 19 is, however, inserted in the centre of the table which the Berti reserve for the relevant name, and only the word wadūd is associated with the table in them.

Conclusion

The Berti philosophy of the composition and use of erasure is centred around the idea of the internalization of the Koran, the names of God, and other divine inscriptions. Although the drinking of Koranic texts seems to be widespread only on the periphery of the Islamic world (for West Africa see Sanneh 1979), the view that the Koran has a medical value is not merely the invention of black Africans. It is contained in the Koran itself:

"We send down (stage by stage)
In the Koran that which
Is a healing and a mercy ..."

(Ali 1938:718).

The notion of uttering the divine names for various purposes is similarly borrowed from the Koran:

"The most beautiful names
Belong to God:
So call on Him by them;" (Ibid:396).

The phrase "call on Him" in the second verse should perhaps be better translated as "invoke Him" (by His attributes). The original word is udū (invoke) which derives from the word du`ā (invoking) discussed in Chapter 7. Although it is the spiritual healing which is meant here according to the theological interpretation of the

Koran (Ibid:718 and 396), the Berti understand these verses as recommending and justifying the use of erasure as medicine.

By using erasure as medicine, the Berti aim at curing a variety of diseases brought about by a number of causes including the unknown: the evil eye, sorcery, devils and jinns. Trimmingham's generalization that "Islam has no remedy against witchcraft" (Trimingham 1968:84) is, simply, false. Diseases caused by natural forces are not normally cured by erasure. We have come across a category of diseases whose causes are not known; there is, however, no indication that this category consists of the diseases caused by natural causes (weather, wind, heat, etc.)

Although the erasure is often taken as medicine for specific identified diseases, it is by no means confined to the treatment of illness; it is also considered as efficacious in remedying moral disorder and material losses. This indicates that the individual's preoccupation with his health is classed together with the pursuit of his own material and moral welfare in general.

This chapter should have provided a further insight into the meaning which the Koran has for the Berti people, that I have indicated in Chapter 2. The lack of an organized method of transmission of the theological meaning which I discussed there makes it possible for the Berti to ascribe their own meaning to the Koranic text; this meaning derives from their consideration of the Koran in terms of their own reality and at the same time relates it to this reality through its pragmatic manipulation.

I have mentioned before that the method of training of fakis, which is based on memorization, is not favourable to the development of individual creativity. A limited level of creativity is, however, engendered in various forms. Erasure 6 of this chapter shows how certain Koranic verses are reformulated to suit the occasion. My failure to trace some of the texts shown in this chapter to the published books used by fakis is evidence that these texts have not spread from the orthodox Islamic centres (Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Iran). It is, therefore, possible to assume that they have been composed in the peripheries of the Islamic world (see Sanneh 1979) of which the Berti are a part.

C H A P T E R 4

Hijāb

General remarks

In the previous chapter I examined the preparations of certain Koranic verses and other formulae for drinking purposes. In this chapter, fairly similar texts are written on a piece of paper to which the Berté refer as a hijāb (lit. protector). The term hijāb is difficult to translate into English. Different scholars used a variety of terms and definitions when referring to it in their writings. While Hussey reserved the term without translation (Hussey 1933:37), Abdal Halim (1939:37) and Al-Tayib (1955:147) preferred the term "amulet" and Al-Safi used the term "phylactery" (1970:32). However, Al-Tayib employed the word "amulet" as a general term referring to hijāb, bakhra (fumigation charm) and perhaps erasure (Al-Tayib 1955:147). His use of the term and the way he defines it is similar to Sanneh's who, in his study of the Jakhanke of West Africa, uses the term hijāb for:

"any phrase from an Islamic ceremony or prayer devotion which is believed to be infused with baraka and which is efficacious when retained on one's person, either in the form of a memorised formula or as an amulet. Such a baraka-charged formulae can also be written down on a Quran slate and washed off, the mixture serving as medicine" (Sanneh 1979:208).

Both of the two terms (amulet and phylactery, see Fowler and Fowler 1964:40 and 914) limit the functions of hijābs as will appear from further examination of the indigenous meaning of the term. Writing about northern Sudan, Al-Tayib defines hijāb as: "astrological formulas written on a sheet of paper which would later be rolled up and covered with leather according to a certain design requiring the skill of the local saddler" (Al-Tayib 1955:147), and Al-Safi describes it in the following way: "Some Quranic verses are written on a piece of white paper, supplemented by the 99 names of God, names of Angels and jinn and some astrological formulae. This is called higāb (phylactery)" (Al-Safi 1970:32).

These definitions exclude many other objects recognized as hijābs by the Northern Sudanese including the Berti people. A Berti hijāb may contain some Koranic verses, some of the 99 names of God and names of angels and demons, or it may include only one or some of these things. It may be rolled up in a leather cover, but it may also be covered by a piece of cloth. It is also possible to find a hijab which is used without either of these covers such as the harrāsa hijāb (guardian, see the list below, 12) which is hung, unfolded and uncovered, over the entrance of a hut. Moreover, the hijāb may be written by non-human beings through human mediums, a possibility not covered by the above mentioned definitions. The contents of such a hijāb are believed to be unintelligible to human beings (see Osman 1979/1980:23).

The hijāb has many functions and the following list is not comprehensive: it may be used to avoid the malicious influences of evil spirits, the evil eye, or sorcery, or to divert away weapons such as bullets, knives, sticks, etc. A hijāb may also be employed to incite love in someone, to gain respect, to frighten away enemies, to ensure success in trade, animal husbandry, cultivation or any other activity which may affect one's livelihood. The hijāb is then considered to have the power to affect the entire environment for the benefit of its owner.

Once a hijāb is prepared, it has to be used in a certain way depending on its kind and function. According to Al-Safi, "the paper of the hijāb is folded in a special way, wrapped, hanged by a thread and worn across the trunk, around the arm, waist or hanged around the neck" (Al-Safi 1970:32). This description is again adequate for the majority of cases but does not exhaust all the ways of keeping a hijāb. Depending on the kind of the hijāb, it may be buried, burnt, hung from a roof or inserted in the walls of a house or a shop. In the case of animal hijābs, they are normally hung around the necks of camels, donkeys or horses.

Consultation for a hijāb takes place in the same manner as it does for erasure (see Chapter 3). The writing of a hijāb is done on a special kind of paper sold by almost all village shops and imported specially for making hijābs. As the faki usually does not keep blank paper, the client may have to bring his own. The standard size of hijāb paper, which also seems to be the largest of

all paper available, is about 13" X 18". Writing is normally done on one side only, and the written side later becomes the inner side after the hijāb has been folded so that it measures approximately 1" X 1". With comparatively little space to be filled with writing, the hijāb requires less labour than erasure and it takes a faki about two hours of work to complete a single hijāb. Covering the hijāb with a piece of leather or cloth, if necessary, is the responsibility of its owner who in most cases entrusts the job to a local saddler. Due to the small amount of labour required for its preparation, the cost of making a hijāb is considerably less than erasure and ranges between one and ten pounds. Several factors operate in determining its actual price: the kind of hijāb on order, the status of the healer and his relation to the client, the financial ability of both, the time of consultation, etc. The cheapest and also the shortest hijābs are those written for animals. A hijāb is normally prepared to be used by a particular person but a recent tendency towards impersonalisation of hijābs is manifest in the sale of hijābs in the local markets without a previous order. No dealers are involved in the trade in hijābs and it is the faki who prepares the hijābs and sells them at the same time. The commercialisation of hijābs and their display for sale are abhorred by many fakis on various grounds: firstly, hijābs should be prepared for particular individuals, not for unknown buyers in the market; secondly, a faki must not be materialistic in imparting his knowledge and should leave his client free to offer whatever he can afford; and thirdly, a successful faki always has plenty of clients and does not need to sell his products in the market to unknown customers.

It is difficult to substantiate this criticism by the ethnography at my disposal. The first point hinges on the assumption that a hijāb works only for the particular individual for whom it was originally written. The Berti, however, never throw a hijāb away and it is often inherited after the death of its original owner. A hijāb is also transferable between friends and relatives and can be transferred through theft without distorting its efficacy.

The second point of criticism focuses on the pursuit of money through offering the hijāb like any other commodity. Its price is set by the seller, who aims at maximising his gain, and is eventually reduced after much bargaining to the level which the buyer is prepared to pay and the seller to accept. One may argue that a similar pattern of price fixing is followed when the faki is consulted in his house: he leaves the choice to his client only when he is certain that he is likely to get an acceptable offer. However, the relation between the faki and his client is personal in the case of the private consultation, while in the market the actors may not know each other; the visiting client is often a kinsman, a neighbour, a friend, or at least an acquaintance entertained by the faki who acts as a host during the consultation. The personal relationship between the faki and his client can be consolidated, confirmed, recreated or denied by the very process of the interaction. In the process of price fixing in the faki's house, the personal relationship is a factor to be considered. While it would be inappropriate to characterise Berti market bargaining as

devoid of all aspects of personal interaction, the market does not create a favourable situation for the exploitation of these personal bonds compared to the faki's house and it is perhaps the relative impersonality of the market price fixing which invites the anger of the more traditional fakis. The commercialisation of hijābs is simply disliked because it denies the faki the possibility of exercising a beneficial influence on relationships within the local group.

The third point of criticism accuses the faki who resorts to selling hijābs in the market of failing to secure enough customers at his house. Though there is an element of truth in the claim, it would be fully convincing if a good faki earned all the cash he needed for running his household from the fees received from clients. But there is probably not a single faki in Berti society who does that. As a rule, the fakis like anybody else sell products of one kind or another for cash in the market, although not necessarily hijābs. The fact that some of them resort to the sale of hijābs would indicate not that they have failed as fakis but that they have failed as producers, and that lacking either agricultural surplus or animals which they can market, they have of necessity to resort to the sale of other commodities, as the poor who have no surplus to market have of necessity to resort to the sale of their own labour.

Almost every adult Berti has at least one hijāb usually prepared for him after a successful treatment by a faki. The majority of them have between one and five hijābs. A few claim to have quite a large number of hijābs numbering up to a hundred. The highest number of hijābs owned by a single person that I saw was 50, followed by 40, 36, 20, and 15. The owners of these hijābs were not fakis, although two of them were fakis' sons. The owner of the highest number of hijābs was regarded as a troublesome person and he had actually appeared in various local courts more than ten times. He had eight hijābs for ensuring that things would go his way if he was taken to court, and 44 hijābs in his total collection could be used in various actions inciting troubles; some of his hijābs were for protection against various weapons, some were for scaring off enemies and some for ensuring success in adultery and theft. The other owners of large numbers of hijābs whom I met were ordinary people who could not be differentiated from an average Berti. The majority of their hijābs were also for protection against weapons and a very few were related to health problems. Women exhibit less interest in hijābs than men but they normally keep a few against diseases. This derives from the fact that they are less involved than men in fighting, trading, travelling, going to court, etc.

Many Berti tend to keep more than one hijāb of the same kind and they often claim that should one fail, the substitute might work. It is particularly non-medical hijābs, especially those for protection against weapons, which are often duplicated. The hijābs against diseases do not render themselves to testing like those used

to combat weapons. Stories about testing a hijāb of the latter kind with both positive and negative results circulate widely in the area. Some of them support the efficacy of hijābs, others tell about unfortunate results with the user ending up in the hands of the police. However, deliberate testing of hijābs is viewed with disapproval and if the test of the hijāb is negative, it is not accepted as evidence for the fraudulence of a hijāb, because one's own faith in a hijāb is necessary for its efficacy. The hijāb contains "the name of God which shall not be doubted". It is not the hijāb as such but rather God invoked in it who fulfils the objective. Thus, doubting the efficacy of a hijāb implicitly involves doubting the power of God, and people often say to the sceptic; "the name of the God shall not be doubted" without necessarily referring to the hijāb. The question of faith as contributing to the efficacy of a hijāb cannot be supported in the case of animal hijābs. Other Berti argue differently when a hijāb fails to stand a test. Blame is thrown on lack of ritual cleanliness, mistakes in writing, lack of appropriate knowledge on the faki's part, etc. Even if the result of the test is accepted, it can only prove or disprove the efficacy of a specific hijāb; it does not affect the belief in the efficacy of other "untested" hijābs.

Types of hijābs

The following types of hijābs are the ones most commonly used by the Berti:

1- hijāb bundug

The word bundug means rifle and the name of the hijāb can thus be translated as "rifle hijāb". It supposedly protects its bearer from rifle shots either by preventing the gun from exploding or by causing the enemy to miss his target regardless of the length of the range.

2- hijāb tasrīf

The term tasrīf derives from the verb yisarrif meaning to deflect or cause the target to be missed. Some regard this type as efficacious against all sorts of arms including rifles. Others take it to be protective only against minor weapons such as swords and sticks but not firearms.

3- hijāb hadīd

Hadīd means iron and it is occasionally substituted by the word sakkīn (knife). This hijāb is believed to stop iron weapons, specifically knives, from penetrating the human body. It is also more popular than the previous two hijābs as knives are used more

often than other weapons in fighting. Most of the homicide cases in the area are caused by knife-stabbing. A Berti male adult carries a knife all the time when he is outside his own household, a practice which amounts to a public demonstration of his manhood.

4- hijāb nejēsa

The word nejesa comes from nijis which means ritually dirty. This hijāb protects its bearer against various kinds of weapons excluding firearms. All the previous types of hijābs must be removed from the body in case of involvement in contaminating actions such as adultery. Nejēsa hijāb does not need to be removed since its efficacy is not affected by ritual dirtiness and in consequence it is the most effective hijāb against attacks during adulterous acts.

4- hijāb batūta

The nearest word to batūta in classical Arabic is battata meaning to flatten (Elias 1978:35). In Berti Arabic, the word batūta has no meaning in itself and it is never used to refer to anything else than this particular hijāb. The batūta hijāb causes the adversary to fall asleep or lose his senses temporarily. It is, therefore, appropriate for intrusion into other people's homes for theft or adultery. Every "professional" thief in the area has at least one of these hijābs.

6- hijāb burda

The term burda stems from the word bārid (cold) which is a key term in Berti symbolism (Osman 1979/1980) and is used metaphorically to signify easy and comfortable in opposition to hār (lit. hot) which signifies difficult, uncomfortable, etc. The burda hijāb is believed to secure for its holder an easy passage in confronting his adversaries. A person taken to court can turn the verdict in his favour simply by carrying the hijāb with him. A positive verdict is described as "cold" in opposition to a negative one referred to as "hot".

7- hijāb sūg / jālib

Sūg means market and the word jālib is sometimes used instead. It originates from the verb yajlib meaning to bring, to attract or to import. This type of hijāb is used by the local merchants and is expected to attract more customers. It is normally placed under the scales or hidden somewhere in the shop.

8- hijāb rizig

The word rizig refers to wealth or sustenance. The rizig hijāb is believed to enrich its owner by boosting his material success in terms of animals, crops, money, etc.

9- hijāb mahabba

Mahabba means love. The hijāb is expected to make its owner loved by other people, specially women (see Chapter 3, Erasure 12).

10- Hijāb umalsibīān

The term umalsibian (lit. mother of the children) is used as an undifferentiated name for a certain class of subversive female jinn (jinnīya).

"She is described as a lean and loathsome woman, travelling invisibly and destroying by her mere presence. In addition to her unquestioned enmity towards children she attends child birth, causing abortion, animate retention or stillbirth" (Al-Safi 1970:10).

This hijāb, mostly used by children and women is expected to avert the wrath of this malicious being.

11- Hijāb sihir

Sihir is the harm done by sorcery or the evil eye (see Chapter 3) and the hijāb is used to avoid this harm. The same type of hijāb is also referred to as hijāb hifiz (from yahfaz; lit. to protect or keep in good shape). This is a general term and is used by those who regard this hijāb as protecting not only against sorcery and the evil eye but also against diseases caused by jinns.

12- Hijāb hirāsa

The term hirāsa means protection; the hijāb may also be called harrāsa (protector). It is believed to protect infants and particularly newly born children against various malicious agents (Al-Safi 1970:32). I have also come across the term kundu used to refer to the same hijāb. The word kundu has no meaning either in the Berti language or in classical Arabic and it might therefore have been borrowed from the neighbouring non-Arabic speaking tribes.

13- Hijāb shayātīn

Shayātīn are devils. This hijāb is normally made for those who have been afflicted by devils and are mad as a result; it is used to protect them from any further encounters of this kind.

14- Hijāb arkabī

Arkabī derives from the verb yarkab meaning "to mount" or "to achieve contact with the target" and it refers to a spear or an arrow hitting its target with the help of the hijāb. Neither of these weapons are used by the Berti any longer. The hijāb itself hardly exists in the Berti area except in stories, mostly about the past. It is also associated with non-Berti tribes which still use spears and arrows.

15- Hijāb angalat

Angalat derives from the verb yāngil which means "to bend and become unstretchable" and is used in conjunction with throwing spears and shooting arrows where it refers specifically to the movement of the

actor's arm. The hijāb is presumed to freeze the enemy's arm as soon as he bends it or raises it to strike with his spear or arrow. A few times, the hijāb was mentioned to me in connection with the use of sticks in fighting. To my knowledge, this hijāb is not used by the Berti and is believed to be popular among the Fellata tribes of West Africa.

The above list contains all the different kinds of hijābs known to the majority of Berti villagers. It is, however, a list of ideal types for a number of actual hijābs which I have seen combine more than one of these ideal types in a single piece of work. I shall now turn to the descriptions of some of these actual hijābs.

Examples of hijābs

All hijābs start with certain sentences which I will omit in the subsequent description to avoid excessive repetition. These are: "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful", "May God pray for and lay peace on the prophet Mohammed and his Companions" and "May God accept our plea". Most of the hijābs are concluded with the Solomon's signs as described in the previous chapter. The main body of the hijāb consists of a number of Koranic verses, some of which are repeated a certain number of times. Passages merge into one another without full stops. Purely for the sake of convenience I will terminate the various passages by the sign "*". Should a need for further comments within the text arise, they will

be placed between square brackets. Passages which are repeated more than once will be marked by the letter "R.", followed by the number of repetitions.

Hijāb 1 (tasrīf: to avoid various weapons)

With the omission of the general introduction, the hijāb (see photocopy No. 1) reads as follows:

To avoid [ysarif] rifles, swords, knives, sticks, whips, bullets, rocks and all kinds of weapons * They [the weapons] never penetrate the body by the will of Allah * Your God is One and the Book [Koran] is one, they should not be doubted. Any one who doubts this hijāb is an infidel with regard to God and his prophet * The Exordium chapter [see Chapter 3, Erasure 2]* The Throne Verses [Ibid, Erasure 1] * "The desire of increase in worldly possession beguiles you till you reach the graves. Surely you will soon come to know the vanity of your pursuits; again, you surely will soon come to know how mistaken you are. Indeed if you only knew with the certainty of knowledge, you could surely see hell in this very life. But you will see it with the certainty of sight in the life to come, and then you shall be called to .."(Khan 1981:629). [the chapter ends with the following incomplete word: "tus", R. 4]* "Surely, a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievously heavy is it

on him that you should fall into trouble, ardently desirous is he of your welfare, compassionate and merciful towards the believers. Yet, if they should turn away, say to them: Sufficient for me is Allah. There is no god but He. In Him do I put my trust. He is the Lord of the Mighty Throne" (Khan 1981:190). [R. 7]* The Unity chapter [see Chapter 3, Erasure 4; R. 4]* The Dawn chapter [see Chapter 3, Erasure 3, R. 4]* The Mankind chapter [see Chapter 3, Erasure 3; R. 4]* "Allah" [R. 13]* [A 63 cells table (7X9) follows. The Arabic letter (ل) is written twice jointly in each cell.]* "Allah our Lord, do Thou send down to us from Heaven a table spread with food, that it may be a festival for the first of us, and for the last of us, and a sign from Thee, and do provide us from Thyself for Thou art the Best Provider" (Khan 1981:116). [R. 4]*

Hijāb 2 (Tasrīf: to avoid various weapons)

The following example (12) is a translation of another hijāb called "tasrīf" (see photocopy 2).

For protection against rifles, knives, swords, whips, arrows and guns* The hijāb has been tested [perhaps unintentionally] and there is neither controversy over it nor doubt about its efficacy* It consists of the following verses: "The desire ...tus [see above, hijāb 1]"* "...they

walk on its light, and when it is dark they stand still. If Allah so willed, He could destroy their hearing and their sight; Surely Allah has the power to carry out all that He wills" (Khan 1981:7)* "The desire ... tus" [as before]* " Whatever previous commandment We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We reveal in this Quran one better or the like thereof: Knowest though not that Allah has full power to do all that he wills?" (Khan 1981:18-19)* "The desire ... tus."* "Supplicate: O Allah, Lord of Sovereignty upon whomsoever Thou pleasest, and Thou takest away sovereignty from whomsoever Thou pleasest, and Thou abasest whomsoever Thou pleasest; in Thy hand is all good" (Khan 1981:51)* "The desire ... tus"* "Allah has created every animal from water. Some of them move on their bellies, some of them on two feet and some on four. Allah creates what He pleases. Surely Allah has power to do all that He wills" (Khan 1981:344)* "The desire ... tus"* "...it is Allah alone Who is the protector; it is He Who quickens the dead, and it is He Who has power over all things" (Khan 1981:482)* "The desire... tus."* "...and Who will make the angels His Messengers having two, three or four wings. He adds to His creation whatever He pleases. Allah has power over all things" (Khan 1981:426)* "The desire ..tus"* "Peace! will be the greeting conveyed to them from the Ever Merciful Lord" (Khan 1981:437)* "Peace be upon Noah, is the greeting among the peoples" (Ibid:444)* "Peace be upon Abraham" (Ibid:445)* Peace be on Eliaseen (Ibid:446)."* "Peace be on Thee, O Thou of

those of the right" (Ibid:545)* "It is all peace, till the break of the dawn (Ibid:625)"* [the hijāb is decorated with black and red zigzag lines creating 280 spaces. The spaces are filled with "Oh Mohammed" and O Allah" repeated 80 and 200 times respectively. A table identical to the one shown in the previous chapter (Chapter 3, Erasure 6) is located in the centre of the decoration.]*

The hijābs 1 and 2 combine three of the major categories from the list of ideal types of hijāb (1, 2 and 3). The purpose of the hijāb is stated at the beginning of each text. It is specified in both of them that there is no doubt about their efficacy. However, the warning goes much further in the first one. A person who doubts it is declared as an infidel "who does not believe in God and his prophet". Though the majority of the Berti may not approve of the assumption that doubting the hijāb indicates a lack of faith in the power of God and His prophet, the warning still taps a sensitive nerve and might operate to eliminate doubts.

As far as the contents of the two hijābs are concerned, there appears to be a wide difference between them in some respects. The first hijāb is certainly unique when compared to others of the same category, i.e. those against weapons, and labelled tasrīf. Four of the Koranic chapters included in it (the Exordium chapter, the Unity chapter, the Dawn and the Mankind chapters) are associated with different kinds of hazards. The table in the hijāb contains a single letter repeated twice in each square. The letter is one of the two Arabic letters which are regarded as extreme in their

"hotness" or "unluckiness" (Al-Bōni 621 hij.: 10-14). This is probably related to the notion expressed in the local saying "The hot cures the hot". The saying is used to emphasise that a complaint can only be dealt with efficiently by using measures of equal strength against it. I have discussed a similar notion in the previous chapter in relation to the medicines for children and for adults. The most important passage in the hijāb seems to be the takāthur or "The Piling Up" chapter (Ali 1938:1780). This chapter is also found in the second hijāb where it forms the main passage. The chapter indeed appears in most of the hijābs against firearms (see the untranslated hijāb in photocopy 3). The meaning of the words of the chapter: "The desire....tus" (see Hijab 1) has little to do with the purpose of those hijābs in which it is used. The words contain a warning to those who are distracted by the pleasures of the earthly life from following the divine way. The way the chapter is copied reflects the marginal importance of its overall meaning. A part of it is omitted altogether and the Arabic word tusālunna ("you shall be called to account") is only partially copied. We are left with the letters creating the sound tus which has no meaning and does not form a word proper. The sound tus is thought of as being similar to the hissing sound made by a rifle bullet which has failed to explode, and the Berti often say tus when they want to imitate the sound produced by a failed shot. The guns which the Berti use misfire quite often. As cartridges are expensive and difficult to obtain, the Berti have developed a technique of refilling empty cartridges and using them several times. Instead of using gunpowder, they often use local explosives extracted from rocks. This technique is very often ineffective and

the re-used cartridges quite often fail to work, producing the sound rendered onomatopoeically as tus. As what is important in the chapter is this sound and its associations, the rest of the word and the remaining part of the verse are left out. The chapter, or more precisely the part of it, appears in this form in all of the three hijābs referred to so far. It is repeated seven times in the first two hijābs and accompanied by a variety of other Koranic verses in all three of them. Most of the other verses assert the power of God and his infinite ability to do whatever he wants. The first verse following the main chapter ("They walk ... wills") could be viewed as a plea to God to incapacitate the enemy by temporarily impairing his sense of sight and hearing. At the very end of both of the last two hijābs, a number of verses containing the word "peace" are quoted. The word "peace" appears in conjunction with a number of prophets. According to the Koran, all of these prophets were saved from some kind of danger: hell, God's wrath, flood, slaughter, etc. Although none of them was saved from the hazards specified in the introduction to the hijāb, they are seen as being relevant to them as well. The emphasis seems to be on safety generally rather than on the specific kind of danger from which one is saved. Lastly, the two hijābs shown in photocopies 2 (hijāb 2) and 3, are not fully identical, and particularly the tables included in them bear some differences. The letters used in the table of photocopy 2 are substituted by their numerical values in photocopy 3 and the exponent 10 is added to each of them. The central square is, however, exempted from the operation. The original letter is retained in both hijābs and the exponent 10 is added as in the other squares.

Hijāb3 (for sūg: market)

The following hijāb is typical of those used by Bertti merchants in order to attract more customers.

"Rejoice then, in the bargain (bēy) that you have made with Him; that indeed in the supreme triumph" (Khan 1981:188). [R. 3]* "...: Leave me not alone, Lord, Thou art the Best of heirs (wāriḥīn)" (Ibid:316). [R. 3]* Whoever sells (bā'a) the "second life" for "this earthly life" will soon discover his disappointing deal* "Those who swear allegiance (yibāyūnaka) to Thee swear allegiance to Allah; Allah's hand is above their hands" (Ibid:513)* "Many a small party has triumphed over a large party by Allah's command; Allah is indeed with the steadfast" (Ibid:40). [R. 3]* "When they perceive a matter of commerce or amusement they drift away from Thee and leave Thee standing by Thyself. Tell them: that which Allah has to bestow is better than any matter of amusement or commerce. Allah is the Best Provider" (Ibid:563)* [The hijāb ends again with the table shown in photocopies 2 and 3. Squares are filled simultaneously with letters and their numerical values (for this hijāb see photocopy 4)].

Hijāb 4 (sūg: market)

This hijāb (photocopy 5) is identical to the previous one and probably from the same source. A negligible difference occurs in the table in which only the numerical values of the letters are given.

Both of the above two hijābs are expected to attract more customers to the merchant. This is the notion from which the other name of the hijāb (jālīb), explained above, is derived. The concern seems to be not with the number of customers as such but with the amount of sales. This is the main factor determining the choice of the Koranic verses. The Berti words for "sell" or "sold" are yibī and bā'a. Unlike classical Arabic, the Berti dialect uses the same word for buying and selling. The passages of the hijāb show particularly well the Berti understanding of the quoted Koranic verses and its divergence from their classical meaning. In their theological interpretation, words which are taken to relate to the subject of the hijāb are often metaphors for different experiences. Some of the words in the quoted verses have different meanings in classical Arabic from the meaning ascribed to them by the Berti, and very often it is the phonetic sound of the word which is the source of the meaning ascribed to it by the Berti. I have bracketed the key words in the Koranic verses and I will use them to clarify my argument.

The first verse in example 3 "rejoice ... triumph" is selected because it contains the word "bargain" (bēy) which has the same meaning in both classical and Berti Arabic. In the Koranic verses it is, however, used metaphorically and has nothing to do with markets, goods or buying and selling. Rather, it refers to those militant Muslims who offer their lives in the jihād in return for the rewards of the next life. The sentence "Whoever ... deal." is not a Koranic verse as it stands. Its source is unknown to me and it would not be appropriate to substitute it with a similar Koranic verse on the assumption that it is misquoted. What is important is that it includes the key word bēy despite its classical meaning which is different from the one ascribed to it by the Berti. Again the verse: "Those who ... hands" provides a problem. It contains the word yibāyiū translated as "to swear allegiance" which is phonetically similar to the key term yibēy (to sell, Arabic and Berti) and is thus attributed with the meaning "to sell". The last verse: "When they ... provider", is chosen because of its two words: tijāra (commerce) and rāzig (provider). The classical meaning of the verse is again different from that ascribed to it by the Berti. The verse was revealed to the prophet in the course of his outrage when his co-worshippers left him behind leading the prayers and rushed to watch the arrival of a commercial caravan. The word "commerce" is used in a context of warning similar to the previous term "bēy" in the passage: "Whoever ... deal" (see above).

Hijāb 5 (for rizig, i.e. wealth)

As trade is not the only means of gaining wealth, the Berti have hijābs which relate to economic activities in a more general way.

"Allah will soon bring about your victory (fath) or some other events from Himself favourable to you" (Khan 1981:107)* "With Him are the keys (mafātīh) of the unseen, none knows it but He. He knows whatsoever is in the land" (Ibid:124)* "Our Lord, judge (aftah) between us and our people with justice, for Thou art the Best of those who judge (fātihīn)" (Ibid:150)* "If the people of those towns had believed and been righteous, We would surely have bestowed (fatahnā) blessings upon them from heaven and earth" (Ibid:151)* "O ye who disbelieve, if you sought judgement (tastaftihū), then judgement (fath) has indeed come to you" (Ibid:166)* "When they unpacked (fatahu) their things they found their money had been returned to them" (Ibid:225)* "They sought (istaftahu) Our Judgement, and every haughty enemy of truth came to naught, and found himself facing hell" (Ibid:239)* "Even if We were to bestow (fatahnā) upon them some extraordinary means of perception and they were to begin to perceive the truth through it" (Ibid:244)* "...implored his Lord: My people have rejected me Lord, therefore, do Thou judge (aftah) finally between them and me, and deliver me and the

believers that are with me from our enemies" (Ibid:362)*
"Whatever of mercy Allah grants (yaftah) to people may be withheld by none; and whatever He withholds, may not be released by any thereafter. He is the Mighty, the Wise" (Ibid:427)* "Those who follow the book of Allah and observe Prayer and spend out of that which We have provided (razagnā) for them, secretly and openly, are pursuing a commerce that suffers no loss; for Allah will give them their full rewards and will add to them out of His bounty" (Ibid:430)* "When they approach it, its gates will be open (futihat)" (Ibid:463)* " Surely, We have granted (fatahnā) thee a clear victory (fatah), Allah may cover up thy shortcomings, past and future, and that He may complete His favour unto thee, and may guide thee along the right path; and that Allah may help thee with a mighty help" (Ibid:512)* "In heaven is your sustenance (rizig), and also that which you are promised. By the Lord of the heaven and the earth, the Quran is certainly the truth even as it is true that you speak" (Ibid:524)* "Thereupon We opened (fatahnā) the gates of heaven with water pouring down; and We caused the earth to burst forth with springs, so the two waters met for a purpose which had been determined. We carried Noah in the Ark constructed with planks and nails" (Ibid:534)* "When they ...Provider" (rāzigīn) (see Erasure 3)* "... help from Allah and a speedy victory (fath). So give glad tidings of it to the believers" (Ibid:561)" {R. 3}* Bestow on me wisdom and understanding of the matter; You are the

Greatest Bestower. Provide (arzig) me with my sustenance; You are the Greatest Provider (rāzigīn). [R. 3]* [The hijāb contains a unique table that is different from the conventional tables. It includes in its centre the following incantation: May God, the Lord of the worlds enrich (arzig) His servant in trade! Amen. (see photocopy 6)].

Hijāb 6 (for wealth)

This hijāb is identical in its purpose to Hijāb 5 but its verses are different.

The Unity chapter* "Surely a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievously heavy is it on him that you should fall into trouble, ardently desirous is he of your welfare; compassionate and merciful towards the believers" (Khan 1981:190)* Holy is He who created all things, provided them with their sustenance (rizig) and made them heirs [not Koran; R. 6]* In Allah we put our trust, "sufficient for us is Allah, and an Excellent Guardian is He" (Khan 1981:69). [R. 3]* Holy is He ... heirs [as above]* "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful"* [see photocopy 7].

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
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The key word which appears in most verses in Hijāb 6 is the word fatah, yaftahu ("to open") and its derivatives mafātīh, aftah, fatahnā, tastaftihu, fath, fathu and yaftahu. In the Koran it conveys the idea that the means of sustenance and wealth are locked beyond the access of individuals and that it is God who "opens the gates of the means of subsistence" to his favourite creatures. This notion is embodied in the greeting formulae used by the Berti in the markets. When a customer leaves a shop or passes in front of it, he addresses the shopkeeper saying: "May God open (the gates of wealth for you)". The shopkeeper responds saying: "Amen". I have discussed the same notion with reference to love and kindness in Chapter 3 (Erasure 12). In my translation of Hijāb 5, I have reserved the original words relating to the verb fatah and its derivatives. It is apparent that the word fataha is the main determinant of the selection of the verses for the hijāb. Other verses are chosen because they contain the word rizig (wealth, sustenance) or one or more of its derivatives (rāzig, rāzigīn, arzig).

Few changes have been made in the selected verses and more or less the only manipulation has been in deciding where to start the quotation and where to end it. For example, the verse "With Him ... land" (Hijāb 5) is only partially quoted. It continues in the Koran as follows: "He knows whatsoever is in the land and in the sea; ... not a leaf falls but He knows it" (Khan 1981:124). The Berti quotation ends with the word "land" and the rest of the verse is omitted. The Berti have no sea in the area and they know little

about it. In the Berti hijābs generally, there is no reference to seas or rivers, which have a vital importance as a source of livelihood in other parts of the Sudan, and it seems that they are not mentioned in Berti hijābs simply because they play no part in the people's livelihood. Their hijābs are thus typical to Western Sudan where little is known about rivers and seas, contrary to the general view that the hijābs are more or less the same throughout the Muslim Sudan.

The page numbers cited in the translation of Hijāb 5 provide an insight into the order of the verses in it and indicate that the author of the hijāb followed the sequential order of the verses in the Koran. This rule is not followed in other hijābs.

Hijāb 6 is interesting in its lack of conformity to the general pattern of other Berti hijābs. It differs from them particularly by including the Exordium chapter. It seems that it was included because its title (al-fātha) relates to the key word in the previous hijāb and consequently to the notion of God being in charge of "opening the gates of wealth". The word rizig (wealth) is equally a key word in Hijāb 6 where it appears six times. But this hijāb lacks a "key verse", i.e. a verse which is repeated more often than any other and which is hence obviously ascribed higher importance than other Koranic passages. Instead of resorting to a "key verse", the author of the hijāb has composed his own sentence which to most Berti sounds like a Koranic verse.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ وَاللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

الحمد لله رب العالمين الرحمن الرحيم ملك يوم الدين
 لغفور غفار كانستغينه هوننا صا ط كستغ صا ط الذي
 التي يجمع بيننا كستغ يجمع ولا رها لذي ذا فيني
 قد اعوذ بربنا ان نسرطوا ان نسر انه ان نسر قد نسر
 العواصا كئاسا نبي يوسوس في صدورنا ان نسر طين
 الجنة وننسر قد اعوذ بربنا ان نسر من شر ما خلق
 من شر خلقه اذا وفين من نسر لفتنا نسر حقوه
 من شرنا الذي اذا نسر قد نسر هو العواصا الذي
 يوسوس في صدورنا ان نسر طين العواصا الذي
 لا يقره الله في صدورنا في السموات والارض الا
 ذالذي يفتخ عنده الا في ذنوبنا ما نسر ان نسر
 وع يجمعون بيننا كستغ يجمع ولا رها لذي ذا فيني
 والارمينه ولا يجمعون بيننا كستغ يجمع ولا رها لذي ذا فيني
 عسولنا القصصا عزيز حيايه ما عنته عسولنا القصصا
 روفرا يجمعون بيننا كستغ يجمع ولا رها لذي ذا فيني
 نطقه وهو رب العرش العظيم نطقه وهو رب العرش العظيم
 عزيز عليه ما عنته عسولنا القصصا روفرا يجمعون بيننا
 نطقه وهو رب العرش العظيم نطقه وهو رب العرش العظيم
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Hijāb 6 is concluded by the Koranic verse "In the name of God,.. " which appears just before the signs. This is certainly strange as the verse is associated with the beginning rather than with the end of activities. Although many Berti might disapprove of the use of the verse in this position, a few other hijābs with similar endings were to be found (see photocopy 8).

Hijāb 7 (also hifiz: "protection")

The Hijābs 7, 8 and 9 are more or less the same in their content and purpose even though they were collected from different parts of Berti territory. They are primarily concerned with health but are also regarded as efficacious for warding off misfortune brought about by the evil eye and sorcery.

The Exordium chapter* The Mankind chapter* The Dawn chapter* The Unity chapter* The Throne Verses* "Surely, a Messenger ... Throne." [see Hijāb 1; R. 2]* "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful"* [The hijāb is concluded by the usual seal described before in Chapter 3; see photocopy 8].

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ صَدَقَ اللَّهُ بِمَا نَبِيٌّ وَهُوَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ

الحمد لله رب العالمين الرحمن الرحيم مالك يوم الدين
الهدى والبقى المستقىم الهدى المستقىم صراط النبي
الضيق بين يديكم حفظا بكم جميع ولا انفا لزيدا صيني

قد اعوذ بربنا ان نسرط ما نرسله ان نسرط من نرسله

المناسك التي يوسوسني في صروان سر مننا عتده
وان سر قرا اعوذ بربنا ان نرسله ما نرسله

انما السقيت اذ وغي من سر نقتات في العقود
من سرنا السقي اذ احسا وقد هو الله اصره على

على بغيره وروى بغيره كافر او الله كاله الا هو الذي حفظ

لما حذره سنة ولا تفرطوا في الله ما نرسله الا هو من خذ ان

لست في سنة ٢٧٨ ذته يوم من سنة يبيع وما نرسله ولا يحسن

بينه وبينه ولا يمشا دوسو كرسية الله في سنة لا يمشا

ولا يمشا في سنة ما نرسله الا هو الا يمشا في سنة رسول من

القسام من نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله

فان نقول فقد حسبنا الله عليه رسول الله

الرسول من نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله

ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله

الله الا هو الله الا هو الله الا هو الله الا هو الله الا هو

في الاخر من نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله

ولا يمشا في سنة ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله

ولا يمشا في سنة ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله ما نرسله

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم صلوات الله عليك سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم

الحمد لله رب العالمين ارحم الراحمين صلوات الله على سيدنا محمد وآله الطاهرين

نستعينك اهدنا صراطك المستقيم صراط الذي انقضت عليه غيرك المصطفى

عليهم ولا يزالون واحيني قد اعوذ بك من ان يمسني طلاقك من غير ان اذنك

من الله والى الله ائتنا الله الذي يؤمنون في صدورنا من غير

منه الحمد لله والى الله قد اعوذ بك من ان يمسني طلاقك من غير ان اذنك

فالسقيا اذا وحي من الله ففشات في العقود من غير

ما ليسني اذا حساد قد هو الله امر الله الصالحين ليدروهم

بجسدك كفو الله اله الاصل الحار في الاصل والاصل

ولا تفرقه ما في السموات وما في الارض من هذا الذي لا يفرقه عند الاذن

يعلم ما بين يديهم وما خلفهم ولا يحيطون بشئ من علمه الا بما يشاء

كاتبه اسمعوت والارض والسموات والارض والسموات والارض والسموات

لقد علمت علم رسول الله القسطنطين في ربه عليه السلام في ربه عليه السلام

روفرهم فان تولوا فقل حسبي الله لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم

العزيم العظيم لقد علمت علم رسول الله القسطنطين في ربه عليه السلام

عليه السلام ولا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم في ربه عليه السلام

عليه السلام ولا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم في ربه عليه السلام

الله اعلم
الله اعلم
الله اعلم

Hijāb 8 (against sorcery and the evil eye)

The Exordium chapter* The Mankind chapter* The Dawn chapter* The Unity chapter* The Throne Verses* "Surely, a Messenger ... Throne" [R. 2]* The Throne Verses* [see photocopy 9].

Hijāb 9 (against sorcery and the evil eye)

The Exordium chapter* The Mankind chapter* The Dawn chapter* The Unity chapter* The Throne Verses* "Surely a Messenger ... Throne" [R. 3]* The usual seal follows; see photocopy 10.

There are tremendous similarities among the last three hijābs in their arrangement and contents. There are however slight differences in the number of times certain verses are repeated. The Throne verses are copied only once in hijābs 7 and 9, whereas they are repeated twice in hijāb 8. The verse "Surely, ... Throne" appears twice in hijābs 7 and 8 and three times in hijāb 9. Hijābs 7 and 9 are concluded with the famous seal; the seal is not drawn in hijāb 8. Hijāb 8 is the only one among the three which bears the verse: "In the name of ... Merciful" at its end.

The inclusion of the Exordium chapter in the above hijābs promotes them beyond the level of a simple protection against evil forces to that of ensuring success in general.

As I explained in the previous chapter, the Unity chapter is specifically effective against the evil eye. As I also mentioned before, special power to counter acts of sorcery is ascribed to the Mankind and the Dawn chapters. I have also already explained the protective nature of the Throne Verses in general which accounts for their relevance to the above hijābs. The verse: "Surely ... Throne" has appeared before in hijāb 1 for similar protective purposes. In conclusion, it may be observed that the above three hijābs contain items that are capable of fortifying the individual against multifarious dangers. Yet, in referring to them, the emphasis is mainly on sihir to the exclusion of the other evil forces. This might be taken as indicative that sihir is conceptualised as a major and more important cause of ailments than all the other identifiable causes.

Hijāb 10 (burda)

The following two hijābs (10, photocopies 11 and 12) are classified as burda. As has been noted before, such hijābs are believed to benefit their owner by "cooling off" (yibarrid) the enmity of his rivals. These two hijābs are taken from two pages of a faki's umbatri; they do not constitute hijābs in themselves, but

Burda

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ
 الفاتحة سورة قلنا يا نازك بنينا وادوسم على ابراهيم نزلت
 سورة ابراهيم وبنينا بيد ابراهيمهم / الاصفهاني نزلت
 سورة ابراهيم وبنينا وادوسم على ابراهيمهم / الاصفهاني نزلت
 سورة ابراهيم وبنينا وادوسم على ابراهيمهم / الاصفهاني نزلت

| | | | |
|------|--------|--------|--------|
| عزرا | فانكبت | فانكبت | فانكبت |
| عزرا | فانكبت | فانكبت | فانكبت |
| عزرا | فانكبت | فانكبت | فانكبت |
| عزرا | فانكبت | فانكبت | فانكبت |

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ
 الفاتحة سورة قلنا يا نازك بنينا وادوسم على ابراهيم نزلت
 سورة ابراهيم وبنينا وادوسم على ابراهيمهم / الاصفهاني نزلت
 سورة ابراهيم وبنينا وادوسم على ابراهيمهم / الاصفهاني نزلت

Burda

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ
 الفاتحة سورة قلنا يا نازك بنينا وادوسم على ابراهيم نزلت
 سورة ابراهيم وبنينا وادوسم على ابراهيمهم / الاصفهاني نزلت
 سورة ابراهيم وبنينا وادوسم على ابراهيمهم / الاصفهاني نزلت

| | | | |
|------|--------|--------|--------|
| عزرا | فانكبت | فانكبت | فانكبت |
| عزرا | فانكبت | فانكبت | فانكبت |
| عزرا | فانكبت | فانكبت | فانكبت |
| عزرا | فانكبت | فانكبت | فانكبت |

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

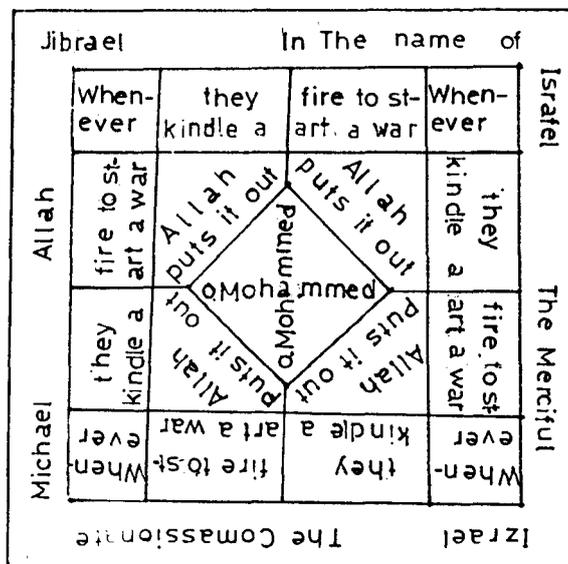
are mere sources for copying.

The Exordium Chapter* "When they cast him into fire We commanded it: Be cool and a means of safety for Abraham (Khan 1981:314)." [R. 3]* "Thus they devised a plan against him, but We humiliated them" (Ibid:444). [R. 3]* "Whenever they kindle a fire to start a war, Allah puts it out" (Ibid:109). [R. 3]* "In the name ... Merciful" (Ibid:634). [R. 19].

Hijāb (10) includes a table of nine cells (3X3). In the centre cell the name "Mohammed" is written twice, one across the other diagonally. The four corner squares are filled in by the names of the four archangels (Jibrael, Michael, Israfil and Izrael). In the four remaining cells, are the names of the first four successors of the prophet Mohammed (caliphs): Abu Bakar, Omer, Uthman and Ali (see photocopy 11).

Hijāb 11 (burda)

The hijāb is composed of the following drawing:



The outer space of the square includes first, the names of the four archangels, each one written once on a single side of the shape; and second, the verse: "In the name ... Merciful" divided into four parts, each written on one side of the shape. There is no relation between the part of the verse and the archangel with whom it appears on each side of the drawing (e.g. "in the name" and "Jibrael"; see the drawing above). The verse: "Whenever they kindle a fire..." is divided into four parts, each repeated four times. Three of these are inserted into the cells adjacent to the outer space and repeated four times. The four spaces next to the central cell are filled with the fourth part of the previous verse: "Allah puts it out", written once in each corner. Thus, the full verse appears four times in the whole shape. The central space includes the words "O Mohammed" written twice across each other (see photocopy 12).

There are a number of similarities between hijābs 10 and 11. They both include the Koranic verse "Whenever ... out". This verse attributes innocence to the client and views his rival as the aggressor who starts the trouble. This is indicated by equating the client with the prophet Abraham who was saved from the fire lit by his enemies. The two hijābs are the only ones to contain the names of four of the most famous archangels. These names are frequently mentioned in the published books owned by local fakis. Their use is, however, associated with very different contexts of which only a few could be related to the purpose of the hijābs (Al-Tukhi N.D.:74, 90, 93, 98, 99, 100, 104 and Marzugi 1970:107). The archangels are

also spoken of in Arabic books as kings of their race and are therefore endowed with exceptional power (Al-Tūkhi N.D.:15).

The name "Mohammed" is written in a similar manner in both hijābs. The verse: "In the name ... Merciful" appears in the main body of the hijābs as well as at the beginning of each of them. Its latter position is common to all kinds of hijābs and it is probably inspired by one of the published books used by fakis in which it is indicated that reading the verse 19 times every morning will save the reader from the "fire" (hell) (Al-Tukhi,b,N.D.:85). The Berti employ the word "fire" metaphorically to indicate difficulties and troubles and it is its metaphorical meaning which makes it appropriate for the hijāb which is not related to either the fire of hell or to ordinary fire but is concerned with slander or any other activity that may instigate trouble. Lastly, the second hijāb looks more artistic than the first although both of them are from the same private book.

Hijāb 12 (mahabba: love)

The following two hijābs are translations of what are called mahabba hijābs, i.e. hijābs used to secure the love, affection and respect of other people, notably women. Both hijābs were written by fakis with exceptionally little training: the handwriting is primitive and full of mistakes.

The Exordium chapter* The Throne Verses* "The love of desired objects, like women and children and stored-up reserves of gold and silver, and pastured horses and cattle and crops, appears attractive to people. All this is the provision of the hither life; and it is Allah with Whom is an excellent abode" (Khan 1981:49)* "I surrounded thee with My love .." (Ibid:300). [R. 4]* ".. and love them as they love Allah, but those who believe love Allah most ..." (Ibid:26)* They love them as they love Allah, o You Beloved, o You Beloved, o You Beloved* May God accept this from us.

The hijāb ends with a table of 9 squares. The central cell is left empty; other cells are filled with numbers or perhaps letters (some of them are not readable; see photocopy 13).

Hijāb 13 (mahabba)

To become irresistible to all people* To gain the love of men, women, enemies and the angels who will pray to God for you* "He is Supreme (gāhir) over His servants and He sends guardians to watch over you, until, when death comes to any one of you, Our deputed angels take his soul and they fail not in the discharge of their duty in any respect" (Khan 1981:125)* "Surely We dominate (gāhirun)

them" (Ibid:153)* "... are diverse lords better or Allah, the One the Most Supreme (gahhār)?" (Ibid:222)* "There is no God but Allah, the One, the Most Supreme (gahhar)" (Ibid:454)* "...and they will all appear before Allah, the Single, the Most Supreme (gahhār)" (Ibid:242)* "He could have chosen whom He pleased out of His creation. Holy is He! He is Allah, the One, the Most Supreme (gahhār)" (Ibid:456)* "Whose is the kingdom this day? Of Allah, the One, the Most Supreme (gahhār)" (Ibid:466)* "Then oppress not the orphan.." (Ibid:623)** "Every one has a goal which dominates him; do you, then, vie with one another in good works" (Ibid:24)** "He had a high standing with Allah" (Ibid:418)* "She said: Surely, when mighty kings invade a country they despoil it and humiliate its leading people" (Ibid:371)* They follow the words of Allah* "On that day people will all follow the caller in whose teaching there will be no deviation" (Ibid:306)* "If they desire reconciliation, Allah will bring about accord between husband and wife" (Ibid:78)* "... be suitably reconciled to each other, for reconciliation is best. People are prone to covetousness. If you are benevolent to each other and are mindful of your duty to Allah, surely Allah is Well Aware of what you do" (Ibid:92)* "Allah desires to make clear to you, and guides you to the ways of those before you" (Ibid:77)* "... they desire to seek judgement from the rebellious ones though they had been commanded not to obey them! Satan desires to lead them astray grievously" (Ibid:82)* "Allah desires to turn

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم عليه السلام
 ما دة للقدر من نبي ياد ما من حفة ويعبر هذا الجان في نساء
 عبد الله سيدنا ويعبر من المصعة ويعبر من الاعداء ويستعد
 له من اجراء اسماء وهو الفاعل في قرة عبادته ويريد سلكه
 حقا حيث اذا اجتمع المؤمنون تفرقتهم بسبب فيهم لا يحفظون انما
 قد فرقتهم عن انسابا مستحقون خيرا من الله ان احد القهار
 وما من الله الا الله الواحد القهار ونزلوا الله الواحد القهار
 مما لها خلق ما يشاء مما يخلق ما يشاء سببته هو
 الله الواحد القهار لقد الملهك النيرم البيرم لله الواحد القهار
 فاما ما بينهم فلا تقدر سالتك يا حقا نضرب بغيره في ربه
 وبالقهار وبالقهار اخذ من نخله ويا لفقرا يا فقرا رخذ من نخله
 وليد وجنة ويكدر جهنم وليد وجنة وليد وجنة وليد
 جهنم هو مولى وليد وجنة هو مولى وليد وجنة هو مولى
 فاستنقذ الخيرات اتم وجنته وجنته من لها في ربه
 ولها والله في ربه وكان عند الله في ربه وكان عند الله في ربه
 وكان عند الله في ربه وكان عند الله في ربه وكان عند الله في ربه
 فالتان الملهك اذا دخل القدر القدرية يسمعون كلام الله في
 م يمد يتبعون به يمد يتبعون اذا عبدوا الله في ربه
 عو له ان يزيدون الا خلق به في ربه يمد يتبعون
 سبها صلتا والصح خيرا وحضرت الا قسم الا قسم الشيخ وان
 ان تحسنوا وتتقوا وتتقوا اذا الله كان بما نقله من ان
 القيت والقيت عليه حجة منيع ولقنت عليه حجة منيع ولقنت عليه
 ولقنت عليه حجة منيع ولقنت عليه حجة منيع ولقنت عليه حجة منيع
 يدني الله ليبيز لكم وسهله يكسر سنن لا يد من قلوب
 يهتد به سنن الذين يريدون من قلوبهم ويريدون ان يتقوا
 ابن النكلا ان قد اذروا ان يعفوا اليه ويريد الشيطان ان يفسد
 حلال بعد الدين من ضللكم ويدر بركتكم عليه حجة منيع
 والله يدني ان يتقوا حجة منيع ويريد الدين يتقوا حجة منيع
 ان تصيبوا حلالا عظيم ويريد الدين يتقوا حجة منيع
 حلالا عظيم ويريد الدين يتقوا حجة منيع حلالا عظيم
 حلالا عظيم ويريد الدين يتقوا حجة منيع حلالا عظيم

| | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|
| ١٥ | ٧ | ١ | ١ | ١ |
| ٨ | ٧ | ١ | ١ | ١ |
| ٤ | ٧ | ١ | ١ | ١ |
| ٨ | ٧ | ١ | ١ | ١ |
| ٤ | ٧ | ١ | ١ | ١ |
| ٨ | ٧ | ١ | ١ | ١ |
| ٤ | ٧ | ١ | ١ | ١ |
| ٨ | ٧ | ١ | ١ | ١ |

to you in mercy, but those who pursue evil courses, desire that you should incline wholly towards evil" (Ibid:77).

A 25 squares table is added at the end of this hijāb. Unfortunately, most of the figures and letters in the cells are not legible. In the centre space, the name of a man is inserted together with another word which may be the name of a woman (see photocopy 14).

The word hubb (love) or its derivatives appear repeatedly in the first hijāb. Two of the verses containing the word translated as "love" seem to be central to the second hijāb as is evident from the number of times they are repeated. However, there is another word - yaghar - in the second hijab which plays the role of what I have called the key word. Yaghar means to dominate, to suppress or to become irresistible to other people. Both hijābs are not merely useful to invite the woman's love but are also expected to neutralize the anger of a particular person if used for that purpose. The word yaghar typifies well the gender relations in Berti society which are characterised by the domination of men over women or husbands over wives. The domination called for in the hijāb thus typifies the ideal marital relationship in Berti society.

To compose a hijāb for the purpose of gaining the love of a woman is certainly a difficult task for a Berti faki guided by his knowledge of the Koran. The Koran is not a book of romance and contains little reference to sexual love. All the relevant words in the Koran are related to the love of God and of things connected with the next life. This is particularly clear in the first hijāb (12) where the word "love" hardly relates to the love which is meant in the purpose of the hijāb.

The second hijāb (13) refers to the love of women in its introduction but the emphasis seems still to be placed on the relation between the client and other men, including his enemies. The word gāhir, unsatisfactorily translated as "irresistible", implies domination and suppression. This makes the hijāb less relevant to love as such than to defusing the anger of unfriendly people.

Mahabba hijābs are described in the Arabic literature available to Berti fakis and a few of the verses found in Berti hijābs are recommended in these books. Among these are the Exordium chapter (hijāb 12) and the verse: "The love of ... abode" (Hijāb 13; see Ibn Sina, N.D.:72 and Marzugli 1970:80). But the Berti hijābs as such are definitely an independent creation of Berti fakis; the Arabic literature does not contain anything equivalent to the two hijābs which I have described here.

Hijāb 14 (umalsibiān hijāb)

I have referred before to umalsibiān as a class of a subversive female jinn. She comes into the house, shouts in an animal voice, and leaves the occupants of the house suffering from her malicious visit. Among the troubles she causes are sickness, sterility, bad luck, abortion, miscarriage, etc. Almost every Berti faki knows that the prophet Solomon, equipped with his knowledge of all non-human languages, met her in the bush. She looked like an ugly old woman. Flames were coming out of her mouth as she breathed and the earth was cracking as she walked with her long sharp toe-nails. The prophet grabbed her and forced her into what are called the Seven Pledges of Solomon (uhūd Sulēmanīa sabāa). Under his interrogation, umalsibiān disclosed her purpose. She confessed that she had developed a keen delight in causing human beings anguish wherever she found them. Solomon forced umalsibiān into a deal according to which she should not harm any individual who carried a certain hijāb specified by the prophet.

The Exordium Chapter* The Throne Verses* This is umalsibiān hijāb against devils, jinn and misfortunes* This is a promise (from her): "No god but Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful", the Owner of the two Worlds, no one can escape His judgement. I (umalsibiān) pledge not to come near to or to harm anyone who carries this amulet; neither during the night, nor during the day, and Allah is my witness [[lahtahtēl]]. I will never harm the bearer of

this hijāb on his travels, or while he is eating, sleeping, walking or sitting. Nor will I interfere with his children, wealth, body or blood* " .. and announce: Truth has come and falsehood has disappeared, falsehood is bound to perish" (Khan 1981:272)* "Nothing is hidden from Allah, in the earth or in the heaven. He it is Who fashions you in the wombs as He wills; There is none worthy of worship beside Him, the Mighty, the Wise" (Ibid:48)* "Verily, We created man from clay; then We placed him as a drop of sperm in a safe depository; then We fashioned the sperm into a clot; then We fashioned the clot into a shapeless lump; then out of this shapeless lump We fashioned bones; then We clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed it into a new creation. So blessed is Allah, the Best of creators" (Ibid:329)* " His power is such that when he intends a thing He says concerning it Be; and it is" (Ibid:438)* Allah Who is Powerful, Wise, ..., I swear not to come near to or touch the bearer of this protector. Not to harm his bones, head, brain, hair, veins, neck, hands, legs, waist, womb, as long as the earth and the skies endure. Allah is my witness concerning this oath* [[mahtahtīl]]* "We shall turn to all that they did and We shall scatter it like particles of dust" (Ibid:350)* "Nothing is hidden ... Wise" (see above)* "Verily ...creators" (Ibid)* "His Power ... it is" (Ibid)* "The case of Jesus in the sight of Allah is like unto the case of Adam. He created him out of dust. He said concerning him: Be; and he began to be"

(Khan 1981:55)* "It is not in accord with the Majesty of Allah that He should take unto Himself a son. Holy is He. When He decrees a thing, He says concerning it: Be, and it is" (Ibid:291)* No God but Allah, Who has the ultimate Glory and Respect. He Who created the hills* I (umalsibiān) promise not to harm or come near the bearer of this hijab. Neither will I harm his wealth, children, food, drink, milk or harm him while he is resting and living. I will never interfere as long as the days and nights endure and Allah is my witness* [[fahtahtēl]]* "Moses said: That which you have cast is sheer sorcery. Allah will stultify it. Surely, Allah does not permit the design of the corrupt to prosper" (Khan 1981:200)* "Nothing is Wise" [as before]* "Verily it is" (Ibid)* "The caseto be" (Ibid)* The Throne Verses* "Allah is He beside Whom there is no god, Knower of the unseen. He is the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful. Allah is He beside Whom there is no god, the Sovereign, the Most Holy, the Provider of peace, the Bestower of Security, the Protector, the Mighty, the Subduer, the Exalted. Holy is Allah, far above that which they associate with Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner; His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him. He is the Mighty, the Wise" (Khan 1981:557)* He Who sent the Messengers, the Knower of the unseen and the seen, the Manifest and the Hidden, the Most High and the Owner of the next World* I, umalsibiān, promise not to harm or even

come near the owner of this hijab. I will never interfere in his sleeping, walking, drinking, clothing, food and laughter and Allah is my witness* [[gahtahtīl]]* "Nothing is ...Wise" [see above]* "Verily creators" (Ibid)* "His Power ...it is" (Ibid)* "Thus holy is He, in Whose hand is the Kingdom over all things. To Him will you all be brought back" (Khan 1981:439)* "Peace! will be the greeting conveyed to them from the Ever Merciful Lord" (Ibid:437)* "Allah is ... Wise" (see above)* ...* I, umalsibiān, will never harm the bearer of this hijāb concerning his wealth, children and dependents. Nor will I interfere with the daughters of Eve and sons of Adam concerning their desires and ambitions. Nor in their short or long travels and Allah watches over what I say* [[nahtahtīl]]* "When my Lord's warning of universal catastrophe is to be fulfilled, He will knock it down into a flat mound. My Lord's warning is bound to be fulfilled" (Khan 1981:287)* "Nothing ... Wise" (see above)* "Verily ... creators" (Ibid)* "The case of ... to be" (Ibid)* "His Power ... it is" (Ibid)* "Thus ... back" (Ibid)* In the name of Allah, no god but He, Who erected the skies without pillars and flattened the earth without corners. He Who made the firm hills and set the dawns and winds in motion. By the name of Allah Who puts life into the perished souls, Who humiliates every stubborn tyrant, I, umalsibiān, promise not to come near or harm the bearer of this hijab. I will never interfere in his ..., and Allah is my witness* [[jahtahtīl]]* "Unto Him ascend good words

and righteous conduct Exalts them" (Khan 1981:428)* "Peace ... Lord" (see above)* "Nothing ... Wise" [as before]* "Verily ... creators" (Ibid)* "His power ... it is" (Ibid)* By the name of Allah, Who secured sustenance and sent messengers, Who created rain and made the plants grow, He Whose Power exceeds that of all things and whose Judgement none escape. I , umalsibān, take refuge with His words and pledge not to, neither openly nor secretly. I will not interfere in his trade, field, blood, flesh and veins. Nor will I meddle with his sleep, his walking or his running. Allah watches over my words* [[bahtahtīl]]* "So was the truth established, and what they did was proved vain" (Khan 1981:152)* "Peace ... Lord" [as before]* "Nothing Wise" (Ibid)* "Verily creators" (Ibid)* "His Power it is" (Ibid)* "The case to be" (Ibid)* "Woe to us, who has raised us up from our graves? This is what the Gracious One had warned us of, and the Messenger spoke the truth" (Khan 1981:436)* "... for that which they have wrought is but a magician's trick, and a magician shall not thrive, come whence he may" (Ibid:302)* "When they made their cast, they bewitched the eyes of the people and struck them with awe and perpetrated a mighty illusion" (Ibid:152)* No source of power but of Allah, the Great and Most Exalted* The Throne Verses* The Unity chapter* The Dawn chapter* The Mankind chapter*

Hijāb 14 (photocopy 15) also contains 14 tables of two distinctive types, seven with squares that are filled with letters and numbers which are found in most umalsibiān hijābs, (see photocopies 16, 17, 18), and the other seven filled in with words only which are unique to this hijāb. The verse: "His Power ... it is" (see the translation), is divided into 9 parts which are then distributed in the cells of the tables. The hijāb also includes seven names of powerful jinns which I have written in my translation between double square brackets. These names are believed to be those of the kings of the jinns and as they are in jinn language, they do not convey any meaning in themselves. The names of jinn kings are obviously selected because it is hoped that by influencing the kings, one can automatically exert one's authority also over their subjects (see Al-Tūkhi, b.n.d.:13).

As I have described earlier, umalsibiān is a dragon-like female jinn. She is viewed, or she has described herself, as a malicious being who is perpetually interested in causing human beings anguish. It was the prophet Solomon who came to the defence of human beings and forced her into the seven pledges which are the subject of the hijāb. It is her words which make up the hijāb but it is not clear whether the wording of the hijāb is her composition or whether it was dictated to her by the prophet. In any case, she promised to refrain from her mischievous interference, but only with regard to the holders of the amulet.

The contract between Solomon and umalsibiān has seven points. In some copies of the hijāb (see photocopies 16, 17 and 18), each of the seven points corresponds to one of the week, days starting from Sunday, the first day of the week called ahad (from wāhid, one). The hijāb also includes seven other tables filled with letters and numbers. It is the latter tables that are found in most of umalsibian hijābs. Koranic verses are repeated seven times each supplemented by seven names of jinn kings. We have, thus, seven days of the week, seven tables, seven names of jinns, verses which are repeated seven times and above all seven points in the whole deal. The choice of the number seven is obviously related to its symbolic attribute as a "lucky" number.

Most of the umalsibiān hijābs contain more or less the same verses. A few are added or omitted with variations in the number of times each one is repeated. However, my examination of the tables did not show the same result. Every table seems to be different and there is not a single line identical to its counterpart in a different copy. While Koranic verses convey certain meanings to the fakis, separate numbers and letters do not and are thus difficult to commit to memory. Moreover, numbers and letters resist being strung into the mnemonic units that are necessary for rote learning. Numbers and letters are, therefore, more prone to changes every time they are copied. These speculations seem to indicate that it is the memory which assists the writing rather than the other way round.

The umalsibiān hijābs are considered to be useful only to women and children; most adult Berti men regard them as irrelevant to them. This view is often defied by the fakis who consider the hijāb to be useful for all people regardless of their sex or age. The umalsibiān hijāb is also regarded by non-professionals as a guardian against sickness only. But according to the view of the fakis, the context of the hijāb is much wider than it is generally thought to be. Although there is a clear reference to sickness in the hijāb, there is also repeated mention of travelling, trade, fields, etc. Nevertheless, those who are not able to read are unaware of the exact area of reference of the hijāb and limit its efficacy to sickness.

Printed copies of umalsibiān hijābs are occasionally displayed in Berti markets. I was told that there are two types of them: a big one and a small one. The big type which was obtainable during the time of my fieldwork (see photocopy 17) is fairly similar to the handwritten hijābs. It is believed that the small one is of use for children only. Almost all the Berti I consulted showed a clear preference for the local handwritten copies. It is a general belief that the printed one is written by a "machine" and is therefore inferior to that which is written by a religious human being. The same belief also applies to printed Koran books as compared with the handwritten copies. The handwritten copies of the Koran themselves are classified according to the status of their writers and the best of all are those which are written during the fasting month. This notion exhibits a close link between the piety of the doer and the

perfectness of the piece of work done. Generally speaking, people are expected to be more religious during the fasting month. Indeed, a number of the Berti, including the fakis, tend to show a stricter observance of the religious rules during this month. Work done in this month, especially if it is religious in nature like copying the Koran, is thought to attract more blessing. It might thus be the lack of piety involved in their production which casts doubt on the efficacy of the printed articles.

Finally, the hijāb shown in photocopy 16 reveals an interesting fact concerning the training of fakis. Although half of the Arabic letters have dots either under or over them, there are very few dotted words in the passages. The writer has ignored most of the dots and has connected together a number of words which should be written separately. There are also a number of writing mistakes in almost every line. The writer seems to have had an extremely poor training compared to his colleagues. Nevertheless, the copy was used as a hijab until it came into my possession.

Hijāb 15 (batūta)

I have stated before that batuta hijābs are employed to cause a partial loss of consciousness and that for this reason they are thought appropriate for use by thieves and adulterers. Hijāb 15 is a translation of the text which I copied from the collection of one of the fakis. The hijāb is preceded by a long introduction followed by the text. The introduction concerns the faki only and is not

copied into a hijāb. I, however, consider it important to include the introduction of the hijāb in my translation of it.

This is batūta* If read by a frightened person, he will be protected by Allah from every danger in the world* If one writes it on a sword, washes it and rubs himself with the liquid, he will have a kingdom by the will of Allah* If batūta is written on the hide of a lion or a leopard, the actor will become a king by the will of Allah* The one who reads batūta will never be harmed by the enmity of kings and ministers* If batūta is written on the ankle of a dead person, and buried in an ant hole, the invading enemy will turn away* The one who reads batūta will avoid poverty and will gain much wealth* If batūta is written and hung around a goat's neck, the animal will never be eaten by a wolf* If batūta is written, erased and sprinkled on the house of a Muslim or an infidel enemy, he will certainly perish by the will of Allah; fear Allah and never administer it except against the person who deserves it* Bataūta can enable the sick to survive chronic leprosy, itch or headache by the will of Allah* If batūta is read with the rival's name after the sunset prayers, he will vacate the vicinity with the wind and never come back at all* If batūta is written and burnt in the place of prayer with the name of a woman, she will never marry another man apart from the actor, even if she were asked by a thousand men* If batūta is read by a (ritually) clean person, the reciter will see (in a dream) the prophet and

the angels telling him about his future in paradise* If one writes batūta on a lion's or a cat's skin, and then wraps the piece of skin around his arm, he will be invisible to all human beings and will never be harmed at all.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, Lord of Moses, Lord of Harun, Lord of Ismael, Solomon, David, Zakaria and Ayub [names of prophets]. Praise be to the Lord of Gibrael, Michael, Israfil, Israel, Munkar, Niker and Ridwan [names of angels]* Praise be to the Lord of the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalm [zabūr] and the Koran* O batuta, o Saadata, Jita, Jindita ... [names of devils]* "They are deaf, dumb and blind and are not able to understand" (Khan 1981:27)* "Put thy trust in Allah; sufficient is Allah as a Guardian" (Ibid:410)* "Render our enemy dumb, blind and inarticulate * "Our Lord, make us not the subject of persecution at the hands of the oppressors" (Ibid:201)* "Put down that which is in thy right hand, it will swallow up that which they have wrought, for that which they have wrought is but a magician's trick, and a magician shall not thrive" (Ibid:302)* [A different copy of a batūta hijāb is illustrated in photocopy 19; appendix 3, p308].

The introduction to the above hijāb indicates its general use. If we regard the introduction as part of the faki's knowledge, we are again confronted with the discrepancy between the esoteric and the exoteric levels of belief. I pointed out before that this hijāb is used to facilitate the intrusion into a rival's territory. This is well known to all and none of the non-professionals related the hijāb to its general purposes specified in the introduction such as marriage, becoming a king, protection against sickness, protection of animals, etc. The fakis support their belief in the general powers of the hijāb by referring specifically to those various contexts in which the hijāb is supposed to be effective. The contents of the hijāb, however, clearly lend support to the exoteric knowledge about it in that the verses which it contains are directly related to making a person invisible.

It is known that the hijāb must be combined with three "spouses": the saliva of a dead person, a strand of hair from the forehead of a recently born cat which is still blind, and the first menstrual blood of a young girl. At least the cat's hair, which can easily be obtained, is said to be necessary for the efficacy of the hijāb. According to the native exegesis, the saliva of the dead man causes the enemy to lose awareness of his surroundings; in this respect he resembles a dead man. The hair of the blind cat is seen as being capable of blinding the rival. The fakis were not able to offer any explanation for the use of the menstrual blood. However, menstruation, especially in a young girl, is a subject of great secrecy as are all facts related to adult sexual organs. Knowledge

about such facts is either denied or severely suppressed. In one of the Berti riddles, the female sexual organ is described as "that which has never seen the sun" i.e. as something that is never exposed to light and is always confined to darkness. I would argue that it is this secrecy, confinement to darkness, and suppression of knowledge which makes menstrual blood relevant to the hijāb rather than the fact that the hijāb itself is used to facilitate adultery. The Berti are unlikely to associate adultery and menstrual blood simply because intercourse is avoided during a woman's period when it is regarded as dangerous and a possible cause of venereal diseases.

To set the batūta hijāb in operation requires a special ritual technique. The owner holds the hijāb high above his head in his right hand and points it towards his rival. He then utters the name of the rival followed by the name of the rival's mother three times. He also addresses the hijāb saying ansik (grasp) or agbud (take over) before moving into action. This is the ideal way of activating the hijāb but it is often impossible to put into practice, especially when the owner of the hijāb does not know his victims. Nevertheless, the batūta differs from other hijābs in many respects. It is personalised and addressed like other live objects. It is set in motion and told about its victim. It is raised high and oriented in the direction of its victim as if it were to fly as specified. It is easy to speculate why other hijābs are not set in motion in this way. For example, a person may not know exactly when a disease is striking or when a flying bullet from an enemy's rifle is approaching, and so he may not have a chance to

activate the hijāb. However, this is not necessarily the case with all the hijābs. A person may be perfectly well aware of the time when his love hijāb should start operating and a merchant certainly knows when he needs more customers in his shop. Thus, the fact that batūta, unlike other hijābs, is activated in a specific and conscious way cannot be explained simply on the basis of a knowledge of the time of operation or the specificity of the possible threat. The batūta hijāb, however, has a salient characteristic which is not found in other hijābs. It is the only hijāb which is used mainly for theft and adultery which, are both regarded as immoral actions. (A few Berti thieves might argue otherwise with regard to certain kinds of theft). All other hijābs which are not activated in the same way as batūta, are concerned with protection in general or with a legitimate pursuit of one's livelihood and are hence moral in their use. Even nejēsa hijāb (see types of hijābs, 4) which is used in adultery, does not directly help its user in his immoral action but protects him against attacks during it. It is perhaps the use of batūta hijāb in immoral actions which makes it necessary that it should work only when it is activated by its bearer. Note that the responsibility for the operation of the hijāb and hence for the immoral action is shifted from the hijāb, with its sacred contents, to the activator.

Batūta is regarded as a male hijāb and women are not expected to obtain it. Women do not normally indulge in ambitious and risky plans concerning theft (e.g. camel theft), and their role in initiating adultery is smaller than that of men. Gender relation also affects the use of other hijābs, especially those which may

involve the use of violence. Mahabba hijāb is also mostly used by men while women are expected to use it only to secure the love of their husbands, especially when their husbands are polygamous.

According to the introduction to the batūta hijāb, it can be also used to protect animals. Only a few Berti I talked to expressed the view that the hijāb could really serve this function. The general view is that animals require different hijābs from those used by people and that the animal hijābs have limited contents and are cheaper than the hijābs for people. This fits in with the Berti conception of animals as being susceptible to less serious malicious attacks than human beings. On the whole, they need to be protected only against the evil eye. Jinns, devils and umalsibiān, who cause disease in humans, have no direct interest in them. The limited size of animal hijābs can also possibly be related to the limited intensity of the evil eye when directed against them.

Hijab 16 (harrāsa: protector)

New born children are regarded as weak and exposed to many hazards from various malicious forces. To protect it against them, a baby requires a special hijāb called harrāsa (lit. guardian, protector). Immediately after a baby is born, a Koran book may be placed at the bed where it lies until the hijāb is prepared. The baby may not only face disease or death at this stage but may also be exchanged for the baby of a jinn; such a changeling is called mubaddal (lit. exchanged). If later the child happens to be

paralysed, deformed or mentally retarded, it is always considered to be a mubaddal. It is, nevertheless treated normally and no attempt is made to dispose of it. To prevent the baby from being exchanged during the first weeks of its life, it must have a hijāb and must not, in any circumstance, be left alone. The contents of the harrāsa hijāb are: the Exordium chapter, the Unity chapter, the Dawn chapter and the Mankind chapter.

As young children lack the ambition typical of adults and have no sins, some eventualities mentioned in the Koranic chapters are of little or no direct relevance to their well-being. In the previous chapter I mentioned that the Dawn and the Mankind chapters are considered particularly good for children's diseases the cause of which are unknown. As there is little chance of sorcery being practised against innocent children, concern with their well-being focuses on protecting them against the evil eye, unknown diseases and interference by non-human beings, which may include exchanging them. Both the Dawn and the Mankind chapters refer to taking refuge with God against human as well as non-human malice (see the discussion in Chapter 3). They are thus capable of dealing with the threat of the baby being replaced by a changeling as well as with any other malicious interference. The Unity chapter is proverbial as an efficient guardian against the evil eye, which is seen as one of the most fatal hazards for babies. The Exordium chapter is regarded as a good omen for any beginning (opening the gates of the two worlds). Its use, therefore, indicates a wish for a safe start in life and a healthy future for the baby.

Conclusion

I make no claim to have incorporated here all the kinds of hijābs which exist among the Berti. I have attempted to represent the majority but further research would certainly uncover a number of other hijābs which I have not mentioned.

The hijābs differ from one another by the kind of formulae contained in them. These formulae, Koranic verses, sentences, words, names, etc., are in one way or another related to their subject matter. Each hijāb contains what I have referred to as key words or verses. These are often marked by their frequent repetition or the high frequency of their appearance in the passages. Repetition of certain formulae in writing or ritual speech is aimed at changing the reality which exists independently of the actors. This notion of the "magical" power of a certain class of uttered or written words is not something that is exclusive to Berti thought, and has been extensively explored in anthropology (e.g. Malinowski 1948, Evans Pritchards 1937, Horton 1967, Stratherns 1977 and Tambiah 1979). According to the Berti belief, God himself created things by uttering "words". This belief is clearly Koranic, as can be attested to by a few verses which appear in Hijāb 2: "His Power is such that when He intends a thing He says concerning it Be: and it is", or "When He decrees a thing, He says concerning it: Be, and it is". The formulae and words which the Berti utter have, however, a similar creative power only when God endows them with it. In line with this view, the Berti fakis often comment on their hijābs: "we make the reasons (nisabubu), and God

accomplishes (bitim) them. A similar notion is involved when the client, instead of asking a faki to make him a hijāb to prevent illness, says: "create me a reason (sabbib lay) to avoid sickness. That is instead of saying: make me a hijāb to avoid sickness. One sentence found in all hijabs which I have omitted from the descriptions of them to avoid repetition is: "May God accept our intention" (rabbānā tagabbal minnā). The word "intention" refers to the purpose for which the hijāb is written. The "intention" i.e. the purpose of the hijāb is specified in some but not in all cases. God is believed to be capable of knowing it even if it is not specified. The notion does not diminish the power of the formulae used. Rather, it amplifies the believed power of God which alone renders the formulae powerful.

The belief in the power of the sacred formulae has led to their being used in various ways. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that some formulae are internalized in the body through drinking the erasure of their writing. What we have been concerned with in this chapter is a very similar idea. What every hijāb basically does is that it retains the sacred word on the body in a written form.

In the course of explaining the "classical" or "orthodox" meaning of the formulae, we have identified the Berti lack of a "proper" understanding of what is quoted. Typical of the societies characterised by minimal literacy is the division of knowledge into exoteric and esoteric or folk and specialised. The illiterate Berti may not know the contents of his hijāb and may not understand it if it is read to him. That, however, does not reduce the wisdom of the

words and it is only the illiterate's ignorance which blinds him from perceiving it (see Tambiah 1979:182). The meaning is thus viewed as being inherent in the words rather than being assigned to them by individuals. Should we continue to insist that the meaning of a Koranic verse, for instance, is that which it conveys to an Arabic linguist or a Muslim theologian, another problem would arise: the Berti fakis themselves would only be in a slightly better position than their illiterate clients. In their "classical" meaning, the verses quoted in some hijābs bear no relation to the subject matter of the amulet. We may perhaps need to review what we imply by "meaning" or "understanding". However vague or "unclassical" it may be, a faki assigns a definite meaning to whatever he quotes. This also holds true in varying degrees in the case of the illiterate. Despite his declaration that he does not understand the contents of his hijāb, he assigns to them specific meanings. How coterminous these meanings are with their classical counterparts is of little importance.

The majority of Berti hijābs are ordered by name from the faki. There are, however, some situations when the clients are not in a position to specify the appropriate kind of hijāb required. This is often the case with medical hijābs for which, in order to specify their kind, one must know the cause of the illness. That cause can be initially unknown to both the faki and the patient. In such a case, a special method of divination is employed to discover the cause of the illness, according to the result of which a hijāb is prepared. In the following chapter, I will address myself, among other things, to this method of diagnosing the causes of various

ailments.

C H A P T E R 5

Book Divination

In Berti Arabic there is no word that is synonymous with the English word "divination". The nearest to it is the word sagit (deduction) which in its general sense refers to various methods of divination which involve writing and reading. The word kitab (book) is often joined with the word sagit to form the phrase sagit al-kitāb which can be translated as the book divination. This is to set apart these methods of divination or to emphasize the use of the "book". The latter may entail some elements of sanctification inherent in the use of "the book". The title of the chapter therefore derives from this notion. In its narrow sense, the word sagit refers to just one such method of divination which consists in subtracting a certain number several times from a total sum which represents the numerical value of certain words or names. It will be explained later how this method is employed. The fakis as a rule employ the word sagit in its narrow sense, the non-professionals in its general sense. Another Berti word for divination is tanjīm which means "astrologizing" and derives from the word najīm (star). Everybody has one of four different stars and this star, which is itself established through divination, determines his future. The term sagit and tanjīm are occasionally used interchangeably by the Berti. The third term is istikhāra which connotes a "search for divine advice". The advice is believed to be revealed by God in a dream stimulated by certain prayers. This method of divination is much less common than the other two and it will not be covered in this chapter.

Values of Arabic letters

It is believed that all Arabic letters have corresponding numerical values. The numerical values of the letters in certain words - e.g. people's names, days of the week, and some other nouns are customarily added up. The totals produced are then treated in a certain way to provide answers to specific problems addressed through divination. In order to practise divination, a faki must know the values of all the Arabic letters. Most fakis tend to learn them by heart; those who have not learnt them by heart rely on written lists either in their umbatris or in published books which they keep. Table 1 shows the values of the Arabic letters according to five different versions. The first three versions are taken from umbatris. The fourth and the fifth versions are taken from various books used and recommended by the fakis, (see Abu Maasher N.D.:1; Al-Tukhi {b} N.D.:10; 28, 1961:5 and Marzugi 1970:18). Versions one and two are included in most of the umbatris but version three is the one which most fakis told me. Version four is taken from a book (Abu Maasher) which is consulted by most fakis more often than other published books. Version five is very rarely used. The numerical values which consist of more than one figure in version four are reduced to single figures by the omission of the zero digits; as a result, the values ascribed to different letters in this version become identical to those shown in version three.

Table 2
The Recommended Names

| Week days | male names | female names |
|-----------|--|--|
| Saturday | Abdullahī, Yunus, Ibrahīm | Mariām, Mariōma |
| Sunday | Suleimān, Daūd, Ibrahīm | Halīma, Hallōm |
| Monday | Mohammed, Hāmid | Fātna, Fatnīa, Fattūma |
| Tuesday | Ismāīl, Ishāg, Yagūb | Khadīja |
| Wednesday | Yahīa, Osmān, Zakarīa Omer, Daūd, Harūn | Asha |
| Thursday | Idrīs, Abbakar, Mūsa, Īsa, Yagūb | Kaltūm, Umkaltūm, Kaltūma, Umkhamīs |
| Friday | Adam, Yūsif | Hawa, Ungīma |

Table 3
Conformity and Non-conformity to
the Recommended Names *

| Village | Total Population | Non-conforming names | | |
|---------|---------------------|----------------------|-------|-------|
| | | men | women | Total |
| 1 | 101 | 10 | 17 | 27 |
| 2 | 32 | 6 | 7 | 13 |
| 3 | 152 | 9 | 27 | 36 |
| 4 | 145 | 20 | 38 | 58 |
| | 430 | 45 | 89 | 134 |
| | | 10.5% | 20.7% | 31.2% |
| | | 33.6% | 66.4% | 100% |

*The table deals with the present living population of the villages only and unnamed babies are excluded.

I have presented the numerical values of letters as though they were in the form of lists. In fact, there are no such lists as such in the umbatris. Letters and their values are recorded in two ways. In the first method of recording them, which is the most popular one, a number of letters are clustered together to form a pronounceable mnemonic. There are altogether nine mnemonics, eight consisting of three letters each and one consisting of four letters. The mnemonics do not have meanings in themselves even though they appear in word-like forms. Above each letter in these mnemonics, a number of dots equal to its numerical value are made (see photocopy 20).

The second method of recording the values of the letters consists of arranging them in a table. Each letter is placed in a different square with one or more dots representing its value. Hence, to arrive at the value of a letter, one has to count the dots associated with each one. This method of arranging the letters and their values has three main features. Firstly, no single standardized sequential order of the letters exists. This is also apparent in the books published outside the Berti area but used by Berti professionals; in fact one of the famous Egyptian writers himself uses two different alphabetical orders (Al-Tūkhī 1961:5 and N.D.:10). Secondly, there is no correspondence between the sequential position of a letter and its value; in other words, the fact that a letter occupies a higher position in the table does not imply that it has a higher numerical value. This is of course logical since no importance seems to be attributed to the sequential

ا ب ق د ه
ح ط ز حاء
ع ف ص و
ظ عر ط صر حساب

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
سيدنا محمد وعلي
ابن قتيبة بن سعيد
وصحبه طه صر حاء

order itself. Thirdly, there is a limited use of arithmetic, and figures are replaced by dots whose numbers vary according to the value of the letters.

It is the names of persons that play the most important role in the method of divination called sagit and it is their constituent letters that are counted. All Berti are aware of this and they constantly assert that names of persons should not be chosen haphazardly, for a wrong choice of the name of a newly born child will inevitably lead to wrong divinatory results (for more details see Osman 1979/80:28-29). The appropriate system of naming is that recommended by the "book" and ism al-kitāb (the name of the book) is the name a child should be given. According to this system of naming, a child's name depends on the day of the week on which he or she was born. For each of the week days, there is a limited number of male and female names, of which one should be chosen; sometimes a rosary is used to determine the choice. A number of rosaries, each representing a recommended name, are given to the mother who chooses one of them. Table 2 lists the recommended names for the different week days. Two of the names appear twice, i.e. on two different days; this is because the table is compiled from the statements of several informants. The table also shows that there are more names for men than for women (24:15). With regard to the column of female names, a number of the names for a particular day may derive from a single Arabic name. For instance, female names recommended for Monday are Fatna, Fatnia and Fattuma. Fatnia and Fattuma are both derived from the first which is nearer to the classical Arabic name. This applies to many other names in the table as well.

The recommended names are mostly names of prophets and religious figures important in the Islamic tradition. It is known to some Berti that the prophet Mohammed was born on a Monday and to a few fakis that \bar{I} sa (Jesus) was born on a Saturday (San \bar{u} si N.D.:118) but although Mohammed is a name recommended for Monday, Isa is not recommended for Saturday. Consequently, the relation between Mohammed and Monday becomes a weak basis for speculation and generalization about the other names.

So far we have been dealing with the naming system as it is ideally conceptualised by the Berti. This ideal system is, however, not always adhered to in practice. In the three naming ceremonies I attended, names were twice chosen according to "the book". In each of these two cases, a faki suggested a name which was accepted by the men concerned and a messenger was then sent to inform the mother of the name of her baby. In the third case, a grandfather suggested his own name (Mohammed) for his grandchild who was born on a Saturday. The suggestion was accepted without any complaints about the breach of the book's naming system.

Table 3 shows the number of persons with names not recommended by the book among the population of four villages. It indicates that full 31.2% of people have other than recommended names. The remaining 68.8% of people bear names recommended in the book and listed in Table 2. This does not mean, however, that all their names were properly chosen for there is no proof that they all match up with the appropriate birthdays. It is of course difficult to

check the adherence to the system of naming in cases when the name was given a few decades ago but I suspect that on the whole people who bear an inappropriate name constitute a much higher percentage of the total population than Table 3 indicates.

There is a much higher population of women than men with unrecommended names (89:45). Put differently, out of the total of 134 unrecommended names, 66.4% are female names while only 34.6% are male names. This, in my view, relates to the fact that there are only 15 recommended names available for women while there are 24 names recommended for men; it seems that the smaller number of recommended female names is compensated for by choosing more unorthodox names.

The fact that specific names are recommended by the book is just one of the factors which is taken into consideration when the actual name of a child is being chosen; other factors may often have a more decisive role. So, for example, the parents may name their child after its grandfather or grandmother in an effort to perpetuate this particular name in the family. The child may be given the name of a famous or talented relative, of a political leader or even of the president of the country in an effort to secure for him good fortune in life. A child's name can also be chosen to commemorate a pilgrimage, a good rainy season, etc. In the last few decades, the Berti have come into increasing contact with the outside world and this has led to a wave of new names which are not necessarily the names of Islamic religious figures.

Consultation for sagit divination does not take place publicly. Unlike the sand divination described earlier, or most divinatory practices studied by other anthropologists (Clarke 1939, Bascom 1941, Beattie 1967, Park 1967, Turner 1961 and others), this type of divination is cloaked in secrecy and there is no seance at which others beside the faki and his client may be present. The faki's insistence on complete privacy makes it of course difficult, if not impossible, to collect enough data on the actual divination as it takes place. In consequence, all the data on which I rely in my descriptions are those which I was given by various fakis. Obviously, the knowledge which these data embody is the esoteric knowledge of the fakis. In fact, this knowledge has no exoteric counterpart, for most of the clients are illiterate and are given the result of the divination "ready calculated" by the fakis. The implication of this is that a client will hear only about the one possibility which concerns him at the time. The difficulties deriving from the secret nature of sagit divination do not in themselves diminish the value of the data and their analysis, although they obviously impose their limits.

Most of the fakis say that they employ divination about twice a month. It is important to note here that this is not to be taken as an indicator of the degree of intensity of their professional activities in general, as divination is required only on rare occasions compared with the other services which fakis regularly perform. Most of the divinations are concerned with marriages. Although most of the fakis' activities are concerned with the

treatment of diseases, the causes of disease are only rarely established through divination. This is because the symptoms of the disease usually provide adequate clues. As there are no such clues to reveal the future prospects of a suggested marriage, it becomes necessary to resort to divination.

The following descriptions of specific types of sagit divination have all been either dictated to me by fakis or copied by myself from their private umbatris; none of them is copied from the published books used by the fakis. As descriptions of the divinatory procedures are meant to be read by the fakis and not their clients, some of them include a few introductory lines addressed to the professional. I have recorded every detail of the descriptions contained in the umbatris, including their titles when they were given.

Marriage and divination

Divination 1

"A chapter on marriage

Will he produce from her? Will they prosper together or not? Count the name of the man and the name of the woman. Subtract from the total in fives until you are left with five or under. If the result is five, the marriage will be a fair one. If it is four, the couple will produce many children and gain a lot of wealth and blessings. The

family will also be favoured by kings and other people. If the outcome is three, the client should withdraw from his decision for the potential wife is an unlucky one for him. Should the man become stubborn enough to disregard the advice, he will certainly regret it (and God alone knows). Again if the result of the subtraction is two, the married life will be bad at the beginning but things will take a turn for the better afterwards. Lastly, if the outcome is one, the marriage will be full of trouble. It will drive the man crazy. Such a marriage is no good at all; it starts and ends with the devil. Let the client forget about it."

Divination 2

"Will he succeed in marrying the woman? Will she bear him children?. Count the name of the man and the name of the potential wife. Subtract from the total in eights. If you get one, they will marry and live together for a long time. Two: he will marry her and they will have many children together and become wealthy. Three: he will never succeed in marrying her but if he does, they will certainly have no children at all. Four: he will never marry her without an extremely long struggle. Five: the marriage will start with difficulties that will give way to an easier time towards the end of the couple's life

together. Six: she will be a good wife who will bear him many children. The couple will be loved by all people including sultans and everyone who meets them. Seven: the husband will find wealth and children with this wife. Eight: she is a blessed woman, prosperous, friendly and hospitable to all those favoured by her husband."

Divination 3

"The pregnant woman

In order to know whether a pregnant woman will give birth to a male or a female baby, count her name and the name of her mother. Add that to the total numerical value of the day of consultation. Subtract from that in fours. If you get one, she will give birth to a boy. If you get two, she will have a female baby. In the event of the result being three, the pregnant woman will have a miscarriage. If the result is four, the woman will give birth to twins."

The above descriptions of the divinatory procedures reflect the positive as well as the undesired consequences of marriage and indicate the questions a Berti may have in mind when he is planning to get married. The ease with which a particular marriage can be concluded appears to be considered fairly important, which is quite understandable, given that Berti marriages normally involve the kin

on both sides and that the consent of at least some of them to the proposed marriage must be obtained before the marriage can be arranged (see Holy 1974:73). The desirability of a long, prosperous and happy married life is also emphasized in the texts and the culmination of the marriage in the birth of many children is the factor given by far the most importance. References are frequently made to prosperity and the concern with relations in the community seems to predominate over that with relations in the elementary family. Marrying a certain woman does not only determine the number of children one begets, but is also decisive in securing wealth, happiness and longer life. It is always the woman who is blamed if the couple is childless. It is not my purpose here to discuss Berti marriage (for more details on Berti marriage see Holy 1974:71-79); all I have tried to do is was to indicate which aspects of marriage are reflected in the descriptions of divinatory procedures and can thus be considered as being of the utmost importance to the actors themselves.

Death and divination

Divination 4

"Which of the spouses will die before the other? Count the names of both of them. Subtract from the total in threes. If the result is one, the man will die before the woman. If you get two, the woman will die first. If what is left is three, both of the spouses will die almost at

the same time and God alone knows."

Unlike other divinatory procedures, this one provides little guide for action and its value may not go beyond the satisfaction of psychological and intellectual curiosity. This divinatory procedure is also almost unique in that it exhausts all the possibilities which can be expected as answers to such an inquiry.

The absent person and the sick person

Divination 5

"On a missing person

A missing or an absent person: will he come back soon? Is he dead or alive? Count the name of the missing or absent person. Add that to the total numerical value of the day on which the consultation takes place. Subtract from the total in threes. If you get one, he will return after a long time, sick and impoverished. If you get two, the person concerned will come back home soon, healthy and prosperous. If you get three, he will never come back at all."

Divination 6

"The absent and the sick man

Count the name of the sick man and the name of his mother or the name of the absent man and the name of his mother. Add the total to the number of days left in the current lunar month. Subtract from the total in thirties until you get less than 31. Find what is left in either of the tables below. Should the figure appear in the death table, the absent person will never come back and the sick man will never recover. Should it be in the life table, the absent person will certainly come back and the sick man will soon recover.

| Life Table | | | Death Table | | |
|------------|----|----|-------------|----|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |

Divinations 5 and 6 are perhaps valuable in an area where the means of communication are still rudimentary. At least some of the potential answers contained in them can provide relief for the worried and generate hope about absent relatives. Both descriptions include extraneous factors to be added to the numerical values of the names of the people concerned: the day of consultation and the remaining days of the month. It may seem that they introduce an arbitrary element into the divinatory procedure but the Bertis do not see it in this way. For them the extraneous factors which enter into the divinatory procedure are controlled entirely by God and are not at all arbitrary for a man is able to make the move to consult a diviner only when God allows him to do so, or in the Bertis' own terms, when God releases (yatlig) him to visit a faki and permits a consultation to take place. This notion clearly implies that the result of the divination is ultimately controlled by God.

Divination 7

"Will he die from his sickness or recover and live longer? To find the answer, count his name and the name of his mother. Add the total to the numerical value of the day of consultation. Subtract from the total in threes. If the result is one, the sick man will recover after a long period of suffering. If you are left with two, he will recover very soon; cure him and take your fees, and don't be afraid, he will recover by the will of God. If the result is three, the sick person will die very soon and

God alone knows."

Divination 8

"Count his name and the day on which he consults you. Subtract the total in fours. If the result is one, his sickness is caused by a jinn. If it is two, the cause of the sickness is wind. If it is three, the cause is sorcery. If it is four, the cause is the evil eye."

Divination 7 and 8 are concerned with the future state of a sick person. The first one predicts the recovery or death of the patient and the duration of his sickness. The second one reveals the cause of the sickness. Unlike the other divinations they are not merely of interest to the client but to the diviner as well for he himself is the healer in most cases. I should draw attention here to the fact that these descriptions of divinatory procedures are of course handled and used by the literate healers rather than their illiterate clients; thus the instruction to the diviner included in description 7 is for his benefit. He is expected to act accordingly, while the client receives a prepared answer without seeing the text. Description 7 lists as the second possible outcome of the divination that "the sick person will recover (in any case) by the will of God" but then it is added; "cure him and take your fees and don't be afraid, he will recover". The personal pronoun refers here to the healer who himself acts as a diviner at this stage. It is common for many healers to specify the fees which

are to be paid after the client has fully recovered and a small proportion of the fees may be handed over to the healer at the start of the treatment. In this case the healer is told to go ahead with the treatment without any hesitation. The divination here provides a guide for action for both the diviner and the client but the description does not stipulate whether the recovery will result from the treatment by the healer or whether the patient will recover anyhow even without medical assistance.

Divination 8 limits the causes of diseases to four only. Although the specified causes are primary in the Berti etiology of illness, they are far from exhaustive. The causes specified in the divination do not include God who is regarded as the ultimate cause of all diseases and who is cited as a cause in the case of all "unknown diseases" i. e. diseases whose specific or direct causes are not known. The fact that the Berti acknowledge that other causes of disease exist besides those mentioned in this divination indicates clearly that the theory of causation of disease outlined in the above text is not the only one employed by the Berti. But as the fakis have their own conventional treatment for all diseases attributed to any of the four causes, the text acquires a practical value for them in their profession as healers (see the discussion in the final section of this chapter).

Divination and business

Divination 9

"This chapter is about business travel. In order to know whether the journey will be of any benefit to the client, count his name and add it to the name of his destination. Subtract three from the outcome. Repeat this until you get less than four. If the result is three, the client will neither return home safely, nor find anything to his advantage at his destination. If the result is two, the journey will be a successful one; the client will prosper and win the support of many people there, by the will of God. If the outcome of the subtraction is one, the traveller will never gain anything there; he will be safe if he carries with him a hijāb in which the following Koranic verse is written: "Now has come unto you an apostle from amongst....." (for the verse see Ali 1938:478-9).

Divination 9 is geared to meet the needs of a person embarking on business travel. The answers given are: do not go, go ahead with the trip or do not go without the amulet prescribed in the text. The third possibility initiates a new action: the client is urged to obtain the prescribed hijāb and thus to enter into a new, hitherto unforeseen, transaction with the faki, and it secures for the faki a new piece of work; at the same time, the divination specifies the

contents of the hijab. This divination does not only unveil the future in a negative or a neutral way as the other divinations do but also suggests a means whereby a positive action may be taken to safeguard the client's future.

Divination 10

"Partnership

This divination is for business or trade partnership. Count the client's name and add it to the name of the business which he wants to become a partner in (farming, trade, etc.). Subtract from the total in twos. If the result is one, he had better not go into that partnership, as there will be no good in it at all for him. If the result is two, it will be a blessed and a profitable partnership..."

People's characters

Divination 11

"A chapter on a dispute

Should the client continue in or withdraw from a dispute? Count his name and the name of his rival. Subtract the total in fours. If the result is one, the client will defeat his opponent. If it is two, the dispute will be a tough one with no winner. If it is three, the rival will

win. If it is four, the client will ultimately win but only after a hard struggle and God alone knows."

Divinatory procedures 10 and 11 provide further examples of divination as an optional base for further action. In the first case the client is told whether his partnership will have a positive or a negative outcome. The second case predicts the future of a dispute; the client is left free to continue with or withdraw from the dispute.

Divinatory procedure 11 contains a certain logical inconsistency in that it is the name of the client and that of his rival which are added up and then subtracted. Whichever one of them consults a diviner becomes the client and the other the rival mentioned in the description of the divination. In other words, either of the two opponents can assume the role of the client and since the names counted are the same, regardless of which of the two goes to the diviner, the numerical result has inevitably to be the same for either of them. This inconsistency would be exacerbated if both men consulted their diviners about the dispute: they would both be told exactly the same thing. If the result were one, for example, they would both be told that they would win the dispute; if it were three, they would both be told that they would lose it which is of course impossible.

Divination 12

"To discover a person's star

Count the name of the person and the name of his mother. Subtract the total in fours. If the result is one, his nature (character) is nāri. If it is two, his nature is hawāi. If it is three, his nature is mā'i. If it is four, his nature is turābi. This is the best method."

Divination 12 is called tanjīm, as I mentioned before and its purpose is to find out the person's star (najīm). The four stars which the Berti recognize have nothing to do with those in the sky but represent the four natural elements: fire (nār), wind (riāh or hawa), water (maa) and earth (turāb). The names of the four stars appear in their adjectival forms when applied to people.

According to the Berti, every individual, male or female, has one of the four stars as his or her personal one; this star reflects the person's character, humour, fortune and achievements in life. As such, the four stars are neither good nor bad but each one of them signifies either positive or negative values in specific contexts. Thus the Berti claim that a mā'i (a man whose star is water) makes a good chief and is better than those with different stars at establishing a new village. His subjects will find it easy and comfortable to live with him. Some people prefer a nāri (a man whose star is fire) as a chief. Although life with a nāri person is

"hot", such a person is better at maintaining order since toughness, one of the qualities of a nāri person, is regarded as an essential quality for maintaining peace and justice. Such a characteristic is believed to be lacking in the mā'i person. A turābi person (a person whose star is turāb - sand, soil, earth or dust) is said to be good at accumulating wealth and turābi is in this context often compared with riāhi (a person whose star is wind). The former has the ability to store and reproduce, a quality which the latter lacks. The riāhi is generous and always ready to help other people. It is precisely his excessive generosity that prevents him from accumulating wealth. The mā'i man is normally singled out to take part in rituals concerning water; he initiates the digging of a new well or a new pool, or plays an important part in rain rituals.

People's stars gain particular importance with regard to their marriages as the Berti believe that the future of a marriage is determined by the stars of the couple. Choosing the marital partner with the right star does not only ensure the future success of the marriage but is also vital in warding off sickness, divorce and the premature death of the spouses. Two combinations of stars are highly recommended for the spouses. The first is mā'i: turābi. These two stars suit each other very well and a couple with these stars are destined to have a bright future; they will accumulate considerable wealth and produce many children. The spouses complement each other in exactly the same way as water and soil complement one another and in conjunction generate life and prosperity.

The second combination considered favourable by the Berti is riāhi:nāri. When talking about a couple who have these two stars, reference is often made to the effects of wind on fire: with wind, the fire gets bigger and bigger.

The most unfortunate combination seems to be mā'i:nāri because the mā'i eventually kills his or her nāri partner in exactly the same way as water "kills" fire. I mentioned before that a nāri person is considered to be "hot", in the sense of being difficult to cope with; he is also referred to as having a "hot chest". The danger which the nāri faces in his marriage to a mā'i is a reversal of the situation, in which it is the person with a "hot chest" who is the dangerous spouse capable of killing the other. A Berti man or woman is sometimes reluctant to marry a widow or widower, especially one who has lost more than one marital partner, for such a person is believed to have a "hot chest".

The riāhi:mā'i is also regarded as a combination to be avoided. The word maa (lit. water) also means rain and clouds (see Chapter 7). The Berti equate the mā'i partner with clouds which get blown away by wind (riāh) so that no rain falls.

The combinations riāhi:turābi and nāri:turābi are not ideal. The Berti ascribe a high value to the accumulation of wealth by the family and to many children and if a turābi is married either to a riāhi or a nāri, neither wealth nor children can be expected. These two combinations are, however, less unfortunate than the two

previous ones since at least misery and death are not predicted. They are also regarded as acceptable for older people who wish to get married simply for company as such people have already passed the reproductive age and have little material ambition.

The remaining possibility is that the husband and wife are of the same star. Many people are of the opinion that such a marriage will be a stable one, and that the spouses are not in danger of premature death or illness. Others emphasize the idea that when the husband and wife are of the same star, they will not have many children and will fail to produce wealth. This combination is also seen as acceptable for marriages in later life which are not motivated by the considerations of production and reproduction.

In evaluating a prospective marriage according to the couple's stars, the Berti put the main emphasis on the couple's prospects for production and reproduction. The nature of the relations between the husband and wife is only of marginal significance. The same views are reflected in the descriptions of divinatory procedures in the faki's umbatris. For example, in divinations 1-3, the client is informed about children and wealth but not about marital relations.

The possible combinations of husbands' and wives' stars are summarized in Table 4. The + sign indicates a positively valued combination of stars, the sign - a negatively valued combination and the 0 sign either a neutral or an ambivalent combination.

Table 4

Success or failure of marriage

| | | | | |
|----|---------------|--|---|--|
| 1 | Mā'i: turābi | | + | |
| 2 | Riāhi: nāri | | + | |
| | | | | |
| 3 | Mā'i: nāri | | - | |
| 4 | Riāhi: mā'i | | - | |
| | | | | |
| 5 | Riāhi: turābi | | 0 | |
| 6 | Nāri: turābi | | 0 | |
| | | | | |
| 7 | Mā'i: mā'i | | 0 | |
| 8 | Nāri: nāri | | 0 | |
| 9 | Riāhi: riāhi | | 0 | |
| 10 | Riāhi: riāhi | | 0 | |
| | | | | |

The Bertī notion of people's stars representing the four primary elements is certainly borrowed from the Arab culture. The early Arabs had a theory which posited a correlation between the human body and the bodies of all warm-blooded animals, the four primary elements (earth, fire, water and wind), the four natural properties (dryness, heat, cold and moisture) and the stars and planets (Browne 1921:114-126). Some of these notions were also

expressed in Greek philosophy (Browne 1921:114; Lloyd 1964). The Berti are in contact with Arab culture through the books used by their fakis. The description of the divinatory method for establishing people's stars (Divination 12) is copied word by word from Al-Tukhi's book (Al-Tukhi 1961:5). It is of course legitimate to infer that Al-Tukhi himself might have modified it from a different source, or that the Berti might have got it from another book. In any case, the basic theme of the text is not only part of the fakis' esoteric knowledge but is well known to ordinary Berti villagers. A different version leading to the same "stars" and known to a number of fakis, can be found in Abu Maasher (Abu Maasher N.D.:9-10; see also Osman 1979/80:26). Abu Maasher is one of the most popular writers and has many books named after him. It is probably due to the fact that the Berti have only limited knowledge of astrology that the four stars they recognize have lost the astrological significance which they had in early Arab culture. Thus the position of the planets and the moon and the stars in the sky are considered to exert little influence on human destiny. The only celestial star which directly influences the health of humans and animals and their prosperity is an unlucky red star which appears every few years in the north (Holy 1983:273). The effects of the moon on human destiny is indirect and relates to the classification of the days of the month into lucky and unlucky ones. Planets other than the earth are virtually unknown to the Berti.

The stars of the prospective couple, like the significance of the birthdays when naming a child, are only one of the many factors taken into consideration in actual marriage choices. In order to evaluate the weight given to this factor in actual decisions, I myself established the stars of 36 actual couples using the divinatory procedures described above and then classified them according to the desirability of their combinations. The result of this exercise is summarized in Table 5 where 1 stands for nāri, 2 for riāhi, 3 for mā'i and 4 for turābi. The order of the figures within each combination is not significant; in other words, there is no difference between, for example 3:4 and 4:3 (mā'i:turābi and turābi:mā'i).

Out of the 34 couples, only 17 (50%) had the combinations of stars which are highly recommended by the Berti. More than a fifth of the couples had stars whose combinations are regarded as highly unfavourable. On the whole, the exercise showed that in their actual practice the Berti conform only weakly to their cognitive model. However, the divination obviously exerts some influence on the individual's behaviour as a decision making mechanism (Park 1967). Bascom, from a similar perspective, points out that the "elimination of fruitless hesitation and indecision would seem to enable the individual to concentrate his entire energy, without distraction, upon the task in hand" (Bascom 1941:45).

I have already mentioned that the Berti notion of people's stars is undoubtedly borrowed from Arab or Islamic culture, i.e. from that body of knowledge which existed in the Islamic empire and was perpetuated afterwards but which need not necessarily be of Arab origin or entirely derived from Islam (Browne 1921:2,6; Ulman 1978:xi). Another notion which the Berti have obviously taken from the Arabs is that a person's future is determined largely by the day of his birth. His name is chosen accordingly and is then used to provide further clues about his fortune. This notion is common in many cultures which are influenced by Islamic culture. Bloch in his study on the Merina of Madagascar, reports a similar belief:

"..the astrological system centres on the belief that one's destiny, lucky or unlucky, good or bad, dangerous to others or not dangerous, is determined by the time of one's birth. Thus, lunar months are strong or weak, and so are the days of the week, and the time of the day (Bloch 1968:289)."

It seems that the Merina take the theory much further than the Berti. They consult their astrologers to determine the exact time propitious for circumcision, marriage and even a funeral ceremony (Ibid:291).

It is not only the general notion about people's stars and about the importance of an individual's birthday for his future that are of foreign origin. Some of the specific descriptions of divinatory practices can also easily be traced to sources originating outside the Berti area or even outside the Sudan. For example, the description of divination 6 is taken from Abu Maasher with the omission of an exponent added by the Arab writer to the total before the final deduction is made (Abu Maasher N.D.:10). Slightly different versions of the same text are available in at least three other books (Al-Tukhīb, N.D.:10; Ibn Sina N.D.:46; Marzūgi 1970:121). Generally speaking, the Berti method of divination is virtually identical with the method described in various Arabic texts although there is little evidence that the descriptions contained in fakis' umbatris have been directly copied from them.

Even if they have been, all this copying was, however, not passive. Some of the texts contained in umbatris are modified or simplified, particularly in the ways that they employ less sophisticated mathematical knowledge, since the mathematical knowledge of the fakis lags far behind their knowledge of writing in general.

The description of Divination 8 provides excellent ground for speculation on how the original Arabic texts are modified. A fairly similar text is available in Abu Maasher (Abu Maasher N.D.:8). With the exception of the exponent 10 used by the Arab writer and

neglected by the Berti, and the substitution of the figure 7 by the figure 4 in the Berti version, the rest shows a great similarity. The reason for the substitution of 7 by 4 derives from the fact that the Berti recognize only four causes of diseases (jinn, wind, sorcery and the evil eye) while the Arab recognize seven. These, in addition to the four recognized by the Berti, are blood, yellow bile and black bile (Browne 1921:120; Sayūti 911 hij.:3-5; Al-Ansāri 943 hij.:8-11). In its description of the four causes, the Berti text follows the Arab one in words as well as in the order of causes. The similarity in the texts extends to the correspondence between the causes of illness and the figures resulting from the subtraction. The two Arabic sources which mention the seven causes of diseases (Sayūti and Al-Ansāri) are normally to be found in circulation among the Berti fakis. If the Berti method of divination has been adopted these sources, the three additional causes were neglected because they do not fit into the traditional Berti knowledge of illness. Only material that does not contradict the main cultural beliefs seems to be copied. The causes of diseases rejected by the Berti are all to do with parts of the body. To regard such biological entities as causes of diseases to which the body, of which these entities themselves are parts, can succumb, is to advocate a theory of internal disease causation, or differently phrased, a physiological explanation of disease causation. This theory is certainly counter to the Berti one. For the Berti, disease does not arise from within, but comes from without. It is always caused by external and perhaps malevolent agents. As a result, these three additional causes had to be rejected by the Berti. The other four causes (see Divination 8)

constituted the main elements of existing Berti ideas of disease causation, and hence there was no reason to ignore them.

The divination which employs writing and which the Berti call sagit al-kitāb (book divination) is, unlike sand divination (Chapter 6), practised exclusively by the fakis, who represent religion in the community. The use of writing which is still non-secular to a large extent (Goody 1975:4), gives this type of divination a respected status as a mode of communication with the "supernatural" (Ibid:202, 206). It is thus perhaps the direct use of writing that makes book divination a more religious act than sand divination which, regardless of its supposedly religious origin, is largely practised by non-literate people.

Table 5
Couples' stars in actual marriages

| Stars | Values | No. of cases |
|-------|--------|--------------|
| 3:4 | + | 14 |
| 4:3 | | |
| 1:2 | + | 3 |
| 2:1 | | |
| 1:3 | - | 4 |
| 3:1 | | |
| 3:2 | - | 3 |
| 2:3 | | |
| 2:4 | 0 | 3 |
| 4:2 | | |
| 1:4 | 0 | 4 |
| 4:1 | | |
| 1:1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2:2 | 0 | 2 |
| 3:3 | 0 | 0 |
| 4:4 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | 34 |

C H A P T E R 6

Sand Divination

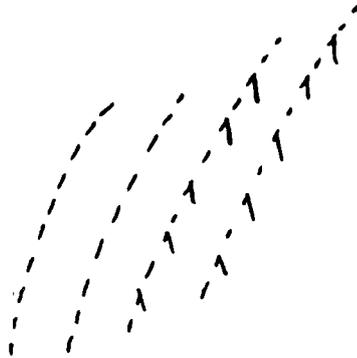
Sand divination (ramul) is a method whereby hidden knowledge is revealed. Its name derives from the combinations of dots made on the sand (ramla) at the beginning of each divinatory session.

The shapes created in sand divination consist of sixteen different forms which I will call "figures". Each figure has a name by which people refer to it. It is also referred to by the numerical position it occupies in the final combination drawn in the sand. A figure is composed of a unique combination of two graphemes, a dot (o) and a double dot (oo) arranged vertically in groups of four. The divination is made by "reading" a set or a combination of 16 of these figures.

The combination is created afresh for each divination, with the sequence of figures which are emerging grapheme by grapheme from an apparently haphazard process. The diviner smoothes a flat area of sand in front of him. He then moves his hand rapidly over the surface producing with his finger a line of dots almost perpendicular to him but curving away slightly from right to left. He does this four times, making four parallel, slightly curved, dotted lines issuing out from where he sits. He then works up each line individually beginning with the one on the right cancelling the dots in pairs. As a result, he is left with either a single dot or a pair of dots at the top of each line. These, read right to left, provide the graphemes for one figure and are re-written in that

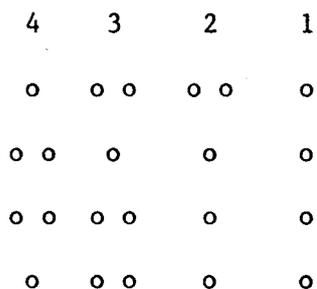
order in vertical form with the right grapheme at the top (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1



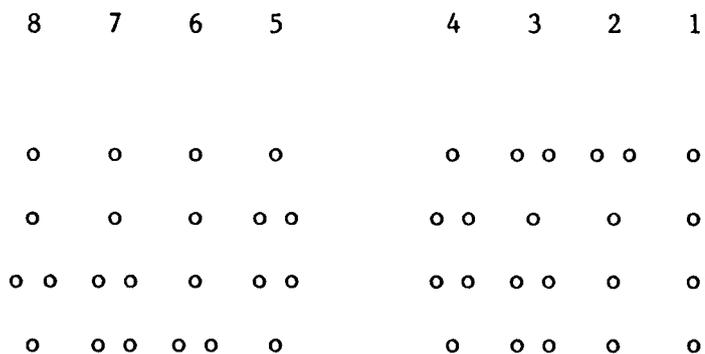
Working from right to left, the diviner places each grapheme under the previous one. This figure is normally drawn in the sand to the right of the dotted lines, leaving enough space to the left of it for the following figures. The action is repeated four times with the dotted lines being wiped out each time a new figure is produced. The second figure is placed vertically to the left of and parallel to the previous one; it is followed by the third and then the fourth. The combination of figures the diviner has arrived at so far could hypothetically look as the one shown in Fig. 2. The combination of the four figures is referred to as sadur al-bēt ("chest of a house"). The figures which make the chest of the house are enumerated from right to left (1-4) as shown in (Fig. 2).

Figure 2



A new combination of figures is then produced from the first four figures. It starts with figure 5 which is taken from the upper graphemes of figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 placed vertically. The sixth figure is arrived at by taking the second line of graphemes of the figures 1-4 in the same order. The seventh figure consists of the third line of figures 1-4 while the eighth figure is composed of the fourth line of these figures (Fig. 3).

Figure 3



The new combination consisting of the figures 5, 6, 7, and 8 represents what is referred to as sadur bēt al-ādu ("chest of the enemy's house"). This combination stands in opposition to the previous one (the chest of our house). Two more combinations referred to as furāsh (beds) are produced from the two chests. A chest and a bed which is produced from it represent a "house". These opposing combinations of chest and bed are occasionally called "our house" and "their house", "our" referring to the diviner and his client, "their" simply to other people or more specifically to the people about whom information is sought through the divination. Each house represents the fortune and the position of its owner or owners in the specific situation under consideration. Beds are also categorized according to the "ours" and "theirs" division. Thus our bed (9-11) is produced from the chest of our house, while their bed (12-14) is produced from the chest of their house (see Fig. 4). The figures 9-14 are arrived at in the following way: taking figure 9 as an example, each grapheme is the result of adding two graphemes occupying the same position in figure 1 and 2. The result of combining any two graphemes is either a single dot or a double dot ($o + oo = o$, $o + o = oo$ or $oo + oo = oo$). Thus the first grapheme in figure 9 (top) is produced by adding the upper graphemes of figure 1 and figure 2 ($o + oo = o$). The remaining three graphemes are produced in the same way. Similarly the eleventh figure is created from the third and the fourth figure. The tenth figure is the result of combining the ninth and the eleventh figures together. Figures 12-14 are similarly created from the chest of the other house. The fifteenth figure located under the two beds is the

result of combining together the tenth and the thirteenth figures. It is referred to as khātīm (ring, stamp or a sign of accomplishment of the divination). If necessary, an additional figure is created from combining the fifteenth and the first figure. This is done very rarely to confirm an earlier reading of the figures. The diviner resorts to the sixteenth figure when he is sceptical about the result of his divination. Such a measure is tantamount to asking the divination to testify to the truth of the previous result. People show their reluctance to draw this figure by their statement "al-ramul mā tahalifu" (i.e. do not ask the divination to swear). The divination here is assigned the ability to swear like people.

Classification of figures

There are only sixteen different possibilities which can be produced from the two odd and even graphemes which gives rise to the sixteen different recognised figures. The most popular way of describing them is to classify them into eight different pairs. In this way of classification, the ramul figures are seen as representing people of different sexes and marital statuses and altogether three pairs of intimate male friends and five married couples are recognised. They are grouped in pairs on the basis of the principle that when counted together, they will always produce the figure referred to as Road (tarīg). There are generally two kinds of meanings assigned to each figure: the intrinsic meaning which the figure conveys independently of other figures and a

meaning which a figure holds only in relation to others in the same combination.

The intimate male friends are:

| | | |
|--------------|---------|---------------------|
| | o o | o |
| Baboon | o o and | o Road <u>tarīg</u> |
| <u>tigil</u> | o o | o |
| | o o | o |

Tigil is regarded as the father of all other figures. It is also called um al-ramul (lit. the mother of divination). The term um means "mother" in Berti colloquial Arabic but it also means "root or origin" in general. In its latter meaning the term does not imply any attribute of femininity, for example the term "um" is often used as a suffix for many Berti male nicknames. The fact that Baboon is considered to be um al-ramul indicates that this figure is seen as the main one from which all others emerge. As Baboon contains the maximum number of dots, other ramul figures can be formed by eliminating a dot from either, some or all of its four graphemes. The relation between Baboon and other figures is often equated with that between a father and his children. Baboon is described as an old man with a well built physique. He is also passive or indifferent in the sense that he does not help anybody but at the same time is not harmful to the people around him. He is, in fact, well described by the term fanti (i.e. indifferent); he neither loses nor gains anything for his group (wala bewaddi, wala bijēb). His colour is dark. The Road is described as a young man and because he is very active he normally acts as a messenger

for the elders. Road, as is clear from the root meaning of the word, could also refer to a way out, to a journey as well as a mediator.

| | | |
|--------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| | o | o o |
| Tyrant (<u>jabbār</u>) | o and | o o |
| | o o | o Halter (<u>rasan</u>) |
| | o o | o |

The Tyrant (jabbār) is a strong and firm man. He could also be an influential person or an elder of a big group. His friend Halter (rasan) is less firm than him; he is, in fact, fragile and could be easily manipulated. The term rasan has a connotation of control over something. That could mean power, authority or gaining generally. The opposition is obvious and visible: the first one is firmly seated in his position, as is signified by the base of two dots on which he is founded. Halter on the other hand, is less balanced.

| | | |
|--------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|
| | o o | o |
| Entrant (<u>dākhil,</u> | o and | o o Departee (<u>khārj</u>) |
| <u>gābid</u>) | o o | o |
| | o | o o |

The literal translation of the term dākhil is "the one who is coming in" (Entrant). He is a man with a mark on his leg and a small chest. When this figure refers to animals it can indicate an animal with a narrow chest. Entrant is also associated with the gaining and arrival of objects into one's own territory. Departee (khārij) is a man with a big chest. He is associated with the loss and outward movements of people as well as of objects.

There are, as I have said before, five married couples, each of whom, again, if added up, will produce a Road, referred to as their son. The couples, beginning with the husbands, are:

| | | | |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | o o | | o |
| Emaciated (<u>dāmir</u>) | o | and | o o |
| | o | | o o |
| | o o | | o |

The Emaciated (dāmir) is referred to as the husband of Bundle (surra). He is a slim man concealing some secret. He is also described as a faithful man who can be trusted not to disclose the secrets of his friends. His wife, Bundle, is a pregnant woman, occasionally described as a woman with a big belly. The figure called Bundle could also represent money, as if the money were wrapped in a piece of cloth, a portion, a share of any divided article or anything transferred in a transaction.

| | | | |
|---------------------|-----|-----|------------------------|
| | o | | o o |
| Good (<u>hur</u>) | o o | and | o Flag (<u>rāya</u>) |
| | o o | | o |
| | o o | | o |

The term hur, translated as "Good" (lit. "free") connotes anything of sound origin and good quality, e.g. a person, a horse, a camel, a gun, a piece of iron, etc. In this respect, Good is described as a man with a mark on his forehead who is influential, wise and a good speaker. His wife, Flag (rāya), is a talkative woman. She has either a big head, thick, bushy or flyaway hair, or alternatively, so little hair that it cannot be plaited and hence is always untidy. By implication, Flag connotes a woman who does not stay in her house long enough to tidy up her hair. This is a sign of a bad upbringing. In other contexts, the figure could also stand for the spreading of news or a cry to announce good or bad news (korarāk).

| | | | |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|----------------------------|
| | o o | | o |
| Unlucky (<u>jillīd</u>) | o o | and | o Pillar (<u>rakīza</u>) |
| | o o | | o |
| | o | | o o |

The jillid (Unlucky) is the most inauspicious ranul figure. He is described as dull (tugum), passive (fanti) and stupid. He is also called um mihela, meaning inactive and slow in his decisions. The house in which the Unlucky settles is always unsuccessful and achieves little or nothing at all. However, Unlucky has a very good wife, Pillar (rakiza). She is described as a patient woman who remains at home most of the time busy with her housework. That is a sign of a successful and a well brought up woman. She is also reliable, stable and trustworthy, thus displaying qualities that are necessary for a successful marital life. Pillar's goodness is so overwhelming that it offsets her husband's unluckiness. Consequently, it is a good sign when she appears in our house together with her husband. In fact, occurrence of any couple in one house is a good sign for the owners of that house.

o o o

Defeated (mahzum) o o and o Red (hanra)

o o o

o o o

Defeated (mahzum) is described as a man with a hairy chest. He is also said to be a stranger in the society in which he lives. He is slim and young compared to other figures in ranul, with the exception of Road. Defeated is married to Red; as her name indicates, she has a complexion that tends towards redness. In other contexts, Red stands for the blood of killed animals, a woman's period and fighting. Red could also refer to meat in the house in which she appears. That seems to be important in cases

where stolen animals are killed and hidden inside houses. On balance, Red is rather an inauspicious than an auspicious figure.

| | | | |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|-----------------|
| | o o | | o |
| Whiteness (<u>Biāb.</u>) | o o | and | o <u>Jōdala</u> |
| | o | | o o |
| | o o | | o |

Little is said about the characteristics of Whiteness (Biāb.). It is of course agreed by all that he is the husband of Jōdala, and that it is a good sign if they appear together in our house. The Bertī conceive of dust as having white colour and in certain positions, Whiteness symbolizes dust stirred by movement of people and hence is often taken as indicative of gatherings. It can thus stand for a market, a celebration or even a fight. Jōdala is a woman whose physique is described as slim, short and with biggish buttocks.

There seems to be a strong relationship between the shape of the ranul figures and the shape of the human body. The upper grapheme of the figure stands for the head or the forehead; this is explicitly stated in the interpretation of the meaning of Flag and Good. The second upper grapheme corresponds to the chest, explicitly stated in the interpretation of the meaning of Defeated, Entrant and Emaciated. The third grapheme from the top resembles the hips, as in Jōdala, while the second and the third together resemble the stomach, as in Bundle and to a lesser degree Emaciated. Legs are represented by the lower grapheme of the figure

as evident in the description of Tyrant as firmly seated on the ground.

In a similar way, the whole house (1-4 and 9-11 / 5-8 and 12-14) resembles the face of the human being. When the upper graphemes of the house chest (1-4 and 5-8) are composed of single dots, they indicate open eyes as a sign of alertness. Conversely, when the upper graphemes consist of double dots, the eyes are closed as a sign of temporary blindness, lack of alertness or ignorance about an incidence. The figures of a house are regarded as happy and laughing when the upper graphemes of the beds are odd (9-11 and 12-14). A single dot here represents an open mouth showing a tooth as a sign of laughter and happiness. When such graphemes are composed of even dots, the figures are unhappy, sad, angry or unfriendly; double dots indicate a closed mouth with no teeth showing.

All the Berti agree on the names of the sixteen figures and on their intrinsic meanings which I have so far described. In divination, the figures are also used as indicative of colour and directions. In this respect, far less agreement exists on the relational meaning of the different figures and their positions in the ramul. In fact, my data show a multiplicity of versions regarding the colour and direction connotations of the figures. As different versions endow the figures with different and often contradictory meanings, I present every version separately whenever possible.

Directions

It is believed that ramul figures, or each one of them represents certain directions. These are both the cardinal directions and occasionally also the subsidiary directions between the main ones. Reading the figures enables the diviner to refer to specific directions whenever it is necessary. The most popular version in this respect divides the sixteen ramul figures into four groups according to the four cardinal directions. Figures in each of the categories are referred to as "the people of that specific direction" e.g. people of the east, of the west, etc. The people of those four cardinal directions are, in fact, meant to be those who live around the Berti area. The four categories of people are classified according to two main criteria: their ritual state (cleanliness or dirtiness) and their state of intelligibility.

The state of ritual cleanliness (tahāra) refers to religious washing performed after defecation or after having sexual intercourse. Ritual washing is also necessary before specific religious activities such as prayers, touching and/or reading the Koran, etc. Even though ritual washing is not solely confined to the lower parts of the body, the Berti seem to give it the utmost importance. Since one cannot undertake vital religious activities when one is ritually dirty (nijis), there is a clear association between ritual dirtiness and the absence of religious activities. The opposition between ritual cleanliness and dirtiness could also be taken to mean knowledge versus lack of knowledge about Islamic

religion. The respective states of ritual cleanliness are signified by the lower graphemes of the ramul figures which stand for the lower part of the body. A single dot as a lower grapheme is expressed by the Berti as fāteh (open), the even dots as makfūl, (locked or shut). Those figures which are open from the bottom, i.e. have a single dot at the bottom, are regarded as clean. Those which are locked from the bottom i.e. whose lower graphemes are composed of double dots, are considered to be ritually dirty.

The second criterion for the classification of the people around the Berti is the degree of their intelligibility. The Berti, being Arabic speakers, regard all non-Arabic speakers as unintelligible, unintelligibility being equated with stupidity and dullness. Again the two terms, open and locked, signified by the odd and even upper graphemes, are used. A single dot on the top signifies an open mind, a double dot a blocked mind. Those who do not speak Arabic and hence cannot communicate efficiently with the Berti are regarded as locked from the top. That applies to the people of the west and the north. On the other hand, those who speak Arabic and hence can communicate easily with the Berti, are regarded as open minded, such as the people of the east and south (Fig. 5). Fig. 6 combines the two attributes (intelligibility and ritual cleanliness) as applied to the peoples neighbouring the Berti in the north, east, south and west.

The different ramul figures are indicated by their numbers as used in Fig. 5 (i-xvi). C stands for ritual cleanliness whose presence is indicated by a (+) sign and absence by a (-) sign. I stands for intelligibility, with (+) sign indicating its presence and (-) its absence. As indicated in Fig. 6, the Berti describe the people of the east as intelligible (open from the top), and at the same time as ritually clean (open from the bottom). To the east of the Berti live tribes who speak Arabic, and have no problem of linguistic communication with the Berti. They are also relatively better educated than the Berti or at least more incorporated into Islam as a national religion. They are, in fact, the people who hold the administrative and political power in the country. Thus, the divination describes them as being open from the top as well as from the bottom.

According to one of the famous diviners in the area, it is the Fur who are meant by "the people of the west". The Fur have gained a reputation for piety and good knowledge of the Koran or religion generally. The Berti themselves occasionally learn the Koran under Fur teachers. As the Fur are reputed to be religious, their ritual cleanliness is recognized by definition. However they do not speak Arabic as their mother tongue like the Berti do and this often creates considerable difficulty in communication between the two peoples. The Fur are therefore classified as locked as regards their minds (the top), and open from the bottom, i.e. ritually clean.

To the south of the Berti live the Baggara Arabs. They are obviously, as their name indicates, Arabic speakers and have no problem of linguistic communication with the Berti; they are hence regarded as mentally open. At the same time they are nomads and, as such, are conceived by the Berti as lacking in religious knowledge. This is perhaps because learning in the local way requires some form of sedentary life. Nomads are indeed generally accused by sedentary people of being by definition non-religious. The diviners supporting this view describe them as being open from the top but locked from the bottom.

The people of the north, i.e. the Meidob who are the immediate neighbours of the Berti and probably also the more distant Zaghawa, speak only very little Arabic and generally are incorporated into the Arab culture to a much lesser extent than all the other Berti neighbours. They are also seen by the Berti as ignorant of religious knowledge. They are conceived of as having fewer religious schools than the Berti and also as being less keen on religious practice. They are described as being locked from both ends, top and bottom.

Classification of the ramul figures into people of different directions should not imply that figures always represent people. In fact, a figure could be taken to represent a direction, without referring to the people of that direction. To illustrate this point, let us imagine a diviner trying to find a stray animal. By looking at the appropriate figure, he can specify the direction in

which the search for that animal should be resumed without implying that it was stolen by a member of a tribe living in that direction.

Dividing all ramul figures into four categories according to the four cardinal directions and equating each category with specific peoples neighbouring on the Berti reflects not only the ethnocentric view which the Berti have of themselves but also their view of other peoples. It is not so much the geographical centrality of the Berti which is at issue here as rather their view of themselves as a yardstick according to which other peoples are evaluated. It is instructive to place this view into the context of the symbolic significance which the Berti ascribe to the cardinal directions. Within this context, the east is regarded as the most auspicious direction while north is the most sinister one. In the popular version of divination, the people of the east are endowed with the most desirable qualities while those of the north are endowed with the least desirable ones. It is of course blatantly ethnocentric to regard those who do not speak Arabic as "locked headed" in opposition to those who do (open headed). The Berti use the term fattah (to become open from the head) to describe a child who has just learned to speak. The same term is used to describe the pupil in the elementary school who has acquired some education. The stupid person is described as makful or tujum, (lit. blocked). Thus, speaking Arabic is equivalent to being intelligent and not speaking it is simply a sign of stupidity.

Directions can be read also from the positions which the specific figures occupy in the layout drawn in the sand. Supporters of this version of divination normally read out the direction from the first and the fifteenth positions combined.

The figures of ramul do not only enable the diviner to specify the four cardinal directions, but also the secondary directions between any two adjacent cardinal points. Another position can also be specified, i.e. the centre which could be the place where the diviner himself is, his house or his village depending on the context. To specify directions from the figures in the first and the fifteenth position allows only limited possibilities: when the two figures refer to two adjacent cardinal directions, the direction specified is the secondary one between them. When the two figures specify two opposing main directions, they are taken as referring to the centre. When both of the concerned figures are the same, i.e. when they refer to the same direction, they are regarded as mutually confirming one another.

This version of specifying directions is quite common in the Berti area and is known by virtually all diviners. Other versions of divination, however, exist. It is problematic to regard them as shared phenomena. They are known by famous diviners although hardly any two of them agree on how they read the directions. Table 6 presents five different versions which I encountered during my fieldwork. In the first and the fifth versions, the direction is read from the fifteenth position of divination. This position is

called khāṭim (seal). As its name specifies, it is the position which puts a seal on divination. In the third and the fourth versions, direction is read from the first position of the divination. This position is called awal al-nīya (the beginning of the intention) since it is the position of the first figure drawn after the client has specified his question. In the second version, the direction is read from the fifth position.

Divining of colours

There exists also a number of versions for specifying colour in divination. They are summarised in Table 7. When collecting the data on which this Table is based, I did not ask for figures that fit each colour, on the contrary, I named the figure and asked which colour it represents.

In the 1st version, colour is read from the 7th position. In the second version, colour is taken as a combination of the first and the second position. In the 3rd version, colour is taken from the 5th position while in the 4th version, it is revealed by the first position of the drawing.

In examining Berti sand divination, one is struck by the multiplicity of different interpretations. Table 7 shows four major versions of colour identification with little agreement between them. All versions agree that the Baboon connotes a black colour and that Jōdala stands for a green colour. Three out of the four versions assign the black colour also to the Unlucky. Red is described by three versions as being red in colour. There are some

variations in the position which any particular figure has to occupy to have a particular colour implication. In fact, every version reads the colour from a different position. The multiplicity of versions is characteristic of knowledge that is transmitted orally. In a changing culture, this is not so much a disadvantage as a positive asset. It renders knowledge more flexible and more accessible for manipulation by the actors. This may be important when the diviner is backing his divinatory pronouncements with knowledge he had previous to the divination. It may be worth mentioning here that the famous diviners have a wide knowledge of divination in general and usually know more than one version. However, I have no data to prove that they use more than one version simultaneously. I am, indeed, not arguing for this, rather, I am merely suggesting that the diviners have a reserve option if they are familiar with alternative interpretations. Some of the versions may be inconclusive in any particular divination. The diviner who is using the first version (Table 7) has no recourse to figures which would indicate certain specific colours (brown, black with white spots, grey, and white). The 4th version (Ibid) provides another similar deficiency. 7 out of the 16 figures are absent from the column. If any of the missing 7 figures appears in the first position from which the diviner reads his colours, he cannot specify the colour from the drawing. The very same problem could be raised with regard to Table 6 on Directions. The diviner using the 1st version has two figures appearing twice each (Flag and Red). Flag represents north and north-west at the same time. Red denotes north and north-east. If either of these two figures appears in the 15th position from which the diviner reads the directions, he will have

to decide the precise direction on some other basis. The 4th version in the same Table (6) is the most incomplete. It is lacking in 6 figures. The diviner will also have to rely on other information if he encounters one of these figures in the 1st position of his divination. Table (6) also shows a lack of agreement on the relation between certain figures and directions. Only one figure, that is Tyrant, is associated with the east in all five versions. One may wonder whether this has anything to do with the historical fact that many of the recent powerful invaders came from the east. However, the most common version does not conform to this reading, since in it Tyrant is not associated with the east.

Table 8 is a summary of Fig 5, Table 6 and Table 7. Column 2 indicates the number of times a particular figure is associated with a specific colour in the four versions shown in Table 7. Column 3 relates the figures to directions according to the popular version shown in Fig. 5, and column 4 indicates the number of times a figure is associated with a certain direction (out of five versions). With regard to columns 2 and 4, the Table includes only the cases where the figure is taken to indicate a certain colour or direction more than once.

The Table indicates that the figure Red is associated three times (out of four) with the colour red, and four times (out of five) with north in addition to the correlation made in the popular version (column 2, 4, and 3 respectively). In Berti colour symbolism, red is an inauspicious colour. The figure Red is associated with blood of animals or human beings and signifies their

death or injury. Occasionally it signifies menstrual blood which is regarded as dirty and contaminating. The figure Red is at the same time associated with north which is the most inauspicious of the four cardinal directions. A lesser degree of consistency of ramul figures with the rest of Berti symbolism is evident in the case of Jōdala. It is associated four times (out of four) with the colour green and is also taken to indicate east in the popular version. In Berti symbolism, green is a good colour and east is the best direction. Consistent with these auspicious associations of Jōdala is its association with the arrival of absent friends and relatives. Other figures in the Table do not show any consistency with the Berti symbolism. Halter, for example, is associated with green and white (auspicious colours) and with west which is neither auspicious nor inauspicious. Moreover, Halter is taken to symbolise a grave-digging tool. It thus clearly occupies an ambivalent position in Berti divination and symbolism. As mentioned before, it is agreed by all versions that Baboon is black. Black is the worst of all colours in Berti colour symbolism. Baboon is also associated with north in the popular version. This association is, however, not supported by the other versions. Generally speaking, Baboon is linked either with sickness or with death. Despite these inauspicious connotations, it is not possible to conclude that Baboon is an entirely sinister figure. I mentioned earlier that it is regarded as an "indifferent" figure and could have either a positive or negative value in divination. The Berti diviners have a common proverb which says: kan Alla gibil, jabbār u tigil, ("If God accept (our wishes, we will get), a Tyrant and a Baboon"). A divination which starts with a Tyrant in the first position and a

Baboon in either the second or the ninth position, is regarded as an affirmative divination: the client's wishes will definitely be fulfilled. The contradictory attributes of Baboon fall in line with its description earlier in the chapter as passive and indifferent.

Reasons for divination

The Berti seek divination to unveil knowledge about various problems. Almost all the diviners I consulted stated that most of their customers come to inquire about lost property, mostly animals. This is fully confirmed by my own findings about the reasons for seeking divination summarised in table 9. When in the field, I noted down reasons for divination specified in the table every time I came across someone divining. In the table, I also included cases which I did not observe myself but of which I heard when in the field. The table thus shows a number of cases where divination was actually used. To seek knowledge about an intended sexual advance is generally considered a lesser reason for divination than any other and such divination is, as a rule, performed by less reputable diviners. Divination on future marital life is resorted to by men intending to get married. They are interested to know what would be the response of the girl's guardians to their marriage proposal. This type of divination is not concerned with the suitability of the prospective wife. That is regarded as a matter which is better revealed by book divination (sagit) than by sand divination. Divination about sick relatives is typically concerned with their future health, the chances of

recovery or the possibility of their death.

Process of divination

Anybody seeking divination approaches a diviner and tells him about the kind of information he requires. All the diviners as well as non-diviners I spoke to, said that the client would normally specify his problem. For instance he says: "one of my animals has been missing for several days, and I want you to employ divination in order to find out where it is". This seems to be the actual practice, although it is believed that an outstandingly good diviner will know the intention of his customer from the divination itself. By drawing the figures, he discovers any unstated intention directly from the drawings.

The process of divination starts by cleaning and flattening the sand in front of both the diviner and the client. Then the client puts his right hand on the cleaned sand and specifies his intention secretly to himself. He also puts a silver coin on the sand which will then go to the diviner. This is called bayād (from abyad, white). The same term is used for one of the ramul figures but its meaning is different in the two contexts. The bayad paid to the diviner is believed to "whiten" his heart and thus to ensure his sincerity. Bayād is thus believed to contribute to the efficacy of the divination since the diviner's sincerity is essential for its success. In the old days, the silver coins were valuable enough to be accepted as fees for divination. Nowadays, due to inflation,

more money will have to be paid to the diviner in addition to the bayād, but the coin is still put in front of the diviner at the beginning of the divination. The diviner, for his part, starts by saying: "bismilāhi, asdug yā ranul", (in the name of the God, tell the truth, you divination). He then proceeds, creating his curved semi-vertical lines as described before. After completing his drawing up to the fifteenth figure, he goes to explain the result of the divination to his customer. The result is either favourable or unfavourable depending on how positive are the figures in the client's own house and how much he gains from the other house as the figures located in various positions in both houses are not permanent. Some of them may be squeezed out of their house. Whether the figure which has been squeezed out will end up in the other house or not depends on whether room is available for it there. If there is room in the opposite house, the figure will be stored up in the "bed", i.e. the bottom of the opposite house. If the opposite house cannot accommodate the figures which were squeezed out from their own house, these figures will remain floating without joining either of the two houses. The ranul figures are divided into two main categories: sweet (hilu) and bitter (mur). The sweet figures are those whose total number of dots is even; bitter figures have an odd number of dots. Any figure trapped between two figures of the other category (eg. a sweet figure trapped between two bitter ones or a bitter one trapped between two sweet ones) is pushed out of the house. Figures occupying the edges of the two houses can also be pushed out of their positions by two figures belonging to the other category. These are the figures occupying the 4th, the 5th, the 8th, the 9th,

the 11th, the 12th and the 14th position. For instance, the figure in the 4th position can be pushed away by those in the 3rd and the 11th jointly. Similarly, a figure in the 5th position can be pushed away by those in the 6th and the 12th, and so forth. To accommodate a squeezed out figure, a minimum of one figure belonging to its own category is required in the bed of the receiving house. The process of accommodating a new figure is called "storing". The best storing is when the arriving figure finds a friend or a spouse in the bed of the hosting house. There are few exceptions against the mobility of figures from one house to another. Three figures do not move at all from their own positions. These are the figures occupying the first, the seventh and the fifteenth position. All these three figures belong to the client, including the one in the 7th position. This gives the client a certain advantage over his "enemy" since three of his figures cannot be lost to his opponent.

To exemplify the process of reading the result of divination, I consider in detail a few hypothetical problems to which answer is typically sought through divination.

A lost animal

One of the client's animals is missing. He does not know whether it has been stolen or has just gone astray; neither he knows whether it is still alive, or whether it has been killed, whether it is sick or in good health and of course whether he will get it back. Diviners I consulted or came across while they were divining

said that they look for specific clues in such cases. If there is a Road or a Tyrant in the first position, the animal has been stolen. Road or Jōdala in the fifth position means that the animal has not been stolen but has simply lost its way. It may, perhaps, have gone astray and will definitely rejoin its herd later. A Road in the seventh position means that the chance of finding the animal is very small or at least that it will not be found in the near future. If there is Tyrant in the eighth position, the herder will be advised not to waste his time searching for the animal since it will never come back. I was told that if any figure is gained from the enemy's house and stored successfully, the animal will be found. On the contrary, if a figure is squeezed out from our house and stored successfully in the other house, the animal is lost. A Red in the fifth position means that the animal is sick. If that Red is pushed to the client's house, he will hear news about the animal and probably succeed in obtaining compensation for it. Reds in the fourth and the fifth positions mean that compensation may be obtained but only after expensive pursuit of the case. If there is Red in the eighth position, the animal has already been killed. A Flag in the fifth position means that someone will bring good news (bishāra) about the animal regardless of whether the client will eventually get the animal back or merely receive compensation. If this is accompanied by a Bundle moving from our house to the opposite one, the client will pay for the good news. If the Bundle is coming into our house, the animal will soon be recovered. A Baboon between two Goods in the enemy's bed (Fig. 7) indicates that the animal is sick but will definitely recover and join its herd. In case of divination about a sick person, the same combination

indicates that the sick person will recover from the illness. A Baboon between two Unluckies (Fig. 8) is a bad sign which indicates that the sick animal will either die or get killed. In case of a sick person, the same combination of figures indicates that he will surely die. The combinations of figures in Fig. 9 is referred to as kīmān u kharit musrān (portions and cleaning of intestines). It indicates that the animal has already been killed and its meat divided into portions either for sale or for distribution. The two Bundles stand for a number of portions while the Road stands for the cleaning of the animal's stomach. The Bundles and the Road have to appear in the enemy's bed (12th, 13th and the 14th position) to give the above mentioned reading.

Following one of the methods of divination described before, the diviner can always indicate the colour of the animal and the direction in which it disappeared.

An enquiry about an absent person

In table 9 I categorised separately enquiries about absent relatives and enquiries about sick relatives. In fact, the divination is similar in both of these cases since enquiries about absent relatives are regarded as being about their health. A Tyrant in the first position means that the absent person is healthy and will remain so at least for a year. A Flag in the fifth position means good news (bishāra): someone will apparently come and bring good news about the absent person. A Jōdala in the fifth position

together with any figure with an odd upper grapheme in the fourth position is referred to as jidan jīti (it is nice that you came). Jidan jīti, outside the context of divination is a frequently used greeting of welcome. In the divinatory context it indicates that the person enquired about is already on his way back home. An odd upper grapheme in the fourth position is regarded as signifying alertness i.e. having one's eyes open. The reverse, i.e. a figure with even upper dots in the fourth position, signifies a lack of alertness: the eyes are regarded as being closed. The jidan jīti figure may also indicate that the client will meet someone with good news. A Baboon between two Tyrants in our bed (Fig. 10) shows that the person, though possibly sick at the time, will recover and remain healthy at least for a year. However, a Baboon in the enemy's bed (i.e. in the 12th, 13th or 14th position) means that the person is sick. A Baboon between two Goods (Fig. 11) means that the person is sick but will definitely recover very soon. Baboon in either of the two beds situated between two Reds (Fig. 12) indicates that the sick person will die very soon. The Reds symbolize the blood shed in sacrifice for his soul or the meat consumed as a part of the sacrificial meal. Baboon between two Flags in our bed, (Fig 13) also indicates that the sick person will die very soon. The Flags symbolize the news of his death which are coming to us. Fig. 14 shows the Baboon (a sweet figure) in the tenth position, trapped between two Unluckies (bitter figures). The Baboon is squeezed out and is moving towards the bed of the opposite house. (12, 13 and 14). It will be "stored" in the 13th position. The Baboon is the sick man dying and moving to his grave, represented by the Emaciated in the 13th position. Fig. 15 shows

two Halters or two Unluckies trapping a Baboon. Halters and Unluckies are called mahāfir (digging tools). This combination of figures indicates that the person concerned is dying and the tools are being used for digging his grave. Lastly, if either of the two chests, (i.e, the upper parts of either of the two houses) consists of figures whose upper and lower graphemes have one dot, the funeral is about to proceed to the cemetery (Fig. 16). This is expressed as shēlat angarēb, carrying of a bed, as according to the local funeral custom the corpse is carried to the graveyard on a bed. The four odd graphemes or the four corners signify the four legs of the funeral bed. Graphemes represented by the letter <X> in Fig. 16 can be odd or even without affecting the general meaning.

Theft and sexual advances

A person attempting a theft or sexual advance may want to know what his chances of success are and consult a diviner. In divination, theft and sexual advances are always treated as similar. The implication here is that sexual intercourse with a woman to whom the man has no right if he is not her husband, is just another form of theft. If there is a Flag or Jōdala in the fifth position, or Road or Bundle in the seventh position, the client is advised to go ahead with his plans which are likely to be successful. If there is a Tyrant in the first position or a Road in the fifth, the advice is negative; the task will be too risky and it is better to refrain from it altogether. An Unlucky in the first

position is also a bad sign; it indicates that the task cannot be accomplished without considerable loss. The signs mentioned so far, apply to an attempted theft as well as the planned sexual advances. As far as only the latter is concerned, if there is only a man in the fifth position with his spouse behind him i.e. in the sixth, the adulterer will meet the woman's husband and will face a lot of trouble. It is only if there is a woman in the fifth position, or women in the fifth and the sixth positions without their spouses appearing in the same house that the planned advance will be safely carried out. The best sign is a Jodala in the fifth position when she is not followed by her husband bayad. As I mentioned before, Jodala is a sign of welcome ("it is nice that you came"). However, if Jodala is accompanied by a Red in the enemy's bed, the woman is menstruating; the lover will have to postpone his visit since intercourse during the woman's period is regarded as dirty and contaminating. Generally speaking, any man with an odd upper grapheme in the fifth position is a bad sign, for the lover will be seen by his enemy (whose eyes are open). Divination may also reveal what will happen to the lover if he carries out his plans. A Flag in the first and the eighth position and a Road present in both houses indicate a fight in which the lover will be involved. Whiteness or two Whitenesses at the edge of our bed is a sign for the chase of the thief or lover. If one or both of them are moving, i.e. are being squeezed out from their positions, it is a sign of the dust stirred by the chase. A Red in the middle of the enemy's bed (the 13th position) is a sign that the lover will be beaten or injured but no party to the fight will get killed. A death may take place if the sign of a funeral bed appears in our house as explained

earlier.

After the theft has already been committed, the divination may tell the thief about the position of the searching party (faza; collective pursuit of the thieves of domestic animals: see Holy 1974:142-4). A Whiteness in the fourteenth position means that the searching party is about to catch the thief and will eventually succeed. Whiteness in the fifth position indicates that the thief will be caught the same day. He will be caught a day later if the Whiteness appears in the sixth position. If an Unlucky stands in the seventh position, the thief will be eventually caught later but not in the next few days.

The issues which the Berti put to divination are those which are not answerable through ordinary human perception. Indeed the Berti resort to sand divination when other means of accounting for the unknown have already been exhausted. The diviner is faced with a situation where his non-divinatory knowledge is of a limited use for his verdict. There is no seance in the proper sense in sand divination, and clues provided by the instigator are hardly useful for formulating the appropriate answers. The diviner's prediction of the recovery of the sick person or of the retrieving of a lost animal may soon be proved right or wrong. When the drawing of the figures is completed, the diviner looks for certain of them and for the order in which they appear. Sometimes specific answers may be given from the layout of the figures. Examples of this have been

given in Fig. 7-16. The layout of the figures may provide a base for formulating very specific answers to specific questions asked by the client. But the same layout may be of little meaning in relation to other questions normally subjected to divination. For example, the layout of figures shown in Fig. 7, 8 and 9 enables the diviner to give very specific answers to questions about a sick person. The same layout would not enable him to give any specific answers to questions about a stolen animal or an intended sexual advance. On the whole, it is difficult to obtain specific answers from the divination as such answers would require the appearance of a number of specific figures in a certain conventional order. I am of course assuming here that the divination is randomly drawn. The diviner is unlikely to manipulate his drawing in order to get a specific layout simply because of his lack of knowledge of the future. There is a wide range of the possible layouts of sand divination. For each divinatory drawing, four basic figures are required (1-4, Fig. 2). As there are altogether 16 different figures, 65536 ($16 \times 16 \times 16 \times 16$) possible layouts can be obtained. Berti diviners agree that the four basic figures have to be arrived at randomly. At the same time, the outcome of the random dots is believed to be supernaturally determined.

The second order of divinatory reading is general in the sense that the answers given by the layout of figures is not addressed to specific questions asked by the client. This order gives only a vague idea about whether the client is gaining or loosing. It pertains to a number of figures exchanged (Berti term: eaten) between the two houses and it suits a number of problems addressed

through divination. The vague nature of this second order of divinatory reading is certainly to the benefit of the diviner. As he offers less specific answers to his client, he stands a better chance of being proved right through future experience. I may add here what I might call the third order of divinatory reading. This is when the layout is meaningless or irrelevant to the problem posed for divination. Divination in this case is regarded as a failure and is either repeated instantly or postponed to a different time.

Learning the Divination

It is widely believed in the area that sand divination stems from "the book" i.e. either the Koran itself or possibly some other religious books. Few literate people know exactly where divination is mentioned in Arabic literature.

Table 10 summarises the literacy or illiteracy of eight diviners who are currently the most famous practitioners in the area where I did fieldwork, the literacy status of those who taught them divination and whether the knowledge of divination was revealed to them in a dream or not. Only one among the three diviners who learned divination from a literate teacher was himself educated in the local religious schools. However, he himself did not see the divination mentioned in any book, though he is of the opinion that it must be described somewhere in religious books. He learned it himself without the use of writing. He uses the same method of divination as many other diviners, i.e. the method which I

described as the most popular version especially in dealing with directions (see Fig. 5). The widely held belief that divination stems from "the book" gives it its ultimate validity as its supposed religious origin makes it clearly sinful not to believe in it. Should divination give false predictions, it is the diviner whose knowledge is questioned but not the divination as such. Modern education has accelerated the growth of new ideas, according to which some of the religious books, as well as some practices, including divination, are regarded as a mere superstition. A large number of religious books, referred to by school leavers as "yellow books" due to the cheap yellow paper on which they are printed, are widely rejected. Nevertheless, few Berti have the education necessary for the development of such views, and hence one should not overestimate their effect.

Two of the eight most famous diviners claim that they were told in a dream to practise divination. One of them claims that he had no knowledge of divination previous to the dream revelation, though he learned more about it from a famous diviner afterwards. Both of the diviners met a red or a white man with a long white beard and long rosary in their dream. Red or white colour is the colour of the Morrocans, the proper Islamic teachers. They are known locally as sharīfs and are believed to be descendants of the prophet Mohammed. Their white beard is a symbol of wisdom and pioussness as is the long rosary used in their prayers. The prophet Mohammed himself and his Angel Jibrael are also described as having similar complexion. Both of the diviners to whom divination was revealed in a dream were instructed in their dreams to commence their divination

by a sacrifice. They were also instructed not to tell lies, not to ask for too much money in fees, to be helpful to the needy and in general to be good to everybody. One of them made a small sacrifice of boiled sorghum. The second one was told to kill a white billy goat. Because he is too poor, he has not managed to fulfil that vow but insists that he will certainly do so as soon as he has enough money. Such a sacrifice will mark a public initiation into the divination apprenticeship as well as an announcement of his new knowledge. These two diviners had a dream revelation over which they had no influence. They were, so to speak, elected into the apprenticeship without their choice. If this is indicative of anything, it is that they possess fine qualities which other people lack. The gift revealed in a dream is not afterwards controlled by the recipients. Should they turn into "bad" people and abuse their valuable gift, it will soon be withdrawn from them. This could take place either simply by their knowledge suddenly disappearing or by the divination ceasing to give them the appropriate answers. As long as the divination is telling them the truth, their moral superiority is recognized not only by ordinary human beings, but also by God.

The two diviners were advised to seek divination only in the early morning, at the time of the afternoon rest and after sunset. They are expected to avoid divination on market days when people move around more than usual. It is believed that divination only works when "legs come to almost a complete standstill". Earlier I mentioned how the practitioner appeals to his divination to tell him the truth right at the beginning of the performance. I also

referred to the response of divination to the attitudes of the diviner. The divination will no longer tell the truth if the diviner turns into "a bad man". In Berti view, the divination is clearly personified in that it is assigned the power to decide, to act, and to respond to the appeal of the diviner. Divination is not simply a knowledge that is manipulated by the diviner. It has its own separate and independent power and only comes to the help of the diviner on its own accord. The diviner has to observe the appropriate moral values in order to preserve his divinatory gift. He should tell the people the truth, be helpful to them, not to be greedy, not to ask for too much money in fees, etc. This means that divination can be considered as one of the forces which preserve the ideal moral values of the society. I mentioned earlier that the divination fees (bayad) are essential for the efficacy of the divination mainly because they insure the diviner's positive intentions. The diviner himself has to be satisfied with his fees in order to undertake a successful divination. He cannot be expected to act with best intentions necessary for the successful outcome of the divination, if he receives less than the minimum expected fees. If he receives more than the maximum expected fees, the efficacy of his divination will be adversely affected or his divinatory power will be altogether withdrawn from him. One may look at this notion about the necessary minimum fees required to ensure the efficacy of the divination as a mechanism whereby the material gain of the diviner is guaranteed. Similarly, one may take the notion about the greed of the diviner adversely affecting the outcome of the divination as limiting the material ambition of the diviner. This is indeed a notion which may prevent him to ask for

too much money, and as such it may be valued in a society with some tendency towards egalitarianism. Greediness, is, however only one way of being a "bad person". Badness demonstrated in other ways can also result in the withdrawal of the diviner's ability to reveal hidden knowledge by divination. The practitioner, by stating that he is a diviner, emphasizes his conformity to the moral values of the society and his status as a good person. He was first chosen because of these qualities and because of them he is still preserving the gift. There are still other forces which influence the amount of fees the diviner receives: the economic standing of the client, his estimation of the diviner's reputation, the importance to the client of the issue for which divination is sought, the relationship of the client to the diviner, etc.

When divination is performed, it explains things dissociated from the diviner in terms of both space and time. It is perhaps the projection of divination beyond its immediate setting that makes it successful only at a time when most social activities are at a standstill. Should the divination be performed at the wrong time, it will cease to offer an accurate explanation. But the choice of the wrong time is only one reason for the failure of the divination. Disbelief in it, failure to pay the initial fees, etc., could have the same result. Needless to say, these notions which sanction the belief in divination as well as in the importance of the diviner can be manipulated by the diviner to his advantage. They give him the possibility of laying the blame for the failure of the divination on factors that lie beyond his control. When the divination is abortive, the diviner can either repeat the whole

operation or ask his client to turn up again at another time. The factors beyond his control become thus clearly the means by which he can safeguard his reputation and escape being forced to give instant information.

The belief that sand divination stems from "the book" validates the divination for the Bertí as it implies that it must have been approved by God and his prophet. The average Bertí believes that all books written by Muslim learned men (ulama) are religious books and are sacred. He is not aware that some of them may contain purely secular information. The Bertí are aware that these books are different from those brought by children from schools or from those which circulate among people educated in modern schools. Consequently, they consider them religious in the way Koran is and believe that whatever they tell is to be taken for granted. As they are all perceived as being of the same order, there is no need to differentiate among them. I would, indeed, think that some of the Bertí may even believe that divination is mentioned in the Koran itself. In my fieldwork, I made myself familiar with all the books circulated among the graduates of the local religious schools. Sand divination is described in only one of them; this book, however, is known by very few fakís. Table 10 shows that hardly any use is made of the description of sand divination contained in this book and that the knowledge of divination is transmitted orally among practitioners, who are mostly illiterate. The description contained in this book is, in fact, brief, incomplete and requires such a good command of Arabic language that it is beyond the comprehension of almost all of the local fakís. The description of sand divination

is contained in a book recently published (1970) and written in the year 622hij. (1225) by Imam Al-Bōni. The piece on divination was originally written by Al-Adhami and probably edited by Al-Boni (Al-Bōni 1970:538-552). It states that some early prophets practised sand divination. Although the prophet Mohammed himself never practised divination, he allowed his followers to perform it (Al-Bōni 1970:539). The divination as described by Al-Bōni starts with the diviner reciting some Koranic suras: ikh̄lās sūra three times and Exordium Al-fātha sūra once (for the words of these suras see Dawood 1979:15 and 265). The Bertī resort instead to saying "in the name of God" in addition to the specification of the problem divined. The advantage of such a substitution is obvious since Bertī diviners may not have learnt the required suras by heart. After reciting the prescribed suras, the Arab diviner draws the figures in exactly the same way as the Bertī diviner does, until he arrives at a shape similar to that shown in Fig. 17.

The layout of the figures is, however, looked at in a way different from that in which the Bertī look at the layout of their sand divination. In the Arab case, the whole shape is viewed as a single unit of several components. What is regarded by the Arabs as a single extended family (mothers, daughters and grand-daughters), is split by the Bertī into two houses (ours and theirs). In Bertī divination, which is characterized by opposition, the right half of the drawing shows the position of the investigator (client), the left shows the position of the opponent. In Arab divination both sides show the position of the investigator. In Bertī divination, figures may move from one house to the other, while all figures are

permanent in the Arab one. The Arabs divide the ramul figures into those referring to the past, those referring to the present and those which may refer to the future. The Berti derive the past, present or future time either directly from the problem to which they seek the answer or from the position of the figures in the drawing. Thus, for example, if the problem to which they seek the answer took place in the past, answers read from the layout also concern the past. The ramul figures are not taken by the Arabs to stand for men or women as they do in Berti divination. Also no reference is made to their colour connotations in the Arab article. With regard to directions, the Berti assign elaborate meanings to various figures while only two figures are treated similarly in Arab divination. These are Jōdala and Red which are connected with the east and west respectively. This is in addition to Whiteness and Bundle which are associated with the sky and earth (up and down) respectively. Arab divination is also recommended to be performed at certain times: from sunrise to noon or in the evenings of the good days of the month. The diviner should avoid any distraction during the performance. He should be at ease and should serve only those who seek the divination in earnest. The diviner should avoid divination on windy, cloudy or rainy days and at times when the animals are unrestful. There are great similarities in the choice of time between the Arab and Berti divinations: both are to be performed only when there is little activity or movement.

Ramul figures are also mentioned in another popular book (Abu Maasher N.D.:12-13), although no reference is made in it to divination as such. They are described as houses (biyūt sin. bēt) e.g. "house of Jōdala" (bēt Al-Jōdala). Each house (or figure) is taken to explain the client's fortune in a particular sphere of life. There is thus the house of children, the house of trade, the house of war, etc. The Berti also use the term bēt (house) in connection with divination, although very rarely in reference to the figure. In ordinary speech, the word bēt means "hut", but it is also used for the compound consisting of several huts. Similarly, in divination, the term could mean a figure and a larger part of the drawing consisting of several figures. Table 11 compares the meanings ascribed to ramul figures in the Arab literary sources with that ascribed to them by the Berti. In referring to each figure, I will use the terms employed earlier in the chapter. Classical Arabic terms for the figures are presented in Appendix 4.

As Table 10 indicates, each figure in the Arab divination refers only to limited spheres of life. Thus, for example, Good stands only for wealth and gains. The wealth and gains are in jeopardy if Good occurs in either the 6th, the 8th, the 12th or the 16th position. In all other positions, it is an index of flourishing wealth and gains (Al-Bōni 1970:550). All other figures are treated similarly, and the positions in which they appear assign them either negative or positive values. In this respect, the Berti method of divination is different in that the figures do not stand for the same properties in all their positions. They are assigned

different meanings according to the positions they occupy in the layout of the drawing.

It is obvious from the above discussion that Berti sand divination is explicitly derived from the Arab literate culture. Although there are a number of Arab writings on sand divination, I have confined myself only to that part of the Arab literature which is available to the Berti. The Berti have, however, modified the sand divination to suit their purpose. Perhaps the best example of this modification is the way in which they adapted it to reinforce their view of themselves and of the people neighbouring on them. Some basic principles of sand divination, however, remained similar to the original Arab method and some of the figures have retained their original names. The modification of the sand divination described in Arabic literary sources is widely reported in North Africa as well as in Black Africa: a detailed comparative study by Hebert (1961) focussed on Mohammed El-Zenati's writings as the main source of the Arab divination. Some elements of sand divination have been incorporated into many indigenous methods of divination in Black Africa. For example, Adler and Zempleni (1972:50-70) have shown how the Arab geomancy has inspired an entirely different kind of divination employed by the Moundang of Chad. The Berti have some other methods of divination which can be regarded as indigenous with regard to Black Africa. Despite, their intensive knowledge of sand divination, these other kinds of divination are not in any way influenced by the Arab geomancy.

Figure 4

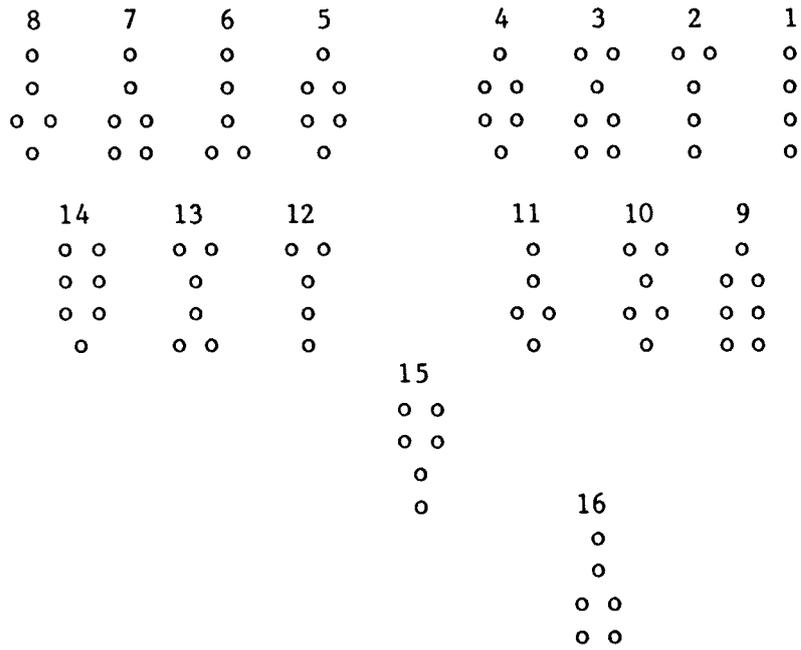


Figure 5

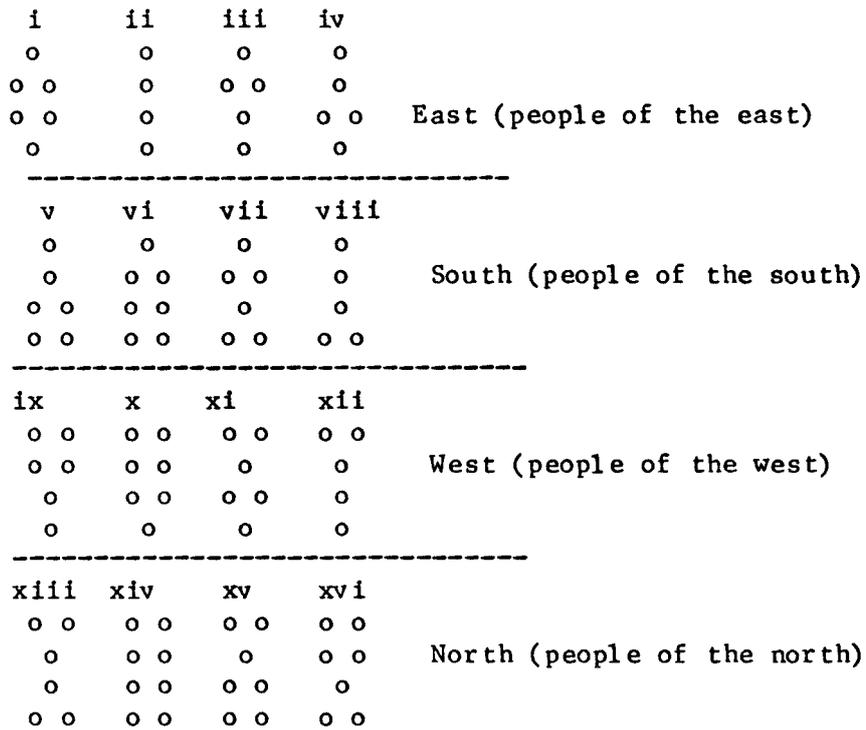


Figure 6

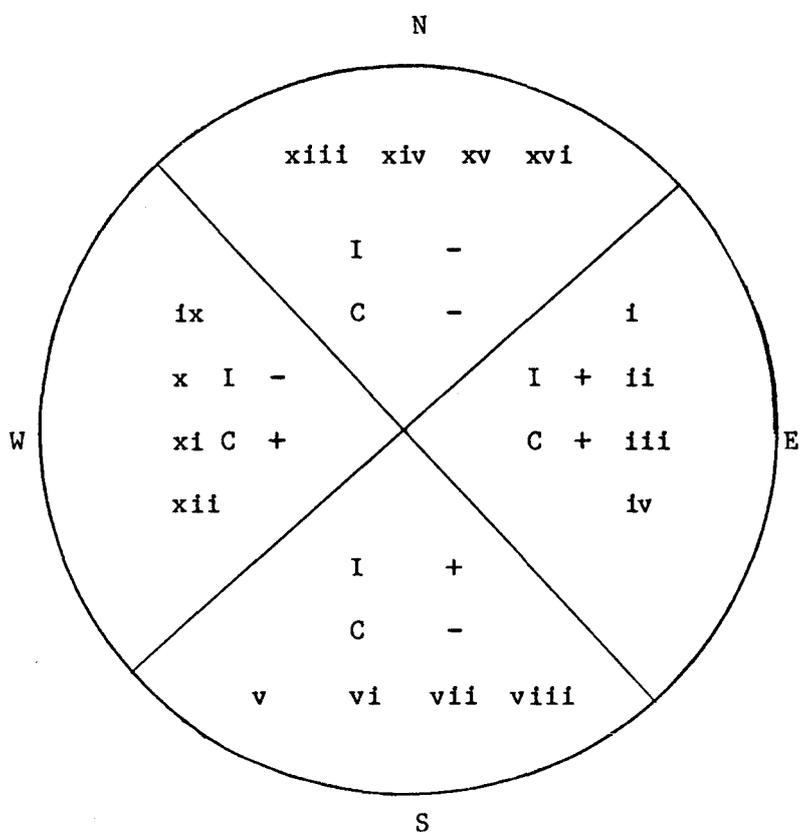


Table 6
Divining of Directions

| Directions | 1st. | 2nd. | 3rd. | 4th. | 5th. |
|------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| East | Good Tyrant | Good Unlucky Tyrant Halter | Tyrant Unlucky Flag | Road Emaciated Tyrant | Good Tyrant Departee |
| West | Unlucky Halter | Emaciated Flag Bundle Baboon | Baboon Pillar | Unlucky Good Baboon | Unlucky Halter Whiteness |
| North | Whiteness Defeated Flag Red | Red Pillar | Good Red Halter Whiteness | Departee Entrant | Whiteness Red Defeated Pillar <u>Jōdala</u> |
| South | Emaciated Bundle | <u>Jōdala</u> Road | Emaciated | Defeated | Emaciated Bundle Road Flag Entrant |
| NE | Red <u>Jōdala</u> | Whiteness | Entrant Defeated | | |
| SE | Departee Entrant | Defeated | Bundle <u>Jōdala</u> | Defeated Halter | Baboon |
| NW | Road Flag | Departee Entrant | Road | | |
| SW | Pillar Baboon | Departee Entrant | Departee | | |
| Position | 15th | 5th | 1st | 1st | 15th |

Table 7
Divining of Colour *

| Colour | 1st.Version | 2nd.V | 3rd.V | 4th.V |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Yellow | Tyrant Good Defeated Whiteness | Emaciated Road, Flag Defeated Red, Bundle | Flag Pillar | Entrant Departee |
| Red | Red Emaciated | | Red Good | Red |
| Black <u>azrag</u> | Baboon Entrant Departee Bundle | Baboon Unlucky Pillar | Baboon Unlucky | Baboon Unlucky Good |
| Green | <u>Jōdala</u> Halter, Flag Pillar, Road Unlucky | <u>Jōdala</u> Halter | <u>Jōdala</u> | <u>Jōdala</u> |
| Brown <u>samri</u> <1> | | <u>Jōdala</u> Whiteness Tyrant Departee | Road | |
| with black and white spots. | | Departee | Departee<2> Bundle | |
| Grey <u>akhbash</u> | | | Emaciated Entrant<3> | |
| White | | | Halter Whiteness Tyrant | Halter Emaciated |
| Position | 7th | 1st and 2nd | 5th. | 1st. |

* The diviner using version (1) used version (2) for divining directions (Table 6). Version (2) of colour divination was employed by the same diviner who used version (1) for divining directions. Version (3) was employed by a diviner who used version (3) for divining directions.

<1> Samri, translated as brown, is described as neither green nor red but in between.

<2> Departee here corresponds to a colour called akkāri which is derived from a bird umakkār. The bird is white or yellow with black spots.

<3> Entrant is described as ramādi from the word rumād, meaning ash. Ramādi is thus translated as grey.

Table 8
Colour and directions

| 1 fig./ No. of times | 2 Colour | 3 popular version | 4 Other versions/ No. of times |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Defeated | Yellow 2 | East | North 2 |
| Red | Red 3 | North | North 4 |
| Baboon | Black 4 | North | West 3 |
| Unlucky | Black 3 | West | West 3 |
| Unlucky | Black 3 | West | East 2 |
| <u>Jōdala</u> | Green 4 | East | |
| <u>Halter</u> | Green 2 | West | West 2 |
| Halter | White 2 | West | West 2 |
| Tyrant | | South | East 5 |

Table 9
Reasons for Divination

| Reasons | No. Cases |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Lost animals | 12 |
| Lost money | 4 |
| Lost sari <u>tob</u> | <u>1</u> |
| Lost property (total) | 17 |
| Future marital life | 13 |
| Success in sexual advances | 8 |
| Attending Traditional Dances | 4 |
| Inquiries about absent relatives | 2 |
| Inquiries about sick people | 3 |
| Other reasons | 5 |
| Total of cases | 52 |

Figure 7

| | | |
|-----|-----|-----|
| 14 | 13 | 12 |
| o | o o | o |
| o o | o o | o o |
| o o | o o | o o |
| o o | o o | o o |

Figure 8

| | | |
|-----|-----|-----|
| 14 | 13 | 12 |
| o o | o o | o o |
| o o | o o | o o |
| o o | o o | o o |
| o | o o | o |

Figure 9

| | | |
|-----|----|-----|
| 14 | 13 | 12 |
| o | o | o |
| o o | o | o o |
| o o | o | o o |
| o | o | o |

Figure 10

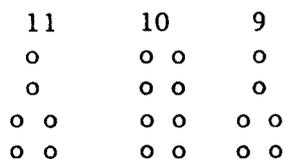


Figure 11

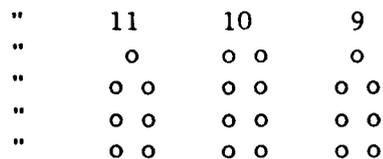


Figure 12

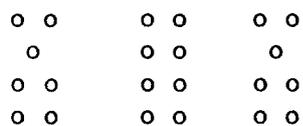


Figure 13

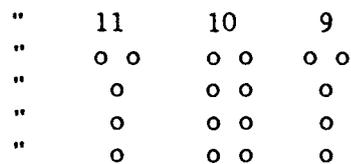


Figure 14

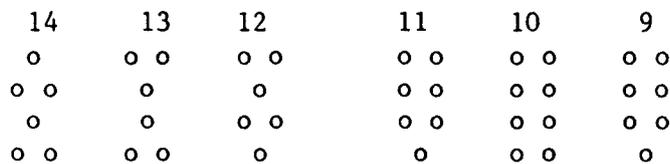


Figure 15

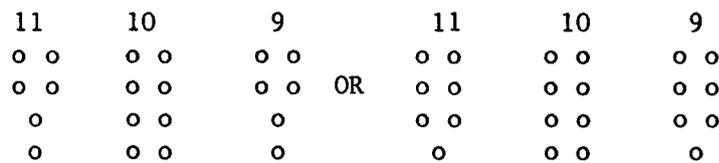


Figure 16

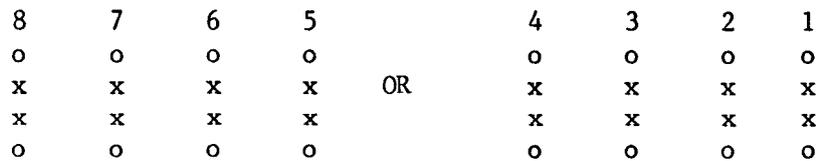


Table 10
Literacy of the Diviners and the Method
of Divination

| The diviner Literate (+) or or illiterate (-) | The teacher Literate (+) or illiterate (-) | div. revealed in a dream; yes (+) or no (-) |
|---|--|---|
| - | + | - |
| + | + | - |
| - | - | - |
| - | + | + |
| - | - | - |
| - | - | + |
| - | - | - |
| - | - | - |

(Fig. 17)

Arab Divination *

| Daughters <u>banat</u> | | | | Mothers <u>ummahat</u> | | | |
|------------------------|----|----|----------------------|------------------------|----|---|----------------|
| 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 14 | | 12 | | 11 | | 9 | |
| x | | x | | x | | x | |
| x | | x | grand_mothers | x | | x | |
| x | | x | <u>hafidat</u> | x | | x | |
| x | 13 | x | | x | 10 | x | |
| | x | | | | x | | |
| | x | | investigated about | | x | | investigator |
| | x | | <u>masuul anhu</u> | | x | | <u>elsa'il</u> |
| | x | 15 | | | x | | |
| | | x | | | | | |
| | | x | balance <u>mizan</u> | | | | |
| | | x | 16 | | | | |
| | | x | x | | | | |
| | | | x | | | | |
| | | | x | | | | |
| | | | x | | | | |

(*) I bid 547, The enumeration is mine, The drawing is to be read from right to left, <x> stands for single or double dots.

Table 11
Arab and Berti Properties
of Ranul figures

| The figure | Arab * | Berti |
|------------------|--|---|
| 1- <u>Jōdala</u> | Life | Welcome |
| 2-Good | Wealth, gains. | Good quality/origin, influence, prudence. |
| 3-Flag | Relatives, brothers, friends, happiness. | News, shout for help |
| 4-Whiteness | Fathers, grand-fathers | Happiness |
| 5-Defeated | Sons and daughters, happiness | Welcome, intimacy |
| 6-Pillar | Sickness, miser, slaves. | Stability, Patience, endurance. |
| 7-Red | Marriage, spouses. | Blood (injury, death, menstruation). |
| 8-Unlucky | Fear, death. | Sickness, death, bad luck. |
| 9-Tyrant | Travel, ambition. | Influence, power. |
| 10-Bundle | Power, glory. | Femininity, pregnancy, money. |
| 11-Emaciated | Friends, lovers. | Faithfulness, friendship, honesty, death, graves. |
| 12-Halter | Ambition and hope (Inside the group) | Control over things, grave digging. |
| 13-Road | Enemies, rivals. | travel, arrival, departure, mediation. |
| 14-Departee | | Loss, departure. |
| 15-Baboon | summary, end (of divination) | Death, sickness, life, success, gain, recovery. |
| 16-Entrant | Fatherhood, end. | Gains, arrival. |

* (Al-Boni 1970:540 and Abu-Maasher N.D.:12-13).

C H A P T E R 7

The Fakis and the Community`

The Village faki

Every Berti village has at least one faki who is in charge of its public rituals and communal welfare. He is referred to as faki al-hilla i.e, the village faki or sometimes imān al-hilla i.e. the village imam (leader of the prayers). In principle, a village faki should reside in the village for which he is responsible. He should keep at least one wife in his village if he is married to more than one. The more a village faki has an interest in the village welfare, the more faithful he is expected to be in his services. In practice, many fakis do not reside in the villages for whose communal welfare they are responsible. On the other hand, several villages may have one faki who is responsible for their interests. This can be related to the limited number of fakis and/or their uneven demographic distribution among Berti villages. The choice of the village faki is made collectively by the adult male inhabitants. Needless to say, some men have more influence in this matter than others in the same village. When choosing a village faki, priority is often given to the resident "recognised" faki if there is one in the village. Residence alone is not sufficient to qualify an aspirant to the office of the village faki. He must be regarded as adequately trained and recognized as "a good" faki (see P 19). A resident faki might feel offended if his co-residents decide to choose one from a different village. Such a decision might motivate him to indulge in prayers counter to the village

welfare. The counter prayers of "a poorly trained" faki are powerless, yielding little or nothing, and in any case his antagonistic efforts can easily be offset by the prayers of the more powerful chosen faki. Once a practitioner is chosen, he remains imam for life of the community concerned. Exceptions to this rule occur when he moves away, takes up a different business or becomes too old for the job. Again this permanence of tenure can be related to the fear of arousing his anger. In one case I came across, a village faki grew too old and blind. His subjects were still obliged to him financially even though the rituals were performed by a new faki. Frustrated because his former subjects were no longer acknowledging his ability, the blind faki was said to have been seen carrying out a punitive ritual to stop the rain. As it was told, he was caught uttering imprecations and throwing sand towards the gathering clouds. In this case the factor of his residence was irrelevant since both fakis were living in the same village.

Many Berti villages have resident fakis but are dependent on outsiders to be their imams. In a few cases, village imams are chosen from outside when there are no resident fakis. Years after the choice has been made, some of the younger residents qualify as fakis but the commitment to the old imam has to continue. This situation is often described as embarrassing, although the tendency is still towards honouring the older allegiance.

A person who is selected as a village faki is expected to perform duties. He has to direct rituals to ensure sufficient rain every year for cultivation. It is his duty to get rid of birds and other pests damaging the crops. If the village is stricken with any kind of misfortune, he should organize the necessary rituals. The village faki is also its imam who leads the public prayers at the two annual religious festivals (ids). In his functions the village faki seems to be similar to what Trimingham referred to with reference to Muslim Africa as a "cleric":

"The cleric stands apart from the rest of the laity only as a lettered man. He performs specific religious functions. He leads in prayer, teaches the young to recite the sacred text, performs the first sacrifice at the great feasts, names the newborn, conducts the marriage ceremony, washes the dead and leads the funeral prayers. No function of village life is complete unless he is present" (Trimingham 1968:59).

Unfortunately, Trimingham does not mention whether the cleric's office is contractual on the same basis as that of the Berti village faki. I will however use the terms, village faki and imam in referring to the Berti cleric. The term "village imam" is used rarely by the Berti in its wider sense, which originated in early Islamic history and in which the office controlled every domain of leadership. In general, the term "imam" is not so central in the social life of the Maliki Muslims as it is in the Shi'ite world

(eg. in Iran; see Enayat 1982).

Communal Rituals

In the last two chapters, I have examined the services rendered by the fakis to particular individuals. This chapter is concerned with the involvement of the faki in rituals performed in the interest of the whole village community and in rituals related to what are termed "rites of passage". For the purpose of the present discussion, ritual is defined as "formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers" (Turner 1967:19). Some anthropologists, especially those working in industrial societies (see Bocock 1974, Moore and Myerhoff 1977 among others) have included what might be called "ceremony" (Leach 1968:521) among rituals. In their view, the above definition is therefore regarded as over restrictive and appropriate for religious rituals only (Goody 1977a). Despite this criticism, the definition is quite appropriate for Berti rituals discussed in this chapter. They all clearly display the characteristic properties specified by Moore and Myerhoff (1977).

First of all, ritual is repetitive in occasion, content and form (Ibid). Its recurrent nature, whereby the same ritual is performed periodically can be observed in any society. Some of its elements are repeated over and over in a marked way. Berti rituals are performed at marriage, death, epidemic, rain shortage, religious

festivals, etc. There is a definite range of formulae, some of which are repeated a number of times ranging into thousands.

In its formality, ritual depends on a special style of behaviour and action which distinguishes it from ordinary practices. In Berti rituals, certain formulae are employed in ways quite different from their non-ritual uses. Moreover, the extraordinary style of ritual action is sometimes differentiated by certain taboos (see Middleton 1977:12). Prohibitions of speech irrelevant to the context and certain interjections are common features of Berti rituals.

Ritual is always consciously enacted. The Berti indeed plan most of their rituals well ahead of their occurrence. This is to some extent related to what Gilson discusses in the concept of nīya (intention) in the rituals performed by Shadhiliya sufis of Egypt: for any ritual

"to be of value and achieve its full purpose it requires a nīya or intention, ... As is often the case in religious rituals, unworthiness in the participant or some insufficiency of intention negates the purpose for which the rite is performed" (Gilson 1973: 156).

In chapters 3 and 4, it was mentioned that the phrase "may God accept our intention" appears at the end of all faki writings. The importance of the intention as a requirement for the efficacy of Islamic rituals is particularly emphasised by Muslim theologians. A

common example often quoted by them is the hypothetical case of the person who intends to wash his hands but unintentionally performs the prayers ablution instead. The ablution in this case is regarded as invalid as a ritual action as it was not performed intentionally and consciously. Ritual action must be a conscious act; it is not spontaneous and it often resists individual creativity. Although ritual might inspire individual creativity in certain societies (see Turner 1977), this is clearly not the case among the Berti.

The typical rituals the village faki performs on behalf of his community are the prayers for rain and for chasing away birds damaging the crops, prayers at Muslim religious festivals and specific rituals undertaken when a misfortune threatens the whole village community.

Prayers for rain (du'a)

The Berti depend on rain cultivation as a main source of their livelihood (Holy 1974). Not only do they attach a high importance to rain as such, but also the distribution of rainfall during the cultivation time is vital for a good harvest (Holy 1980:66). The Berti area lies at the margin of the poor savannah belt which is characterised by its fluctuating annual rainfall, and so it is easily comprehensible that rain should be the focus of an important ritual practice. The Berti believe that rain is ultimately controlled by God whose will to release it or withhold it is not

unaffected by human behaviour. The way members of the community subscribe to the ideal rules of conduct can either please God or arouse his anger. In Berti terms, this is expressed by referring to people as being "good" or "bad", a division which relates to the conceived degree of conformity to the values of the community. The drought of recent years is often explained in these terms i.e. as a result of people's "badness". Rain is thus a potential weapon in the hands of God, liable to be used for reward or punishment.

Rituals directly related to rain are those referred to as rain prayers. These are in fact the main occupation of the village faki. Depending on the kind of rain prayers chosen, he can either perform them individually or mobilise or/and organize his subjects to undertake them collectively. Both types of rain prayers, i.e. the individual and the collective, are referred to by the term du'a (lit. "prayer" or "a plea to God to achieve a certain objective"). The individual prayer is also referred to sometimes as dukhul khalwa (seclusion in a hut). The village faki normally secludes himself for one week for his rain prayers. If rain does not fall within a week, or the amount which has fallen is thought insufficient, the seclusion is extended to 14 and occasionally to 21 days. There is occasionally a hut located at the centre of the village, relatively separate from other homesteads in the village. It is referred to as a khalwa, the same term which is used for Koranic schools. As I mentioned before, The term itself means privacy or seclusion. The village faki does not need to obtain privacy in this khalwa. Instead, he can perform the ritual in his home, as most houses have at least a single hut. During the whole duration of his seclusion,

the faki must remain alone. He must not talk to anybody, especially the adults in the village. A young child about the age of five or six of either sex is assigned to take food and drinks to the secluded faki. Should communication become necessary, the faki can entrust the child with conveying messages to the elders of the village. The child passes on the verbal message to his parents who act accordingly. The timing of the seclusion is decided by the faki though not without some pressure from his clients. If the first rain comes at the expected time of the season, the faki is supposed to go into seclusion some time after that to ensure its continuation. If the rain is late, the faki is pressurized to hasten its fall. In most cases the faki waits until the sprouts are about to dry up and the clients are overwhelmed with despair. He can stop his seclusion if it achieves a good result before the end of the initial period. Should it be necessary for him to continue his seclusion for more than the initial period of one week, he can interrupt it for a few days after which he resumes his task. The practice of seclusion is regarded as a dangerous task which should be performed with utmost caution and in the appropriate manner. Stories are told about the secluded faki ending up with mental trouble darwasha. Fakis indeed regard seclusion as a hazardous undertaking and are only compelled by rumours and complaints from their clients to go into it. God's "names and words" are regarded as extremely powerful ("hot"), and it is believed that their excessive repetition may deplete the strength of those who utter them. Dealing with powerful "hot" names may also arouse the anger of various malicious entities (shayātīn and jinns) who suffer as a result and often retaliate by attacking the faki. Loneliness and

boredom during the seclusion contribute to the difficulty of the task but are not in themselves seen as potentially dangerous to the health of the faki. Some people regard rain prayer as far less hazardous than the uttering of incantations to combat evil forces like jinns and devils, as for example when a faki uses similar "hot names" (of God) to cure "madness". In this case, the danger may affect any member of the faki's family, and almost all cases of mental troubles in faki's families are related to this factor.

A "good faki who fears God" does not illicitly spend most of his seclusion time sleeping, or so it is maintained. Instead, this time is spent in repeating certain formulae several thousand times. The choice of the appropriate formulae is entirely left to the faki. He can opt for the basmala: "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful". As I mentioned before, this is the first verse of the opening chapter of the Koran, i.e. the opening verse of the whole Koran. As it is associated with "opening the doors of the worlds" (see Chapter 3), it has its bearings on wealth or life in general which are fully dependent on rain. Alternatively, the faki may choose istikhfār (lit. "plea" or "asking for forgiveness"). The standard phrase for istikhfār can be translated as: "I ask Allah for forgiveness". What is implied here is the belief that Allah will pardon the community concerned for the previously committed sins. It is obvious here that the notion implies, in a more general sense, that rain is either given or withheld depending on the attitudes and behaviour of the people. Strictly speaking, rain is denied because of sins committed or, in the people's words, because of their "becoming too bad". It is

hoped that the purification sought through the ritual will eliminate the reason for withholding the rain from the offenders.

The word mughīthu can also be repeated in the ritual. It derives from the Arabic verb yaghīth meaning "to deliver help or relief". It is used specifically in a situation of great need when the victim is imploring for rescue. Such a situation can be exemplified by a sick person who turns to God for help after exhausting all available remedies. The term is one of the 99 names of God. It can as well imply "the one who sends rain". As the term for rain ghēth also stems from the same origin, it becomes the most appropriate form among the other names of God in the context of a rain ritual. A different word which provides another option is "Michael". This is the name of the angel believed to be deputed to distribute rain. Alternatively, a faki may pick a relevant Koranic verse as a formula. According to what I was told, any Koranic verse containing the word "water" māiyāt may serve the purpose. The term "water" in this respect also includes "clouds" and "rain". These words - water, clouds and rain - appear in the Koran a vast number of times (Flügel 1842: 188-9, 91 and 139 + 182 respectively). Their use in the Koran is sometimes metaphorical, a fact which is often unrecognized by the Berti (see Chapters 3 and 4). It does not seem feasible to sift out all the Koranic verses containing the above mentioned words, so I will content myself with quoting those which were recited to me by the practitioners. Some of the phrases are merely small parts of Koranic verses:

1- "...who will bring you clear flowing water?" (Khan 1981:574).

2-"We poured down water from the sky in abundance" (Ibid:605).

3-"When he arrived at the spring of Midian, he found around it a crowd of people who were watering their flocks" (Ibid:379).

4-"Allah sends down water from the sky and the earth thereby becomes green? Allah is indeed beneficent, All-Aware" (Ibid:326).

5-"The ark sailed along with them through waves towering like mountains" (Ibid:209).

6-"He sends down water from the sky so that valleys begin to flow according to their capacity" (Ibid:233).

7-"with Allah alone is the knowledge of the Hour. He sends down the rain" (Ibid:406).

8-"He it is Who sends down rain after they despair of it, and spreads out His mercy" (Ibid:485).

9-"..and He reassured his companion saying: Be not concerned; surely, Allah is with us" (Ibid:178).

10-"..and in the water that Allah sends down from the clouds and quickens therewith the earth after its death" (Ibid:26).

11-".. and the clouds pressed into service between the heaven and the earth" (Ibid).

12-"Allah it is who sends the winds that raise the clouds; then We drive them to a region that has become lifeless, and quicken thereby the earth after its death" (Ibid:428).

Six out of the above twelve verses contain the word maa (water) which is the reason for the selection of the phrases. Though the term is general, it is used more often than other words (matar, ghēth) in referring to rain. In a number of the quoted verses the term is rendered more specific by adding that water is being sent from the sky. In the third verse, water is said to be in the ground rather than falling from the sky. That appeals to the situation normally encountered by the Berti during the height of the dry season when there is little water left in their wells.

Five of the other remaining six verses contain the terms "clouds" sahāb and "rain" ghēth as their key words. The ninth verse does not include either of the three key words, i.e. water, clouds or rain, but it relates to the situation of despair when the vegetation is about to die from drought. There is a clear correlation between rain and life on one hand, and dryness and death on the other (verses 10 and 12).

There is thus a relatively wide range of choice of formulae in the du'a. In a rather different context, Gilsenan distinguishes between du'a and salāt (Islamic daily prayers) practised by some Egyptians. He regards the du'a as being an unprescribed formula. On the other hand, the language of the salāt is formulaic and prescribed (Gilsenan 1973:183-4). Trimingham as well refers to the du'a as "informal subjective prayer" (Trimingham 1968:55). The above material shows that Berti du'a is undoubtedly formulaic. There is however a wider choice of formulae in the du'a than in salāt. This is, of course, to some extent a matter of degree since there is also a limited choice between possible formulae for the salat. Whatever formula is chosen, whether it is a word, the whole Koranic verse or part of it, it has to be repeated a certain number of times. fakis are ambivalent about the exact number of the repetitions. The common number is 124000 which is referred to as bīr (lit. well). Some hold the du'a to be effective if it consists of 7 birs (7x124000) (see Holy 1974:157-8). It is often reiterated that if this maximum target is achieved, rain will definitely fall even should the ritual take place in the dry season. Other people

who are less ambitious favour the alternation between several different formulae, each repeated a thousand times only. I have also come across a few who say that whatever formula is chosen, it should be repeated until the rain is obtained. The fakis use their rosary beads to keep a count of their utterances. Many fakis think of the most successful seclusion as that which is accompanied by a public prayer performed by all adult male members of the village. The public prayer (also called du'a) is fairly similar to that performed by the village faki. It is normally performed shortly before or after the seclusion of the faki. The faki assumes a leading role in it and may decide on the formula to be uttered. It is however not unusual for the inhabitants of the village to perform the rain prayer on their own while the faki is in seclusion. The advantage of performing both of the two types of rain prayers simultaneously is that they can both be followed by a single sacrifice.

As I implied earlier, all the adult men of the village are expected to attend the public rain prayer. Attendance is compulsory to the extent that any absentee is liable to be fined unless he presents an acceptable reason for his absence. Fines of around 50 piastres are levied mainly by the village agid. The agid is theoretically chosen by the inhabitants of the village, but the office is often hereditary. The Agid's main job is to mobilise his people for communal activities. The prayer takes several days, and it is occasionally timed to end on the same day as the seclusion of the faki. Every evening after sunset, men congregate in the village mosque (masid) for the rain ritual. The prayer takes about an hour

each evening with the attendants repeating the agreed upon formula several hundred times. In order to facilitate the count of the final achievement, the participants give their totals in hundreds. Using a rosary, each man draws a line on the sand every time he completes a full round of it, i.e. 100. At the end of the service, one man who has been selected for the purpose notes down the total achieved by all the participants that evening. This total is added to that of the next day, and so forth. The number of times the formula is repeated depends largely on the number of the participants. The minimum target is a single bīr (124000) which is often exceeded in the public prayers. Each year that the minimum target is achieved, a line is carved on a piece of wood hung in the masīd, with new lines added each year. This is thought of as a record as well as an auspicious witness of previous achievements. A number of different formulae is used for this type of public ritual. Directly taken from the Koran is the Exordium chapter or more precisely its first few verses. In one of the cases I attended, the public prayer took five days to finish. The minimum target of 124000 was achieved by repeating only the first two verses of the Exordium chapter. Each of the two verses was repeated about half of the specified number of times.

Alternatively, worshippers can repeat the phrase ya mughīthu, i.e. the same formula for which the secluding faki can opt. Michael, the name of the rain angel can also be an option. Another alternative is istikfār. Other possible formulae include "praise be to Allah" (subhāna Allah), "Oh You Who Help" (Ya Muīnu) and "Oh You the beneficent / Gracious / kind" (Ya Latīfu).

Some of the above formulae have already been explained. New formulae in this section are: Subhāna Allah, Ya muīnu and Ya latīfu. They are concerned with praising God and emphasising his inherent helpfulness and kindness. The first formula presents the actors as obedient worshippers glorifying God and thereby worthy of his help. The last two formulae relate to the qualities of God that are being invoked in the context. In general, the formulae used in the collective prayer are those which can be easily committed to memory by the illiterate without any extensive knowledge of the Koran. The only Koranic verses used are the first two of the opening chapter of the Koran which are known to most adult Berti. Other formulae include at most two full words each. As most of the participants in the communal prayer are illiterate, the longer formulae used by professionals in their seclusion are beyond their knowledge. On the whole, public rain prayer is seen as supplementary to the seclusion. Sometimes the faki may go into seclusion without public prayer being performed at all. God's response is then seen as being more effectively gained through the mediation of the holy man than through the collective ritual.

Du'a for chasing away pests

The village faki may also be required to seclude himself to chase away birds and other pests from the fields to prevent them from damaging the crops. Birds and other kinds of pests do not appear every year and, in consequence, seclusion for this purpose is relatively rare. The rarity of the practice is reflected in the absence of standardized formulae. Most of the practitioners I consulted were not readily able to decide which were the commonly-used formulae. There was also a lack of agreement between them on the appropriate formulae, and most of those they mentioned did not relate directly to birds or pests. The exceptions were the three Koranic verses mentioned by a famous faki:

"Do they not see the birds held under control in the vault of heaven? It is only Allah Who keeps them back from swooping on you" (Khan 1981:258).

"Have they not observed the birds above them spreading their wings in flight and then drawing them in? None witholds them but the Gracious One" (Ibid:573).

"...O Ye Naml, go into your habitations, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you unknowingly" (Ibid:369).

The first two Koranic verses are directly related to birds. In addition, they demonstrate the ultimate power of God implicitly denying the efficacy of control over them to any other force. The third Koranic verse is not in fact used against birds but against insects. The word naml means "ants" in classical as well as in Berti colloquial Arabic. Nonetheless, the faki who informed me about it insisted on its beneficial use against all insects "which emerge from the ground". In this sense, it includes ants, worms, grasshoppers and the like. Exception is made for desert locusts for which the faki has no remedy. I have not heard any other faki mentioning these Koranic verses.

The popular formulae invoked against birds are istikhfār, ya ghaffār ("You who forgive the sins") and ya latīfu. The first two formulae relate to the conceptualisation of pests as a form of Godly punishment in the same manner as drought. They can be viewed as purificatory for the previous sins of the community. The third formula (latīfu) is an incantation for God to eliminate the danger manifested in pests. None of the three formulae is related to pests in general or birds in particular. The seclusion for evicting pests lasts for either seven or fourteen days. The formulae have to be uttered the same number of times as in rain prayers. There was disagreement among informants on whether the initial number is also called bir. There are other actions which are recommended by some fakis to accompany the prayers. In the case of birds, people are allowed to arrange parties to destroy the nests in all the trees around the village. This practice is, in fact, arranged every time

birds provide a threat to the harvest, regardless of the involvement of a faki in the action. Participants are not allowed to say shah and ūk which are interjections used for chasing birds. This prohibition occurs only when burning the nests is carried out in addition to the ritual performed in seclusion. A different kind of action is to write the formulae on both sides of a big drum which is then carried through the fields in the early afternoon when the birds are resting in the trees. A few people beat the drum loudly to frighten the birds. They must not talk during the whole mission. Great importance seems to be attached to their silence as is evident from one case I know of in which the two young men who were entrusted with the job were accused of infringing this rule. As they were going through the fields, they were distracted by a wild animal which had been disturbed by the noise of the drum. They hunted the beast, killed it and then resumed their task. When they later appeared in the village, it was thought that they could not have killed the animal without saying a single word. The whole operation was ordered to be repeated from the beginning.

There are two different kinds of prohibition involved in the taboos on speech during the ritual. The first prohibition concerns only specific interjections, and the participants are allowed to talk to each other freely as long as they do not utter the prohibited words. As the communal burning of nests may be performed independently of the seclusion, it is the prohibition which sets it clearly apart as a ritual (cf. Middleton 1977:12). The prohibition consolidates the belief that it is the uttered formulae that are chasing away the birds rather than the interjections. But it has

also clearly practical effects. The burning of nests usually takes place at night. Silence allows the actors to take the birds by surprise in their nests, rather than scaring them off to a safe escape from the fire.

The second prohibition concerns all talking during the ritual, as in the case of beating the drum. As I noted earlier, silence is an essential part of the ritual. The secluded faki himself is not allowed to meet other people and so, by definition, he cannot talk to them. The faki should not even talk to the young child acting as a messenger, unless there is no way out of it, or when the matter conveyed is related to the ritual. Apart from uttering the formulae, silence seems to be a feature for both of the two facets of this ritual, i.e. the seclusion and beating the drum. It may be noted that in many religious rituals such as the Muslim prayers, any speech unrelated to the main task renders the whole prayers inefficacious. This rule may not be general to all kinds of ritual, but the prohibition itself does seem to be a prime feature of ritual.

In anthropological literature, a differentiation is often made between two types of actions: on the one hand, there are human actions which are called instrumental (Rappaport 1971:66), technical (Leach 1976:9) or technological (Goody 1977a:27). On the other hand there are actions which are typical to ritual and are termed "expressive or aesthetic" (Leach 1969:525, 1976:9). According to the Berti, burning the nests is acknowledged in itself as an effective technical act for chasing the birds and I have already

mentioned that it is occasionally done without the involvement of the faki. Beating the drum is also seen as capable of producing the same technical result. The drum is often substituted by a tin which is frequently tapped by young children to clear the fields of birds. Its effect is assumed to last only for a very short time and this necessitates its frequent repetition during the day. The prohibitions discussed change the the status of these actions from technological to ritual ones; this is clearly attested to by the fact that when the prohibitions are misobserved, the whole operation is repeated. Thus, when these actions are complementary to another ritual practice (seclusion), they are themselves assigned ritual status with new emphasis on their expressive power at the expense of the technical one.

Id prayer

It is the duty of the village faki to lead the public prayers performed during the two main annual religious festivals. These are id al-fatur, the festival following the Ramadan, the month of fast, and id al-dahīyya, the sacrifice festival. The Berti attach much more importance to the former festival in contrast to the Islamic orthodox tradition in which the dahīyya is the major one (id al-kabīr) (cf. Tringham 1968:67 for East Africa). The reversal is probably caused by the effect which fasting during the Ramadan has on the patterns of everyday activities. The communal prayer is

the same during both festivals. It is performed on the morning of the festival day between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. A site, usually to the east of the village, is cleared for the purpose. The men sit on their mats in two or three rows with the senior ones to the front and the junior ones behind. A gap is left between them and the women, who again sit in parallel rows. Those who assemble early for the prayer chant certain formulae loudly in unison before the actual prayer starts. The formulae are: "Allah is the Greatest, no God but He. Allah is the Greatest and to Him be the praise". The faki who leads the prayer is normally the last one to join the assembled worshippers. In its detail, the īd prayer is fairly similar to the daily Muslim prayers. It is highly standardised and is more or less similar throughout those parts of the Muslim world that belong to the Maliki sect. There is therefore no need to go into details about it as these can be found in any source on Islamic rituals. When the prayer is over, the men shake hands with each other. Afterwards they proceed to the masīd, while the women disappear into their houses to prepare food. Several dishes of food are then brought into the masīd where they are consumed by the men as an offering to God. If the faki who led the prayer is an outsider, he may return to his own village after this communal sacrifice. Other villagers spend the rest of the day in exchanging visits between houses. The festival visits are accompanied by highly conventionalised utterances. There are a number of formulae used for īd greetings either during the visits or when shaking hands immediately after the prayer. These can be translated as follows: "A happy blessed īd for you". "Let the īd find us the next time more (fertility) and not less (mortality)". "May God increase the

goodness of those of good deeds". "May He erase the sins of those of bad deeds". "May He strengthen / revive our muscles (lit. make them green i.e. healthy, strong)". "May He let the children grow, allow the elders to survive, and bless the dead". "May God accept our fast; Amen". "Pardon / forgiveness for the sake of God and his prophet". The last phrase refers to forgiveness generally, as the others refer to health and welfare, but it may also refer implicitly to specific grudges between the host and his visitor. The notion which is being expressed in it is that this is the day when those who are on bad terms should resume visiting and talking to each other. The request is one which is virtually impossible to refuse, and the addressed person has little option in the matter as forgiveness is sought "for the sake of God and his prophet". It is difficult to regard such a phrase by itself as capable of healing the cracks in social relations, but it creates a situation favourable to the reconciliation between those who have been on bad terms.

Both of the īd festivals provide a rare opportunity for the Berti to indulge in collective religious rituals. Their spiritual importance is particularly significant as most Berti do not perform other Islamic prayers (see Holy 1974:158- 159). They create situations in which pleas can be made to God to forgive previously committed sins. As is clearly reflected in the formulae, the ritual reveals "values at the deeper level" (Wilson 1954:240). The virtue of being "good" and the sympathy for those who have done wrong are stressed as are the collective interest in fertility and the worry about mortality, and the importance of eliminating enmity and old

grudges. In the light of Berti id rituals, one can indeed appreciate Radcliffe-Brown's argument that ritual regulates, maintains and transmits sentiments which are vital for the very enhancement of the society (Radcliffe-Brown 1952:157).

The village faki receives certain benefits from the services he renders to the community. For the rain seclusion he is entitled to seven to eight pounds of millet and five to ten piastres from each house in the village/s. This payment is subject to agreement between the partners and is liable to be renegotiated to match inflation. The faki also receives a portion of the Islamic religious tax (zaka) which is enforced by customary law and represents one tenth of the millet harvest. The tax is divided by the donor between the sheikh, the faki and the older people in the village. The fasting month's festival tax is again divided between the sheikh, the faki and the older people who are in need of some help. This tax amounts to five and a third of a pound of millet per each member of the family including the young children, and it is payable by the head of the family. It can be paid in kind or its money equivalent. During my research, its money equivalent amounted to what was close to 40 piastres. The two taxes are regarded as religious and rewarding in the same manner as prayers. Their payment is sanctioned more by religious morals than judicial laws, and they are paid mostly voluntarily. The first payment is enforced by the local administration. It is not rewarding in itself and is not elevated to the status of a religious practice.

Jumla

At a time of acute misfortune threatening the whole community a jumla is required. Examples of such misfortunes are epidemics, pests and outbreaks of fire. The word jumla means "total" or "sum" and it refers to copying the whole Koran book. The practice is also known as wazn al-kitāb (weighing of the book). The whole Koran book is copied, washed and the erasure is given to all the members of the endangered community to share. It is the duty of the village faki to organize this task. As the action is laborious and done on a single day, all fakis in the area may be invited. Invitations may be extended to include everybody who is capable of copying the Koranic text such as students and school teachers. Writers congregate at the village mosque and a single loose-leaf Koran book is distributed to all the participants to copy. It does not matter where a writer begins as the objective is simply to copy every single word in the Koran. The head faki gives each participant two or three pages at a time. When the pages have been copied, the writer puts them aside and asks for more. Writing takes place in a manner similar to that described in Chapter 3. The amount of water used for washing the written slates should be enough to allow every individual a drink from it. A few writers share a container full of water. Each time their slates are full, they wash them in the same water. The erasure from various containers is later collected in a large water pot. More clean water may then be added to the erasure if there are many people to drink it. When the whole Koran is fully

washed in the water pot, the head faki invites all the men and older boys in the village to have a drink. Some of the erasure is taken to the women in the houses or reserved for the absent members of the community to drink later. The practice usually ends with a sacrifice (karana). A few goats or possibly a bull are slaughtered and cooked by men in the village mosque (see Holy 1974:154-158). Porridge is brought from each house in the village and consumed with the meat. The financial cost of the sacrifice is met by contributions organized and collected by the village agid. At the very end of the ritual, a final address to Allah is made in the form of al-fatha. The faki asks the men to raise their hands as he does. He then reads the Exordium chapter in an audible voice followed by the appropriate formulae for the occasion such as: "May God accept our offering, May He lift up the misfortune (bala) and send down health (shifa)". The faki may specify the kind of misfortune to be lifted. Everybody follows the faki towards the end of the fatha by saying "Amen" and rubbing both hands on the face.

A Jumla performed at the communal level is a rare activity. The time I attended this ritual was in 1973 during an acute wave of measles (habboba). It appeared to be the last resort when all other remedies had already been exhausted. The jumla is highly recommended when the exact cause of the trouble is not known. As the Koran is believed to contain verses useful against various malicious forces, to partake in drinking the whole of it is regarded as appropriate when the exact force cannot be identified. The incantations uttered in the fatha reflect the view that misfortune is "sent down" by Allah who may "lift it up" if appropriately

approached.

A jumla can also be prepared for particular individuals. But because of its high cost, it is usually only the rich people who can afford it. This kind of jumla is also prepared for unknown diseases or for ailments which have proved incurable by other remedies. When various kinds of medicine do not prove effective, it is often assumed that they are not strong enough or that they were badly chosen. It is the very confusion over which Koranic verses should be used in the context that is resolved by copying the whole Koran. The jumla ritual is also held to be useful against future threats in general. Such threats are again difficult to identify which makes the jumla particularly suitable. Although the Koran contains some verses which are believed to cause disease or even death, their inclusion in the jumla is not seen as dangerous for the patient. This is mainly because of two factors: firstly, the "good" verses in the Koran outnumber the "bad" ones, and secondly, it is the intention or the will of the actor that counts. God knows the intention behind any ritual, and it is the believers objective in performing the ritual to which he reacts.

Friday prayer

The last activity in which the village faki is involved is the Friday prayers (salāt al-jumā). As a rule, Friday prayers are not held in individual villages but normally in market centres where they are attended by people from neighbouring villages and often also by people from other tribes. The Friday prayer cannot be performed in an average Berti village because it requires a minimum of 13 attendants. A mosque for this prayer is often built from the local material in the markets. A faki, who usually lives himself in the market centre, is chosen as a regular imām. Friday prayer is never attended by as many people as id prayers. In fact, only two or three people from each village may be present. Those are mostly fakis and other pious men. Older women may attend but not young girls. The Friday prayer is the only ritual attended by people from an area larger than one specific village community.

Rites of passage

Apart from officiating in various rituals performed on behalf of the village community, the faki also officiates at certain rites of passage concerning specific individuals, particularly at rituals accompanying marriage and death. The faki who performs these rituals does not need to be the village imam. Any faki could lead the ritual, but it is usual for the imam to do it if he is present. If he lives in the village, he is naturally the senior among his

colleagues and hence expected to assume a leading role in many ritual activities. Three specific reasons can be seen as motivating the village faki to take part in the life-cycle rituals concerning his fellow villagers. Firstly, his participation in them intensifies or consolidates the relations which he has established with the community of which he is a ritual leader. Secondly, his participation reinforces the personal relations with specific individuals within the village community which it is in his interest to maintain. Thirdly, the performance of the life-cycle rituals is regarded as rewarding in virtue of them being good religious acts. The service which the faki renders is free; he will, however, be entertained with others and share the food and drink offered as a sacrifice.

Marriage

Berti weddings consist of three main stages. The first stage is the (fātha) when the first part of the bridewealth (sidag) is paid. The second stage is the consummation of the marriage iris when the groom and the bride are brought together for the first time in their marital life. The third and the final stage is the rahūla which is well after the birth of the first child and connotes the movement of the bride to her new residence (see Holy 1974:1-5). The first stage of the marriage is by far the most important. It transforms the groom and the bride into husband and wife. Two conditions are required to establish the beginning of the new marriage union: the

payment of the first part of the bridewealth and the fātha. After the bridewealth paid by the groom's representatives is checked by the witnesses, a faki shouts "al-fātha" and all present join in the fātha ritual. The faki adds some incantations appropriate to the situation after reading the usual Koranic chapter: "May Allah protect them (bride and groom), May He make it a family of wealth and children". One man from among those present is asked to announce the marriage by a herald cry (korarāk). A woman from inside the house responds by the female version of the public announcement (zagharād). It is the co-occurrence of the male and the female cries which signifies that a positive event is taking place or being initiated. The absence of the female herald cry, i.e. the male voice alone, signifies some misfortune such as fire, theft, etc. The fātha performed during the first stage of the marriage is not a complicated ritual and in the absence of a faki, any person who knows the appropriate Koranic chapter can perform it.

The faki, or more precisely a number of fakis, also render special services at the consummation of the marriage. Although the celebration may start with a sacrificial meal in the afternoon, the religious service is delayed until midnight. The groom is led to his mother-in-law's house and is expected to spend his first night there. Fakis are normally informed well ahead of the occasion, and they come together with the groom and wait for the bride to appear. When she does, or indeed when her girl friends agree to release her, she joins the groom and the fakis. The groom holds her by the hand, and the fakis chant the Yāsīn chapter of the Koran (see Khan

1981:433-439). As the service is held at night with little or no light, the fakis must depend entirely on their memory in recalling the words of the chapter. After the chanting, a fātha is said which marks the end of the religious part of the occasion.

Yāsīn is one of the most important chapters of the Koran. Berti fakis often quote the prophetic statement that "it is the heart of the Koran" (cf. Sanūsi N.D.:17, Quasem 1977:81). According to the literature used by Berti fakis, to it is attributed the power to solve innumerable problems (Al-Bōni 621 hij.:252-266, Sanūsi N.D.:17-22, Al-Tukhi N.D.:51-57, among others). The same chapter is also widely used for erasure as well as for hijābs. It also contains one of the most crucial verses on which the whole philosophy of using the Koran to influence the environment depends: "His power is such that when He intends a thing He says concerning it Be; and it is" (Khan 1981:438). Another of its verses is also proverbial for its power to distract the sight of the enemy away from the reciter. In my schooldays we used to recite it in order to hide ourselves from the strict teachers every time we misbehaved: "We have set a barrier before them and a barrier behind them and have covered them up so that they cannot see" (Ibid:433). Moreover, the verse used for protective purposes, which I have discussed before, comes also from this chapter: "Peace will be the greeting conveyed to them from the Ever Merciful Lord" (Ibid:437). It is important to note here that almost every faki knows this chapter by heart. It is not impossible that it is solely the faki's concern with his status and reputation which motivates him to commit it to memory. As fakis are often required to chant on crowded occasions,

any lack of fluency in reciting it may harm the reputation of the reciter. All fakis acknowledge the protective nature of this chapter, and a number of them chant at least a part of it every day after the morning prayer. This practice is also strongly recommended in the fakis' literature (Al-Bōni 621 hij.: 263-266). Gilsenan reports how the sufis he studied are recommended to read it every morning (Gilsenan 1973:230). The direct association between the chapter and marriage in general or consummation in particular is however ambiguous. The Arabs never used it in the Berti way as is evident from faki libraries. Among the 20 uses of the chapter cited in a single source, only one refers to marriage in recommending that it should be used by the bachelor who wants to get married (Sanūsi N.D.:17). Again according to these books, it is the reader or the chanter who will benefit rather than his client; in the Berti marriage, it is clearly the client who is supposed to benefit. The majority of the Berti do not know the words of the chapter, and it is therefore necessary for a faki to officiate on their behalf.

Death

When someone dies, the Berti are extremely anxious to get rid of the corpse in the shortest possible time. They are often jokingly accused by their Miedob neighbours of burying their kin before they die properly. As the Miedob live dispersed in small compounds, it takes them a longer time to inform their nearest neighbours of a death in order to be able to perform the laborious

ritual of burial. As soon as a person is classified as dead, Berti messengers rush to the nearby villages to spread the news. Within three or four hours the body is already buried. A prayer referred to as salāt al-mayit (lit. prayer of the dead) is performed. A moment before the burial, the corpse is placed to the west of the open grave and parallel to it. The corpse should be laid in a north-south direction, facing east. The men attending the funeral stand behind the corpse also facing east. The faki who leads the prayer stands in front of the worshippers. The prayer itself is short, and it is standardised throughout the Maliki Muslim world. Immediately after the prayer, the corpse is placed in the grave, buried, and al-fātha is said. A few incantations suitable to the situation are uttered: "May God bless him and forgive his sins, may He take him to paradise, may He bless his descendants and help them through their grief. We (the worshippers) grant it (the fātha) to the deceased". The last sentence indicates the intention that the rewards of the prayer and the fātha be granted to the deceased.

On the third day after the death a big sacrifice is arranged. Everybody in the area is informed, and distant relatives are also expected. Most of the mourners arrive around midday and are offered a small meal and perhaps some tea. The bigger meal is delayed until late afternoon. At least one bull is killed, and contributions to cover the expenses are collected from those attending, who pay about 50 piastres each. Those who are unable to come may send their contributions. Every time a newcomer meets a grieving relative, he shouts "al-fātha", and they together with whoever is around raise their hands. After reciting the fātha, every one says "we grant it

to the deceased", and the newcomer shakes hands with the relative of the dead person and joins the other mourners. Relatives expect al-fātha every time they meet an acquaintance for the first time after the death. This may continue for several years until the deceased is finally forgotten.

The most important part of the death prayers is yet to come. This is also referred to as du'a and is divided into two main parts: reading the Koran and counting the rosary beads. Reading the Koran is more important, and it is considered most unfortunate not to have enough fakis at one's death to perform the ritual. The aim of the ritual is to read the whole Koran at least once. This is done by as many as fifteen fakis depending on the status and the popularity of the grieving family and the number of fakis around. In rare cases the Koran may be covered more than once, but it is not unusual for the fakis to fail to read it in full even once. The fakis congregate under a shelter and start the chant. A single loose-leaf hand written Koran book is distributed by a leading faki. Every one who joins in reading, or perhaps more properly reciting, receives a few leaves at a time. It does not matter where he starts from as long as he goes in the right direction, i.e. from right to left. Each one is responsible for keeping the pages he receives in sequential order. After covering the part he has received, he puts it aside and asks for another bunch of papers. Chanting is done in a loud voice and this is a good chance for every one to prove his capabilities and chant in a loud, fluent and musical manner in order to impress the potential clients in the adjacent shelters. After the whole Koran has been read, it has to be put in order again. The

book at this stage is divided into more than twenty small parts held by different fakis. The respective parts have been separately kept in order, but they themselves have to be put in their appropriate positions to form an ordered single book. It is the holy book and keeping it in disorder is unthinkable. The task of reassembling the book is complicated by the absence of page numbers in the local hand written Koran books. To reassemble the book is a good test for those who claim to have committed the Koran to memory. The contest to make a good impression starts with the faki who has the first part of the Koran. He reads the last verse in the part he has. The faki in possession of the following section should respond, and the two bunches of papers are joined together to form the first section of the book. Then the second faki reads the last verse of his part and hands the joined parts to a third faki, and so forth. The final verse to be read by a faki may not be fully written in the last page of his part; in other words, the final verse may be split into two parts concurrently held by two fakis. In spite of this, a faki is supposed to give his last verse in full by recalling from memory the rest of it. Should he hesitate about the missing words of the verse, many of his colleagues will be anxious to volunteer and assert their reputation at his expense. After the whole Koran book is restored to order, a fātha is uttered, and the whole du'a is consecrated to the deceased.

The second part of the death du'a takes place under a different shelter. This is mainly performed by the illiterate men who know little or nothing about the Koran. A formula is agreed on and repeated by as many men as possible. Formulas are often: istikhfār,

ya latīf, al-hamdu lilāhi (praise be to Allah), etc. In a few cases, the shortest chapter of the Koran (the Unity) is chosen instead. The last option is feasible only when there are enough men who know the words of the chapter. The participants use the rosary to punctuate their repetition of the formula, and every time someone completes a full round, he shouts : salām (lit. peace). The message is answered by a person assigned to keep count of the utterances. He says: marhab al-salām (lit. peace is welcome), and he notes down on his rosary a unit of hundred utterances. To complete the ritual, the chosen formula should be repeated 49000 times. This is regarded as seven units. Each unit consists of 7000 utterances and is called jāria. The word jāria means a "she slave" in classical Arabic; it is not a recognised word in Berti colloquial Arabic, and it is thus a part of the ritual language outside which it has no independent meaning. The above specified target may not be achieved, in which case a minimum of 4000, or in some cases 3000, may be taken as the value of a jaria, so that the seven jārias will represent 28000 or 21000 utterances. A fātha is also performed at the very end of this du'a and consecrated to the dead person. The whole purpose of the du'a is to contribute to the blessings of the deceased. The religious ritual performed on behalf of the dead person will augment his previous achievement to offset his sins.

The day of the death sacrifice ends with the main meal. A similar sacrifice is arranged on the fortieth day after the death. The du'a is repeated, though on a smaller scale. Depending on the financial ability of the family, another sacrifice may be made on the day of the anniversary of the death.

C H A P T E R 8

Conclusion

The influence of the faki

The fact that the thesis discusses only the role of the fakis in Berti society should not lead the reader to an over-estimation of their power in that society. Indeed their influence is much more limited than that of the marabouts of North Africa (see Monteil 1969; Eikelman 1976; Gellner 1969), the saints of Pathans (Barth 1959), or the sheikhs of Lebanon (Gilsenan 1982). Berti fakis neither enjoy the "closeness to God" of the marabouts, nor do they have access to the inner secrets of the self (bātin). Indeed the concept of the bātin (the hidden reality) as opposed to the zāhir (the surface reality), as expounded by Gilsenan with reference to Egypt and Lebanon (Gilsenan 1973, 1982:79), is hardly known to the average Berti. The Berti fakis do not represent a distinct ethnic group in relation to other people. They therefore cannot claim to radiate "baraka" by virtue of their genealogical origin in the way in which "institutionalized baraka" (Crapanzano 1973:73) is transmitted from father to son. Lacking an exclusive ethnic origin, fakis cannot gain credit for themselves by guarding saintly shrines, controlling "baraka" and extorting alms (cf. Barth 1959). Although some fakis might wish to claim genealogical connection with the prophet, that does not set them apart from their clients; non-fakis are equally entitled to such a claim. What O'Fahey calls "the African sense of the nearness of the divine" (O'Fahey 1980:115) seems to operate to the detriment of the influence of the fakis as

mediators between man and God. A faki is not inherently closer to God than other Muslims. Closeness to God is achieved through piety rather than through the knowledge of the Koran, which in itself does not bring an individual closer to God; it can merely facilitate this process if it is used as an instrument of devotion. Devotion is accessible to anybody who acquires basic knowledge of Islamic rituals, and of course has the will to lead a religious life. Thus, the fakis are in a significant way different from those Western clergy who can promise salvation for their clients. Every individual can communicate directly with God and work for his own paradise.

The influence of the faki is further restricted by the prevalence of the belief in the incompatibility between religion on one hand, and wealth and politics on the other. According to this belief, the more one involves oneself in the pursuit of earthly pleasures, the further one gets from gaining entry to paradise. Obviously, a minimum level of involvement in economic activities is necessary for everybody's survival, including the faki's. Yet it is believed that an excessive interest in politics and the accumulation of wealth leaves little time for the intensive performance of rituals expected from a faki. The notion is obviously related to the sufi orders which advocate some form of withdrawal from earthly pleasures in favour of the divine pleasures to come. Although the influence of the sufi orders can be detected among the Berti, it is, nevertheless, minimal when compared to their influence in West Africa and other parts of Muslim Sudan. A very few Berti claim affiliation to the Tijaniya order of North and West Africa, or the

Mahdism of the Sudan. The leaders of both of these sufi orders have shown their lack of interest in this world. The faki is, in any case, expected to be "a man of Allah" as opposed to a "man of this world". He is obliged to exhibit little interest in the struggle for leadership and to suppress the temptation to accumulate and enjoy wealth. The social pressure on the faki to lead a life of poverty is indicated by the term fagīr (property-less) which is occasionally interchanged with the word faki. Those who manage to break through and become too rich eventually find little time for intensive religious rituals. They, therefore, gradually withdraw, often displaying contempt for the practices normally required of them as fakis.

Acquisition of the words of God

In spite of this lack of privileged access to God, the faki plays a very important role in the context of Berti religious life, and it is hoped that by examining the role of the fakis, the thesis has been modestly able to expose a wide range of aspects of Berti religion. This should not imply a clear-cut division between Berti secular and religious activities. Nothing so well describes the Berti attitudes in this respect as Crapanzano's statement: "all activities are religious in so far as they are contingent to the will of Allah" (Crapanzano 1973:4). As should be evident from the thesis, the faki has the power to turn every important social activity to the benefit of his clients. His role ranges from selling a few charms to curing sickness to the provision of blessing

for the dead. He holds this position, or more precisely this power is attributed to him, because of the advantage he has over his clients in having acquired the knowledge of the words of God. The power of the words of God lies in their protective nature and in their potential ability in achieving various aspirations. The ethnography, however, defies the expressed belief that it is the words of God that the faki employs to achieve these ends. In fact, he uses a lot of materials which are not derived from the Koran, and are, therefore, not strictly speaking the words of God. It does not, however, worry a Berti to realize that what he refers to as words of God, for example when speaking about the contents of a hijāb, may contain elements which cannot be traced in the Koran. As a rule, such elements are seen as deriving from the Koran as they have been brought into use by religious imams who have in turn been inspired by God with certain kinds of knowledge. The hijāb, containing what the illiterate undifferentiatingly regards as the words of God, is attached to the body or other objects. A relatively superior method of obtaining the words of God is discussed in the chapter on erasure, which illustrates how they are internalized into the body (see Goody 1968:230).

The acquisition of the words of God through erasure and hijābs has, in each case, specific disadvantages. The drinking of erasure is only temporarily effective; the retaining of hijābs is inconvenient in that the hijābs can be left behind, lost, or made ineffective through exposure to ritual dirtiness. Moreover, the efficacy of both methods can be adversely affected by the shortcomings of their authors, i.e. the fakis who compose them.

The highest form of acquiring the words of God, partially or fully, is that which is achieved by fakis. This is their internalization in the head (rās), the very part which presides (yaras) over the whole body. In another sense, it is the commitment of the Koran to memory which enables the faki to outstrip his clients. Memorisation of the Koran does not only have an advantage over carrying it in the form of a hijāb or internalizing it in the form of erasure. It is equally superior to the ability to read it from the Book. It enables the reciter to invoke it, reproduce it, or rearrange it from within himself instantly, according to his need.

The Bertis and literacy

The analysis of Bertis religious notions on which the thesis centres is inseparable from the role of literacy in their society, and some of the themes of the thesis relate directly to Goody's theory of literacy. This theory was originally outlined in an article he wrote jointly with Watt in the Journal of the Comparative Study of Society and History (vol.5, 1962-3:305-345). The article was later republished in the collection of essays called "Literacy in Traditional Societies" which he edited and to which he wrote the introduction (Goody 1968). Later, Goody expounded more fully his theory in his book "The Domestication of the Savage Mind" (Goody 1977). Two other relevant but less detailed articles, one of which was again written jointly with Watt, appeared in 1973 (Goody 1973,

Goody and Watt 1973). The main theme of Goody's theory pertains to literacy or writing as the variable which accentuates the difference between the so called modern and traditional societies. In the modern societies, literacy has provided for a qualitative change in the mode of thought resulting in a great cultural leap. The capacity of literacy or more precisely of writing is summarised in the following quotation: "...writing, by objectifying words, and by making them and their meaning available for much more prolonged and intensive scrutiny than is possible orally, encourages private thought" (Goody and Watt 1962-3:344).

Goody added more recently:

"No longer did the problem of memory storage dominate man's intellectual life; the human mind was freed to study static `text` ..., a process that enabled man to stand back from his creation and examine it in a more abstract, generalised, and `rational` way. By making it possible to scan the communications of mankind over a much wider time span, literacy encourages at the very same time, criticism and commentary ..." (Goody 1977:37).

The new mode of communication has thus led to a continuous refinement and development of Western culture. At the other pole, the non-literate societies have remained encapsulated in their oral and hence more or less static culture:

"In oral societies the cultural tradition is transmitted almost entirely by face-to-face communication; and changes in its content are accompanied by the homeostatic process of forgetting or transforming those parts of the tradition that cease to be either necessary or relevant" (Goody and Watt 1962-3:344).

The very old dichotomy between the two types of societies which Goody examines (Goody 1977:146-162) seems to reinforce itself. This is due to the single variable, i.e. writing, which prevails in only one type of society to the exclusion of the other. In the oral societies, the only storage of information is in the memory. The transmission of knowledge tends to be subject to a homeostatic process. The knowledge transmitted is not only reduced quantitatively by the social function of memory and its limited capacity for storing information, but is also altered qualitatively in a significant way. As every oral process is an indivisible part of a concrete situation, only the relevant information is perpetuated; the rest is gradually filtered away (Goody and Watt 1962-3:307). This process has important repercussions on the way that oral societies conceive of their past experience: "One of the most important results of this homeostatic tendency is that the individual has little perception of the past except in terms of the present" (Ibid:310).

What is important here is that the materialisation of the cumulative speech in writing makes it possible to be "inspected, manipulated and reordered in a variety of ways" (Ibid:76). This in turn enables the literate person "to stand back from his creation and examine it in a more abstract, generalised, and 'rational' way" (Ibid:37).

The part of Goody's theory outlined above deals with literate societies in which writing is used as an independent mode of communication. There is, however, a considerable proportion of the globe in which, although writing is used, its potentialities are only exploited to a limited extent. Goody identifies the literacy in these societies as "restricted" or "religious" literacy:

"The nature of religious literacy inevitably placed certain limitations on its effectiveness; it was a restricted literacy both in term of the proportion of those who could read and the uses to which writing was put. Moreover, its religious basis meant that a major function was communication to or about God (Goody 1973:41)".

As far as the Berti are concerned, there is indeed a close association between traditional literacy and religion. They were both introduced by Muslim expansion and have continued reinforcing one another up to the present time. The early Arab intruders who taught the Koran combined preaching with teaching their converts how

to write. Many Berti villagers still think that every written thing must be sacred, and in my schooldays we were told that papers bearing Arabic writing were not to be left lying on the street, and we therefore had to collect them and burn them to avoid their being exposed to dirt. All the Arabic letters are sacred because they are potential components of the names of God. The Arabic letters are not considered to be secular nor abstracted from the Koran with which they were originally identified.

The Berti's attitude to literacy, however, only partly confirms Goody's insight that restricted literacy is not secular and that it does not form an independent mode of communication. The association between religion and literacy is clearly evident in the reluctance of the Berti to employ writing in non-religious spheres of life in the same way as they use it in the religious domain (see Goody 1968:14; 1973:41). In Berti society, writing is taught primarily to help facilitate the transmission of religious knowledge in the khalwas, and, as Goody suggests, its main purpose is communication with or about God rather than between individuals. Outside the religious domain, writing is occasionally used by the Berti, for example in writing letters, pedigrees, lists of donors in sacrifices, and in court. As far as the Berti are concerned, the finding that their literacy is confined to the religious domain, or that it is not an independent means of communication, remains an outsider's opinion and cannot be convincingly verified by their own views. As I have pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, it is a characteristic of primary importance in the Berti way of thinking that they do not acknowledge a clear distinction between

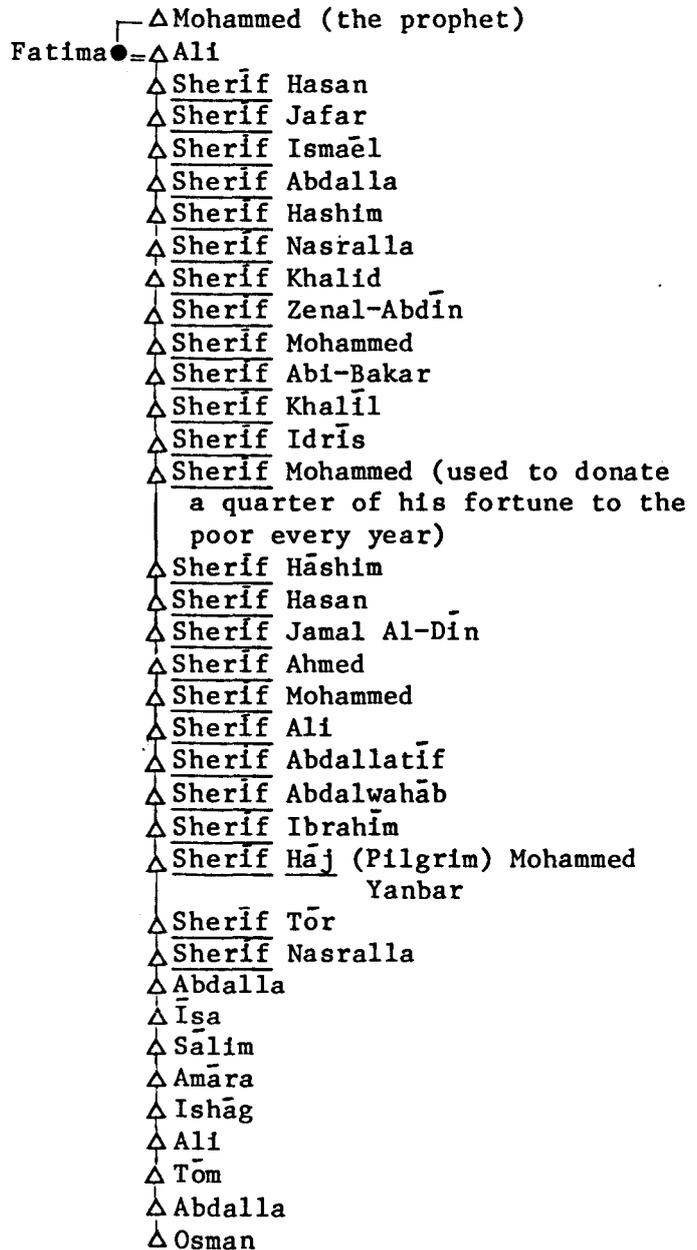
religious and secular activities. In fact, they seem to conceive of religion as encompassing almost every sphere of life. Moreover, despite the limited training of the fakis in writing, and despite the limited number of those who become literate, writing is effectively used in a wide range of activities which contribute to the welfare of individuals. In their application of writing, the Berti are obviously constrained by their lack of knowledge of how and in which activities the writing can be used. The whole thesis is a demonstration of the scope of the uses of writing and literacy in general in Berti society. A Berti does not feel any need to write a biography, make a shopping list or describe a village scene, but for him writing becomes necessary if he wants to cure a disease, to boost his business, to protect himself against weapons, to bless the dead, etc.

The role of restricted literacy in Berti society seems to modify to a certain extent Goody's generalisation that full literacy promotes scepticism and leads to changes in the society in which it exists. In opposition to this is the homoestatism of oral communication, which does not enable the individual to scrutinize his past experience in an abstract way and is therefore less conducive to scepticism and change in the society. Strangely enough, the position of restricted literacy does not lie somewhere between the two extremes as one might expect. The chapter on Koranic schools demonstrates how literacy is used to support memory. What is stipulated in the religious books is not subject to criticism, and literacy is used to help to commit it to memory. In this way, it is through the use of literacy that the religious knowledge is

protected from being changed by simple forgetting "which is the final stage of the homeostatic tendency" (Ibid:30). Restricted literacy is mainly used to document religious dogmas and thus make them immune to forgery. In Chapter 6, I mentioned how sand divination is sanctioned by reference being made to its literary origin. For the Berti, to say that such and such is mentioned in "the book" is sufficient evidence to guarantee its authenticity. Literacy therefore appears as a factor resisting the changes which might otherwise come about through oral communication.

Appendix 1 (A)
A Basanga Pedigree

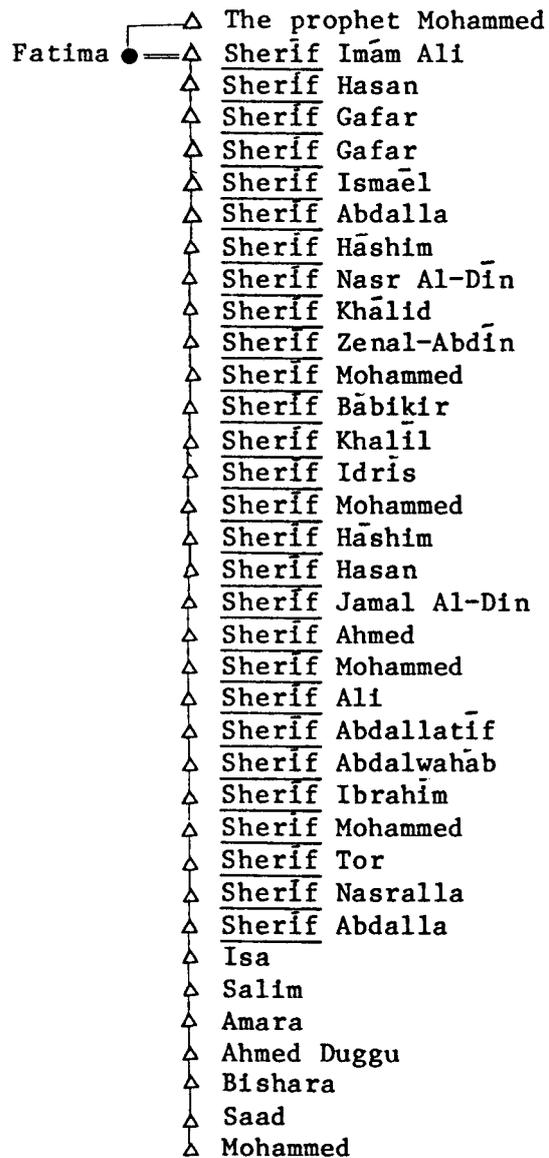
The document starts as follows: "This is the pedigree of Osman Abdalla Al-tom, his brother Mohammed Saleh Abdalla Al-tom and their sisters Ashaya Abdalla Al-tom, Medina ..., Hajja ..., and Halima...". Some of the names are followed by comments or nicknames. The pedigree ends as follows: "... Son of Sherif Hasan son of Imam Ali who was the father of Hasan and Husen and who were the sons of our prophetess Fatima Al-Zahra; the daughter of the prophet Mohammed ..., with whom the pedigree is ended".



(B)

A Basanga pedigree

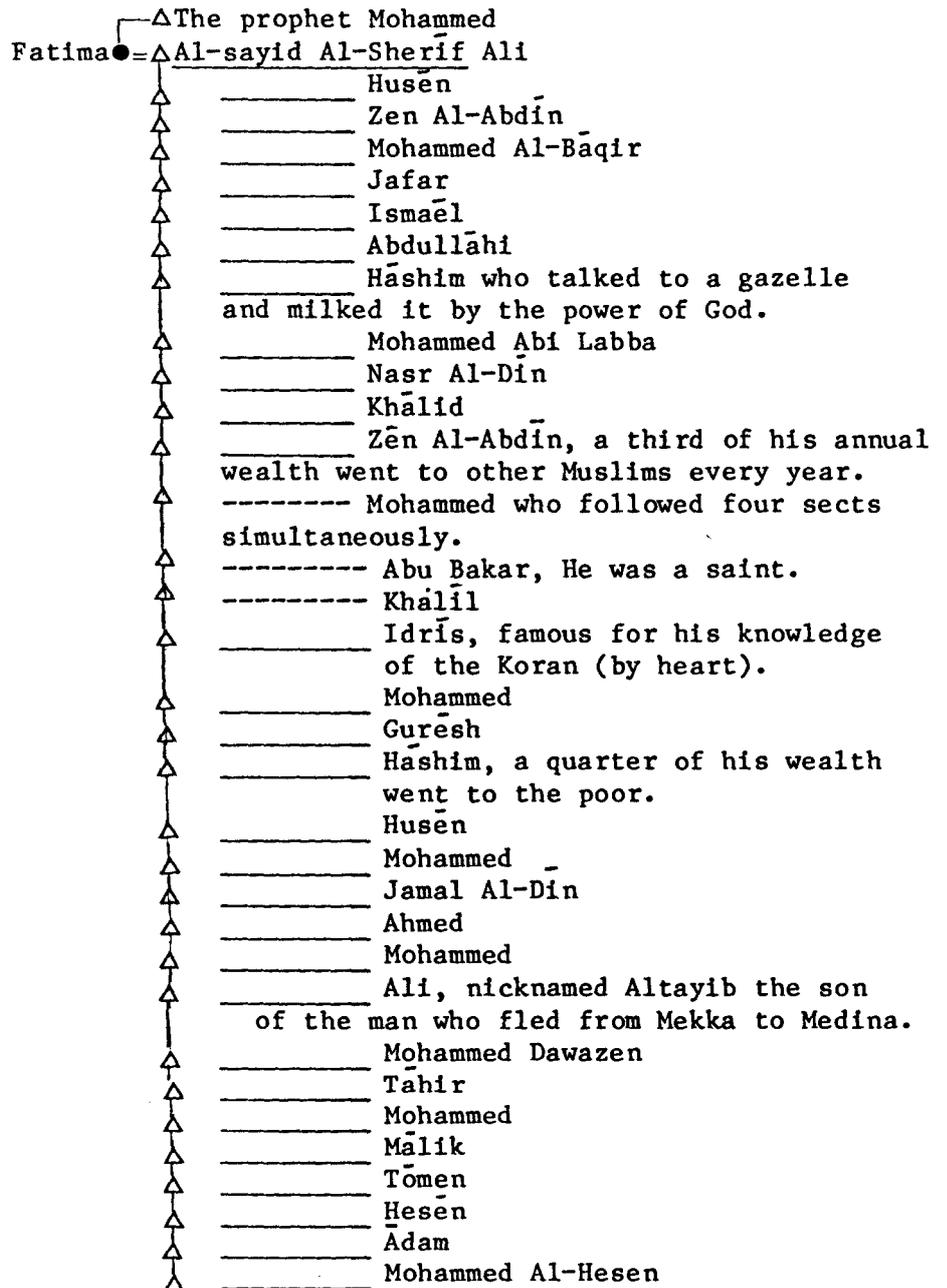
The document is dated the 25th of Rabi Al-thani 1312 hij. (1894). It is concluded by the following: "... Sherif Hasan son of Imam Ali from Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Mohammed, the master of the prophets and with whom the pedigree is concluded."



(C)

A Sharafa pedigree

"Khalifa Omer said: learn your pedigree so that you maintain a contact with your relatives".



Appendix 2
A faki's library

The Koran

Abu Maasher. N.D.

Abu Maasher Al-falaki Al-kabīr. Cairo, Maktabat Al-mashhad Al-husēni.

Al-Ansāri, Abdalwahab Ahmed. 943 hij.

Mukhtasar Tazkirat Al-imām Al-siwēdi fi Al-tib. Cairo, Dar Al-kutub Al-muhammediya.

Al-Bōni, Ahmed Ibn Ali. 622 hij.

Shams Al-māarif Al-kubrā Wa Latāif Al-māarif. Beirut, Maktaba Shabīa (rep. 1970)

Al-Sayūti, J.A. 911 hij.

Al-rahma fi Al-tib wa hikma. Beirut, Maktaba Thagāfiya.

Al-Tukhi, Abdalfattah. (a). N.D.

Al-khātīm Al-sulēmāni wa Al-ilm Al-rabbāni. Cairo, Maktabat Al-gamahiriya.

Al-Tukhi, Abdalfattāh. (b). N.D.

Ighath Al-mazlūm fi Kashfi Ashār Al-ulūm. Beirut, Maktaba thagāfiya.

Al-Tukhi, Abdalfattāh. 1961

Dalēl Al-hīrān fi Tali Al-insān. Egypt.

Athīr Al-dīn, Abdullahi. N.D.

Al-tafsīr Al-kabīr Al-musama Bilbahr Al-muhīt. Riad, Modern Palace Library and Press.

Ibēd, Ibrahim Mohammed. 1973

Majmuāt Amaliyyat wa Mujarrabat Al-imām Al-gazāli Al-kabīr. Cairo, Dār Al-tibāa Al-muhammediya.

Ibn Sina (Avicenna). N.D.

Majamaāt Ibn Sīna Al-kubra fi Al-ulūm Al-ruhaniya. Teheran, Dar Al-kutub Al-Ilmiya.

Marzūgi, Ali Abi Yahia. 1970

Jawāhir Lamāa fi Istihdār Mulūk Al-jin fi Al-wagt wa Sāa. Beirut,
Not Known.

Sanūsi, Abi Abdillahi. N.D.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يا أيدي اللهم يا بنتوت عز الى حال
والنساء عا جهوز يا بنتوت يا بنتوت
يا فقهار يا بنتوت يا فقهار يا بنتوت يا
فقهار يا بنتوت نتكتب ما بدا عا بدا و
بعد بسبب العمير وعمات
بزر وعود القدر ودر القدر
هذا النفا

والصماء والطلافة و...
هذا النفا
والصماء والطلافة و...
هذا النفا

Appendix 4
Berti and Classic Arabic Terms
For Figures of Divination

| Berti Terms | Arabic Terms | Arabic Nicknames |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1- <u>Jōdala</u> | <u>Jōdala</u> | |
| 2- <u>Hur</u> (Good) | <u>Al-ahīān</u> (periods) | <u>Al-dāhik</u> (the laugher) |
| 3- <u>Rāya</u> (Flag) | <u>Ataba Dākhila</u> (threshold [inward]) | <u>Raya</u> (Flag) |
| 4- <u>Biād</u> (Whiteness) | <u>Biād</u> (Witeness) | |
| 5- <u>Mahzūm</u> (Defeated) | <u>Nakle al-khad</u> (pure cheeked, handsome) | <u>Ashgar</u> (Blond) |
| 6- <u>Rakīza</u> (Pillar) | <u>Ataba Khārija</u> (Threshold [outward]) | |
| 7- <u>Hamra</u> (Red) | <u>Hamra</u> (Red) | |
| 8- <u>Jillīd</u> (Unlucky) | <u>Inkīs</u> (Reversed, Unlucky) | <u>Mankos</u> (Reversed, Unlucky) |
| 9- <u>Surra</u> (Bundle) | <u>Ugla</u> (Knot) | <u>Thakīf</u> (Skillful) |
| 10- <u>Dāmīr</u> (Emaciated) | <u>Ijtimāa</u> (Meeting) | |
| 11- <u>Rasan</u> (Halter) | <u>Nusra Dākhila</u> (Success [inside]) | <u>Saada</u> (Happiness) |
| 12- <u>Tarīg</u> (Road) | <u>Tarīg</u> (Road) | |
| 13- <u>Khārij</u> (Departee) | <u>Gabd Khārij</u> (Grip, gain [outside]) | |
| 14- <u>Tigil</u> (Baboon) | <u>Jamāa</u> (Group) | |
| 15- <u>Gābid/Dākhil</u> (Entrant) | <u>Gabd Dākhil</u> (Grip, gain [inside]). | |
| 16- <u>Jabbār</u> (Tyrant) | <u>Nusra Khārija</u> (Success [outside]) | |

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