

The Sanusi Creed in Kabyle Berber: Two Manuscripts from the Lmuhub Ulaḥbib Library (Béjaïa, Algeria)

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Abstract

This presentation is partly based on my MA thesis (Leiden University, 2011) devoted to the Kabyle Berber manuscript KA 21 from the *Lmuhub Ulaḥbib* library (Béjaïa, Algeria) and also includes a comparison with another (unpublished) manuscript from the same library. Both documents present a Kabyle version of the *Sanusi Creed* (*al-ʿAqīda as-Sanūsiyya*) – a text of Islamic theology, named so after its author, known briefly as Sanusi (ca. 1429-1490). The texts deal with monotheism (*tawḥīd*), God's attributes, and their proof (including the proof of God's existence and oneness). First, the manuscripts are placed in their historical and religious context. The structure of the Berber text is presented and compared briefly with the Arabic sources. Different features of the document (palaeographic, orthographic, and linguistic) are discussed and illustrated by means of a passage from the manuscripts.

Outline of the presentation

- Introduction (background information on the manuscripts)
- Content of the manuscripts and comparison with Arabic sources
- A passage from the MS: Proof of God's power
- Features of the manuscripts (Palaeography; Orthography; Language)
- Conclusions

Background information

- Rare: there are very few known Kabyle Berber MSS from pre-colonial period
- Provenance: Lmuhub Ulaḥbib library (Béjaïa, Algeria);
- Date: uncertain; KA 21: oldest? (late 18th/early 19th century?), KIA 8: 19th century?
- Luciani 1893 mentions a Kabyle Berber MS on Sanusi from the 18th/19th century
- Length: KA 21: 8 pp, KIA 8: 5 pp, of ca. 20 lines each
- Script: Maghrebi style of Arabic script
- Language: (mostly) Kabyle Berber, many Arabic terms and phrases, some sentences. KIA 8 has an Arabic introduction (p. 1).

Physical appearance

- Not watermarked paper; complete, unbound manuscripts
- Black ink with added *tashkil* in brown ink (KIA 8 also has key phrases in brown)
- Well-practiced hand.

Content of the MSS

- Kabyle version of the *Sanusi Creed* (*dogma*)
- Arabic original: *al-ʿAqīda as-Sanūsiyya* (العقيدة السنوسية)
- Author: Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf as-Sanūsī (ca. 1429-1490)
- Subject: Islamic theology (*al-kalām*), monotheism (*tawḥīd*), God's attributes (including God's existence and oneness) and their proof.

Versions of the Creed in Arabic

- 1) *al-ʿAqīda al-kubrā* 'the Big/Large(r) Creed';
- 2) *al-ʿAqīda al-wuṣṭā* 'the Middle/Intermediate Creed';
- 3) *al-ʿAqīda aṣ-ṣuġrā* 'the Small Creed' (= *Umm al-Barāhīn* 'Major evidence');
- 4) *al-ʿAqīda aṣ-ṣaġīra* (*Ṣuġrā ṣ-ṣuġrā*, *Ṣiġrat aṣ-ṣuġrā*) '(yet) a Smaller Creed'.

Each of the versions has 2 variants: plain (*matn*), and with a commentary (*šarḥ*)
> There are at least 8 major versions of the Creed.

Kabyle manuscripts and the Arabic sources

- The 'Small Creed' a.k.a. *Umm al-Barāhīn* is Sanusi's most popular work
- The Berber MSS resemble this version of the Creed, but it is not clear on which redaction (*šarḥ* or *matn*) they are based
- *Šarḥ Umm al-Barāhīn* is longer than the Berber MSS, but the Berber MSS also contain elements not found in the *matn* or in the *šarḥ* versions
- Do Kabyle MSS go back to an unknown Arabic version?
- Did the Berber author add new elements himself?
- > The Kabyle MSS have an Arabic source, but they are not a literal translation of it. Also, KIA 8 is shorter than KA 21, but it is not just a summary of it.

Attributes of Allah

- Different groups of attributes (cf. Gilliot 2007)
- Ashariyya theologians sometimes make two attributes for each of the second group: a noun and a corresponding adjective/agent noun (*ism fā'il*) > 20 attributes.
- In other traditions, it is customary to speak of 14 attributes and 7 *ism fā'il*'s; the 14th attribute is *at-takwīn* 'creating, bringing into existence'.

1. Šifāt dātiyya/nafsiyya 'attributes of essence'

al-wuġūd (الوجود) 'existence';
al-qidam (القدم) 'eternity without beginning, oldness, antiquity';
al-baqā' (البقاء) 'eternity without end, everlastingness, remaining';
al-muxālafa (المخالفة) 'difference (from everything)';
al-qiyāmu-bi-n-nafs (القيام بالنفس) 'self-sustenance/subsistence';
al-waḥdāniyya (الوحدانية) 'oneness, being the only one'.

2. Šifāt al-ma'ānī/tubūtiyya 'attributes of meaning, morality/proof'

al-quḍra (القدرة) 'power, ability, omnipotence';
al-'irāda (الإرادة) 'will';
al-'ilm (العلم) 'knowledge, omniscience';
al-ḥayā (الحياة) 'life';
as-sam' (السمع) 'hearing';
al-baṣar (البصر) 'sight, seeing';
al-kalām (الكلام) 'speech, speaking'.

3. Šifāt ma'nawīyya 'moral attributes'

qādir (قادر) 'powerful, able, omnipotent';
murīd (مريد) 'willing';
'ālim (عالم) '(all-)knowing';
ḥayy (حي) 'living';
samī' (سميع) '(all-)hearing';
baṣīr (بصير) '(all-)seeing';
mutakallim (متكلم) 'speaking'.

Table 1. Arabic text vs. Berber MSS

	Arabic (<i>aṣ-Ṣuḡrā</i>)	KA 21	KIA 8
	Introduction on knowledge	Very brief introduction	Introduction to the MS
1	Attributes of God Proof of God's attributes	Attributes of God Attributes of messengers	Attributes of God and their proof
2	Attributes of messengers Proof of messengers' attributes	Proof of God's attributes Proof of messengers' attributes	-
3	<i>lā 'ilāha 'illā llāh</i>	<i>bi-smi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm</i>	-

Table 2. God's attributes (A) and their negative counterparts (NEG.A)

Grey = not mentioned in KIA 8

	A		NEG.A	
1	<i>lwuḡud</i>	'existence'	<i>leɛdem</i>	'non-existence'
2	<i>lqidem</i>	'oldness'	<i>lhudut</i>	'emergence'
3	<i>lbaqa</i>	'eternity'	<i>lfana</i> ¹	'end'
4	<i>lmuhālaḥa</i>	'difference'	<i>lmumaṭala</i>	'similarity'
5	<i>al-qiyāmu bi-n-naḥs</i>	'self-sustenance'	<i>leftiqar~ liḥtiyaḡ</i>	'need'
6	<i>lweḥdaniyya</i>	'oneness'	<i>ttaɛaddud</i>	'plurality'
7	<i>lqudra</i>	'power'	<i>leḡez</i>	'inability'
8	<i>lirada</i>	'will'	<i>lkaraha~ lḡallaba</i>	'unwill'
9	<i>leɛlem</i>	'knowledge'	<i>lḡahl</i>	'ignorance'
10	<i>lḥayat</i>	'life'	<i>lmamat</i>	'death'
11	<i>ssemee</i>	'hearing'	<i>ṣṣamam</i>	'deafness'
12	<i>lbaṣar</i>	'sight'	<i>ḷama</i>	'blindness'
13	<i>lkalam</i>	'speech'	<i>lbakam</i> ²	'muteness'

Table 3. Equivalents of attributes expressed by adjectives/agent nouns/verbs

Yellow = not mentioned in KA 21; bold = native Berber lexemes

	EQV		NEG.EQV	
1	yella	'he exists'	-	-
2	<i>aqdim</i>	'old'	<i>lhadet</i>	'new'
3	<i>lbaqi</i>	'eternal'	aṭʿefnu	'it will end'
4	<i>amḥalef</i>	'different'	<i>mmeṭel</i>	'similar'
5	<i>lḡani</i>	'self-sufficient'	<i>iffetqir~ yeffetqer</i>	'he needs'
6	<i>awḥid</i>	'one'	g sin yyed-sen~s wešrik	'two of them'~'with a partner'
7	<i>lqader</i>	'powerful'	<i>leḡez</i>	'unable'
8	<i>lmurid</i>	'willing'	<i>lkarih</i>	'compelled'
9	<i>lealem</i>	'knowing'	<i>lḡahel</i>	'ignorant'
10	<i>lḥay</i>	'living'	<i>lmeyyet</i>	'dead'
11	ssamiɛ	'hearing'	ṭaɛzzuḡt	'deaf'
12	lbaṣir	'seeing'	ṭaderḡalt	'blind'
13	issawal	'he speaks'	ṭaguḡamt	'mute'

¹ KIA 8 manuscript also *leɛdem* 'non-existence'.² For the last group of negative attributes (11-13), KIA 8 also provides native Berber equivalents: *ṭiɛzzuḡt* 'deaf', *ṭidderyelt* 'blind', and *ṭiguḡemt* 'mute'.

Table 4. Attributes of messengers (only KA 21)

	A		NEG.A	
1	<i>şşedq</i>	‘truth’	<i>lekdeḅ</i>	‘lie’
2	<i>lamana</i>	‘honesty’	<i>lḫiyana</i>	‘betrayal’
3	<i>ttabliḡ</i>	‘conveying’	<i>lkitman</i>	‘concealment’

Proof of God’s attributes (A = attribute, EQV = equivalent)

Table 5a. Proof of God’s attributes in KA 21

A NEG.A PROOF IF-THEN IF2-THEN THEN.FIN	<i>A iwḡeb (ṭewḡeb/weḡben) i Ṛebbi, NEG.A fell-as ḡ Imuḫal; ddalil fell-as ḡ şşenēa, imi ḡ şşenēa ṭella; ḡ winna i ḡ ddalil ḡef Ṛebbi (yella/ḡ EQV i yella). Lewkan (ur illi ara ḡ EQV), ilaq (ḡ NEG.EQV i yella); ma (yella ḡ NEG.EQV ilaq/aḡ yili ḡ...) ilaq ṭṭwedda (ṭetwedda/aḡ ṭṭweddi) (ḡr) şşenēa ulašš-iṭṭ.</i>	A is necessary for God, NEG.A is impossible for Him; The proof of this is creation, since creation exists; it is that which proves that God (exists/is EQV). If (he were not EQV), then (he would be NEG.EQV); If (he were NEG.EQV he would be...) This would lead to the non-existence of the creation.
BUT CONCL	<i>Lakin a yyi-ṭenkerṭ ḡ şşenēa. Mbeəd mi ṭṭalleyeḡ zzḡ-es/zzēḡ-s, ḡ Imuḫal (...)</i> <i>I s-iweḡben i Ṛebbi ḡ A; NEG.A fell-as ḡ Imuḫāl, wa-huwa al-maṭlūb.</i>	But you will deny me in creation. Later when I am looking in it, it is impossible (that...) A is necessary for God, NEG.A is impossible for Him, and that is what was to be proven.

Table 5b. Proof of God’s attributes in KIA 8

A NEG.A Proof	<i>i s-iweḡben i Ṛebbi ḡ A, NEG.A fell-as ḡ Imuḫal. ddalil fell-as ḡ EQV ḡ şşenēa, imi ḡ şşenēa NEG.EQV; ḡ ddalil af Ṛebbi ḡ EQV.</i>	What is obligatory for God is A , NEG.A is impossible for Him. The proof of him being EQV is creation, since creation (is) NEG.EQV . It is the proof of God being EQV .
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Table 5c. Parallel formulations in KA 21 and KIA 8

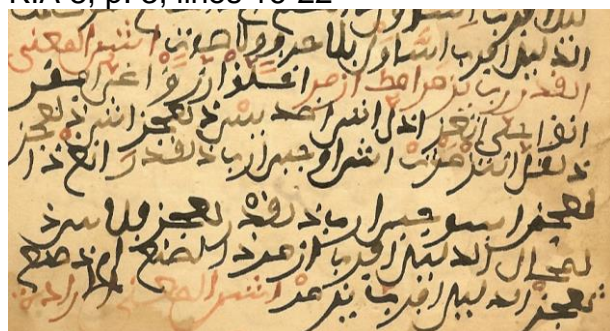
A	<i>(ašu Imaēna n) A... (Ṛebbi) EQV (...)</i>	(What is the meaning of) A ... (God is) EQV (...)
NEG.A	<i>ḡ ašu ḡḡedde-is? ḡ NEG.A/NEG.EQV...</i>	What is its opposite? NEG.A/NEG.EQV ...
God	<i>A iwḡeb i Ṛebbi ~ i s-iweḡben i Ṛebbi ḡ A. NEG.A fell-as ḡ Imuḫal.</i>	A is necessary for God ~ What is necessary for God is A . NEG.A is impossible for Him.
Proof	<i>Ddalil fell-as (...) ḡ şşenēa, imi ḡ şşenēa... (NEG.EQV); (...) ḡ ddalil ḡef/af Ṛebbi (ḡ) EQV.</i>	The proof of this is the creation, since the creation... (NEG.EQV). It is the proof that God (is) EQV .

Passage from the MSS: God's power (*lqudra*)

KA 21, p. 6, lines 15-19




KIA 8, p. 3, lines 16-22



<p>KA 21, p. 6, lines 15-19</p>	
<p>¹⁵Lqdra tēwḡeb i Ṛebbi, leəḡez fell-as d Imuḡal. Ddalil fell-as d ṣṣenəa, ¹⁶imi d ṣṣenəa tēlla; d winna i d ddalil ḡef Ṛebbi d lqader i yella. Lewkan ur illi ara ¹⁷d lqader, ilaq d leaḡez i yella. Ma yella d leaḡez, ilaq tetwedda ṣṣenəa ¹⁸ulašš-itt. Lakin a yyi-tenkert g ṣṣenəa. Mbeəd mi tṭallayeḡ zzḡ-es, d Imuḡal. ¹⁹I s-iweḡben i Ṛebbi d lqdra, leəḡez fell-as d Imuḡal, wa-huwa l-maṭlūb.</p>	<p>Power is necessary for God; Inability is impossible for Him. The proof of this is creation, since creation exists; it is that which proves that God is powerful. If He were not powerful, then He would be unable. If He were unable, it would lead to the non- existence of the creation. But you will deny me in creation. Later, when I am looking in it, it is impossible. What is necessary for God is power; Inability is impossible for Him, and that is what was to be proven: <i>Q.E.D.</i></p>
<p>KIA 8, p. 3, lines 16-22</p>	
<p>¹⁶...ašu lmaəna ¹⁷lqdra? rebbi yezmer; ixelleq, irezzeq; iḡennu, ifeqqer; ¹⁸ineqq, iḡeyyu; iteuzzu, idullu. ašu dḡedd-is? d leaḡaz. ašu d leaḡez? ¹⁹d lqella n[^]tezmerṭ. ašu iweḡben i rebbi, d lqdra neḡ d ²⁰leaḡaz? i s-iweḡben i rebbi d lqdra, leaḡaz fell-as d ²¹Imuḡal. ddalil af rebbi izmer d ṣṣenəa, imi d ṣṣenəa ²²teəḡez, (d) ddalil af rebbi yezmer.</p>	<p>...What is the meaning of power? God is able. He creates, he nourishes; he makes rich and poor, he kills and gives life, he gives and takes away honor. What is its opposite? It is inability. What is inability? It is a lack of ability. What is necessary for God, power or inability? What is necessary for God is power, inability is impossible for him. The proof of God being able is the creation, since the creation lacks power. It is the proof of God being able/powerful.</p>

Palaeographic features of the MSS

- Maghrebi style of Arabic script
- *fā'* ف is written as ب, and *qāf* ق is written as ق
- Clear, consistent, compact handwriting, little space between words
- Virtually no punctuation
- Use of dots (·) as a "phrase divider"
- Use of a "filler" to fill in the space (KA 21, 1:5, 2:16, 3:7) 
- Margin can be used to write a word that was forgotten or did not fit
- Catchword (*custos*) is used to facilitate the ordering of the folios
- Use of the Maghrebi V-shaped *šadda* alongside the Mashreqi W-shaped *šadda*.

Orthographic features of the MSS

- Orthography is rather consistent
- Inconsistencies: mainly in the writing of *alif* and *tā' marbūṭa*
- Function words often spelled together with the lexical words
- Notation of vowel elision and assimilation, e.g. *r^hRebbi* < *n Rebbi* 'of God'
- Some Arabic graphemes are ambiguous: *kāf* is used for *k*, *g*, *k* and *g*; *ḡim* for *ḡ* [dʒ] and *ž* [ʒ]; *šin* for *š* and *č* [tʃ]: that is, some Berber consonants are underrepresented
- Gemination can be indicated by means of a *šadda*, but can be absent.

Two different systems are used for the notation of vowels:

- Berber words: vowels are usually written short (by means of vocalisation);
 - Arabic words/loans: vowels are written etymologically as long or short.
- Schwa (e) and a are often written in the same way (with a *fatha*).

Lexicon: Arabic, Berber, Berberized?

- "Berberized?" (borderline/problematic cases): not clear if the word is Berberized:

- loss of gemination: *tašdīd* is omitted: *al-ḥaqq* (الْحَقُّ), *aš-šarr* (الشَّرُّ), *al-maḥall* (المَحَلُّ)
- loss of *hamza*, e.g. *al-baqā' / lbaqa* (البَقَا')
- vowel *a/e*: *al-qidam / lqidem* (الْقِدَمُ), long/short: *aš-šaffāf / ššeffaf* (الشَّفَّافُ)

- Berberized:

- a change in vocalisation, e.g. *i > e*: *al-wāḡib* > *lwaḡeb* (الْوَاغِبُ)
- *lām* of the Arabic article (*al-*) is vocalised: *al-'adam* > *leɛdem* (الْعَدَمُ).

- Arabic loans in Berber: *lewkan* 'if'; *ḥdiḡ* 'to need', *wžed* 'to exist', *ḥdem* 'to do, work', *ḥleq* 'to create'; *lekdeḡ* 'lie', *ššenεa* 'creation, world', *ššifa* 'attribute', *leɛlem* 'knowledge'; *aqdim* 'old', *aždid* 'new', *amḡalef* 'different'.

- Berber (native): esp. function words: particles, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, but also some verbs and nouns.

- Arabic (words and phrases) due to the religious nature of the text, esp. philosophical and theological terms: *lḡerm* 'matter, substance', *Imεena* 'meaning', *ddalil* 'proof', *ddur* 'circularity', *ššifa* 'attribute', and most of God's attributes themselves (e.g. *lwuḡud* 'existence', *Imuḡalafa* 'difference' etc). Some of these terms do not have a Berber equivalent. However, some of the Arabic lexemes could have been translated in Berber.

Summary and conclusions

- The Kabyle Berber texts go back to the Arabic original (*Sanusi Creed* > *Umm al-Barāhīn*) but they are not literal translations of it
- Use of Arabic terminology due to the pedagogical purpose of the text

Remaining questions

- *Raison d'être* of these texts: their purpose, function, and use in the community?
- How wide-spread was the practice of writing manuscripts in Kabyle Berber?
- Was there a link between different Berber orthographies (e.g. Kabyle and Tashelhit)?
- Wider context and wider implications
- Sanusi Creed as a target for translations in W. Africa
- Other Berber translations of theological works?



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Unpublished:

Pictures of Kabyle Berber MSS on Sanusi from the Lmuhub Ulaḥbib library:

https://www.academia.edu/92642719/Kabyle_Berber_manuscripts_from_the_Lmuhub_Ulaḥbib_library_dealing_with_the_Sanusi_Creed_pictures.

Manuscript KIA 8 (transcription and translation draft):

https://www.academia.edu/92643444/Sanusi_Creed_in_Kabyle_Berber_Manuscript_KIA_berb%C3%A8re_8_from_the_Lmuhub_Ulaḥbib_library.