

A MAGICAL BANNER WITH THE REPRESENTATION OF PARADISE FROM THE TAREQ RAJAB MUSEUM IN KUWAIT

ALEXANDER FODOR

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

Introduction

The Tareq Rajab Museum in Kuwait owns an interesting piece of cotton looking like a triangular banner. It is covered with inscriptions and numbers arranged in squares. The calligraphic panels are penned in black *tulut*, the doubled border lines and the squares are ruled in red. A characteristic sign in writing the numbers is the use of the figure resembling a heart turned upside down for inscribing the number 5¹. In an upright position with the fly end up and the hoist end down, the central lay-out of the elements in the field shows the figure of a stepped pyramid composed of 8 magic squares (**Fig. 1**)². This structure resembles very much the representation of Paradise in Islamic cosmology that has gained a wide popularity in the 18th-19th centuries. The paper wishes to describe this magical object and tries to shed light on the guiding principles that influenced the arrangement of the texts and the numbers in the squares. As is well-known, banners have always played an important role in Islamic politics, warfare and religion³. Starting from the latter point, this study also approaches the subject from the aspects of the relations between Paradise and tomb, Paradise and banner, banner and tomb, banner and magic. As a matter of fact, however, this banner-like object has never been hoisted on a flagpole and has never been used as a real flag. Namely, the traces of folding in the material reveal that it has been meant to be worn as a talismanic chart on the body of its owner for magical purposes.

¹ This fact might also point to India as the place of origin of the banner.

² See the colour plates, Plate No II. See also the folded plate at the end of the volume.

³ For banners in the Islamic world in general, see *EP*¹ and *EP*² s.v. “*alam, sandjak, sandjak-i sherif*”.

Description of the banner

Catalogue number: TEX 004

Length (fly): 406 cm

Height (hoist end): 246 cm

Depth of the bend in the hoist end: 43 cm

Place of acquisition: India

Date: cca 18th century

The banner has been sewn together from 4 pieces of cotton. When folded, it measures ca. 30 x 25 cm.

Inscriptions

All the inscriptions have been chosen from the Qurʾān. At the first sight interestingly, but as we shall see, applying a definite pattern, the position of the letters is the opposite of the direction of the numbers. If we read the text in front of us, the numbers appear turned upside down and vice versa. The text starts in the right corner of the hoist end and ends in the apex shaped fly end. It contains the following Qurʾānic verses (Q 48/1-26)⁴:

1. We have given you a clear **victory**⁵,
2. That God may forgive you your past sin
and your sin which is to come,
and that He may complete His blessing to you
and guide you on a **straight path**,
3. And that God may help you with mighty help.
4. [It is] He who sent down the reassurance into the hearts of the believers
that they might add faith to their faith
– **to God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth**;
God is Knowing and Wise –
5. That He may admit the believers, men and women,
to **gardens through which rivers flow**,
in which they will remain for ever,
and that he may redeem their evil deeds for them.
That is a mighty triumph with God.
6. And that He may punish the hypocrites, both men and women,
and those, both men and women, who associate others with God,

⁴ Qurʾānic verses are quoted in the translation of Alan Jones (Q 2007).

⁵ For an explanation of text in bold characters see the “Commentary” below.

who think evil thoughts about God,
 Against them is the **evil turn of fortune**.
 God is angry with them and has cursed them
 and has prepared for them **Jahannam**
 – **an evil journey's end**.

7. To God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth.

God is Mighty and Wise.

8. We have sent you as a witness

and a bearer of good tidings and a warner,

9. That you may believe in God and His messenger

and support Him and revere Him

and glorify Him morning and evening.

10. Those who swear allegiance to you

are swearing allegiance to God.

The hand of God is above their hands.

Whoever breaks his oath breaks it against himself;

but whoever fulfils the covenant he has made with God,

He will give him a mighty wage.

11. The *bedu* who were left behind will say to you,

‘Our possession and households kept us busy;

so seek forgiveness for us.’

They say with their tongues

what is not in their hearts.

11a. Say, ‘Who possesses anything that will avail you against God,

if He desires harm for you or desires benefit for you?

No. God is informed of what you do.

12. No. You thought that the messenger and the believers would never re-
 turn to their households.

That was made to seem fair in your hearts.

You had evil thoughts and you were a corrupt people.’

13. Those who do not believe in God and His messenger

– We have prepared a **blaze** for the unbelievers.

14. To God belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth.

He forgives those whom He wishes

and punishes those whom He wishes.

God is Forgiving and Compassionate.

15. Those who were left behind will say,

when you set out to take spoils,

‘Let us follow you’,

wishing to alter God’s words.

- Say, ‘You shall not follow us.
Thus God has spoken previously.’
They will say, ‘No. You **envy** us.’
No. They understand only a little.
16. Say to the *bedu* who were left behind,
‘You will be summoned against a people of great might,
whom you will fight or they will surrender.
If you obey, God will give you a fair wage;
but if you turn away as you did before,
He will punish you most painfully.’
17. There is no blame on the **blind** or on the **lame** or on the **sick**
– those who obey God and His messenger
will be admitted by Him to **gardens**,
through which **rivers** flow;
but those who turn away
– He will punish them most painfully.
18. God was pleased with the believers
when they swore allegiance to you under the tree,
and He knew what was in their hearts.
And so He sent down reassurance to them
and rewarded them with a **victory near** at hand,
19. And numerous spoils to take.
God is Mighty and Wise.
20. God has promised you numerous spoils to take,
and has hastened these to you,
and has restrained the hands of the people from you.
[This is] so that it may be a sign to the believers
and that He may guide you on a **straight path**.
21. And other [spoils] that you were not able to take
are encompassed by God.
God has power over everything.
22. If those who disbelieve had fought you,
they would have turned their backs;
and then they would find no protector or helper.
23. That is God’s practice,
which has happened in the past.
You will not find alteration in God’s practice.
24. [It is] He who has restrained their hands from you
and your hands from them in the valley of Mecca,

- after He had made you **victors** over them.
 God is observer of what you do.
25. [It is] they who disbelieved and barred you from the **Sacred Mosque**
 and [barred] the offering which was prevented from reaching its place of
 sacrifice.
 And had it not been for the believing men and women,
 whom you do not know,
 lest you should have trampled on them,
 and guilt befallen you unwittingly because of them
 – that God may admit to His mercy those whom He wishes.
 Had they been clearly separated,
 We would have punished the unbelievers among them most painfully.
26. When those who disbelieved set fierceness in their hearts,
 the fierceness of the age of ignorance,
 and God sent down his reassurance to His messenger and to the
 believers,
 and fastened on them the word ‘piety’,
 to which they have the best right and are worthy of it.
 God is aware of everything.

Here, the text of the Sūra is cut short abruptly since the last three Verses (Q 48/27-29) are missing, probably due to lack of space. After this, however, the Qur’ānic inscription is completed by the very popular Verse (Q 61/13) which reads: “help from God and a victory near”. The word *Allāh* is left out, probably due to lack of space.

1 Squares in the centre (starting from beneath, the hoist end of the banner)

1.1 Square 40 x 40⁶

The square is composed of 1600 numbers arranged in 100 squares of 4 x 4. The first component is placed in the upper right corner, directly under the *Basmala* introducing the Qur’ānic text. The numerical value of each line in these units is the same horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly⁷. The squares of 4 x 4, however, can be divided into different groups according to the characteristic numerical value of their numbers. These values can be the following in the order

⁶ See the folded table at the end of the volume.

⁷ Naturally, several mistakes committed by the copyist can be detected in the arrangement of the numbers.

of their occurrence: 29224, 29226, 29220, 29200, 29218, 29214, 29234, 29214 and the last one is again equal to 29234. As we can see, each of the 4×4 squares is composed of 2 different groups of numbers (with 8 numbers in each). The arrangement of the numbers in the 2 groups follows a well defined pattern shown by **Figs. 2, 3**.

In the starting square, the difference between the two sequences (6540, 6541, 6542, 6543, 6544, 6545, 6546, 6547 and 8065, 8066, 8067, 8068, 8069, 8070, 8071, 8072) is 1518 ($8065 - 6547$). This difference is diminishing gradually by 16 from one square to the next. In the last square (left corner, below), the difference disappears and a continuous sequence of 16 numbers appears in the small rectangles (7301- 7316). The decrease of the numbers of the first group and the increase of the numbers in the second group is illustrated on **Fig. 4** by the diminution of the black component in the squares and finally by its total disappearance in the last square.

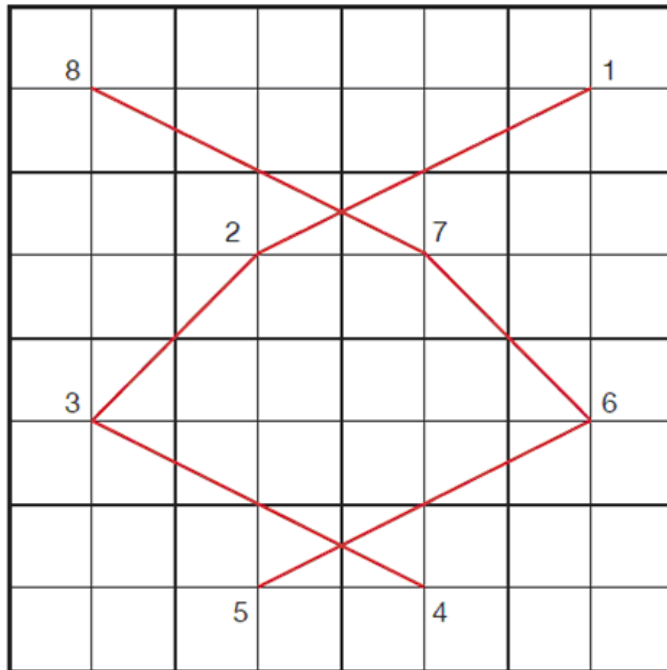


Fig. 2.

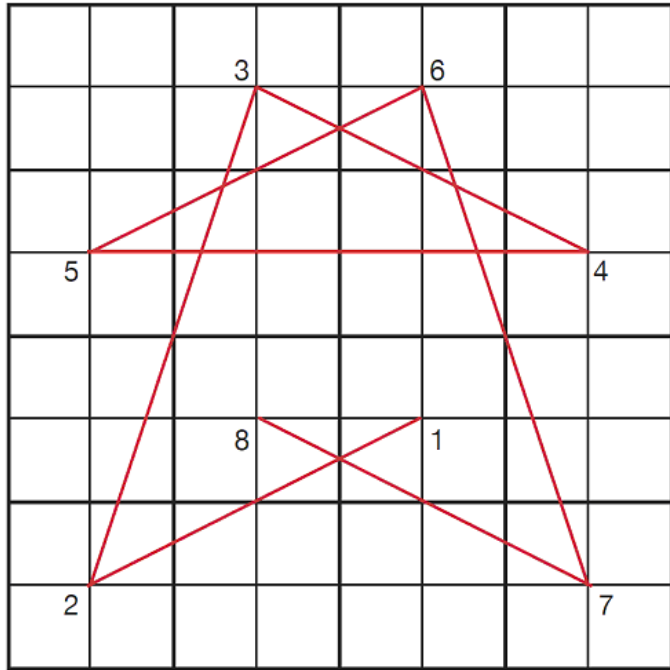
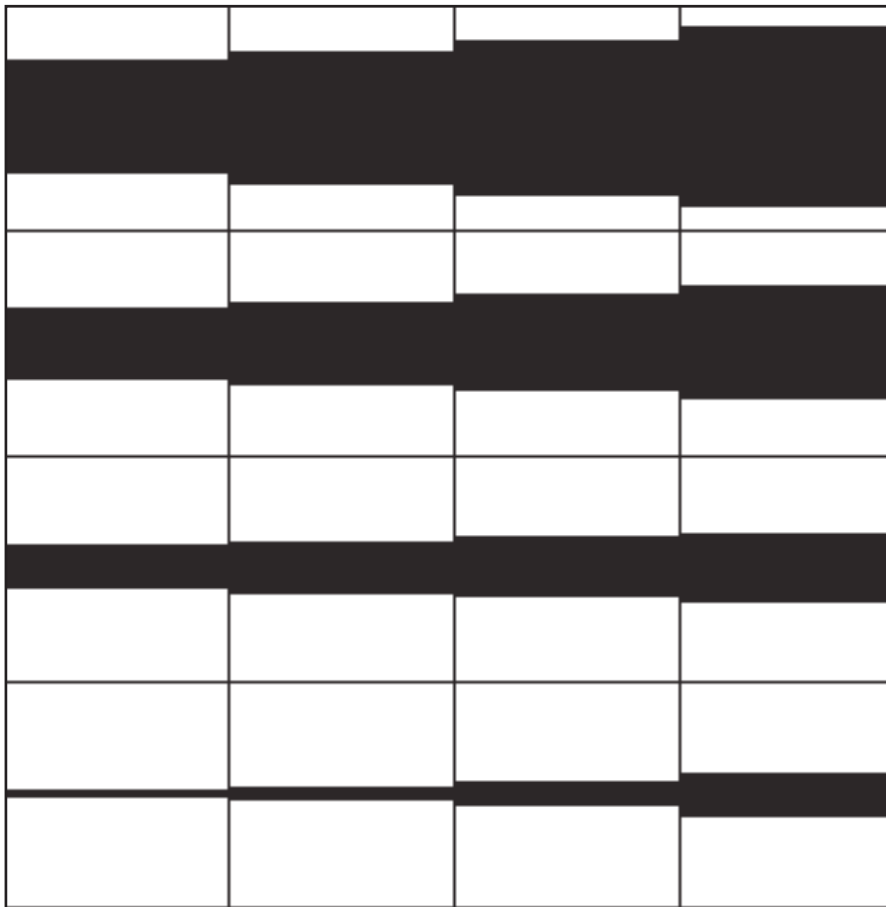


Fig. 3.

**Fig. 4.**

1.2 Square 20 x 20

40	263	266	33	32	271	274	25	24	279	282	17	16	287	290	9	8	295	298	1
265	34	39	264	273	26	31	272	281	18	23	280	289	10	15	288	297	2	7	296
35	268	261	38	27	276	269	30	19	284	277	22	11	292	285	14	3	300	293	6
262	37	36	267	270	29	28	275	278	21	20	283	286	13	12	291	294	5	4	299
80	223	226	73	72	231	234	65	64	239	242	57	56	247	250	49	48	255	258	41
225	74	79	224	233	66	71	232	241	58	63	240	249	50	55	248	257	42	47	256
75	228	221	78	67	236	229	70	59	244	237	62	51	252	245	54	43	260	253	46
222	77	76	227	230	69	68	235	238	61	60	243	246	53	52	251	254	45	44	259
120	283	286	113	112	291	294	105	104	299	302	97	96	307	310	89	88	315	318	81
285	114	119	284	293	106	111	292	301	98	103	300	309	90	95	308	317	82	87	316
115	288	281	118	107	296	289	110	99	304	297	102	91	312	305	94	83	320	313	86
282	117	116	287	290	109	108	295	298	101	100	303	306	93	92	311	314	85	84	319
160	243	246	153	152	251	254	145	144	259	262	137	136	267	270	129	128	275	278	121
245	154	159	244	253	146	151	252	261	138	143	260	269	130	135	268	277	122	127	276
155	248	241	158	147	256	249	150	139	264	257	142	131	272	265	134	123	280	273	126
242	157	156	247	250	149	148	255	258	141	140	263	266	133	132	271	274	125	124	279
200	203	206	193	192	211	214	185	184	219	222	177	176	227	230	169	168	235	238	161
205	194	199	204	213	186	191	212	221	178	183	220	229	170	175	228	237	162	167	236
195	208	201	198	187	216	209	190	179	224	217	182	171	232	225	164	163	240	233	166
202	197	196	207	210	189	188	215	218	181	180	223	226	173	172	231	234	165	164	239

This square is composed of 400 numbers (using the numerals from 1 to 300) arranged in 25 squares of 4 x 4. The organizing principle is the same as in the 40 x 40 square. The numerical value of each line is the same horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly (apart from the copyist's occasional mistakes). The squares can be divided into 2 groups on the basis of their numerical values: each of the first 10 quadrates give the sum 602 while each of the remaining 15 has 802. The arrangement of the 16 numerals in 2 different groups follows the pattern in the 40 x 40 square. The difference between the two sequences in the first square is 285 which gradually decreases and finally disappears in the last square where the order of the numbers gives the following sequence: 193 – 208.

1.3 Square 16 x 16

32	218	221	25	24	226	229	17	16	234	237	9	8	242	245	1
220	26	31	219	228	18	23	227	236	10	15	235	244	2	7	243
27	223	216	30	19	231	224	22	11	239	232	14	3	247	240	6
217	29	28	222	225	21	20	230	233	13	12	238	241	5	4	246
65	186	189	58	57	194	197	50	49	202	205	42	41	210	213	34
188	59	64	187	196	51	56	195	204	43	48	203	212	35	40	211
60	191	184	63	52	199	192	55	44	207	200	47	36	215	208	39
185	62	61	190	193	54	53	198	201	46	45	206	209	38	37	214
97	154	157	90	89	162	165	72	81	170	173	74	73	178	181	66
156	91	96	155	164	83	88	163	172	75	80	171	185	67	72	179
92	159	152	95	84	167	160	77	76	35	168	79	68	183	176	71
153	94	93	158	161	86	85	166	169	78	77	174	177	70	69	172
119	122	125	112	111	130	133	104	103	138	141	96	95	146	149	88
124	113	118	123	132	105	110	131	140	97	102	139	148	89	94	147
114	127	120	117	106	135	128	109	98	143	136	101	90	151	144	93
121	116	115	126	129	108	107	134	37	100	99	142	145	92	91	150

The square has 256 rectangles and uses the numbers from 1-247 which are arranged in 16 squares of 4 x 4. The method of arrangement is again the same as in the case of the square of 40 x 40. The difference between the 2 groups (1 – 8 and 240 – 247) in the first square is 232. This is decreased by 16 from one square to the next and the final square presents the sequence of numbers from 112 to 127.

1.4 Square 11 x 11

11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	11	10
7	6	5	4	3	2	1	11	10	9	8
5	4	3	2	1	11	10	9	8	7	6
3	2	1	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4
1	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	11
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	11	10	9
6	5	4	3	2	1	11	10	9	8	7
4	3	2	1	11	10	9	8	7	6	5
2	1	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3

This square has 121 numbers and uses the numbers from 1 – 11 as they appear in this order in the first line. Each line contains these numbers but in a different arrangement. The organizing principle is based on the following method: In every line following the first one, the number 1 starting the sequence is forwarded by 2 places, the sequence is continued until the end of the line and then the remaining numbers are placed at the beginning of the same line. The total sum of the numbers horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly is 66, the equivalent of the numerical value of the letters of the word *Allāh*.

1.5 Square 8 x 8

141	176	179	134	133	184	187	126
178	135	140	177	186	127	132	185
136	181	174	139	128	189	182	131
175	138	137	180	183	130	129	188
157	160	163	150	149	168	171	142
162	151	156	161	170	143	148	169
152	165	158	155	144	173	166	147
159	154	153	164	167	146	145	172

The square is composed of 4 squares of 4 x 4 created by 2 different sequences of numbers. The numerical value of the numbers in each of the squares horizontally vertically and perpendicularly is 630. The 36 numbers contain the numbers from 126 to 189. The difference between the 2 groups of numbers in the first square is 56 which gradually disappears until the sequence of 150 – 165 appears in the last square.

1.6 Square 6 x 6

4	10	30	32	34	1
31	18	21	24	11	6
29	23	12	17	22	8
9	13	26	19	16	28
2	20	15	14	25	35
36	27	7	5	3	33

The square contains the numbers from 1 to 36. The numerical value of the numbers horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly is 111, the equivalent for the numerical values of the letters of the word *kāfi* ('Sufficient', one of the 'Most Beautiful Names' of God).

1.7 Square 4 x 4

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

The numerical value of the numbers horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly is 20 which is equivalent to the numerical value of the words *wadūd* ('Devoted', one of the epithets of God) and *budūh* (corresponding to the even numbers 2, 4, 6, 8 in the basic 3 x 3 square composed of the numbers 1-9). Seemingly, the square uses the numbers from 1 to 4 and from 6 to 9. Each of these numbers appears twice. In the original square, however, the number 5 is shown at the end of the second line instead of 6. It is difficult to decide whether this was a mistake on the part of the copyist or it was done on purpose. Namely, if we leave the 5 in its place, the numerical value of its lines is 19, a favourite symbol for the *Basmala* written in 19 letters.

1.8 Square 3 x 3

21	28	23
26	24	22
25	20	27

The numerical value of the numbers horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly is 72 which might stand for *bāsiṭ* ('Extending', one of the 'Most Beautiful Names' of God).

2. Squares on the left side (starting from beneath, the hoist end of the banner)

2.1 Square 3 x 3

2	3	8
5	7	9
6	1	4

The square is almost identical with the basic 3 x 3 square, called also *budūh* as a reference to the letters that can stand for these even numbers (*b, d, w, h*). The only difference is that in the original form the number 5 is placed in the centre. The change must have been made on purpose since the same arrangement occurs in all of the similar squares that are represented on the banner. The square is placed under the *Basmala* which starts the Qur'ānic text.

2.2 Square 5 x 5

This square uses the numbers from 1 to 25. The numerical value of each line horizontally and vertically is 65.

17	24	1	8	15
23	5	7	14	16
4	6	3	20	22
10	12	10	21	3
11	18	25	2	9

2.3 Square 3 x 3

See Square 1.8 (3 x 3) in the Centre

2.4 Square 4 x 4

See Square 1.7 (4 x 4) in the Centre

2.5 Square 3 x 3

See above Square 1.1 (3 x 3)

2.6 Square 10 x 10

4	99	95	94	89	88	14	11	10	1
3	22	81	80	75	69	30	28	19	98
8	24	36	27	63	62	46	33	77	93
15	25	35	50	53	56	43	66	76	86
18	29	40	58	44	49	54	61	72	83
84	70	60	45	58	51	48	41	31	17
85	74	64	52	47	46	57	37	27	16
92	78	68	34	38	39	59	25	23	9
96	82	20	21	26	32	71	73	79	5
100	2	6	7	12	13	87	90	91	97

The square contains the numbers from 1 to 100. The numerical values of the lines is varying, most of them are 505.

2.7 Square 8 x 8

1230	1229	1281	1282	1283	1284	1224	1223
1238	1237	1273	1274	1275	1276	1232	1231
1263	1264	1244	1243	1242	1241	1269	1270
1255	1256	1252	1251	1250	1249	1261	1262
1247	1248	1260	1259	1258	1257	1253	1254
1239	1240	1268	1267	1266	1265	1245	1246
1278	1277	1233	1234	1235	1236	1272	1271
1286	1285	1225	1226	1227	1228	1280	1279

The numerical value of the numbers horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly is 10036. The arrangement of the numbers shows certain regularities: the numbers in the rectangles from 3 to 6 present sequences and in a similar way, the numbers in the 2 rectangles on the right and on the left are also sequences. The direction of the order of the numbers in the sequences is changed in every 2 consecutive lines (from left to right and vice versa).

2.8 Square 3x3

See above Square 2.3 (3 x 3)

2.9 Square 6 x 6

9	35	3	34	32	1
7	11	28	27	8	30
24	14	16	15	23	19
13	20	22	21	17	18
25	29	6	10	26	12
36	2	33	4	5	31

The square contains the numbers from 1 to 36. The numerical value of the numbers horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly is 111, the equivalent for the numerical values of the letters of the word *kāfi* ('Sufficient', one of the 'Most Beautiful Names' of God). For a different version with the same numerical value, see Square 6 (6 x 6) above in the Centre.

2.10 Square 4 x 4

250	203	206	243
205	244	249	204
245	208	201	248
202	247	246	207

The square uses 2 groups of numbers (201 – 208 and 243 – 250) according to the geometric pattern applied in the 40 x 40 and other squares. The numerical value of each line horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly is 902.

2.11 Square 3 x 3

See above Squares 1, 5, 8 (3 x 3)

2.12 Square 5 x 5

Fāṭima	115	130	93	°Alī
95	107	137	117	127
119	129	Muḥammad	109	134
106	136	116	131	94
Ḥusayn	96	108	133	Ḥasan

The numerical value of the numbers (including the numerical values of the names) horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly is 583. The numerical value of the names is also 583.

2.13 Square 4 x 4

8345	114	147	2416
613	26	77	125
33	616	93	66
934 10	55	44	62 1587

No evident organizing principle can be discovered.

2.14 Square 3 x 3

3155	3150	3157
3156	3154	3152
3151	3158	3153

The numerical value of the numbers horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly is 9462.

2.15 Square 4 x 4

See above Square 1.7 (4 x 4) in the Centre

2.16 Square 3 x 3

See above Square 8 (3 x 3) in the Centre

3 Squares on the right side

They are identical with the squares on the left side except for one which is a slight variant of Square 2.14 (3 x 3) on the left side because the numbers are completed in the 4th line by 2 invocations to God and by another to Muhammad.

3155	315	3157
3156	3154	3152
3151	3158	3153
yā Allāh	yā Muḥammad	yā Allāh

The numerical value of the numbers horizontally, vertically and perpendicularly is 9462. As for the orthography of the word *Allāh*, we may note that the letter *lām* is written only once, probably in an effort to avoid writing three vertical strokes.

Commentary

1. As a magical object, the banner belongs to the group of the so called talismanic charts and talismanic shirts that are characterized by the presence of an enormous quantity of numbers arranged in squares and inscribed on cotton, paper or gazelle skin (Maddison & Savage-Smith 1997:106-123). The present banner distinguishes itself by the peculiar arrangement of the squares in a stepped pyramid form which resembles a well-known form of representation of the Islamic Paradise. However, not only the geometrical form, but also the accompanying Qur'ānic Sūra (Q 48) is a perfect choice to connect the banner to the idea of Paradise. This frequently used Sūra, called *al-Fath*, 'The Victory' was revealed on the occasion of the Ḥudaybiya Treaty. Seemingly, it was a setback for the Muslims who wanted to perform the Pilgrimage in the year 628 but could not because they were returned by the Qurayš and agreed to postpone it to the next year. The Prophet, however, considered it as a great victory for the cause of Islam as is evident from the text of the Sūra.

So, this piece of Revelation was very appropriate to convey the good news about immediate victory. The message must have been very important for the owner of the banner. Apart from the references to this victory in the Sūra (e.g. 'victory', 'victory near', 'victors', 'the hand of God is above their hand', indicated by bold characters in the text), there are other expressions that evoke the idea of the Paradise ('gardens through which rivers flow', 'gardens', 'rivers'). The references to Hell, the opposite of Paradise, can also be found ('Jahannam', 'an evil journey's end', 'blaze'). Finally, there is a hint to *ṣirāt mustaqīm*, the 'Straight Path' which separates Paradise from the Hell.

The cosmological aspect in the arrangement of the text on the banner is further emphasized by the occurrence of the declaration 'to God belongs the hosts of heavens and the earth' (twice) in the border band which contains the first eleven verses, so symbolically and practically surrounds Paradise which is above the seventh heaven according to Islamic cosmology.⁸

2. If we look for parallels for the stepped pyramid constructed from the magic squares in the central field of the banner, we can find the best illustration for it in the *Maʿrifetnāme*, the famous Encyclopaedia written by Ibrāhīm Ḥaqqī in the 18th century (Fig. 5).⁹ The illustration shows the eight stepped pyramid symbolizing Paradise with *sidrat al-muntahā*, the 'Lotus Tree of the Boundary' painted in gold. On the right side, the *liwāʾ al-ḥamd*, 'the Banner of Glory'

⁸ For Islamic cosmological ideas, see *EI* (1st and 2nd edition) s.v. 'djanna', 'djahannam'.

⁹ See the colour plates, Plate No. III. The photo is taken from a Manuscript of the *Maʿrifetnāme* in the Tareq Rajab Museum in Kuwait (not catalogued).

painted in red represents the Prophet's banner. In the centre, the Ka^ʿba is shown separating the seven heavens and the seven earths. At the lower part of the picture, we see *Ġahannam*, Hell represented by an abyss enclosed between two seven stepped sides. The Tree of Hell painted in black – in sheer contrast to the golden Tree of Paradise – is also represented. Above Hell, we can see the *ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*, the 'Straight Path'. Evidently, the pictures of Paradise and Hell complement each other, as the stepped pyramid can be inserted into the abyss of Hell. Accordingly, the two components together suggest the idea of perfect unity. The popularity of this sacred or magical cosmology in the 18th – 19th centuries is also attested by a similar picture of Paradise and Hell in a *Hilya* of the Tareq Rajab Museum which contains the description of the Prophet's physical and moral qualities and was dated to 1819 A.D. (Fig. 6.)¹⁰

Practically, the quest for this unity can be discovered in the structure of the squares, in the simultaneous decrease and increase of the two groups of numbers composing the numerical sequences in the squares of 40 x 40, 20 x 20, etc., the arrangement of the sequences in alternately opposite directions (Square 2.7). The reverse directions of the position of the letters in the text and of the numbers in the squares also illustrate the complementary character of the unity.

In a way, the border band inscribed with the Qur'ānic text (with reference to God as the Lord of the hosts of heavens) surrounding the field of the banner symbolizes the constant element in the cosmos, while the squares with the numbers in perpetual movement stand for the active manifestation of God in the world. The ardent belief in the unity of the world is best exemplified by the squares with numerical values that symbolize God (Squares 1.4, 1.6, 1.7). This whole construction created in a very meticulous way can be best interpreted on the basis of reverse analogy: All the symbolic movements in the squares are characterized by the reverse directions in the sequences.

In addition to this, the geometrical representations of these magic squares give the onlooker the possibility to view them as manifestations of a special art form and look at the constructions as tessellations. Accordingly, the squares of 4 x 4 can be considered as geometrical forms that are fitted exactly together to create a two-dimensional plane with no gaps between them. This characteristic is further enhanced by the fact the last (fourth) number in the first line of each square is continued by the number coming after it in the first rectangle of the next square. (So, for example, 6547 is followed by 6548 in the first two components of the Square 40 x 40, etc.)

If we turn to the arts to find illustrations for the above mentioned features in the squares: the use of reverse analogy, the play with the opposites (like the

¹⁰ See the colour plates, Plate No. IV.

black and white on Fig. 4), the merging of the contrastive elements, the idea of unity in the world, we can discover them in the works of the Dutch graphic artist, M.C. Escher. His famous woodcuts and lithographs like the “Sky and Water I, II”, the intarsia panel for the Leiden Town Hall, the “Day and Night”, the “Fishes”, the “Encounter”¹¹ might give a clue to perceive the world view hidden in the seemingly boring magic squares.

In the Islamic world, the best and most enthusiastic exponents of this cosmological system characterized by the ceaseless search for the manifestation of God in the unity of the world were the Šūfīs (Nasr 1968:92-97, Cammann 1969a:201, Fodor 2002, 2006).

3. There is a clear evidence which shows that the banner must have been made for a member of the Šīʿa community. The Square of 3 x 3 on the right side completed by the names of ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Muḥammad, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn reveals the evident Šīʿa background. Apart from this, some other elements, in a way hidden, might also indicate this Šīʿite character. Concerning the characteristic number in the first Square (40 x 40), 40 has a special importance for the Šīʿa, too. *Arbaʿīn*, ‘Forty’ is the name of the important event when the Šīʿites commemorate the martyrdom of Ḥusayn on the 40th day after ʿAšūrā on Šafar 20 when millions of Šīʿites make the pilgrimage to Kerbela. According to Šīʿī belief, a prophet after his death can stay on the earth for forty days before he is lifted up to the heaven (al-Muqarram 1979:132, n.1.). A 40 day fasting is also a frequent prescription for magical practices (Ibn Ḥaṭīr ad-Dīn, *Ğawāhir* 345-352). The use of a special group of 40 names termed *al-asmāʾ al-idrīsīyya*, ‘the Idrisid Names’ attributed to as-Suhrawardī is considered a powerful device in magic (as-Suhrawardī, *Hawāšš*).

The banner in itself enjoys a distinguished place in Šīʿī tradition. According to it, the Prophet gave his standard to ʿAlī during the battle of Ḥaybar (aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Manāqib* 142). More important than this is the tradition which claims that the Prophet promised ʿAlī that he would carry the Prophet’s standard (*liwāʾ al-ḥamd*, ‘the Banner of Glory’) on the Day of Resurrection and the People of God will march in its shade. Finally, ʿAlī clothed in the garment of Paradise will be honoured by a place in the shade of the Throne between Abraham and the Prophet (aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Manāqib* 184-186). This ‘Banner of Glory’ had also an inscription in three lines: the *Basmala*, the *Šahāda* and the *Ḥamdala* (*al-ḥamdu li-l-lāhi rabbi l-ʿālamīn*, ‘Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds’) (al-Muqarram 1979:185).

¹¹ Most of his works are exhibited in the Escher Museum in The Hague.

The triangular form of the banner indicates that its origin should be sought in the Eastern part of the Islamic world, namely in Mughal India or Persia. The form is not of Arabic origin (Kratchkowskaya 1937:468) but occurs very often on illustrations coming from these regions. To cite but a few examples, the characteristic triangular banners painted in different colours on illustrations usually depicting battle scenes, can always be discovered¹². In the Ottoman world, banners of rectangular form became popular as we have seen the representation of the Prophet's banner on the picture illustrating the Universe in the *Maʿrifetnāme*.

Even in modern popular representations of Šīʿī religious scenes we can discover the triangular banner painted in red. It appears, e.g. on a coloured print depicting the battlefield at Kerbela (Dayal & Schulz 2009: Fig.31).

4. There is a definite connection in Šīʿī imagery between the stepped pyramid as the symbol of Paradise and the stepped tomb with a palm branch over it. On a magic bowl from India (Fodor 2006), probably from the North and datable to the 18th century, on the exterior, the tomb of Ḥusayn is depicted as a four stepped edifice with a palm branch inside a mosque (**Fig. 7**)¹³. The accompanying Qurʾānic text (Q 2/257) makes it clear that the tomb symbolizes Paradise ('God is the protector of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light') while on the opposite side of the bowl, *Dū l-Faqār*, the Sword of ʿAlī stands for Hell ('Those who do not believe – their protectors are idols. They bring them out of the light into darkness. They are the companions of the Fire, in which they will dwell for ever').

We may also cite another example for the representation of a stepped tomb with three storeys topped by a dome which allegedly belonged to Abraham (**Fig. 8**)¹⁴. The picture decorates a magical manuscript on talismans which might come from the Delhi Sultanate or Central Asia and can be dated to the 15th century (Christie's, 2002:28, Lot 25).

It is worth noting that people in the Šīʿī processions commemorating ʿĀšūrā carry models of Ḥusayn's tomb made from wood or paper in the form of stepped pyramids (Dayal & Schulz, 2009, Figs. 20-24).

5. Although the banner with its exclusively Qurʾānic text and the squares gives the impression of a piece of strictly orthodox religiousness without any indication of a magical character, there are some words in the Qurʾānic verses which

¹² For the 16th century, see e.g. Thompson & Canby 2003: 97 (No. 4.14); 120 (No.4.32); 128 (No 4.36). For the 17th century, see Lukonin & Ivanov 1996: CAT. No. 214.

¹³ See the colour plates, Plate No. V.

¹⁴ See the colour plates, Plate No. VI.

might, however, imply a magical connotation. The simple occurrence of the expressions ‘no blame on the blind’, ‘no blame on the lame’, ‘no blame on the sick’ or the verb ‘envy’ might be taken as a sign of intent to guarantee the protection of the holder of the banner against these calamities. This might be corroborated by the use of another expression which has a definite prophylactic character: *dā’irat as-sū*, ‘the evil turn of fortune’ will afflict those who ‘think evil thoughts about God’ (Verse 6). The notion of *dā’ira*, ‘circle’ in itself is considered as a powerful magical device for protecting the good and containing the bad.

In connection with the magical use of the banner and the *Sūrat al-Fath*, it is worth to quote a passage from a highly interesting magical work of Šīfī character. It is the previously cited book, *Kitāb al-Ġawāhir al-Hams* written by Sīdī Muḥammad ibn Ḥaṭīr ad-Dīn ibn Bāyazīd Ḥawāḡa al-ʿAṭṭār, a Šūfī author who lived in India in the 16th century¹⁵. Speaking about the uses of a famous invocation called *ad-Duʿā as-sayfī*, ‘The Invocation of the Sword’, the book mentions that ‘he who writes it with the *Sūrat al-Fath* and rolls it up in wax, then hangs it on *rāyat al-Imām*, ‘the banner of the Imam’ (ʿAlī), and confronts the enemy, his enemy will be defeated without doubt’ (*Ġawāhir* 303).

6. Summing up what has been said above, we can come to the conclusion that the banner might have belonged to a member of the Šīʿa, who might have been an adherent of a Šūfī *ṭarīqa* in India, possibly, the Niʿmatullāhi order¹⁶. Very probably, he was not a simple warrior but a warlord who could have taken part in military campaigns. Judged by the quality of the banner, the fine craftsmanship manifested in the execution of the work, the owner must have belonged to the upper class. As a soldier, he must have been in great need of a protective device not only to defend him in the battlefield but also to assure him the admittance to Paradise in case of his death.

¹⁵ The book was banned in Egypt a few years ago because of its magical contents.

¹⁶ For the relationship between Šūfism and the Šīʿa, see Nasr 2008.

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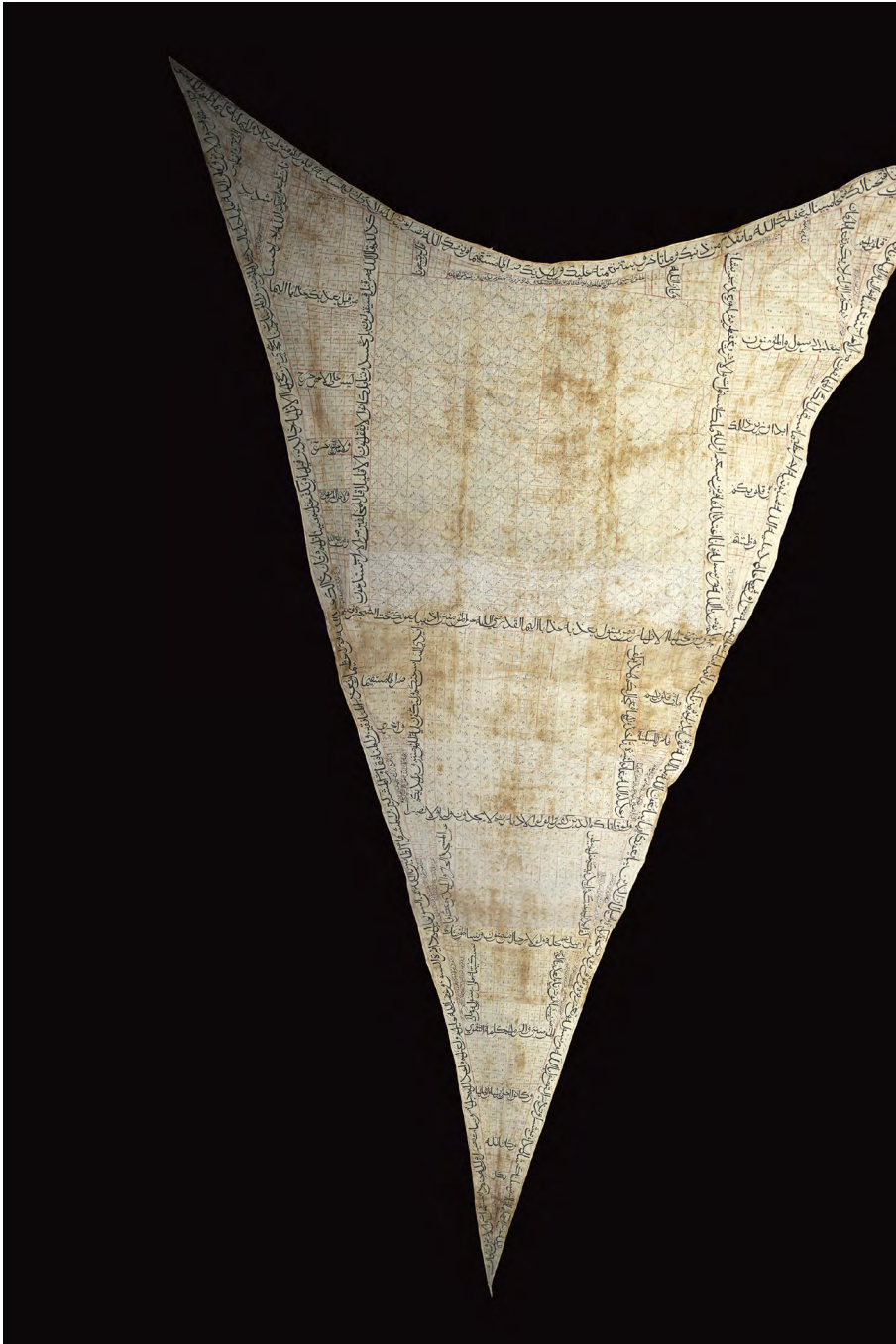


Plate II

Banner from the Tareq Rajab Museum in Kuwait.
Photo by Tareq S. Rajab.

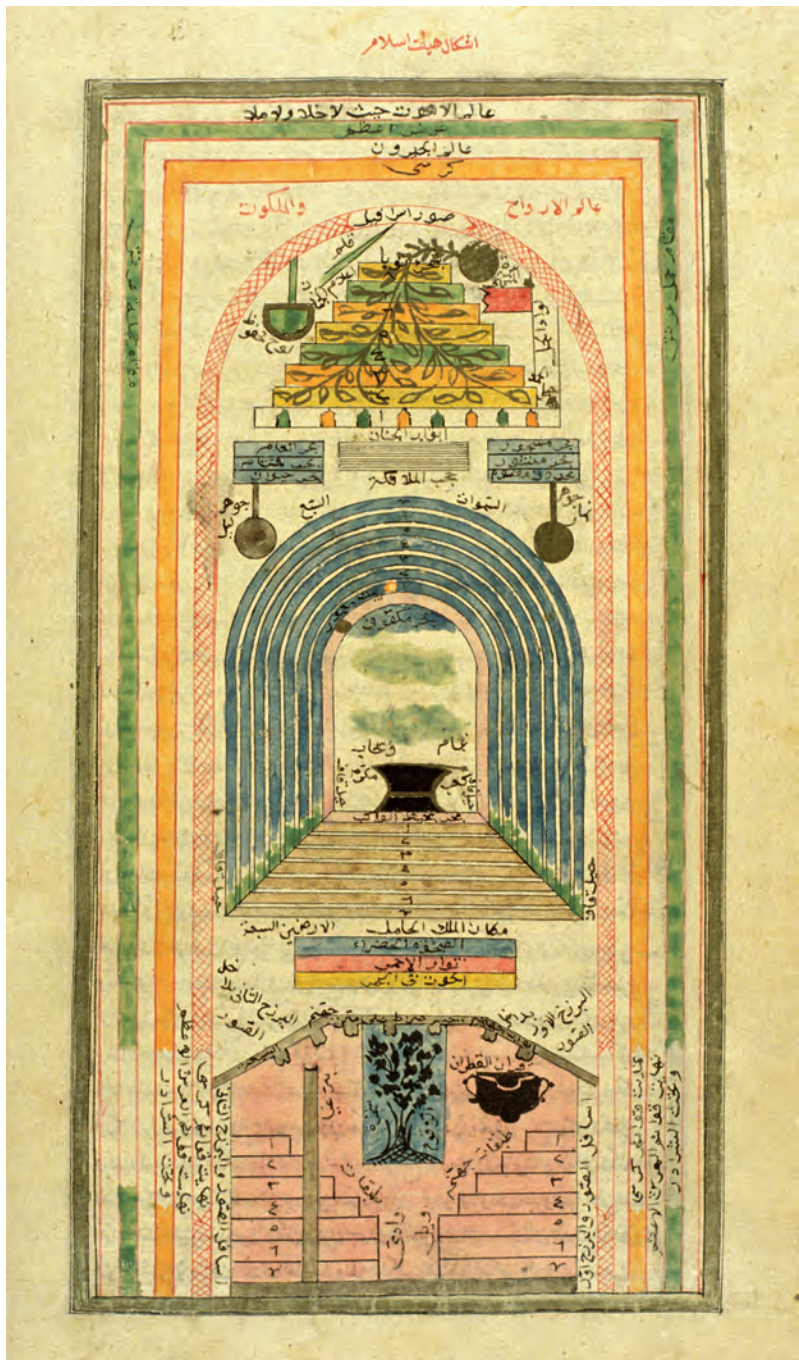


Plate III

Ibrāhīm Ḥaqqī, *Ma'rifetnāme*, MS, Tareq Rajab Museum, Kuwait



Plate IV

Hilya, 1819, Tareq Rajab Museum, Kuwait



Plate V

Husayn's tomb, 18th century magic bowl from India



Plate VI

Abraham's tomb, 15th century manuscript on talismans