

Earth Divination

Points of Interest: The Earthly Science of Renaissance Geomancy

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Principality of Vindheim

I. The Initial Omen

Before examining the chronological development of the art, each attendee must commit a singular horary inquiry to parchment. Write the following question at the head of your notes:

"What shall be the fruit of my focus this hour?"

Without counting or conscious deliberation, trace four rapid rows of vertical slashes from right to left across the page. Count each row. An odd total yields a single point; an even total yields a double point. Stack these points vertically from top to bottom. Compare your resulting figure to the reference table appended to the back of this syllabus to determine your fate when communicating with the Anima Mundi

II. *Ilm al-Raml*

Though we pursue Geomancy, we do not start with it. The term was very occasionally used in classical antiquity to describe a type of augury that attempted to interpret signs in earth, in cracks or patterns, or the occurrence of natural phenomena. It was only later re-coined in the medieval era to form a symmetry with the better-preserved systems of pyromancy, hydromancy, and aeromancy, and then associated with the Arabic divination art of *'ilm al-raml* ("the science of the sand") or *al-khatt bi-raml* ("the drawing of lines in the sand").

In its earliest nomadic iterations, the practice was known simply as *khatt*. A diviner (*hazi*) traced rapid, uncounted furrows or ripples in smooth desert sand. These lines were subsequently erased or crossed out two by two. If two marks remained that predicted success; a single remaining mark foretold failure. As the practice developed, the output of the lines became more complex, trading a simple favourable or unfavourable result for a cast of 16 potential figures, each with 4 component parts made up of odd or even, active or inactive readings for the 4 classical elements.

Eventually, other ways of generating the figures developed. Lines drawn on the earth were not considered absolutely integral to the method. A diviner could cast sticks, or use geometric dice if the desert sand was not readily available. Historical specimens preserved in the Ni'matollahi Khanaqah Library in Tehran consist of four cubic or rectangular metal dice threaded along a central rod. Each face is engraved with either



a single or double point. This way, spinning a pair of these dice-rods one could generate 4 figures all at once- the 4 “mothers” that would go on to form the basis of the entire reading.

Traditionally, the secrets of *'ilm al-raml*, as recorded by sixteenth-century historians such as Ahmad ben 'Ali Zunbul, attributes the figures and their meanings, as well as the system to generate them to a direct revelation from the Archangel Gabriel (*Jibril*) to the prophet Idris, who is most often identified with Hermes Trismegistus (As well as Enoch). Idris was allegedly instructed to pass the lineage to an Eastern sage named "Tum-Tum al-Hindi." Modern linguistic analysis suggests *al-Hindi* is a corruption of *hindasi*, the native Arabic term for a geometer or engineer. The mythic framing of an "Indian" source likely reflects either a corruption of a classical authority like Ptolemy or an appeal to India's status as a site of ancient wisdom.

By the fourteenth century, the art had achieved a systematic maturity. In his *Muqaddimah* (1377), the historian Ibn Khaldoun dedicated an exhaustive analytical chapter to geomancy. He detailed the sixteen figures, classified them by structural favorability, and assigned them directly to the twelve signs of the Zodiac and the four cardinal points (not twelve houses!). This text demonstrates that the internal mathematical logic, the generation of secondary figures, and the astrological frameworks utilized by Islamic scholars directly inspired the European tradition.

From the ninth century to its peak in the sixteenth, *'ilm al-raml* was practiced at every level of Islamic society—from wandering desert nomads to court astrologers (*munadjjdimun*), physicians, and elite scientists. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, a leading polymath and director of the Maragha Observatory, authored the definitive manual *Kitab al-wafi fi 'ilm al-raml*.

Nasir described two main uses for geomancy. First, to avoid complex calculations in the field during a military campaign, or when astrolabe observations were impossible (such as at night or on cloudy dates). Geomancy acted as an alternative terrestrial route to celestial insight. Second, Islamic scholars viewed the random casting of dots as a method to quiet the physical senses. Contemplating the mathematical figures triggered *kashf* (intuitive supernatural revelation), peeling back sensory perception to reveal hidden events.

Unlike sorcery or magic (*sihr*) (*see-hur*) or the active conjuration of the dead (*istihqār al-arwāh*) (*is-tih-DAAHRal-ar-WAAH*), geomancy enjoyed elite status because it was explicitly validated by a famous Hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: "*Among the prophets there was one who practiced khatt; whoever succeeds in doing it according to his example will know what that prophet knew.*"

Objectiones et Dubia

The historical records we possess (Ibn Khaldoun, Zunbul) were written centuries after the system's creation and were deeply motivated to frame geomancy as an elite, prophetically sanctioned science rather than a survival of folk animist fortune-telling. They were written to present a continuous legacy from Gabriel to Idris in order to portray a consistent mythic framework designed to secure religious legitimacy. In reality, it's likely that *Ilm al-Raml* was highly syncretic, and only adopted these orthodox prophetic narratives in order to bypass strict Islamic prohibitions against sorcery.

III. Western Geomancy

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Western scholars translating Arabic manuscripts in hubs like Toledo and Barcelona gained access to a fully realized system of terrestrial divination: *'ilm al-raml*. While classical tradition recognized pyromancy (fire), aeromancy (air), and hydromancy (water), it lacked a framework for earth. The Arabic "science of the sand" slotted perfectly into place as the missing quadrant of "geomancy," blending with Pythagorean number logic and elemental physics. From there, cloistered intellectuals expanded the art, as seen in works such as *De Arte et Scientia Geomantiae* (traditionally attributed to William of Moerbeke) or Bartholomew of Parma's *Tractatus sphaerae*. Their research was sponsored by patrons who wanted geomantic tools they could use to predict the outcome of conflicts, successions, or chaotic papal elections.

Because of its universal applicability and reduced reliance on complex celestial calculations, geomancy became a valuable divination tool for the literate elite. Rulers used it in their statecraft- Richard II, vulnerable to insurrection, commissioned a geomantic codex at the end of the 14th century and explicitly used it to identify his enemies and time his military campaigns. Itinerant medical practitioners who didn't have the tools or training to calculate astrological charts turned to geomancy to provide diagnostics. John Crophill of Wix, (d. c. 1485) recorded geomantic shields as a regular tool to identify systematic illnesses or map a patient's anatomy.

In the 16th century, the printing press allowed vernacular language manuals of hidden arts for medicine, metallurgy, and divination to be printed and thereby provide access to the general public. First published in French (1558) and then translated into English by Francis Sparry (1591/1598), Christopher Cattan's *La Géomancie* burned off the linguistic haze of Latin obscuring geomancy from the public. Cattan acknowledges astrology as the mother of geomancy, but simplifies its practice by systematically stripping away the dense, academic layers of Ptolemaic aspect angles, lunar calculations, and technical horary charts developed by the twelfth-century translators. Cattan popularized portable pen, ink, and paper over traditional sand trays, and replaced complex astronomical computations with streamlined, direct lookup tables of judgments. This allowed merchants, town clerks, and village practitioners to immediately evaluate business partnerships, verify trade routes, and identify stolen goods entirely outside the walls of universities or ecclesiastical institutions.

Objectiones et Dubia

The survival of elite, highly structured Latin manuscripts creates a historical illusion that geomancy was exclusively a literate, academic pursuit. Yet, contemporary vernacular literature references geomancy as a popular folk practice. As early as 1386, Geoffrey Chaucer openly mocked the widespread reliance on "divynailles as geomancie" among ordinary citizens in the Parson's Tale, while William Langland's *Piers Plowman* condemned the art as "gynful of speche." Though the methods of folk practice are not preserved in tomes or manuals, it echoes the syncretic practice of the Arabic *ilm al-Raml*, and mirrors the spread of the sophisticated figured divination practices in the African continent south of the Sahara (which we unfortunately do not have time to cover here).

IV. Demonization and Decline

For centuries, geomancy was studied and protected under a specific intellectual framework within the Catholic Church as a standard branch of natural magic, entirely separated from demonic conjuration (*nigromantia/necromancy*). Citing Thomas Aquinas's *Quolibet* to argue that the art was a licit "daughter of astrology", translators such as Hugh of Santalla and Bartholomew of Parma published their manuscripts with full Church sponsorship. These early European texts preserved the claim of Islamic scholars that the 16 geomantic figures were delivered directly by an angel to the sons of Noah before the flood, keeping the lineage clean of heresy. Scholars like Albertus Magnus confirmed the art was legitimate because the points were marked by human hands using standard ink and paper, avoiding illicit tools like mirrors or blood sacrifices.

This status as a legitimate science would not last long past the 16th century. The transition from tolerance to criminalization was dictated from above- the elite of the Catholic church trying to maintain control in the wake of the Protestant rupture. The first move against geomancy was to apply local laws of censorship against divinatory manuals. Venetian and Milanese *Indices of Prohibited Books* (1554) blanket-banned geomancy alongside pyromancy and chiromancy. However, because these only targeted printing houses, rather than practitioners, enforcement was inconsistent. This changed in 1586, when Pope Sixtus V's papal bull *Coeli et Terrae Creator* declared Geomancy a sin, arguing that the art was either a fraud driven by random dots, or an operation of the Devil; for there was no natural mechanism to guide the diviner's hand.

The last breaking point was when the art became a direct political weapon used against Church rulers. Written traditions had long condemned inquiries into the mortality of sovereigns (a taboo stretching back to the Auguries of the Roman Empire) due to the political sedition and destabilization caused by predicting a prince's death. However, by the seventeenth century, this restraint collapsed. Between 1626 and 1628, Pope Urban VIII had his own imminent demise predicted by hostile diviners. This acute disruption led directly to his Papal Bull of 1631, which formally reclassified any prediction of a sovereign's death as a capital crime of treason, no longer merely threatening a practitioner's spiritual well being, but wielding the power of the state against them.

Objectiones et Dubia

The historical record presents the Church as an institutional monolith that flipped from tolerance to total ban in 1586. Yet, Papal bulls were frequently impotent local political maneuvers; the spiritual ban of 1586 failed so completely that the Church was forced to issue the Franciscan decree of 1591, threatening its own friars with years in the galleys for hoarding geomantic texts in their cells. Furthermore, while Urban VIII publicly outlawed divination to protect his hierarchy, he simultaneously commissioned horoscopes of his own bishops and hired practitioners like Tommaso Campanella to perform private, defensive planetary magic behind sealed Vatican doors to deflect eclipse omens. The Church banned geomancy not out of a unified doctrinal consensus, but as a reactive, inconsistent attempt to monopolize spiritual authority during a period of deep political fracturing.

V. Practicum: How to Geomance-y

1. **Create the Four Mothers (*Matres*):** 16 lines of random points (or other source of 16 odd/even results) yield four initial figures. Each figure is mapped to an element (fire, air, water, earth) or quadrant of the body (Head, Neck, Body, Feet).
2. **The Four Sisters (*Filiae*):** Created from the 4 mothers. The heads of Mothers I–IV are stacked vertically to form Sister V; the necks form Sister VI, the bodies form Sister VII, and the feet form Sister VIII.
3. **The Four Nieces (*Nepotes*):** Produced by addition of the previous figures. Mother I + II = Niece IX; Mother III + IV = Niece X; Sister V + VI = Niece XI; Sister VII + VIII = Niece XII.
4. **The Court (*Curia*):** Niece IX + X = Right Witness (XIII); Niece XI + XII = Left Witness (XIV). Right Witness + Left Witness = The Judge (XV).

Of the General Shield and the Judgment Thereof

While the technical extraction of the figures proceeds by an exact mathematical symmetry, the interpretation of the Shield remains more an art than a rigid science, requiring a subtle eye to discern the unseen currents of the matter. In accordance with its ancient Arabic lineages, the Shield must ever be read from the right hand unto the left, tracing the flow of time and causality as it descends from the fountainhead of the four Mothers into the ultimate verdict. Here, the Right Witness (*Testis Dexter*) stands as the true vicar of the Querent, showing their present state and the initiating causes of their inquiry, while the Left Witness (*Testis Sinister*) looks outward toward the Quesited, representing the future trends, the desired object, and the external environment. Should the Judge (*Judex*) pronounce a neutral, mixed, or otherwise ambiguous sentence, the classical masters allow the generation of the Reconciler; this supreme arbiter is brought forth by combining the points of the Judge with those of the First Mother, thereby clarifying how the final decree shall manifest in the Querent's life.

Within the foundation of the art, the four primary Mothers carry specific, non-astrological weights that define the theater of the question. The First Mother signifies the Querent themselves—their character and immediate physical condition; the Second holds dominion over their substance, representing that which sustains them through wealth or property; the Third governs their immediate environment, including kinsmen, brief journeys, and messages; while the Fourth portends the final end of the matter (*Finis Rerum*). To unearth the hidden root of this conclusion, the diviner employs the *Via Puncti*, or Way of the Points, tracking the single, active lines of the Judge upward through the generations of the Shield. If the Judge be an even figure, the Way is immediately blocked, signifying that the question arises from diffuse, obscure origins. Yet if an odd point allows the trace, its ascent through the lines relies upon the metaphysical truth that the odd point is inherently active and spiritually directed. Should this path terminate in the First Mother, the outcome is the direct fruit of the Querent's own volition; if in the Second, it is driven by material substance; if in the Third, by environmental triggers; and if it rests at last in the Fourth Mother, the matter is anchored in the past, born of an inescapable condition. If yet more

detail is required, then the figures could be assigned to astrological houses- a controversial and exacting procedure.

Practitioners disagreed whether a figure should be interpreted primarily by its planetary nature, its elemental association, or its position alongside its neighbours in the chart. In European practice theories of house mapping generally fell into three distinct approaches.

Continuous Succession

This manner of projection is the simplest and most direct, prioritizing rapid execution over complex astronomical computation. Under this rule, the first twelve figures of the Shield are mapped sequentially into the twelve houses of the sky in a strict numerical, anti-clockwise order. The four Mothers (*Matres I–IV*) are placed directly into the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Houses respectively; the four Sisters (*Filiae V–VIII*) occupy the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Houses; and the four Nieces (*Nepotes IX–XII*) are delivered into the Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Houses. The witnesses and Judge, who represent the resolution of the entire chart are not placed in any specific house. This sequential standard was aggressively popularized by Christopher Cattan for the use of the Renaissance bourgeoisie and mercantile class, as it allowed a merchant or town clerk to generate a complete horary chart using nothing more than a pen and a sheet of paper, completely bypassing the need for complex astronomical instruments.

Precise Angular Distribution

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (or more likely Pseudo-Agrippa) describes the following method in the treatise *De Geomantia* that was included in the posthumous Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy. It strikes an elegant balance between respecting the astrological import of the houses, and not being a mathematical nightmare.

The Four Angles (*Houses 1, 4, 7, 10*): These vital pivots of immediate, present reality are populated exclusively by the four primary Mothers (*I, II, III, and IV*), ensuring the root seeds of the query sit in the strongest sectors of the sky.

The Four Succedent Houses (*Houses 2, 5, 8, 11*): These sectors of future assistance and delayed resources are filled by the four Sisters (*V, VI, VII, and VIII*).

The Four Cadent Houses (*Houses 3, 6, 9, 12*): These domains of dissipation, loss, and hidden enemies receive the final four Nieces (*IX, X, XI, and XII*).

Ineffable Celestial Judgment

The last, most... *advanced* method completely disregards the generation numbers of the figures, treating geomancy as a terrestrial mirror for a living sky. The geomantic divination was the first small step, to finish the reading the diviner must cast a true astrological horary or natal chart for the exact moment of the query, utilizing an astrolabe or an ephemeris to map the local horizon. The twelve geomantic figures are then distributed into the houses solely by matching

their inherent planetary and zodiacal rulers to the signs rising in the firmament. Even after the colloquial dissemination of easier methods, this practice was preserved in elite Latin compendiums such as the *Fasciculus Geomanticus*, and I will not pretend to understand it (yet).

House & Name	Modality	Core Significations
1st: Soul and Life	Angular	Physical frame, stature, complexion, vitality, health, beginnings.
2nd: Property and Wages	Succedent	Money, movable goods, personal possessions, gold, trade profits.
3rd: Brothers and Sisters	Cadent	Brothers, sisters, local travel, letters, messengers, neighbors.
4th: Father & Mothers	Angular	Lineage, land, hidden treasure, immovable property, the grave.
5th: Offspring and Children	Succedent	Offspring, banquets, taverns, fine garments, pregnancy, delight.
6th: Illness and Disease	Cadent	Acute disease, systemic illness, subordinates, domestic livestock.
7th: Maturation and Endings	Angular	Wives/husbands, open enemies, lawsuits, treaties, public battles.
8th: Slaughter and Death	Succedent	Mortality, wills, executors, inheritances, partner's money, loss.
9th: Movement and Changes	Cadent	Long-distance voyages, foreign lands, Church, dreams, philosophy.
10th: Power and Glory	Angular	Kingship, high office, professional rank, reputation, the mother.
11th: Hope and Expectations	Succedent	Good fortune, friends at court, favor of princes, ambitions.
12th: Enemies and Jealousies	Cadent	Imprisonment, execution, secret malice, witchcraft, large beasts.

(House names from the 13th cent. Arabic Geomancy Machine. There is no universal agreement on their names or exact domains)

Angular: Present Reality: Represents immediate, stable, and highly visible conditions. Favorable figures here (e.g., *Conjunctio*) indicate the matter is resolving successfully in the current moment.

Succedent: Future Assistance: Represents subsequent developments or delayed resources. Figures in these sectors indicate assets, allies, or conditions that will arrive later to sustain the matter.

Cadent: Dissipation & Loss: Represents instability or evasion. Figures falling into cadent houses suggest the energy of the query is escaping, changing form unproductively, or being undermined by hidden actors.

<i>Geomantic figure</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Puer	Boy, yellow, beardless, rash and inconsiderate, is rather good than bad
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Amissio	Loss, comprehended without, that which is taken away, a bad figure
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Albus	White, fair, wisdom, sagacity, clear thought, is a good figure
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Populus	People, congregation, an indifferent figure
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Fortuna Major	Greater fortune, greater aid, safeguard entering, success, interior aid and protection, a very good sign
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Conjunctio	Conjunction, assembling, union or coming together, rather good than bad
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Puella	A girl, beautiful, pretty face, pleasant, but not very fortunate
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Rubeus	Red, reddish, redhead, passion, vice, fiery temper, a bad figure
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Acquisitio	Obtaining, comprehending within, success, acquisition, absorbing, receiving, a good figure
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Carcer	A prison, bound, is good or bad according to the nature of the question
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Tristitia	Sadness, damned, cross, sorrow, grief, perversion, condemnation, is a bad figure
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Laetitia	Joy, laughing, healthy, bearded, is a good figure
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Cauda Draconis	The threshold lower, or going out, dragon's tail, exit, lower kingdom, is a bad figure
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Caput Draconis	The head, the threshold entering, the upper threshold, dragon's head, entrance, upper kingdom, is a good figure
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Fortuna Minor	Lesser fortune, lesser aid, safeguard going out, external aid and protection, is not a very good figure
⋮ ⋮ ⋮	Via	Way, street, journey, neither good nor bad

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