An Amuletic Manuscript: *Baraka*
and *Nyama* in a Sub-Saharan
African Prayer Manual

The Lilly Library is home to a copy of the *Dala’i al-Khayrat* (The Proofs of Good Deeds), a manual of Sufi litanies (sing. *wind*, pl. *awrad*) written in the fifteenth century by the Moroccan mystic al-Jazuli (d. ca. 860/1456), an Iberber from Sus, Morocco.1 The text, historically popular in sub-Saharan Africa, contains a collection of prayers to the Prophet Muhammad arranged according to the days of the week; it also includes a description of the Prophet’s tomb and his many names. The manual served to guide adepts into the act of oral remembrance (*dhikr al-salat*) achieved through repetition, whether aloud or silently, alone or collectively. Because versions of the *Dala’i al-Khayrat* often included descriptions of Mecca and Medina, the text also came to be used as a *hajj* guide by pilgrims from throughout the Islamic world. Because the *Dala’i al-Khayrat* is intended as a mnemonic device for recitation, ideally to be memorized, the text likewise is amenable to variation depending on choice and need.2

The Lilly copy of the *Dala’i al-Khayrat* is unbound and includes twenty-seven square leaves of paper and sixty bifolia, with the average leaf measuring 6.9 × 7.9 centimeters. The leaves are piled into a stack of folios protected by a leather cover that comprises a flap and its spine. One of the cover’s flaps has been replaced with a piece of leather, unattached to the spine, which rests loosely atop the pages. The cover and leaves fit into a custom-made leather pouch with a rich patina (Figures 8.1 and 8.2). Fine strip-work lines the outer edges of the front triangular flap and divides the area into two triangular sections. The leatherworker enhanced the top of the pouch and its back seams with whip-stitched leather in a style often used to stitch amulet packets. The front of the pouch is also incised with a dot-filled diagonal grid pattern, while its bottom and back are each engraved with an X. The pouch once hung from delicate, twisted leather thongs (now severed) that are beautifully knotted and attached to the sides. A lighter-colored area worn into the center indicates where a thong once secured the pouch shut.

The manuscript’s text, including catchwords,3 is written in different hands, indicating that the task of transcription was undertaken by various scribes. The majority of the calligraphy is executed in brown ink. Script in black ink fills the preface and some other folios, which may have been added at a later date. Red ink punctuates the words “God” and “Muhammad,” the vocative exclamation “o you,” and the first lines of many new sections.4 The text is written in what has been called the “traditional cursive” style.5 This calligraphic style is believed to be a variant of *Maghrabi* script, employed in a version of *Ajami* particular
Upon acquiring the *Dalâ‘il al-Khayrat*, Ruth E. Adomeit guessed it to be of Bedouin origin, although evidence internal to the manuscript points to Sub-Saharan Africa. Like the script, the manuscript’s decoration suggests an origin east of the Niger Bend, while the “traditional cursive” style of the script suggests that the work was made in what is now northern Nigeria, in particular from a Hausa area. A conclusive attribution is difficult, however, because the book and pouch feature a program of motifs found widely across west Africa.

Although it is impossible to unravel exactly which visual associations the Lilly *Dalâ‘il al-Khayrat*’s artist drew upon, and how the work’s intended audience interpreted such local motifs, the manuscript exemplifies a stage in the process of indigenous motifs being transplanted to Islamic devotional texts, as well as the possible affinities of these motifs with Islamic beliefs and designs. Patterns can thus disclose the resulting lexicon of Afro-Islamic motifs at work in a nineteenth-century west African codicological context.

Only rarely have scholars of Islamic art addressed patterns in sub-Saharan Islamic manuscripts. Considerations of geometric motifs have included vague but recurrent comparisons to textiles, with some mention of leatherwork. Qur’anic marginalia have been discussed as recitation aids, and geometric designs as applied to manuscripts and other written arts in the form of abstracted magic squares have also been considered. “Purely decorative” magic squares, devoid of letters or numbers, are cited as adding aesthetic qualities crucial to textual efficacy in northern Nigerian amulets and manuscripts. In amuletic practices, in which texts are frequently used, the many sub-Saharan Islamic manuscript motifs appear adaptable to a diverse array of media. Studies of amulets also reveal a flexible relationship between textual and geometric patterns, demonstrating the ways in which practitioners could use both traditions interchangeably.

On one hand, producers of sub-Saharan written arts are thought to have created west African patterns and painting styles particularly for Islamic manuscript designs. On the other hand, north African roots have also been posited, as have links with Near Eastern sources. Elements of west and north African design intermingled for centuries on ancient trade and later, *hajj* routes, before equally varied influences from the Islamic world joined the sub-Saharan circulation of forms and ideas. Affinities between Islamic and indigenous practices facilitated the interactions and borrowings between both religio-cultural systems, a phenomenon to which the Lilly manuscript certainly bears witness.

In the Lilly *Dalâ‘il al-Khayrat*, west African design elements and Islamic prayers appear to mutually enhance each other. Tapping spiritual resources through indigenous visual channels, the manuscript’s powerful sub-Saharan motifs indeed work alongside Arabic script to create what Prussin calls “a double insurance [providing] a new agency through which particular actions can be effected.” Such patterns include incisions on the manuscript’s pouch, Akan *adinkra* cloth patterns.
and the quincunx (a design with four intersecting lines meeting at a center point, which forms two triangles with touching tips). The checkerboard incised on the pouch can be seen as a Ramana tiv (sing. ti) graphic sign; it also includes elements that resemble Hausa patterns associated with reptiles. Furthermore, the adinkra patterns and the quincunx shape often occur on Akan regalia, as well as on masks, fabrics, amulets, and beaded designs throughout west Africa.

As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the Lily prayer manual therefore exemplifies a strategic synchronization of indigenous African motifs in an Islamic prayer book, catering to the reader’s expectations of symbolic vocabulary and deploying potent patterns that could reiter- ate and strengthen the Arabic prayers contained within al-Jazuli’s text. The manuscript’s artist may have selected patterns that maximize the work’s ability to marshal the twin Afro-Islamic concepts of baraka and nyama. In Islamic belief, baraka is divine presence, charisma, wisdom, and blessing, while in the thought of Mande and closely related peoples, nyama comprises a universal animating force directed by owners of objects and possessors of knowledge.

The Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat may have been made or used in areas where both the concepts of nyama and baraka were relevant. When a devotee uses a book like the Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat to invoke prayers, he or she probably relates and expands both nyama and baraka, both nurturing and potent apotropaic forces. Similarly, each time the adept touches or uses these sacred words and powerful motifs, he or she likely accrues further baraka through Islamic prayers and nyama through the activation of the manuscript’s potent Afro-Islamic motifs.

The relationship between amulets and secrecy in west sub-Saharan Africa changed as west African Muslim clerics—and, to some extent, non-Muslim practitioners—increasingly used Arabic writing. Amulet producers were not the only viewers able to understand legible Arabic script. Because Arabic writing was much more accessible than, for example, Mande kili kili secret speech, a reader and others allowed to view an amuletic text were able to comprehend it. Perhaps efforts to reenforce this somewhat compromised secrecy with a tradition of highly esoteric talismans have resulted in a tension between the covert secrecy and the overt display of Arabic writing singular to sub-Saharan Africa.

In west Africa, as opposed to the rest of the Islamic world, Arabic script is rarely viewed publicly. Occupying the space between manuscript and amulet, books and other textual objects are instead often worn on the body or carried as talismans, suspended or carried in beautiful pouches and surrounded by west African trappings of amuletic secrecy. The Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat is an apt example of secrecy reconciled with accessibility in order to secure dual potency. Working in a land with infrequent Arabic speakers, the book’s maker created a text that, because of its legibility, facilitated the flawless recitation of words seeking blessing and protection, then ensconced it in a leather pouch that radiated and hid this power.

Al-Jazuli’s Dala’il al-Khayrat was frequently carried as a talisman. Although it does not exemplify amulets that retain power through permanent encasement, the manuscript in its leather pouch reflects the transformative power of legible and unseen writing. The following excerpt, which chronicles Akan practices involving Arabic script, reinforces the fact that the written word itself could carry amuletic qualities:

The appeal of the written word to the Akan, especially when used in magico-religious contexts, had little to do with its semantic meaning. It was the sacred, the spiritual, dimensions of writing that were of the greatest interest to the Akan. In a purely Akan (i.e., allograph) setting, Arabic script did not function as a vehicle for verbal communication. Rather, it was perceived at a more abstract level as a symbol of man’s relationship with God. In this context, the lettering, the epigraphic symbol, ceases to function as a medium of communication and becomes a message in and of itself.

Accordingly, west African clerics incorporated Arabic writing into their practices. Alongside oral communication, Arabic letters constitute potent elements of esoteric knowledge singular to west African Islamic healing practices, in which book arts play an important role. Languages spoken in the Sahel include words that illustrate the frequent conflation of amulets and script. For example, the Tamacheq word for an Islamic prayer book worn around the neck is tcherét, or amulet, while tiéré in Wolof literally means “a book or writings” and designates the encased papers inscribed with potent texts and worn as talismans. Similarly, the common Mande word for amulet is sëbëm, meaning “writing.”

Instances of the amuletic serviceability of sacred writing indicate that legible or not, sewn into a packet or not, script serves as an important ingredient for efficacious protection and blessing. In an oft-used remedy, the cleric writes blessed words (usually from the Qur’an) on a slate, washes them from the board, and prepares a sacred liquid. The client can then absorb the words by imbibing them, bathing with them, or using them as a lotion or compress.

According to tradition, Arabic letters are very powerful because God transmitted the Qur’an to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel in the Arabic language. In sub-Saharan Islamic practices, the use of the Qur’an as an amulet allows devotees to access this scriptural source directly, as attested to in cases found in Hausaland and in the Borno area. The devout may store wrapped Qur’ans in their houses for prophylactic purposes, and a family may keep a copy near an expecting mother or a newborn child. Sometimes known as al-Hisn al-Hasin (the fortified fortress), and including certain protective Qur’anic chapters (suras) alongside other prayers, many of these popular small manuscripts are still available in markets. In fact, some Qur’anic suras are considered
such potent antidotes to illness that clients frequently request their transcription for amuletic purposes.

Legibility can also increase a book’s protective function through its mnemonic role, aiding in recitation and thus acting in essence as an audible amulet. As the Dala’il al-Khayrat is a book of litanies in praise of the Prophet Muhammad, and as it is generally believed that the repetition of the Prophet’s many names conveys blessings upon the person reciting these praises, the text’s purpose of obtaining blessings and protection remains central. Furthermore, African philosophies continent-wide are replete with the importance of the spoken word. Even words that are legible can function within the realm of the supernatural, thereby creating an ambiguity of purpose—attempting to convey information or using script-forms as magical devices.

The very legibility of Arabic script can enhance an amulet’s secrecy as well. Because many Sahelians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not fluent in Arabic, legible script, no matter how meticulously written, was often considered a secret medium of divine knowledge. The instruction, through rote repetition, of a few key phrases, often by teachers who were not fluent Arabic speakers, further emphasized the physical and occult properties of the Arabic script, as well as the perception of each individual word’s link to spiritual power. Because writing can be semantically opaque despite its legibility, some Qur’anic chapters and verses may contain subtle, even hidden, meanings. Furthermore, many writings produced and used by West African Sufis emphasize the mystical meaning of single letters. In a system of gematria, each Arabic character has a corresponding number. As a result, clear writing can facilitate clear communication while retaining elements of secrecy. Additionally, scribes may scramble otherwise readable Arabic letters to form meanings that can only be understood by a select few.
Much as the Dala‘il al-Khayrat captures this tension between concealing and revealing, so does a sub-Saharan amulet also held in the Lilly Library (Figures 8.3 and 8.4). This work contains the "Beautiful Names of God" (al-asma‘ al-husna) and was most likely made in the nineteenth century in present-day northern Nigeria.13 The amulet is folded onto itself, concealing words—a litany of God's many names, epithets, and attributes—that become unseen but remain powerful. The work also has an abstract geometric design likely meant to remain visible when folded. The Lilly amulet's outer design recalls similar patterns on the Sunday and Monday prayer panels of the Lilly Dala‘il al-Khayrat, functioning as a decorative "cap" to the folded amulet (Figures 8.5 and 8.6).14

The amulet's two dark brown calligraphic outlines surround the nearly square box that is filled in some areas with a light brown wash. A large diamond, divided by an X whose tips reach the outer points of each corner box, fills the central panel. Both lines of this X form one side of a smaller X in each corner square. Embazoned just above this pattern is the proclamation "Victory is from God, and conquest is imminent" (Qur'an 110:1). This bold declaration guarded the back of the folded amuletic packet and, by consequence, its owner, who may have found the amulet particularly protective in a martial context.

Much like the Lilly Dala‘il al-Khayrat, this amulet has a dual nature: it is secretive because it contains text stored away, but it remains legible—and therefore accessible—upon need and desire. The Lilly amulet also is embellished with a protective graphic design, much like the pouch of the Lilly Dala‘il al-Khayrat. As a consequence, both works on paper contain concealed script that is otherwise legible, an amuletic technique that is rather typical of Islamic manuscripts in sub-Saharan Africa.

Many of the Lilly manuscript's decorative patterns appear to indicate that the work's power is reinforced by the inclusion of nyama. Nyama is a potent energy that operates beneath the visible surface of the world to give it structure and make it work.40 Beautiful objects such as this manual contain significant amounts of nyama. Mande often describe nyama as a dangerous and negative force that can be turned positive through knowledge and expertise. Such knowledge facilitates dašhw, or recipes, used to create šebènw (amulets) and hubu (power objects), which help a user harness nyama for his or her own ends.42

Only highly trained specialists can work with nyama. Artists, who are often called nyamakalaw (specialists in handling nyama), can orchestrate dramatic transformations during which the artist imbues the final product with his or her own considerable nyama. For example, blacksmiths master fire to change iron ore to liquid. Nyamakalaw are characterized as "points of access to terrific powers, [which they] rearrange and transmit [through their art]."43 The Lilly manuscript's scribe, painter, and leatherworker may have exerted nyama that had been strengthened through expertise in indigenous practices and combined with Islamic knowledge.44 Such fusions in the Lilly Dala‘il al-Khayrat could have thus created a tangible power object containing highly volatile nyama channeled into a usable form.

In addition to nyama, the Islamic concept of baraka, or blessing, is frequently at work in books carrying amuletic and devotional qualities, such as al-Jazuli's Dala‘il al-Khayrat. In Islamic thought, baraka is an esoteric (batin) force that can be accrued from diverse objects.45 All baraka comes from God, and the text of the Qur'an is thus considered replete with divine grace. The effusion of baraka from the Qur'an consequently flows into any Arabic letter or word. Further, handwritten books
such as the Lilly manuscript are often thought to be permeated with the calligrapher’s own blessing. In sub-Saharan Africa, for both Muslims and non-Muslims, Arabic writing itself forms a key to understanding God’s secrets and the hidden truths of the natural world. One can use writing to communicate with supernatural powers. For example, the writing of certain verses of the Qur’an can establish “a direct link between [the desired outcome] mentioned in the verse as an act of God” and its net result. Thus, the words of the Dala’il al-Khayrat contain the esoteric quality of baraka believed to be at work in a number of objects and places.

Because of their links to the twin Afro-Islamic concepts of baraka and nyama, the patterns in the Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat provide an opportunity to consider the ways in which pictorial elements can help express universal power within a syncretistic cultural context. Three west African designs in the manuscript are of particular interest here: the incised pattern on the front of the manual’s pouch; designs similar to adinkra cloth patterns as found in the Saturday prayer panel; and the quincunx motif found in the Thursday prayer panel. Although it is impossible to determine exactly where the artists obtained these designs, or to what extent these were modified, the motifs were chosen not only because they are ubiquitous in west African arts but also, and perhaps more importantly, because they may all be considered to be infused with nyama.

Like other popular prayer manuals, the Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat was used to intone Arabic-language litanies and to promote the Islamic faith south of the Sahara. The text’s preface, which clearly states that “[memorizing this book] is one of the most important missions in following of God,” illustrates its purpose in Islamic pious education and proselytization. It also suggests that the transmission of knowledge as contained in the text occurred primarily in oral form, buttressed by the written word and its accompanying visual vocabulary.

As noted previously, painted panels divide the Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat into halves, thirds, and weekdays. The folio containing the Tuesday prayer panel could indicate the ways in which a devotee may have used this work (Figure 8.2.). To the left of the panel, a vertical inscription notes that the manuscript was either “in the possession of” or “used in the presence of” a man named Ḥusayn ibn al-Sahl (literally, “Servant of the Sahel”). The latter reading implies that a group of adepts may have held regular prayer meetings in an individual’s personal residence, and that a certain Ḥusayn ibn al-Sahl may have been both the manuscript’s owner and the leader of prayer sessions. His appellation “Abd al-Sahl” provides further confirmation that the Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat was probably produced in Sahelian territory.

Meticulous vocalization marks indicate that this work was not meant for native Arabic speakers. Generally, only the Qur’an is fully vocalized because its precise oral recitation has remained of prime importance in both Arabic and non-Arabic lands. The fastidious insertion of vocalization marks throughout the manuscript thus indicates the importance of conveying accurate Arabic-language prayer formulas to an audience composed of non-native Arabic speakers.

Editorial marks appear throughout the text: some marks ask the reader to repeat certain praise phrases for emphasis; others include prescriptions for additional prayer formulas; and still others make available new prayer phrases. This critical apparatus suggests that the Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat was used as a guide to teach and perform oral prayers, its pedagogical and performative purposes evident both in its preface and its extra-textual notes.

The Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat’s mention of Ḥusayn ibn al-Sahl on its Tuesday prayer panel suggests a sub-Saharan provenance, and its script specific to the Sahelian region, its array of west African motifs, and its collection of loose-leaf folios contained in a leather satchel are all typical of sub-Saharan manuscripts produced during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such manuscripts are often held in a leather pouch.
that is incised or otherwise embellished, closed with a flap held in place by a thong, and frequently comprised of loose leaves that bear distinctive geometric designs rendered in earth tones within rectangular panels. The Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat is thus typical of sub-Saharan Islamic manuscripts produced at the turn of the twentieth century.

The Lilly prayer manual is nestled in a leather pouch featuring designs that, like the other patterns in the book proper, carry a constellation of meanings in Sahelian arts. The pouch’s chiseled motifs are similar to the large number of Bamana graphic signs, or pictographs, called rìw (singular ri) (Figure 8.8), as well as Hausa patterns used on leather work, embroidery, and other media. Dots fill the lozenge-shaped spaces of the diagonally oriented grid on the pouch’s front cover (see Figure 8.1). The flap’s spine and back bear X-shaped incisions, as well. According to the Bamana philosophical system from which rìw developed, these signs bear weighty cosmological meaning. For instance, a large X usually signifies the four elemental ingredients for fertility. The X can also evoke the universe and humankind, as well as the four cardinal directions.

The grid pattern on the front of the pouch may also be an elaboration of the northern knot design also common in Hausa art, called the dagi. The many interstices in this grid form diamond shapes recalling ti lozenge signs, and they also recall other Hausa patterns. In Mande thought, the lozenge exemplifies the four celestial directions in a subtle variation of the X (which can represent the four cardinal directions). The lozenge therefore signifies fecundity and universal origins. Mande cemda (sand divination) practitioners may also use four marks in a lozenge shape to represent the balance that heralds a positive outcome for the client. Within book arts, a cover for the divination manual Ktab Moussu (Book of Moses) made in northern Nigeria carries this pattern. This work may well illustrate that the dot-filled diamond’s potential for garnering nyama, or a similar power, was deemed appropriate for the book format in particular.

The design on the manuscript’s pouch could also suggest reptilian and/or amphibian skin. Several Hausa clans were reported in 1930 to have snake totemics, while other clans were protected and aided by lizards, crocodiles, and frogs. Snakes sometimes seem to miraculously scale trees, and crocodiles and frogs can breathe air and live in water. Creatures so able to travel between the realms of sky, land, and water are highly important in many indigenous belief systems, as their liminal abilities are believed to enable communication between humans and supernatural beings. These animals are often rendered with hatched patterns (designating skin) throughout west Africa. Hausa designers have also used patterns likely based on the Islamic dagi, or northern knot, but with a hatched effect similar to that of the Lilly pouch, to represent stylized reptiles (Figure 8.9). If the pattern on the front of the Lilly pouch does recall reptile skin, it may have been seen as encoding liminal power. An artist may have used such associations with reptilian

Finally, the hatched grid on the front of the pouch closely resembles an Islamic magic square (marubbu or waft), although divested of its constituent numbers and letters. Magic squares garner power from the association of each of the twenty-eight Arabic letters with a number. Numbers are often arranged in a sequence that "translates" to a proper name or the words of a sentence on the grid’s first row. Frequently seen as small models of the harmonious universe, magic squares often serve as symbolic representations of life in constant flux, perpetually renewed through contact with a divine source at the center of the cosmos. While the image on the front of this pouch may not be a true magic square, it is certainly related to the power represented by its simulations and may well have been designed to invoke that power.

Grids in Afro-Islamic and non-Muslim lexicons serve multiple purposes, here united in a pouch that exemplifies the complexities of west African Islamic imagery. Whether or not one interprets the grid as a reptilian design or a magic square filled with dots, the pouch’s lattice-work patterns seem strategically designed to evoke recognition of and confidence in the power held inside for a viewer conversant in multiple symbolic languages that range from the purely ornamental to the potentially protective.

Akan cultures have long been known for rich inventories of proverbs and related figurine sculpture, incorporating a dialogue between visual motifs and verbal expressions. Though the Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat carries oft-used Akan patterns, the volume’s geometric designs are used widely throughout west Africa and have many possible meanings, even among artists of the same city or region. Akan artists have continually incorporated these ideas gleaned through multiple cultural contacts, and have built Arabic script into their existing symbolic systems, including adinkra cloth.

Adinkra cloth probably originated as a mourning textile among the Asante. Typical mourning adinkra are patterned in numerous squares subdivided by designs that are combed or stamped onto milled cotton cloth. When worn during funerals and in mourning, adinkra can protect the living while the nearby spirit of the recently deceased remains influential. Patterns in the Lilly prayer manual are very similar to adinkra examples, suggesting possible connections between the forces
Sankofa advises viewers to heed past lessons and thus praises ancestral involvement in human affairs. Such interest resonates well with ideas of Muhammad’s ancestry, providing an affinity between a visual form indicative of African cults of the ancestors and Sufi devotional practices aimed at praising the primordial figure of the Prophet Muhammad. Hausa bori cults also emphasize ancestor worship as present in Islam, which itself stresses the importance of ancestral relationships. Cult members, many considering themselves Muslim, become possessed by helping spirits, some ancestral, for healing purposes. Islamic personalities, such as the Prophet Muhammad, are often incorporated in order to sanction the practices. The pattern of ancestral worship in the design of the Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat thus appears to reconcile the practice of pleasing ancestors to obtain their intercession with the manual’s praises to the Prophet Muhammad, himself a prophetic forerunner capable of interceding on the petitioner’s behalf.

Quincunx designs on the Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday prayer panels recall motifs popular across sub-Saharan west Africa (see Figures 8.5, 8.6, 8.7, and 8.12). In Akan design, the quincunx-shaped adinkra pattern called nframadan, or “wind-resistant house,” represents fortitude, social security, excellence, and preparedness for life’s uncertainties (Figure 8.13). This shape is important in sub-Saharan Islamic thought because it represents the center, with a vertical axis and the four cardinal directions present in the orderly universe. Such designs thus help believers to orient themselves in the most advantageous way within the cosmos.

The main leaf that will be considered here is the Thursday prayer panel (Figure 8.12). Two red lines border a dark brown line, the three together framing the pattern’s overall rectangular shape with a dark brown dot at each corner. These lines in turn surround two broad bands that sandwich red and brown script designating the Thursday prayers. Net-like patterns enliven these top and bottom bands, while a heavy quincunx anchors the panel on each of this border’s sides. Like the grid on the front of the pouch, intersecting lines form diamond-shaped spaces on these top and bottom bands. However, dark brown dots scintillate at the points of intersection while red dots punctuate the lines in between. The lateral quincunx panels repeat these smaller, lacey diamonds, their heavy triangles filled with dark brown ink that evokes the visual weight appropriate for such powerful symbols.

The quincunx provides a center that protects Asante rulers during earthly interactions and allows the king to actuate beneficial cosmic interactions. Throughout the year, the asantehene leads periodic community renewals of ancestral relationships in the adae ceremony. T. Edward Bowdich, leader of a British trade mission to the Gold Coast in 1817, described an adae ceremony that he saw at the Asante capital of Kumasi:

The delicate white curve and dot motif (resembling a heart) that enhances the Saturday Prayer panel in the Lily Dala’il al-Khayrat strongly resembles the sankofa, or “go back to fetch it,” adinkra pattern (Figures 8.10 and 8.11). The Saturday prayer panel occupies an entire leaf of the manuscript. Lines of rust red and dark brown separated by white surround the panel. Dark brown gracefully outlines three red dots at each corner of the outer red stripe. These lines surround an elaborately decorated frame. Repeating white forms with delicate, in-turned spirals frame white dots on the border’s top and bottom bands. Irregular, interlocking block shapes, whose pulsating rectangles may recall strip woven textiles, embellish the lateral bands. Aestere, angular letters, colored pale beige by the exposed paper beneath, proclaim Saturday prayers against a brick red ground.
[The leader danced with] his left forearm and hand pivoting on the axis of his elbow, making graceful, grasping movements towards the cardinal points, and as the four directions are gathered in towards his chest, his sword swaths the four winds. In this manner, he signifies that he, as custodian of the state, is capable of, and willing to move in any direction, and at all times, to gather the forces and bounteys of the universe into his being, so that he, as intercessor between the ancestors and his people, may place these vital forces at the disposal of the former for the benefit of the latter.  

In a performance of strength and generosity, this leader stood at the center of the four directions and ushered forth a harmonious universe. Periodic ceremonies regenerated the ancestral relationships needed to make universal power safe and available to his subjects. In a similarly custodial act, the quincunx mframadan pattern also borders a fan wielded by the amulet-laden Asanteene Otumfu Nana Opoke Wale II (Figure 8.11). When held by royalty, this decorative motif displays and amplifies God’s shielding presence and ability to provide abundance. The quincunx’s power to provide protectiveness and blessing may have been deemed particularly appropriate to decorate the incipits of daily prayers as contained in the Lilly manuscript.

The quincunx shape thus has references in Banama tiv script, the Akan adinkra pattern called mframadan, and Islamic amuletic practices related to the magic square. Readers and viewers of the Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat thus could have derived multiple meanings from indigenous symbols embedded within the manuscript’s decorative program, themselves powerful conveyors of nyama, or similarly potent resources, and baraka in written practices specific to Islam in sub-Saharan west Africa.

The Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat demonstrates that one can also reap blessings through the display of legible and enactivable knowledge, as exemplified in both script and graphic design. In sub-Saharan west Africa, legible script is rarely publicly viewed. Therefore, the bodily display of the Lilly manual’s pouch advertised the manuscript’s secrecy. Most likely worn around the neck, the beautiful container accordingly heightened the power it concealed. That such sub-Saharan manuscripts were produced in loose leaves, and placed within leather pouches often associated with amulets, highlights such books’ hidden protective properties, even if they were meant to be read. As a result, a tension between legibility and amuletic secrecy seems to constitute a primary factor in the work’s potency. The designs on the pouch—a cross-hatched grid on the front with dots in its interstices, and the X incised on its bottom and back—all serve to communicate this power.

While we do not know more about the Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat’s original owner (or owners) than the name ‘Abd al-Sahil, we do know that the manual was used to guide him privately, possibly while he led other devotees publicly, in weekly prayers. Because the manual was clearly intended for practical use, the text is fully legible. Moreover, the wear on this manual—missing leaves, sheets that seem to have been penned at various times, the severed cover flap—indicates repeated use. Such use indicates that the legible writing was crucial to the Lilly manual’s potency, as each recitation likely built its own store of nyama and baraka.

Indigenous and Islamic patterns have intermingled over the centuries, and combined baraka and nyama (or a like power) in ways singular to west Africa. Patterns include the grid pattern on the Lilly pouch, which recalls Banama tiv graphic symbols as well as Islamic magic squares, both of which represent the power of one’s proper place in an orderly universe. The design similar to the Akan adinkra sankofa pattern on the Saturday prayer panel, which refers to ancestral assistance, could resonate with Sufi practices of venerating the Prophet Muhammad. Lastly, the X shape in the quincunx pattern of Banama tiv graphic signs, and the Akan mframadan adinkra pattern combine the benefit of proper orientation within the orderly universe and the blessing, protection, and intercession garnered from ancestors through praise.

The Lilly Dala’il al-Khayrat seems to combine nyama and baraka by embedding within its structure recognizable symbols of power, and such patterns certainly helped emphasize the many symbolic meanings and pious contents of the text that they accompanied. The book’s artist probably saw it appropriate, in this particular case, to weave Islamic and indigenous resources into a hybrid iconography of protectiveness,
itself forming a series of resources for harnessing apotropoeic power and obtaining blessing. These functions were vital in proselytizing to prospective converts, especially those not educated in Islamic tenets and possibly unsettled in Arabic.

Symbols deployed in the Lily Dalal’al-Khayrati’s painted panels represented the power of the letters, which in turn could take on an abstract or symbolic meaning. Conversely, the designs also would have helped strengthen the faith of those closely acquainted with Islamic pictographic language and the Arabic idiom. Whatever the reader’s level of knowledge, the geometric patterns could have worked alongside the Arabic script as conveyors of naya and baraka, thereby ushering protection and blessing through an Afro-Islamic fusion of form. The Lily Dalal’al-Khayrati therefore represents a particularly intriguing example of the synthesis of indigenous and Islamic philosophies and designs singular to Islamic manuscripts produced in sub-Saharan west Africa during the modern period.

NOTES
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1. Al-Jallal spent nearly forty years in Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem, after study- ing in Fez. He returned to Morocco and then entered the Shafi’iyya sect, at which time he began fourteen years of worshipful solitude. Afterward, he founded the Shafi’i sect called “Al-Jallali.”

2. AFRICAN ARTS, “Creation of the Arts of Senegal (1967).”

3. This manuscript is also known as “The Battle of the Images.”


6. See also the divination manual called the Kitab Mecca (Book of the image collection of Baraka and Iskandar for the use of similar designs in a specifically amuletic context, see”. For further information see René Breu- mans, African Islam (Washington, D.C.)


8. For symbols from a Chadian, Dalal’al-Khayrati’s painted panels are on an amuletic tone, see Breu- mans, African Islam, 18–20.


27. Writing boards, however, are often placed on a view near Qu’ritec schools. Prussin, Hatunmeri, 41.


31. Muslim clerics may be called marabout, sultan, karmakum (Prussin, Hatun- mery, 47, 77); alai (Prussin, "Towns of Islamic Architecture in the Futa-Djalon," 37); and in Ghana, lamna (kalb), if specializing in medicine, or a mami dambola, if specializing in divination. These terms are often shortened to lamna (Hassan, Art and Islamic Literacy, 197).

32. Ndeye, African Islam. 122. Tambouh is the Fula name for the sierra leone used the secree inrity in writing to gain power as they stroes the difficulties of learning, Arab (Hassan, Art and Islamic Literacy, 197).

33. Roberts, A Saint in the City, 120. Wolof is spoken in much of Senegal.

34. Sijol also refers to the fact that most scripts used by specialites are secret and meant for spiritual use, Mcnaughton, The Mandel Blacksmiths, 58. Mandel blacksmiths, iconographers, and spiritual artist association use at least two types of non-traditionalistic, graphic writing to make amulets. Both of these types are deciphered only to the highly specialized practitioners (ibid., 195).

35. Clients may seek certain possessions in this liquid, as well, and the words can also be treated and ioked, see Raymond Silverman, "African Writing and the Occulut," in Brocade of the Pen: The Art of Islamic Writing, ed. Carol Garrett Fischer (East Lansing: Art Museum, Michigan State University, 1973), 17.


39. Mcnaughton discusses the powerful confidance of kilificit secret script with ingredi- enls over which these words are intoned, and the speeker’s "rhythmically implanted" spirit (Mcnaughton, The Mandel Blacksmiths, 45, 50, 112). See also Robert Farris Thompson, Flash of the Spirit, 775, 115-117, 119-123.


41. Prussin writes that, "just as education eventually came to consist of only learning to recite the most important verses of the Koran, so it was no longer essential that a marabout study science strictly, while the study of Arabic script was a fundamental part of the equipment of every well-educated Muslim. The quality and literacy of that writes word varied considerably" (Prussin, Hatunmeri, 56, 75). See also Louis Bronner, Western and Southern African, The Religious Heritage and Spiritual and Cemeral Islam (Beloize: University of California Press, 1948), 76.

42. This aspect of imagery and symbolism is crucial to understanding patterns pointed in Sidi manuscripts as well as their written contents. See Prussin, "Architectural Facets of Islam in the Futa-Djalon," 56.

43. For various levels of Sidi calligraphic scripts, see Hassan, Art and Islamic Literacy, 202-232.

44. Variations of this design are present in the divination manual in the private Morgan Collection called the Kitab al-Musawas (Book of Musawas). 192.


48. Hassann writes about leatherworkers and/or blacksmiths who produce these amulet covers being literate and working with the masons to enhance the amulet’s efficacy (by being attractive) and secrecy (Hassan, Art and Islamic Literacy, 202). Also see Prussin, Hatunmeri, 88.

49. Roberts, A Saint in the City, 47-58.

50. Mcnaughton, African Islam, 32.

51. Hassan, Art and Islamic Literacy, 201.

52. The Futa-Djalon al-Khayr is unapologi- zed. This quote occurs on one of the other preface leaves in black script.

53. For an example of such use, see Blyden, "The Koran in Africa," 52. She is also known as the Sudan.

It is the immense region of grassland between the Abyna Desert to the north and the rain forests to the south and southwest. This area includes sections of these contemporary na- tions with Senegal, Guinea, and the northwestern Sudan, and it is no longer essential that a marabout study science strictly, while the study of Arabic script was a fundamental part of the equipment of every well-educated Muslim. The quality and literacy of that written word varied considerably. (Prussin, Hatunmeri, 96, 75). See also Louis Bronner, Western African, The Religious Heritage and Spiritual and Cemeral Islam (Beloize: University of California Press, 1948), 76.

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