El-Sayyid Ahmad El-Badawi (1200-1276) is one of the most powerful saints in Egypt, with a cult that comprises large segments of the Egyptian population as well as people outside Egypt. This cult derives much of its power from Sufi (mystic) philosophy and rituals, which lead to ecstatic experiences and rhetorical poetic expressions. Of all the saints venerated in Egypt, and particularly the axes or arch-saints who support the earth, Ahmad is the only one whose deeds are recounted in three major traditional poems which may be called epics.

Writings which date back to the 14th and 15th centuries record the life history of El-Sayyid Ahmad El-Badawi. These sources authored mainly by his followers, trace the genealogy of Ahmad through twenty-seven links to 'Aali Ibn Abi Talib, a paternal cousin of Prophet Mohammad and the Fourth Caliph. The title "El-Sayyid" denotes this kinship to the prophet's family. Like many nomads, especially Berbers in North Africa, Ahmad wore a veil which allowed only the area around his eyes to be seen. The title "El-Badawi" refers to this characteristic.

After the assassination of Aali by the Kharijite rebels, and the defeat of his followers (the 'Aalawites) by the Omayyads, many members of Ahmad's family fled to remote areas to avoid persecution. A branch of the family resided in North Africa, where its members intermarried with local Berber groups.

Ahmad was born in the town of Fez in the year 1200 A.D. (597 A.H.). He was the sixth child in his family; two older brothers and three (sometimes four) sisters of Ahmad are usually mentioned. He wore the red Sufi mantle in his childhood, red being the characteristic color for Ahmad's followers. When Ahmad was seven his father decided to move back to Mecca. On their way the family stopped in Egypt, where they stayed from three to five years. In Mecca Ahmad led a life of chivalry at first; that phase of his life was characterized by courage and piety. He therefore earned the title of "al-'Aftab," i.e., the one who causes damage to the enemy. Ahmad refused to marry and rebuked his older brother Hasan (who became the head of the family after the death of their father and middle brother) for his suggestion that he should do so.

Following this early phase Ahmad turned to austere living and worshipped in solitude in a cave outside Mecca. About the year 1237, Ahmad persuaded his brother Hasan, also a Sufi, to accompany him to Iraq where two major Sufis had founded philosophical schools of mysticism and impressive organized brotherhoods. These were Ahmad al-Rifa'Ai (d.1175 A.D.) and 'Aabdul-Qadir al Jeelani (d.1166). The two brothers toured Iraq. In the north they were received in a hostile manner by rugged Kurdish mountain tribesmen. Some written sources cite his battle with Fatma Bint-Birry in the context of describing this trip. The brothers returned to southern Iraq where Hasan, the older brother, decided to return to his family in Mecca while the younger Ahmad decided to return to the north; however, Ahmad did return to Mecca soon afterwards, in the year 1238.
Ahmad's life, according to these sources, was motivated by manāms, i.e., instructive dreams of a religious nature. A manām advised his mother of his birth and future greatness; another instructed his father to move to Mecca, while a third urged Ahmad to travel to Iraq. A short while after his return to Mecca, Ahmad received through another manām instructions to travel to Tanda, a small village in the Nile Delta in Egypt. He obeyed the instructions and left Mecca, taking with him the book of his genealogy and another book of "stories." His trip to Egypt started in the year 1238, the same year he returned from Iraq. Ahmad arrived at Tanda about a year later, where he headed directly to a specific house where he was well received.

Ahmad resided on the top of the house, where he met with his early followers. This group of early sufis was referred to as "Sutuhiyah," i.e., the "House-Toppers," a title for one of the brotherhoods which is organized around Ahmad's person and teachings.

The reports of Ahmad's karamit (miraculous manifestations) are numerous. Even after his death, he has been continuously reported to have performed outstanding supernatural deeds. According to these accounts, which are esoteric in nature, both Ahmad and his family were motivated by manāms. In contrast to this viewpoint, a contemporary Egyptian historian, 'Ashur 'A. 'Aashour, reviewed Ahmad El-Badawi's life history from an objective perspective. In a bold and painstaking analysis, 'Ashur correlated the movements of Ahmad's family from North Africa to Hejaz with political and religious changes. The new conditions would have affected the family adversely.

'Aashour also pointed out that Ahmad's trip to Iraq influenced him in two basic ways: it filled him with admiration for the Sufi cult of al-Rifa' Al, which made him aspire to a similar status, and it led him to realize that it was impossible for him to occupy any place of prominence in Iraq. His trip took place only twenty years before the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols, a period which was characterized by confusion, decadence, and an ugly sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims. Moreover, Iraq already had its Sufi masters (agtab, i.e., axes). Ahmad could only be a follower. His trip to northern Iraq, where he was confronted by hostile Kurdish mountain tribesmen, strengthened his conviction that if he were to have his own way, it had to be elsewhere.

'Aashour suggests, among other possibilities, that young Ahmad's stay in the Nile Delta during his trip through Egypt must have made a strong impression on him. This explains his heading to Tanda and to a specific house there. Sh'a'Aban argues convincingly that Ahmad chose this location for a number of well calculated reasons: its central position as a crossroads to populated areas; the docile nature of its peasant population; its relative isolation from the seat of political power, which might have stifled his organization before it grew; and the fact that there were no prominent saints in the area.

In this strategic location Ahmad's cult was born; it grew and spread to become one of the most powerful cults in Egypt, if not in the entire Middle Eastern area. Ahmad seems not to have left Tanda or the top of the house where he stayed until his death in August 1276.

'Aashour attributes the "fabrication and propagation of Ahmad's miraculous manifestations" to a group of "beneficiaries." These followers gained vast political, religious, social and above all, economic power from maintaining the cult and enhancing its causes.
Transformation of Character

Scholars of various persuasions agree that saints' cults in Egypt date back to ancient times.9 The transition from an ancient polytheistic religion to Christianity and then to Islam did not radically alter the basic religious beliefs and practices of the native Egyptian peasant. The present versified story of El-Sayyid Ahmad El-Badawi is a strong proof for this argument.

The majority of Egyptians, especially in rural areas, live according to three separate temporal systems. The oldest of these is the ancient solar system known as the Coptic Calendar, which is used exclusively in agricultural and related activities.10 The second is the more recent lunar system, which begins with the year of prophet Mohammad's Hegira (flight) from Mecca in the year 622 A.D., was introduced with Islam during the first half of the 7th century A.D. (first century A.H.). The third and most recent system is the European Christian solar calendar, which was introduced only during the French Campaign (1798-1801). Currently, Egyptian folk groups reckon ancient agricultural occasions according to the Coptic, Islamic religious occasions according to the Islamic, and governmental formal occasions according to the European Christian system. It has been observed that celebrating Ahmad's birthday (mubīd) is linked only to the agricultural calendar.11 Ahmad's festivals are generally held around the first half of October (after the cotton harvest) and around April (after the wheat and bean harvest); a third and lesser festival is held on 17 or 18 January but seems to have diminished.

A number of scholars consider a belief in trees, wells, and animals to be a survival from ancient religious systems.12 The effect of ancient religious beliefs, however, seems to have been much greater than merely isolated concepts, practices, and calendar festivals. We may propose here that in Tandata the cult of Ahmad El-Badawi was transformed from that of a Sufi fakir to a cult of an Ancient Egyptian deity. This transformation involved Ahmad's physical appearance and functions, as well as his overall character.

Early sources describe Ahmad as follows: "He was thick legged, long armed, large faced, black eyed, tall, wheat colored [i.e., coppertone skin]. There were three smallpox marks on his face, one on his right cheek and two on the left. His nose was aquiline. It had two moles on it—one on each side; each mole was smaller than a lintile seed. Between his eyes was a razor-blade wound caused by the son of his brother al-Husayn ... while he was in Mecca and still young ... ."13 Another source describes Ahmad as having "thin skin, straight slender flesh and a lean body."

Early 'historical' reports indicate that, in the manner of the austere Sufis, Ahmad ate very little. He spent a great deal of his Sufi life on the top of the house in a trance, just staring at the heavens. He spoke sparingly, laughed or frolicked rarely, and certainly did not participate in either one of the two major wars: against the Mongols in the east and against the crusaders in Egypt itself.

With the exception of the alleged battle with Bint Birry (which is reported to have taken place before his actual sainthood), early accounts agree on these general characteristics. According to folk belief, however, Ahmad combines a number of roles found in ancient Egyptian religion. As one of the four "Axes," he is believed to carry the world. A counterpart for this belief is found in the ancient Egyptian belief in four gods, the sons of Horus, supporting the legs and arms of Nut, the heavens.15
Ahmad's physical characteristics are depicted in oral lore as follows: a dwarf with a huge mouth and belly, a scabby head usually covered with a long conical cap, a joker, a military war lord, a helper, and an avenger. None of these traits (except the last two, which are normally assigned to any saint) are congruent with Ahmad's image portrayed in historical reports.

"He is usually depicted in the form of a dwarf with a huge bearded head, protruding tongue . . . long but thick arms and bowed legs . . . on his head he wears a tiara of feathers . . . [he is] a god of music and the dance; he is a god of war and slaughter, and . . . a destroying force of nature. . . ."\textsuperscript{16} This is not a description of Ahmad as he appears in our text, but of the ancient Egyptian god Bes, also of foreign descent. Budge states that "... Bes is certainly African."\textsuperscript{17} In other folk accounts of Ahmad, he is said, among other things, to control the wind and help in childbirth. These functions were also assigned to Bes in Ancient Egypt.

Veronica Ions wrote that Bes "... was enthusiastically adopted by the common people and became one of the most popular deities. . . . Though sometimes portrayed in military dress as slayer of his worshippers' enemies, he was primarily a god of good humor and of merrymaking."\textsuperscript{18} Similarly, Wallis Budge wondered: "It is difficult to understand the change of view on the part of the Egyptians which turned the god of mirth, and laughter, and pleasure into an avenging deity, but it may be explained by assuming that he only exhibited his terror and ferocity to the wicked, while to the good in the Underworld he was a true friend and merry companion."\textsuperscript{19}

We may ask the same question about Ahmad El-Badawi, who underwent a similar process of transformation in his physical appearance, roles and character. The answer may be found in the political and psychological conditions of Ahmad's era.

**Mysticism and Escape from Reality**

As mentioned earlier, the cult of El-Sayyid Ahmad El-Badawi is embedded in Sufi folk philosophy and practices. On the whole, formal Moslem orthodoxy (Sunni Islam) opposes such cults and most of their mystic doctrines and rituals.\textsuperscript{20} It is often argued that mysticism (Sufism) is connected in varying degrees with early Christianity. The Roman persecution of the first Christians led to their dispersion and the establishment of monasteries in remote parts of Egypt during the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. A number of writers also advance the idea that the Shiite sect of Islam resorted to mysticism after its defeat and persecution at the hands of the Omayyads.\textsuperscript{21} Sufi philosophy seems to have acquired early strength among Moslems in North Africa (the stage for Ahmad's birth and early childhood), which served as a refuge area for a number of "oppressed" groups.

The defeat of Sunni Moslems in the crusades and the establishment of Christian European colonies in various parts of Moslem lands also enforced the drive towards repentance and return to early austere and pious ways of life. In other parts of the Moslem state, especially in the east, austere Sufi trends developed on a limited scale. In that area Sufism seemed to be an extreme reaction against the extravagant life style which characterized Moslem countries during their political and economic peak (8th and 9th centuries A.D.). It is worth noting, however, that both the luxurious and the austere extremes are against Sunni Islamic teachings.
The Mongols (referred to by a prominent Moslem historian as "the infidel enemy," verse no. 64,22 and the crusaders (referred to by the same historian as "the European enemy," verse verses no. 118-119, have occupied vast stretches of Moslem lands, where numerous massacres were reported.23 The crusaders advanced deeply into the Nile Delta. In Egypt Sufism seems to have developed under these adverse conditions. In its early stages, however, Sufi philosophy did not influence the life of Egyptians in any major way. It was only during the era of the Mameluks (1250-1517 A.D.) that Sufism acquired strength and became widespread.

The new group ruling Egypt, the Mameluks, added to the Egyptians' sense of total defeat and helplessness, for "In spite of their having embraced Islam, and of their efforts in defending the Islamic homeland, the bitter fact which was difficult for Egyptians to ignore easily is that the Mameluks were foreigners... and that at one time they were slaves and that they ruled Egypt as a haughty aristocracy... [which] prohibited native Egyptians from even riding horses...24

Among such vanquished masses, Sufi teachings and fantasies found fertile soil for their development into cults. Generally speaking, Sufi philosophy and rituals and Sufi brotherhoods are opposed by formal religion, yet they not only continue to exist, but to prosper and expand.

Narrative Poetry; a Folkloric Genre

Narrative poetry is almost totally lacking in classical (learned or academic) Arabic literature, including that of Egypt. A number of stories told exclusively in poetic format, however, are found in the contemporary folk culture of Egypt. One of these genres is the seerah, i.e., epic-romance, which combines poetry with prose intermittently.25

The subject matter for narrative folk poetry (excluding the seerah) is divided evenly between the religious, as is the case without present text, and the local, social, and historical. A number of narratives included in the first category of belief narrative poetry may be viewed as epics.26 This type of narrative poetry is simply called kihjah, i.e., a serious story. Meanwhile, the majority of the stories in the second category of essentially non-religious expressions may be viewed as ballads with "true" (historical, legendary) contents. A story which belongs to this type is normally called a mawwal, i.e., a song or a hadithah, i.e., a true event.27

Enno Littmann called his variant of our present text a "Lied," i.e., song. Clearly influenced by the characteristics of the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, Littmann observed that "Among the Arabs and the Abyssinians, and also perhaps among the Hebrews and the Arameans, the epic of 'hero-legends' [probably meaning accounts about a demigod] is expressed in prose. Only among the Ugaritics and Babylonians were there true epics whose origin is perhaps due to foreign influence."28 Similarly William Kelly Simpson, in his introduction to The Literature of Ancient Egypt, states that "The [formal] culture of Egypt was not expressed in epics or drama... . . ."29

In its present purely poetic narrative form our text seems to have been formulated in folk circles after the 15th century. This view is supported by the fact that earlier accounts were given either as a rhymed prose narrative or a classical lyric
poem which alluded to narrative events. Combining these two forms without merging them is a basic characteristic of the seerah (epic-romance) such as those dealing with 'Aantar and Abu-zaid.'

Eastern and Western Exchange

The period of the Crusaders was one of military conflict between Middle Eastern Moslems and European Christians, yet its impact on the cultures of the two peoples was major. Cultural exchanges during the crusades, as well as during similar periods surrounding it, left a vast legacy of new acquisitions among members of both camps.

Of particular importance to our present study is the movement of legendary narratives. A number of students of European and Middle Eastern cultures have pointed out the influence of Islamic stories exercised on Byzantine and Medieval European romances such as Aucass. Among these we may point out Henri Gregoire's "Exchanges Epique Arabo-Grec Sharkan-Charsanis," Henri Gregoire and Roger Gossens, Byzantinisches Epos und arabischer Ritterroman," and Samuel Singer's "Arabische und Europäische Poesie im Mittelalter." Littmann points out the similarities between the cult of 'Ahmed el-Bedawi' and its Christian European counterparts. He draws attention to the fact that Ahmad's first festival was held during the 17th and 18th of January contemporaneously with the Christian Epiphany. Littmann finds strong similarities between Ahmad's life history and that of Saint Nikolaus Pregrunus, as outlined in Heinrich Gutter's Die Christliche Legende des Abandlandes (1910) and suggests that in a number of spots the Christian Hellenistic concepts were substituted for those associated with Ahmad.

15th Century Variant of the Battle

Some printed sources report that during Ahmad's trip to Iraq, Axis al-RifaAli visited him in a madam and told him about Fatma Bint Birry (compare verses no. 27-35); he also advised him that he, Ahmad, was the only one that could defeat her. Ahmad asked his brother Hasan to join him in his trip to the north, but Hasan decided to return to his family instead. Ahmad travelled to Fatma Bint Birry's valley (apparently in northern Iraq). The story is reported as an account by Ahmad himself; its main events are as follows:

Ahmad pretended to be dumb and mute (cf. verse no. 193). Fatma had 2,000 girls whom she had instructed to bring to her any stranger who might appear in the area. When Ahmad was taken to her she recognized his identity and asked him if he had come to seek revenge for all the men whom she had 'fascinated' (compare verse no. 26, 235 and 346). She asked him to marry her instead (see verses no. 333-336). Fatma began showing her beauty to Ahmad (see verses no. 292-299); he, however, thought: "Fatma, this is something that does not concern me or [even] occur to my mind." He remained silent. She was finally convinced that he was not Ahmad, whom she had seen in a dream (see verses no. 123-124).
Fatma's deputy, a good man named Ahmad al-'Airaqi (i.e., the Iraqi) suggested that the stranger be hired as a camel herder and communicated this idea to Ahmad; he agreed. The 7,000 camels managed themselves (cf. verse no. 180); however, on the seventh day Ahmad decided that it was time to take issue with Fatma. He ordered the camels, "with God's permission," to die and took a handful of air and said "... to the heart of Fatma Bint Birry; come to see!" (cf. verses no. 124-129).

Fatma was reported to have been as if "... struck by a thunderbolt." She rode her horse, but the horse refused to move except in the direction of the camels. Fatma travelled while surrounded by "people, fakirs, deputies ..." while the head deputy talked to her ..." He asked her to pray to God that the deaf-mute stranger would regain his lost senses. She answered him, "If he is my adversary, Ahmad, we will reach him to find that he can [actually] hear and talk."

The deputy signaled Ahmad that Fatma came to see him. "Fatma dipped into the air with her hand; a filled cup was in her hand." She signaled Ahmad to take the cup; he splashed its contents into the air and caused Fatma and her horse to sink into the ground as far as "the pupils of her eyes" (see verses no. 323-324).

Fatma shouted for help and called the clan of Birry and the clan of Na'Aeem. Fearing death, Ahmad lifted up the tails of his robe, rolled up his sleeves, and called, "O, family of [prophet] Mohammad, O, family of 'Aali, O ... " (see verses no. 311-317). Immediately, "... the Knights of Najd and Iraq came ... from every side ... It was a day with a great [battle] dust, like a sea with turbulent waves. When the clan of Birry and the clan of Na'Aeem saw ... [that], they could not endure. They turned their backs and fled" (compare with verses no. 254-290 and 318-325). They asked for forgiveness. The Knights of Najd and Iraq told Ahmad "We wouldn't hurt whoever is named Fatma for the sake of your grandmother Fatma al-zahra the daughter of God's Prophet ... forgive Fatma, Ahmad" (see verses no. 348-349).

Ahmad decided to forgive her on the conditions "... that she would not return to molest any of the men with means [i.e., Sufis], live ... on her original capital, ..." Fatma agreed and asked to be administered the 'oath' as a follower of Ahmad (see verses no. 352-353), and chanted a lyric poem which describes her entire encounter with Ahmad.

Fatma's aseedah is in grammatical, classical Arabic; like Ahmad's account it is given in the first person. It is composed of 56 verses and is strophic. The entire poem is without doubt the composition of a learned poet; none of the verses in her poem appear in the folk rendition of the story.

The Present Text

The present text was recorded in June 1972. The source is a janitor named Shakir, who worked in a governmental office in Cairo. He was about forty-five at the time of collection. Shakir is literate; he had a few years of village religious elementary education. He used to be a shaykh (shaman) in his home village in middle upper Egypt until 1960, when he moved to Cairo with an "important man" whom he had "cured." The important person offered Shakir a job in Cairo; Shakir accepted on the condition that it should not be arduous, and explained, "I am not used to tiring work." He learned the poem in his village in middle
upper Egypt and had not heard it since he moved to the city twelve years before the recording took place.

During an interview with a number of informants about saints’ miraculous manifestations, the topic of the four axes who support the earth came up. One narrator named Husain, evidently correlating the words “El-Sayyid” and “World” with the contents of the story, stated, “The basis for this [belief] is . . .” Shakir then quoted verses three and four exactly as they appear in our text. He then recited verse no. 30. Evidently being unable to continue with the poem, he began to paraphrase and explain the story and used one verse which is a combination of the first part of verse no. 33 and the second of verse no. 34: “While in the universe a lass appeared who has taken away the ‘drinks’ of the pious ones!”

Shakir reacted “No! No!” He then proceeded to recite starting with verses no. 31 and 32 which Husain had left out and continued with the rest of the story. Shakir spoke fast; it was clear that he had memorized the text. He later stated, “I heard it and read it in a booklet which I have.” The published text which Shakir was referring to appears in a sixteen-page booklet and contains 351 verses; it is sold in folk quarters for the equivalent of ten cents.

In spite of its printed character, the published variant is of folk oral traditional nature. It belongs to a cycle of versified stories which constitute a major segment of the art of the professional maddah (praisers, sing. maddah). A maddah, unlike the sha’Air (poet) who performs the epic-romance, specializes in religious poetry and sings to the accompaniment of musical instruments which are not used by the Sha’Air. A maddah is considered, for all practical purposes, a sort of beggar and is so treated in folk communities; verse no. 13 illustrates the status of the praiser. (Recent popularization movements are changing this view of the maddah.) Littmann’s composite variant was dictated in 1912 by a blind beggar who had learned it earlier from the head of his ‘guild’; it contains 359 verses.

Shakir stated that certain parts of the poem are also used in zikr, a Sufi ritual which combines bodily movement with chant and drum beats. He chanted verses 1 through 16 as an example of the portions which are used in zikr; he stated “I was not a [lead] chanter but many times I stood as a raddad [chorus].”

During his recitation Shakir was interrupted repeatedly. His first performance of this text was relatively spotty, yet it contained all the events given in the printed text in their exact sequence. Husain, for example, interrupted frequently and suggested that an event should be introduced at a certain point; Shakir disagreed. In all cases Shakir proved correct, according to both the printed text and to Husain, who later agreed with Shakir’s presentation.

Under relatively adverse conditions Shakir’s rendition was fairly accurate. Taking the printed text as a basis for comparison, Shakir started from verse no. 30; in this respect he was motivated by Husain’s attempt to tell the story. Of the remaining 321 verses he presented 208; 64.8 percent of what he had learned and read several years earlier.

At first Shakir’s performance (recall) was slightly spotty; for example, the verses from nos. 31 to 61 went as follows: 31, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 38, 39, 39, 40, 41, 42, 42, 44, 46, 47 (paraphrased), 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 62.
The efficiency of Shakir's verbatim recall declined towards the end. He tended to paraphrase or narrate in prose and used poetry only sporadically. Verses 232 to 262 went as follows: 232, 236, 237, 239, 240, 268.

After the departure of the four other participants, I asked Shakir to repeat the poem for me. He asked for a little rest and seemed to be occupied for about ten minutes.

The second rendition proved to be virtually identical with the printed text. It was given without hesitations, explanations and, most of all, without being interrupted. With his eyes half-closed, not focusing his sight on any specific object, frowning or closing his eyes and shaking his head occasionally, Shakir fired off the poem in 355 verses. Four verses which are not included in the printed text appear in Shakir's second rendition; these are verses no. 5, 258, 322, and 353. Only verse no. 353 adds a significant component to the story. Verses 4 and 5 exist in oral tradition as truisms. The printed text combines the first part of verse no. 4 with the second part of verse no. 5 into one verse. Both Shakir's two renditions and Husain's portion include verses 4 and 5 as separate units; in this respect they are in agreement with the oral traditional truisms.

Verse 292 of the present text appears between verses 296 and 298 (verse no. 297) in the printed text.

Other minor variations between Shakir's rendition and the printed text appear frequently. All these differences are, however, limited to:

1. change in the tense from the 'past continuous' dialogue to 'present continuous' dialogue:
2. use of adjectives; in verse no. 53, for example, the word "nadeem" (etymologically correct but an ungrammatical form for "nadin," i.e., repentful) appeared first as "'Aad~em,,' i.e., destitute or utterly stripped. In a different context, Shakir had explained, "'Nadeem' or 'Adeem' or 'adeem' (i.e., worn out) they are all the same"; and
3. use of names and praise and nicknames.

Ahmad may be referred to as El-Sayyid, "the Badawi," the 'Aimwite, Abu-Farrag, the Bringer-of-the-Captive; the Bringer-of-the-She-Captive, the Bringer-of-the-Captive; the One-with-the-Long-Reach and the Prince. Other titles such as the Silent One and the One-Who-is-Angry [on behalf of the truth], appear elsewhere.

Prophet Mohammad may be referred to as the Honest One, the Beloved One, the One-Who-the-Long-Reach and the Prince. Other titles such as the Silent One and the One-Who-is-Angry [on behalf of the truth], appear elsewhere.

Apart from these variations, Shakir's oral rendition and the printed text are identical.

This folk poem, however, imitates the literary elite format of the classical Arabic Qaseedah, a fact which suggests that the original saint's legend was versified through a literate source. Unlike most folk poetry, which is stanzaic, our present text is strophic; its first two verses use correct prosody and are desinently inflective. They also use the literary poetic device called tasree'A, i.e., the dipods of the first verse in a poem use the same end rhyme. An example of tasree'A is:
The rest of the poem is formulated in a different meter and end rhyme. In many instances, the rhyme is imperfect (slant rhyme). The language is typically that of folk and common speech used in rural areas, particularly among Sufi groups. Much of the jargon of mysticism, verbal formulas, typical traditional imagery (mental or intellectual formulas) and narrative episodes and motifs appear in the poem.

Notes

1. The complete text of this epic was published with a brief introductory note in Folklore Forum 9(1976): 3-4.

2. In their Concise Encyclopaedia of Arabic Civilization: The Arab East (Djambatan: Amsterdam, 1961), p. 76, Stephan and Randy Ronart report erroneously that Ahmad died in the year 1258.

3. One of these versified narratives relates the birth of Ahmad, his supernatural qualities as an infant, and some of his 'miraculous' accomplishments in his adult life. The second narrative deals with how Ahmad rescued a woman named Khadra "al-Shareefah," who was captured by the crusaders.

A narrative account of the function of the axes appears in Hasan El-Shamy's Folktales of Egypt, no. 33 (forthcoming in the University of Chicago Press series of Folktale of the World.)

Only one other Axis besides Ahmad has a versified narrative which revolves around his supernatural deeds. He is Al-Djuqi; his story describes how when he was still a child, he took his mother, then his father, for a tour of the universe and showed them Heaven and Hell and their inhabitants.

The scenes, acts, values, and languages used in these poems are typical of the peasantry. See Erno Littmann's discussion on this matter in the Introduction to his translation of an oral rendition of our present story "Ahmad il-Bedawi, ein Lied auf den ägyptischen Nationalheiligen" Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur: Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse, Mainz (Wiesbaden: 1950, no. 3), pp. 50-123, also issued as an independent book, pp. 1-73; see pp. 61-62 and Footnotes nos. 6 and 8, pp. 122-123.


6. Al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi . . .

7. Formal religious figures did actually try to stop the cult of Ahmad from expanding. However, as writings sympathetic to Ahmad indicate, these attempts failed. See 'Aashour, pp. 125-132.

8. 'Aashour, p. 102. The writings of 'Aabd al-Wahhab Al-Sha'Aarani (1493-1565) in particular seem to have contributed the largest share of Ahmad's recorded miraculous manifestations. 'Aashour, p. 106-114, traces several erroneous historical reports, in which rulers allegedly paid homage to Ahmad, to Sha'Aarani's writings, p. 194; also Vollers, p. 194 (Vollers, it should be pointed out, mistook Al-Sha'Arani's name to be the more common one "al-Sha'rawi"), points out that Al-Sha'Arani was one of Ahmad's "greatest worshippers." For a biographic statement on Sha'Aarani, whose thoughts on other social matters were surprisingly progressive, see Concise Encyclopaedia . . . vol. I, pp. 482-483.


18. Ions, p. 11.


23. For a concise description of the first and second crusades, see Nutting, pp. 171-192; see also his summary of the accounts on the Mongol massacres, pp. 192-204.


25. For a description of the hard and the subject matter for his performances in Egypt during the 1830s, see Lane, pp. 359-391.

In his study (Arabic) on Al-Hilaliyya in History and Folk-Literature (Cairo University, 1956) 'Aabd El-Hamid Younis assesses the relationship between poetic and prosaic passages in the Seera, see pp. 139-140; see also p. 9 in the English summary.

26. Examples of this category include: "The Story of Sarah and Abraham," which accounts for the sacred belief of Abraham's intention to sacrifice his son Isma'Aeel (in the Islamic version) and the consequent emergence of the Arabs; the "Story of Maryam (Mary)" which accounts for sacred Muslim beliefs about the birth of Christ. In his description of "Beggars" in Egypt, pp. 299-300, Lane only alludes to their art of "Chanting verses in praise of the Prophet..." It is in this context of sacred accounts and figures that Enno Littmann uses the term "epos;" see his work on Mohamed in Volkspos (Copenhagen, 1950); see also the data related to note no. 28 in this essay.

27. A relatively large number of secular narrative folk songs are found in Egypt. All account for actual events of considerable importance for folk communities. Among these are: "Al-adham El-Shargawi," a story of an Egyptian outlaw with Robin Hood characteristics; "Hasan and Na'Aeema," a story which accounts for the murder of a singer who dared to fall in love with a girl from a notable family; "Shafeeqa and Mitwalli," a story which tells how a brother killed his sister to preserve the family honor. Political themes are also treated in the narrative mawwal; one such song accounts for the assassination of the Egyptian Prime Minister Butrus Ghali in 1910 and provides political and economic causes for the act.

28. Littmann, "Ahmad..." p. 60; see also note no. 27.


30. See note no. 25.


33. (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1918).


35. See note no. 5.

37. Five informants were present at the beginning of the session. Shakir (our main source for the present text) Husain, and Tilib, are all middle-aged men who came from the same area in Middle Southern Egypt. Two younger informants, one thirty-five years old and the other twenty, were from the eastern province of the Nile Delta; both younger informants had received a few years of secular elementary schooling.


39. Events which normally appear in the story which account for Ahmad's birth, and others which appear in the story of Ahmad's freeing of a woman captive, are included in Littmann's version. See verses 322ff. and 345ff. in his poem.


41. The term "performance" is used here to indicate two collateral aspects of behavior. The first is what a person does when faced with a "task"; or "a personal activity considered as producing a result," which is the 'psychological' definition of "performance." The second is "the property of a phenomenon by virtue of which it can be counted or measured," or "that aspect of a phenomenon which can be described in terms of the numerical system," which is the psychological definition for "quantity." The concept of "quality," which is an aspect of experience differing in kind from all other aspects, is inapplicable to this use of the term "behavior," the word "behavior," thus, is being used here to refer to a combination of both the psychological terms of "performance" and "quantity." It should also be differentiated from the current folkloristic usage of the word "performance," which stands mostly for what psychologists would refer to as quality. See Horace B. English and Ava English, A Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychological and Psychoanalytical Terms (David McCoy: New York, 1966), pp. 379, 434.