

Arabic Sūfī Literary Works among Yoruba 'Ulamā' in South-Western Nigeria

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Abstract

The spread of Sufism to Yorubaland can best be seen today in the literary contributions made by Yoruba 'Ulamā'. These contributions are in both prose and poetry forms. In this paper, poetry will be given more attention than prose. A *Sūfī* literary work has been described as the literary productions of renowned Sufis and acclaimed mystics. Others defined *Sūfī* literature as the literary production of every Muslim thinker. Those works that treat *Sūfī* topics such as illumination, gnosis, divine, love, ecstasy are also regarded as *Sūfī* literature while any prose or poetical expression which faithfully expresses the deep sentiments of the composer especially if such sentiments are of an ethical nature also falls under this category. In this work, *Sūfī* literature that treats *Sūfī* topics and any prose or poetical expression which faithfully expresses the deep sentiments of the composer, because mystics who wrote have always treated *Sūfī* topics and noted for their sincerity. This paper draws samples from the work of Arabic writers that are read and digested by Yoruba Muslim scholars which later became sources of their pragmatic and speculative thinking in *Sūfī* manners and it ends with some recommendations.

Keywords: *Arabic, Literary works, Pragmatic, Speculative, Yoruba 'Ulamā.'*

Introduction

According to generally accepted etymology, the word *Sūfī* itself is derived from *Sūfī* meaning "white wool" because the clothing made of white wool, which was particularly liked by the Prophet and by the early disciples who wished to follow his example, very soon became a symbol of

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ascetic renunciation and orientation toward the contemplative life. This observation concerning the wool clothing worn by the Sufis, from which they take their name, provides the opportunity to underline how inherent mysticism is in Islam and how it has been since the beginnings of Islam. Sufism is not something that put itself on top of Islam and was later granted, as an addition, a dimension that was non-existent in the original. In many verses of the Qur'an, there are teachings, for example, that God is near to man, "nearer to him than his jugular vein", that "He is the best and most beautiful recompense," that He illuminates the hearts of those who invoke Him morning and night with humility, respect, and love, that He saves His friends from fear and sadness. In other words, God has made a provision, through His word, for drawing nearer to Him, whatever is not explicit in the Qur'an, the Prophet, through his Hadith and Sunnah, explains and makes it known. By the virtue the Prophet exemplified, he was regarded as the first *Sūfī* and a source of inspiration for all the generations to come. The ideal of spiritual poverty (*Faqr*) which aids the seeker of God in drawing nearer to Him can be admired most by concentrating on the directives and counsels derived from the Prophetic tradition and his Sunnah. Muhammad had made numberless retreats in the mountains around Mecca, especially in the cave of Mount Hira even before the revelation of the Qur'an, where angel Gabriel came to him for the first time, and this happened because the Prophet's soul was a clear mirror capable of showing the nature of the truths of heaven that God chose this man in particular to entrust with message of Islam.

The Trend of Sufism in Yorubaland

The trend of Sufism continued until the emergence of *Sūfī* order such as *Qādiriyyah* and *Tijāniyyah*. The introduction of the spiritual path into the Yorubaland before the outbreak of the Fulani Jihad in 1804 and the establishment of the Islamic emirate at Ilorin in 1825 made the history of Sufism in the part of this country, Yorubaland, become clearer.¹ Alfas Alimi Abdullah Dindi, Muhammed Beyguri, Nda Salati, Muhammed ibn Abdul-Qadir (*Tāj al-adab*), Muhammad Kamal al-Din, Adam Abdullah al-Ilori are few of the early personages usually associated with the teachings and practices of Sufism in Yorubaland. The Scholars who were committed members of the *Qādiriyyah Sūfī* order were also propagandists of Sufism in Yorubaland. The activities of Nda Salati (d. 1966) in propagating *Qādiriyyah* in Yorubaland deserve special mention. He worked hand in hand with Shaykh Nasir Kabara (d. 1996) to propagate Sufism. He

travelled extensively in Yorubaland and succeeded in having many *Qādiriyyah* centres opened in numerous Yoruba Urban cities.²

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Tijāniyyah seemed to start its activities in Yorubaland. The *ṭarīqah* was known to have been brought to Ilorin by Shaykh Muhammad Wali of Ita Kudimo Ilorin. The *Amir* then ordered some people to beat this Shaykh in order to renounce Tijāniyyah as the Amir (Ali: 1869 – 1891) was a member of Qādiriyyah. The Shaikh, during the process of being beaten, died and after his demise, the chanting of *kalimah ash-shahādah*. (La ilāha illā Allāh) continued to be heard uninterruptedly from his grave and those involved started to regret their action and repented. Tijāniyyah later surfaced in Ilorin and thereafter was introduced into other parts of Yorubaland through the influence of the Shaykhs of the order. Sufis like Abu Bakr Alore, Nda Rabih, Bashar Adangba, Eleha, all of Ilorin were instrumental in the spread of Tijāniyyah outside Ilorin.³

There is no gainsaying the fact that Skaikh Nda Salati was the greatest Qādiriyyah propagandist in Yorubaland. As a result of his personality and devotion coupled with endurance to the course of Qādiriyyah, other towns and cities to which the order had spread apart from Ilorin are Osogbo, Ibadan, Iseyin, Ede, Ilobu, Ifo, Shaki, Ifon, Ejigbo, Lagos, Iwo, and Offa, to mention but a few. In those places today, the order has gained ground as youths are found in the *ṭarīqah* carrying *Bandiri* to important places in public gatherings and occasions for *Wa'z*. After the death of Nda Salati (d. 1966), many of his followers further expanded his influence on Ekiti, Ondo, and Owo areas of Yorubaland. The magnificent Mosque of the Skaikh at Mushin in Lagos is enough a symbol to immortalize his commitment to the order and achievement.⁴

The Tijāniyyah also has been spreading in Yorubaland sporadically due to the proselytization efforts of its members wherever they reside. Muqaddams always embark upon recruitment exercise within their areas of influence. They disseminate the doctrines of Tijāniyyah and attract new members by enumerating the benefits which one would derive from being a member. Today, in Yorubaland, Sufis have gathered themselves in different towns under an umbrella of one *Khalifah* who is the overall leader of the *ṭarīqah* in the town and may appoint a Muqaddam as his deputy if he wishes.

The Concept of *Sūfī* Literature

The spread of Sufism to Yorubaland can best be seen today in the literary contributions made by Yoruba ‘*Ulama*.’ These contributions are in both prose and poetry forms. In this work, poetry will be given more attention than prose as we are dealing with the Arabic poems of some selected Sufis in Yorubaland.

A *Sūfī* literary work has been described as the literary productions of renowned Sufis and acclaimed mystics. According to this opinion, it is the recognition accorded an author as a *Sūfī* that qualifies his work to be considered as *Sūfī* literary work. Going by this opinion, the literary work of a political guru will be regarded as a political literature. This is unacceptable to us because any politician may decide to write on a subject matter with either historical or religious approach.

Others say: *Sūfī* literature is the literary production of every Muslim thinker. This is based on Professor McDonald’s view that every Muslim thinker/author can be regarded as a *Sūfī*. This implies that all the literary productions of great Muslim thinkers no matter their areas of specialization will qualify as *Sūfī* literature. This is too generalizing and therefore lacks merit. Also, others regard *Sūfī* literature as those works that treat *Sūfī* topics such as illumination, gnosis, divine love, ecstasy, and others like that. This means that it is the topics that are dealt with in a piece of writing that is used to consider whether such as work fits being categorized as *Sūfī* literature. Also, some regard *Sūfī* literature as prose or poetical expression, which faithfully expresses the deep sentiments of the composer, especially if such sentiments are of an ethical nature.⁵

One may incline to agree with the last two opinions which regard *Sūfī* literature as those works that treat *Sūfī* topics and any prose or poetical expression which faithfully expresses the deep sentiments of the composer, because mystics, past and present who wrote have treated *Sūfī* topics and are noted for their sincerity.

The History of Writing in Arabic

The history of writing in Arabic extends over a period close to 800 years in the Nigerian region. The first known writer in Arabic was a grammarian and poet of Kanem, Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Kanemi (died c.1212), at the

present time scholars are still using Arabic as the chosen language of their doctrinal polemics, their Islamic teaching manuals, and the poetry they so frequently write in praise of the Prophet and in praise of *Sūfī* leaders or to elegize departed friends, colleagues, or patrons, indeed, in the second half of the twentieth century, usage of Arabic as a literary language and as a general language of written communication has become more widespread, even as literacy in English or in certain African language has increased.⁶ Muslim scholars have in some cases modernized their teaching methods and facilities and produced generations of students who have gone on to found their own schools; the teaching of Arabic in primary and secondary schools in Muslim majority areas have become commonplace, while several of Nigeria's universities offer undergraduate degrees and doctorates in Arabic studies.⁷ Considerable encouragements has been given to this process by certain Arab countries- notably Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia- that have sent Arabic teachers to Nigeria and have offered scholarships to Nigerians to study Arabic (and many other subjects) in the countries concerned.

The use of Arabic as a literary and scholarly language has a historical depth of over five centuries and shows no sign of diminishing. It is worth recalling that writing in verse was considered the hallmark of the accomplished scholar. Nigerian Arabic poets, Yoruba *Sūfī* scholars inclusive, authored poems not simply to impart knowledge or to imbue their audience with feelings of piety and devotion, but also to elegize and eulogize, to celebrate victories, to satirize enemies, to criticize their societies, to record joy and sorrow, pleasure, and pain. With all these, education in Arabic and Arabic writing skills are expanding while the old genres of Islamic writing (*fiqh*, *tawheed*, *hadīth*, *Ṭaṣawwuf*, etc.) will not disappear, there is likely to be more writing that is discursive in nature rather than bound to texts of the past.⁸

Sūfī literary works can be said to have begun among Yoruba 'Ulamā'' with the advent of Islam and with the emergence of what can be described as Islamic literature in Arabic. To ascertain this, H. K. Bidmus says:

“To the best of our present knowledge, there is no work by a Yoruba Arabic author that is basically on the doctrines of *Ṭaṣawwuf*. Nevertheless, some Yoruba Arabic writers devote special chapter in their works to Sufism. In such chapters they discuss its importance. And some compose poems in praise of *Sūfī* leaders like Sheikh Ibrahim

Niyas from Kawlack in Senegal. Going through such chapters and poems, though few in number, one can to some extent, see the working of the minds of the authors on the subject of Sufism.⁹

The fact is that Sufism has played and still continues to play a key role in the development of Islam. All the Jihads to raise the standard of Islamic learning that were and are still concerned with the development of Islam were led by people who can be called Sufis in all perspectives. Their attempt to put their views down and document their practices and comment on Islamic issues according to their own understanding gave birth to a bulky literature that we have today. Among them are: *Kitab Khatm al-Awliyā'* (the Seal of the Saints) of Al-Ḥakīm Al-Tirmidhī (d. 285 / 898), *Kitab At-Ta'arruf li-madhhabi ahli al-Taṣawwuf* (The presentation of the Doctrine of the Sufis) of Muhammad al-Kalabādhī (d.385/995), *Kitab al-luma* (Book of flashes) of 'Abu Nasr' al-Sarraj (d.378/988), the *Risālah* (Treatise) of al-Qushayrī (d465/1072) and *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah* (the Classes of Sufis) of Abū 'Abdulrahmān as-Sulamī (d. 413/1021) to mention but a few.¹⁰

When Neoplatonism found its way into Sufism through the influence of the teachings of Plotinus, the mixing up of heresies with Sufism prompted the *Sūfī* leaders to embark on writing books to enlighten people about the true picture of Sufism. The contact of the early Muslims with the works of Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato made the situation become more complex. Things began to be regarded not as other than Allah but as identical with Him. Allah Alone is, and other than Allah is merely non-existent.¹¹

Heresy was the result of this doctrine. Some people, because of the weakness of their faith, started to regard everything as permissible. Some even felt that there was no need any longer to follow *Shari'ah*. Some even discarded *Shari'ah*, considering it as book-Knowledge and creed of the imperfect which is not necessary for the perfect. They raised the science of *ṭarīqah* to an important level by considering it as Heart-Knowledge which is an inheritance from one mind to another.¹² This ugly development continued until the real object of Sufism was neglected. Piety and holiness were overlooked and other mere things like control over nature, illumination, *Taṣrīf* or miracles were considered the sole end of the journey of Sufis. People started to use all means to attain these feats, all in an attempt to draw people's attention to themselves, captive and exploit them.

But true Sufism consists of avoiding lust and keeping away from sinful desires as stated by Ahmad Tijani:

Know that Sufism is to observe the commandment (of Allah) and to keep away from the forbidden in the open and in secret, so as to please Him (God) and not in order to please yourself.¹³

Therefore, a true *Sūfī* worships Allah with complete devotion as if he sees Him (God), for even though the worshipper sees Him not, He (Allah) sees the worshipper.¹⁴ Heresies that were mixed up with pure Islamic Sufism prompted the early teachers to document their real and true teachings on Sufism. The *Sūfī* leaders embarked on these meritorious acts to correct all wrong interpretations and misrepresentation of *Sūfī* doctrines. They started this decent work by discussing *Zuhd* (Asceticism), *Faqr* (Poverty), *taqwā* (Piety) etc. and with collections of hadiths. It later developed to what we have today whereby Sufis have produced an enormously rich literature for future generations of Murids, admirers, and scholars.

Sūfī Literature

Sūfī literature has been classified into two categories: Pragmatic and Speculative. This classification is done by an Egyptian *Sūfī* poet in Arabic, Safi Husayn. He explains this when he says:

“*Sūfī* poetry in Egypt emerged from two distinct groups of religious leaders: these are the ascetic (and pious) jurists, and the speculative Sufis. The poetry of the first groups usually bears a mark of asceticism, wise sayings, admonitions, and moral guidance. The poetry of the second group is usually marked by erotic idea and Divine love.¹⁵”

This classification by Husayn has since not been refuted by scholars. The poetical compositions of *fuqahā'* (the jurists) and the Sufis have many things in common. This may have been the effect of the close connection and cordial relations that existed between them. This similarity is more apparent in their approach to religious rites. Jurists were also referred to as Sufis and pious men in the same way as Sufis belonged to one or other of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence. For example, Imam Shāfi'ī (d. 204 H.) who was an acclaimed jurist was said to be a *Sūfī*. He says in one of his poetical works:

فَأْتَى وَحَقِّيَ اللَّهُ إِيَّاكَ أَنْصَحُ فَقِيهًا وَصُوفِيًّا فَكُنْ لَيْسَ وَاحِدًا
وَهَذَا جَهْلٌ كَيْفَ ذُو الْجَهْلِ يَصْلُحُ فَذَلِكَ قَاسٍ لَمْ يَذُقْ قَلْبُهُ تَقَى

Meaning:

Be a jurist and a *Sūfī* (do not be one without the other) with the reality of Allah, I am admonishing you.

That (jurist) is an imitator whose heart has no taste no taste of piety, and that *Sūfī* is an ignorant and he (an ignorant man) can never put things in order.¹⁶

Also, Imam Malik (93-17911/712-795CE) was reported to have said:

مَنْ تَفَقَّهَ وَلَمْ يَتَّصِفْ فَقَدْ تَفَسَّقَ، وَمَنْ تَصَوَّفَ وَلَمْ يَتَفَقَّهْ فَقَدْ تَزَنَّدَقَ، وَمَنْ تَفَقَّهَ ثُمَّ تَصَوَّفَ فَقَدْ تَحَقَّقَ.

Meaning:

He who observes *Sharī'ah* but neglects Sufism becomes a reprobate, and he who learns Sufism but fails to observe *Sharī'ah* has become a *Zindīq* (an atheist), and he who combines both attains the realization of the truth.¹⁷

Throughout the length and breadth of West Africa, Shaykh Uthman bn. Fudi, his brother, 'Abdullah and his son, Muhammed Bello are well recognized both as *Sūfī* leaders and jurists.

Shaykh Uthman ibn Muhammad ibn Fudi popularly known as Shaykh ibn Fudi or Dan Fodio (1754 – 1817C.E) was the leader of the 18th-19th centuries Islamic revolution in the Northern part of the present-day Nigeria. He was born at Maratta on Sunday 15th day of December 1754 to a Fulani family of high reputation for learning and social respectability.¹⁸

His son, Muhammad Bello was born on a Wednesday during the month of Dhul-Qa'dah, 1195A.H/November 3rd, 1781, C.E. He was the fourth son of Shaykh Uthman ibn Fudi while his mother was Hawwa. Bellow grew up in a family circle of great piety and learning. He received a thorough education based on the pattern of the classical Islamic System when Uthman resolved to wage Jihad against injustice and Kufr in Hausaland

and he was subsequently declared as Amīr l-Mu'minīn (Commander of the faithfuls) in 1804, Muhammad Bello was the second person to give the Shaykh the oath of allegiance which the latter needed dearly, Abdullahi ibn Fudi being the first. They fought and won a large territory and in 1812, the Shaykh decided to divide the area between his brother 'Abdullah and his son Bello for effective administration. Abdullah was given the western part while the eastern part went to Bello. Muhammad Bello died in the Month of Rajab 1253 A.H/183) C.E. and was buried in Wurno.¹⁹

Classification of Sūfī Literary Works Among Yoruba 'Ulamā'

As stated earlier on, *Sūfī* literature can be classified into two: pragmatic and speculative. Pragmatic *Sūfī* poetry (*'al-Shi'r 'al-Sūfī 'al-Wāqī'ī*) in Arabic literature in general and in West Africa Arabic writing in particular contains the popular themes such as:

- i. *Zuhd* (Asceticism)
- ii. *Al-Hikmah* (wisdom)
- iii. *Al-Wa'z wa-l-Irshād* (Admonitions and ethical counseling)
- iv. *Madḥ an-Nabī* (panegyric of the Prophet)
- v. *Dhikr al-amākin al-muqaddasah* (remembering the Holy Places)
- vi. *Shi'r ul-Ṭarīqah* (poems of *Sūfī* path)

Then, speculative *Sūfī* poetry (*'al-Shi'r al-Sūfī 'al-tafakkurii*) are classified into two:

- i. *'Al-Ḥubul-Illahiyy* (Divine love)
- ii. *Al-Ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyyah* (The Doctrine of Muhammadan Reality).²⁰

While discussing a survey of the Arabic *Sūfī* Literary works in circulation among the Yoruba 'Ulamā'', attempts would be made to highlight the alien Arabic *Sūfī* literary works in circulation among Muslim scholars in Yorubaland that the scholars read which later became sources of their pragmatic and speculative thinking in the *Sūfī* manner.

Pragmatic *Sūfī* Poetry

1. *Zuhd*(Asceticism)

This is a theme of pragmatic *Sūfī* literature, which discusses death, preaches renunciation of the world because of its ephemerality. It sings the praise of poverty and teaches that the real riches are those of the hereafter. The following extract quoted from the work of ‘Ali ibn ‘al Husayn in his *Kitab az-Zuhd wal-Waṣīyyah* is illustrative of the point being made:

- ١ - هل الدنيا وما فيها جميعاً
سوى ظلٍ يزول مع النهار
- ٢ - تفكّر أين أربابُ السرايا
وأربابُ الصوافن والعشار

Meaning:

1. Is this world and all that it contains anything other than shadow which disappears with the passing (away) of the day?
2. Reflect thoughtfully in what has become of the commanders of military detachments and owners of valuables treasuries and leaders of groups.²¹

In this excerpt, the ascetic teacher, ‘Ali bn Husayn calls the attention of his readers to the ephemeral nature of this world. He seeks to remind his readers of the passing away of individuals and groups who once ruled the world. Now they have been wiped off the surface of the earth, and no more traces of them can be seen. Death that took them away is going to take others away too. This type of poem discourages people from inordinate pursuit of the pleasures of life.

Another excerpt in this work to further illustrate the point being made is the following:

- ١ - ألا إن السباق سباق زهد
وما في غير ذلك من سباق
- ٢ - ويفنى ما حواه الملك يوماً
وفعل الخير عند الله باق

Meaning:

1. Verily, the race of asceticism is the real race, and no other contest should be beside this.

2. All what has been gathered through one's dominion will vanish, and what remains with God is one's good deed.²²

Ali bin Husayn uses his lines of poem to inform his readers that the real contest is not the racehorse but that of *az-zuhd*. The wealth gathered by human being in this world is of no benefit if it is devoid of good deed. The good deed would remain while other things are useless. A person without good deed will eventually regret, groaning with sorrow on the last day, the day of his death. The day of separation from this life is hidden to human beings, then, the readers should reflect on this day knowing well that after that separation, the next thing is accountability.

Another work on this theme is a book entitled: “*al-Qasaid'al-Ashriyyāt*” (The ten-line poems) of 'Al-Wazir 'Abdur-Rahman bn. Ahmad Al-Fazazi which is popularly read throughout the length and breadth of Yorubaland. In this work the ascetic writer tries to encourage his readers to turn against the trivialities of this world and concentrate seriously on the hereafter. The work meditates on death and spells out the evil of this life and the goods of the world beyond. Just like *Kitab az Zuhd*, *Al-Qasāid al- 'Ashriyyāt* is full of ascetic poems, the only difference being that the latter is written in very terse language while the language of the former is simple and straightforward.

The following extract from '*al-kitab 'al-Ashriyyāt*' further illustrates the point being made:

أيا غافلا والموت بالقرب يطراً أهلك مرعى في مريبك يماً
أجسك لم تعمل بما كنت تقرأ أجدت بك الأيام والنفس تهماً
كأنك من خطب المنون ميراً

Meaning:

- O you heedless one, death will soon overtake you unexpectedly, your aim is to dine and wine with ease.
- I swear, you are not practicing what you read, and the days (of death) are moving closer while you are still committing atrocities, as if you are free from the calamity of death.²³

***Al-Hikmah* (Wise Saying)**

This theme of pragmatic *Sūfī* poetry tries to moralize and encourage readers to reflect on the affairs of this world. The writers of this type of poem use a number of wise sayings and proverbs to buttress their points. At times they use short words and sentences that are full of meanings. An example of a book containing wise sayings is that of the fourth Caliph, 'Ali ibn. Abi Talib entitled *Nahj ul-Balāgha* (The method of eloquence). The other one which enjoys patronage by Muslim ascetics and students in West Africa is *Aṭ- Wāqu Adh Dhahab* (The collar of Gold) written by 'Al-Zamakhshari. (1075 – 1144).²⁴

There are wise sayings both in prose and poetry. They read some of the books, which influence Yourba 'Ulamā' to versify poems along this line. Example of this is *Diwan 'Al-Imam Al-Shāfi'ī* (anthology of poems written by Imam Al-Shāfi'ī) and the following extract can be used to illustrate our point:

ومن يذق الدنيا فإني طعمتها وسيق إلينا عذبا وعذابها
فلم أرها إلا غرورا وباطلا كما لاح في ظهر الفلاة سرايبها

Meaning:

1. Who tastes life like me as I have experienced the sweet and bitter side of it?
2. I discover that it is a deceit and worthless thing, just like a mirage that appears on the surface of waterless desert.²⁵

The Ascetic jurist, Imam Al-Shāfi'ī cautions his readers against being carried away by the flood of life. He describes this life as a decomposed matter that is very distasteful and unpleasant having become rotten with ill – smelling. Therefore, we should move away from it and leave it for dogs to eat. Whoever releases it is free from the horrid smell of the stink.

Another extract of the same author which deals with this theme is the following:

١ - اصبر على مرّ الجفا من معلّم فإن رسوب العلم في نقراته
٢ - ومن لم يذق مرّ التعلم ساعة تجرع ذل الجهل طول حياته

Meaning:

1. Be patient of the painful and bitter treatment from the teacher for the failure of (acquiring) knowledge is in keeping away from him.
2. Whoever does not taste the harshness of knowledge for a while, will, for a long time, gulp the ignominy of ignorance.²⁶

The wise poet emphasizes the importance of knowledge to a human being. He stresses the need to undergo pain in order to acquire knowledge and without the necessary pain, knowledge acquisition may be a mirage. Whoever has no knowledge is not worthwhile to be alive and if he is alive, he is already dead and should be regarded as such. The combination of the two makes the essence of a man. To lend credence to this assertion, Abu 'Alī Al-Hassan bn. Mas'ūd (d.1102) in his popular ode titled: al-Qasīda Al-Dāliyah says:

وَذُوو البصائر في الحياة وإن فنوا والغمر مفقود وإن لم يفقد

Meaning:

Those who are knowledgeable are alive even though they have passed away, but the ignorant one is dead, even though he is still alive.²⁷

Also, in *Kanzu Al-Fattāh fī Sharḥ Al-Qaṣīda Tafuttu* (تَفُتُّ) of Abu Ishaq Ibrahim Ibn. Mas'ūd (Al-Bidawiyy) a man of Bida origin, there are examples of wise sayings among which is the following on the importance of knowledge:

إلى علمٍ تكون به فقيهاً مطاعاً إن نَحِيتَ وإن أمرتا
ويجلو ما بعينك من غشاها ويهديك السبيل إذا ضللتا
ينالك نفعه ما دمت حيا ويبقي ذكره لك إن ذهبنا

Meaning:

1. (I am calling your attention) to knowledge with which you will become a knowledgeable somebody, and a commander that people obey his order.
2. The membrane that covers your eyes will be removed, and (knowledge) will guide you if you are astray.

3. Its benefit is eternal, even when you have passed away, its remembrance remains forever.²⁸

This message on the importance of knowledge is truly clear. A wise saying urging all and sundry to crave for knowledge and give preference to it over all other things.

Also, a book; *Lāmiyya* of Ibn *Al-Wardī*, who was known as *Sirāj Udīn Abu Ḥafṣ* (d. 749) contains a lot of wise sayings, among which is the following excerpt:

أي بُنِّي اسمع وصايا جمعت حكماً خُصَّتْ بها خيرُ الملل
اطلب العلم ولا تكسل فما أبعد الخير على أهل الكسل

Meaning:

1. Oh, my son, listen to admonition that is full of wise sayings, specially meant for the best community.
2. Seek for knowledge and do not be indolent as every good thing is far from a lazy one.²⁹

This extract of Ibn Al-Wardī emphasizes the significance of knowledge, especially that of jurisprudence. To attain this, too much sleep must be abandoned with the desire that one has nothing to lose because of striving during knowledge. The attainment of knowledge is not limited to a set of people; anybody who strives can also get it. Good deeds must also be a companion of knowledge as this is the ornament with which knowledge is beautified. Grammar is also an important aspect of knowledge, which should not be ignored. This beautifies one's speech and makes speech eloquent and meaningful.

***Al-Wa 'z wa l-Irshād* (Admonitions and Ethical Counselling)**

Another type of pragmatic *Sūfī* themes in Arabic literature is that which is written with the aim of moralizing and teaching Islamic ethics. This type of poetry which instructs and teaches morals, as described by Abdul-Rahmon, is also known as didactic poetry.³⁰ Yoruba 'Ulamā'' also engage themselves in a work like this. They also admonish people and serve as counselors to their readers. A work titled *Majmū' Khams al-Qasāid*, al-Ibrahimiyyah an excerpt from it buttresses this:

كن حافظاً عضواً ونفساً والهوى
في ما علمت عينه بحراميا (٩)
كن شاكراً والزم قناعة ما وهب
من مكثراً أو من قليل راضيا

Meaning:

1. Take care of the parts of body, soul, and caprice, in all you know as prohibitions.
2. Be grateful (to God) and be contented with what you are given, either in a large or small quantity.³¹

This admonition is meant for those who reflect. It contains warnings and ethical counselling and if properly followed, one will be successful in this world and in the hereafter.

The poet talks on greed as an evil thing that must be avoided and replaced with contentment. Also, he enjoins everybody to accept the judgment of God as final. Trying to fault Him makes the case worse than the acceptance of the judgment. One should be patient in his pursuit for wealth as the provisions of a man would never miss him. He further warns those who are learned but at the same time sinful. He urges them to correct the evil things before nemesis catches up with them. Death, which is inevitable, comes unexpectedly, and the Almighty should be our companion. Another work on this theme is that of Lāmiyyat Ibn – Wardī where he says:

ثم من الأسباب للنجاح
هجرك للضحك والمزاح
لا سيما في ساعة التعلم
فذاك وقت الأدب المحتتم

Meaning:

1. Surely, among the means for obtaining success is your abstinence from laughter and joke.
2. Especially during the time of learning when decorum is necessary.³²

This is an admonition for whoever wants to acquire knowledge. There are prerequisites for effective learning and knowledge acquisition, which the poet mentioned as necessary, and every learner must strive to follow these instructions in order to be able to live peacefully with his co-learners.

Among such attitudes is abstinence from too much laughter and joke. Also, it is good to be kind and pardon those who hurt one's feeling; this would accord one a great honour and respect.

Among such works that are well known to the Yoruba ‘Ulamā’ which influence them to write on this theme is that of ‘Abu Ishaq Ibrahim bn. Mas‘ūd entitled: *Kanzul-Fatā fi Sharḥ Al Qaṣīda Tafuttu*, a work that is full of wise sayings and admonition. The following except illustrates our claim:

فقابل بالقبول لنصح قولي وإن أعرضت عنه فقد خسرتنا
وإن راعيته قولاً وفعلاً وتاجرت الإله به ربحنا
فليست هذه الدنيا بشيء تسوؤك حقبة وتسرّ وقتنا

Meaning:

1. Accept my words of Admonition, but if you turn away from it, surely you are doomed.
2. But if you heed to it in both words and deeds, and engage in business with God, you have already succeeded.
3. This life is nothing but vanity; it makes you sad for a long time and gives you happiness just for a while.³³

This admonition also entails counselling. The poet, without any gainsaying, is a counsellor and at the same time an admonisher. He admonishes that the world is ephemeral and what to prepare for is the hereafter that is the eternity. What profit is it for a man who is successful in this world but unsuccessful in the Day of Judgment? This is a great loss, He also counsels that we are all mortals and there is no cause for joy or laughter in this world that is likened to a prison and human beings are the prisoners who do not know whether they would be bailed or remain incommunicado in the prison forever.

Another work from another author of repute on this theme is that of ‘Abū ‘Alī al-Hassan bin Mas‘ūd popularly known as Dāliyyah. (An ode with *dal* as its Rāwiy).

The following lines of his poem depict our assertion:

ويح المشرف للخسيس مجله ومذل ذي الشرف الأثيل الأتعد
وحفيظ من هو للصدّاقة خائن ويخون ذي الودّ الصفي الأتعد
ولبائع حورا حسانا خرّدا عربا بعظم في التراب مدود

Meaning:

1. Shame unto him who elevates a despicable person and degrades a highly honored person of noble and firm origin.
2. And pays attention to the betrayer and deceives a sincere and old friend.
3. (He is also) an exchanger of a beautiful chastely Arab virgin with a bone that contains maggot in the sand.³⁴

This poet urges us to be alive to our responsibilities and concentrate more on how to be successful in the hereafter. According to the counsellor, it is a shame and a pity for one who concentrates more on worldly affairs than that of the eternity. He likened the worldly affairs to a fake target, deceit, illusion, and hope that can never be realized. Human being is not a permanent resident on earth and whenever his tenancy lapses, he quits for the world beyond.

Madā'ih ul-Nabiyy (Panegyric of the Prophet)

Panegyrics of the Prophet are a popular theme in the work of Muslim scholars of all ages. They sing the praise of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) and eulogize him and his followers in fine poetry. They embark on such with the aim of showing their admiration of the Prophet's qualities and to educate their audience about the virtues of the Prophet. Poets like Ka'b bn. Zuhayr, Ka'b bn. Malik, Hassan bn. Thabit (d. 674) and a host of others are reported to have been the protagonists of this type of poetry in Arabic.³⁵

Al – Burda and Hamziyya of Imam Būṣīrī (d.694) contains a lot of panegyric of the Prophet. In Al-Burda, the following lines of poem are relevant here:

والفريقين من عرب ومن عجم	محمد سيد الكونين والثقلين
أبر في قول لا منه ولا نعم	نبينا الأمر الناهي فلا أحد
لكل هولٍ من الأهوال مقتحم	هو الحبيب الذي ترجى شفاعته
مستمسكون بجبلٍ غير منفصم	دعا إلى الله فالمستمسكون به
ولم يدانوه في علم ولا كرم	فاق النبيين في خُلُقٍ وفي خُلُقٍ

Meaning:

1. Muhammad is the leader of the heaven and earth, and the leader of the humans and the jinn and the two units of Arabs and non-Arabs.
2. Our Prophet, the commander of good things and the prohibitionist of bad things, there is no one that is better than him in words and deeds.
3. He is the beloved one whose intercession is what is expected for every terror that is stormy.
4. He called to the way of the Lord and those who hold fast to him, hold fast to a rope that can never cut
5. He is above all other Prophets both in creation and character; they are nowhere to be found in knowledge and dignity (of the Prophet).³⁶

Many poets engage themselves in this type of poetry by devoting all their poetical composition to the eulogy of the Prophet. They shower encomiums on him describing his matchless character and unique nature that shows the reason why he is placed on the highest pinnacle of behavior in the Quran when Allah says:

*“And you stand on an exalted standard of character”*³⁷

The moral greatness of the Prophet was thus testified to by ‘Aisha, than whom none was more intimate with the Prophet. His morals are the Qur’an; meaning that all the pictures of sublime morality depicted by the Qur’an affords really a glimpse of the moral greatness of the Prophet. For this single reason, the poets of the past and present who concentrate on the panegyric of the Prophet consider it worthwhile. To some modern scholars, panegyric (*madh*) is generally viewed as lacking sincerity and as devoid of realism. For them, it embodies fictitious praise, outlandish conception, excessive affectation, and hyperbolic expressions.³⁸ To those who engage in such, it is a genuine expression of truthful sentiments and sincere emotion which emanate from the inmost recesses of the heart and thus become appealing to readers and listeners.³⁹

Al-Fazazi whose full name was ‘Abu Zayd ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad (d. 627/1230) composed a poem popularly known as ‘Ishriniyyāt (the twenties) because of the number of lines in each ode in praise (*Madīh*) of the Prophet Muhammad in Cordova in the year (604/1208). Al-Fazazi was a Muslim Scholar and mystic. In his work, the individual odes are arranged in alphabetical order (rhyme letter). Originally, the title of his work is al-Wasā’il al Mutaqabbalah (the Acceptable means), but sooner than later, the

designation 'Ishriniyyāt became popular with the work. At some later period, a Muslim scholar, 'Abu Bakri ibn Muhib wrote a *takhmis*⁴⁰ on the work and the two components are never recited or printed separately.

The following extract from 'Ishriniyyāt depicts some of the beautiful expressions of Madḥ an-Nabī (Praising the Prophet):

مديحُ نبي الله أركى التعبدِ لما حاز من فضلٍ وفخرٍ وسؤددِ
أمعشرَ من يدلى له بتوَدِّدِ تعالوا فعندي للنبي محمدِ
مديح كآزهار الحمائل طلّتِ

Meaning:

- The praise of the Prophet of God is the purest worship, because it contains grace, honour and power, O you people that are close to the Prophet with love, come, for I have praise like flowers of a drizzly thicket with me for the Prophet Muhammad.⁴¹

In the 'Ishriniyyāt, Al-Fazazi believed that what he said about Prophet Muhammad's life and his personality to be the truth, gave eloquent expression to his ideas, which ranged over all the aspect of the Prophet's life. He supports his statements with more than enough proof to ensure that no iota of doubt would be left in the mind of his readers and listeners. He says, concerning his evidence:

حوى كل مجدٍ للورى وجلالةِ وجاء بآياتٍ محت كل قالةِ
فمن شكّ فيه فهو حلف ضلالةِ أفي الحق شكٌ بعد ألف دلالةِ
تقدمها ذكرٌ مدى الدهر يُقرأُ

Meaning:

He (Prophet Muhammad) possessed all glory and loftiness and brought the signs that obliterate all other speech, and whoever is in doubt is a strayed person, can there again be doubt in the truth after thousand proofs had been produced? remembrance has preceded it whenever it is being read.⁴²

However, Al-Fazāzi's concept of praise (*madḥ*) goes beyond the dictionary meanings of the words: panegyric, eulogy, laudation etc. To him, it is first

of all, a glorification of God, and a way of expressing gratitude (*ḥamd*) for sending the Prophet Muhammad as mercy (*raḥmah*) to mankind, obedience to, respect for, and love of one whom God Himself is the first to praise by describing him as the ‘best example’ and the ‘most excellent in moral’ is the meaning of *madh*.⁴³

This also accounts for why the writer considers *madh* as *azkā at-Ta’abbud* (the purest devotion). Since it is through the praise (*madh*) of the one praised (*mamdūh*) that one understands the Prophet’s message, according to the poet, hence, it is a duty (*wājib*).⁴⁴

Also, to those who subscribe totally to the praise of the Prophet and regard it as a duty base their assertion on the fact that God and His angels also honour the Prophet as the greatest of men. We are asked to honour and bless him all the more because he took upon himself to suffer the sorrows and afflictions of this life in order to guide us to God’s mercy and the highest inner life, then why wouldn’t mankind take it as a duty to praise him, the panegyrists believe that the blessings which Allah showers on the Prophet show that he is pure and holds communion with the fountain head of purity, it is therefore a duty to eulogize him.⁴⁵

This theme has been extended to praise *Sūfī* personalities and Muslim leaders. This is common among the Indigenous ‘Ulamā’ who used to praise their teachers with lines of the poems. Some Sufis have written a number of fine poems to eulogize their Shaykhs. Such poems are available with the *Sūfī* writers and their followers.

Dhikr al –amākin Al-Muqaddasa (mention of holy places) i.e., Al-Hanīn ilā l-amākin al-Muqaddasa (Holyland Nostalgia).

Yoruba ‘Ulamā’ have also cultivated the habit of including this theme in their work. In such works, they express their yearnings to these holy places and their desire to benefit from the goods in these places. This theme has been described as a further development of the traditional prelude called *Nasīb* with which Arab poets opened their poems in the past during the pre-Islamic time. In the *Nasīb*, the ancient Arab poets gave a vivid description of the deserted encampments of their beloved. They also related their experiences, as their she – camels travelled day and night, defiant of all difficulties and hardships, as she travelled in an unfriendly climate.⁴⁶

The pragmatic *Sūfī* poets, rather than weeping over the ruins of the deserted encampments of the beloved, do express their yearnings to hold places like Makkah, Madinah, and other ancient cities. Their yearning is not really to the place but to those people who live there in the past, particularly, the Prophet, the members of his household and the companions.⁴⁷

Examples of this type of poetry which later endeared the Yoruba Muslim scholars to write the same is the work of Al-Fazazi and Al-Muḥibb (‘Ishriniyyāt) also known as al-Wasā’il al-Mutaqabbalah (The Acceptable means) which has the following lines of poem as its opening:

خليلِيَّ عوجا بالمحصَّب وانزلا ولا تبغيا عن خيفه متحوِّلا
فأكرمُ به مغنيَّ تحراه منزلا أحقُّ عباد الله بالمجدِ والعلَّا
نبي له أعلى الجنانِ ميؤأً

Meaning:

My friends, turn off the road for “Al-Muhasab and have a stopover, do not seek to deviate from his Khayf, also honour him by having in mind to stop there for habitation, the worthiest of the servants of God to be glorified and elevate is the Prophet the owner of the loftiest place in the paradise.⁴⁸

Also of relevance to this theme is the work of Imam *Al-Shāfi’ī* in his book: *Diwan Al-Imam Al-Shāfi’ī* where we have the following lines of poems on his love for the Prophet’s household:

يا راكباً قف بالمحصَّب من منى واهتف بقاعدِ خيفها والناهضِ
سحرا إذا فاضَ الحجيجُ إلى منى فيضاً كملتطمِ الفراتِ الفائضِ
إن كان رفضاً حبُّ آل محمدٍ فليشهد الثقلانِ أني رافضي

Meaning:

- O you rider, wait at *Al-Mahaṣṣab* in mina, and extol those sitting in his Khayf and those who are getting up,
- Early in the morning, when pilgrims spread out profusely to Mina like the spread of the Melee of the Euphrates.

- If the love for the Prophet's household is bigotry, the humans and Jinns should bear witness that the time has come for my own bigotry.⁴⁹

In this poem and the one preceding it, some of the holy places that are mentioned are: *Al-Maḥaṣṣab*, *Khayf* and *Mina*. These places are well known because of their importance even during the lifetime of the holy Prophet.

The call to honour those places is in honour of the Prophet who also honoured the places because of one incident or the other which caused his stop over at these places.

In Majmū' Khams Qaṣā'id, an ode composed by Shaykh 'Uthman bn. Fudī contains Nostalgia for holy places and specifically, the grave of the Prophet Muhammad in Madinah. He says:

هل لي مسير نحو طيبة مسرعاً لأزور قبر الهاشمي محمد
لما فشا رياه في أكنافها وتكمش الحجّاج نحو محمد

Meaning:

1. Is there any opportunity for me to make a quick journey towards *Taybah*, to visit the grave of Prophet Muhammad from Hashim family?
2. When its aroma spread to its environment and the pilgrims concentrated themselves towards the Prophet Muhammad.⁵⁰

Uthman bn Fudī; in this poem is full of infatuation of the love of the Prophet. This is clear in his ingenious statements about him and the holy places that have link with the Prophet. The mentioning of the holy places like *Taybah* (Madinah), *Qabr* (Prophet's tomb) *Diyar* (house) are frequent in his poem. Those holy places are significant to Muslims till date considering the influx of pilgrims to the holy place called *Taybah* every year.

There is another work that contains the mentioning of the holy places. The work of Muhammad bn Ismail entitled: *Ahmm al-aḥkām fi Qaṣā'idat dhikr al-Ḥajj* has the following lines of poem:

ونحن لجيران المحصب جيرة
نوفى لهم حسن الوداد ونرعاه
إلى زمزم زُمت ركابُ مطيِّنا
ونحو الصفا عيس الوفود صففناه

Meaning:

1. And those living at ' *al-Muḥaṣṣab* are our neighbors, we also give them love and take care of the love.
2. We fastened our riding camel at the place called *Zamzam*, and towards the *Safa* we lined up our breeding camels.⁵¹

Those places mentioned in the above excerpt are either in the holy city of Makkah/Madinah or Mina and their environs. They have become holy places for the role they play in the fulfilment of one of the pillars of Islam called Hajj / holy pilgrimage. For the honour accorded the Prophet by the Almighty God, his houses and prayer grounds are also worthwhile to be honoured and glorified both in Makkah and Madinah. Some other places where he performed some religious rites pertaining to the holy pilgrimage are also regarded as holy places for their significance in the religion of Islam.

***Shi'r Al-Ṭarīqah* (Poems on *Ṣūfī path*)**

Another theme of pragmatic Ṣūfī poetry is *Shi'r Al-Ṭarīqah* on which poems are written by Muslim scholars and *Ṣūfī* teachers for use by members of their order. It is to serve as a student's guide or a companion for the disciples. These poems are intended to teach the newly initiated and other disciples the true ethics of the *Tarīqah*.

These poems are meant to explain the virtues and doctrines of the order. The language use in this type of poem is always simple and straightforward for easy understanding.

The Yoruba indigenous *Sūfī* 'Ulamā' are also fond of using this theme as the Arabic poetic works that are common around them set the pace for such poetic compositions.

The popular work on this theme is the *Ruhul – Adab* of Ibrahim Nyass Al-kawlakhi (d. 1975). A leader of *Tijāniyyah* order who was born in rural Senegal in the year 1900, he was a renowned Islamic scholar in the twentieth century. His follower numbered in Millions and was well-known among the 'Ulamā' and leaders of the broader Muslim world. The following are some of the lines of poem in the work:

يقول إبراهيم نجل الحاج عبد الإله بدرنا الوهاج
من بعد بسم الله ثم الحمد لله ذي الطول العظيم المجد

Meaning:

1. Ibrahim, the son of Alhaj Abdullah, our brilliant full moon said
2. After starting with the name of Allah, I express all thanks to Allah, the Magnificent, and the Glorious.⁵²

Ibrahim, the author of *Ruhul – Adab* describes his father as the brilliant full moon because he cleared the darkness of ignorance in Kaolack, Senegal. He also says that Tariqah is the method of worshipping Allah as prepared by some saints.

The services observed in *Tijāniyyah* are seeking for the forgiveness of Allah (*Istighfār*) praying and seeking blessings for the Prophet (Aṣ-Ṣalāt ‘alā An-Nabī) and glorifying Allah. All these are ordered in the Holy Qur’an according to the teaching of the members of the Tariqah and their leaders. Also, these are performed morning and evening to glorify Allah.

The services contain *Lāzim* (morning and evening daily) *Wazīfa* (once or twice daily) and *Zikr* (evening of Fridays after ‘Asr prayer).⁵³ On the persistence in doing the obligatory services of the tariqah, the members of the order quote the Prophetic tradition which says: “the most desired service by Allah is the one devoted on for long even it is a short one”.⁵⁴

They maintain that in whatever service we are rendering to Allah. He wants it to be done with concentration and humbleness, particularly in supplication. About the person to be chosen as a Shaykh, the author of *Ruhul Adab*, Ibrahim Nyass has enumerated some qualities to be observed in a trainer before choosing anyone as a Shaykh and whoever trains one spiritually to know Allah is the real Shaykh to whom one has to submit whole – heartedly. One should inform him of his conditions so that he may properly guide to the right path. That is the *Murīd Ṣādiq* who submits himself totally to his Shaykh as Ismail did to his father, Ibrahim. Whatever the Shaykh may do to the *Murīd* that makes him suffer, he should realize that he cares for his future enjoyment.⁵⁵

He further says in his work:

فلتمسكن بعصم المشايخ
إذا أردت نيل عز شامخ
خير شيوخ الدهر بالإطلاق
إمامنا التجان ذو الأخلاق

Meaning:

1. Abide strictly by the teaching of the Shaykh if you really want to attain high glory.
2. The best of Shaykhs to be followed among all is our leader, Tijani the mannered.⁵⁶

The factual knowledge of Allah as contained in Hadith Qudsī where Allah says:

“Know me before you serve me (correctly), if you do not know me how you can serve me,” here, Allah actually means his knowledge and not the knowledge of his service as taught by some scholars, say the Sufis. This knowledge is only obtainable by special training i.e., *Tarbiyah* which is obtained from the Shaykh in Tijāniyah. Whoever lacks this knowledge will ever attribute his problems and fear to other creatures like him instead of the creator, the Almighty.⁵⁷ to buttress this point the author, Shaykh Ibrahim Nyass says:

خلقت ذا الخلق ليعبدون
يعنى بيعبدون يعرفون

Meaning:

Allah says: “I created these beings so that they can serve me, “Service” there means they should know me.⁵⁸

He therefore urges every Muslim not to relax their effort and not to rest on their oars in seeking the knowledge of Allah which will eventually show one the wonders in getting near to the Beneficent.

Speculative Sūfī Poetry in Arabic Literature is classified into:

- (i) Al-Ḥubb Al-Ilāhī (Divine love) and
- (ii) Al-Ḥaqīqah Al-Muḥammadiyyah (the doctrines of Muhammadan Reality).

The above classifications on speculative *Sūfī* poems are not common among the Yoruba 'Ulamā' A group of ascetics and pious men emerged from the second century Hijrah when platonic love poetry became

widespread. They developed interest in this type of poetry and directed their love and yearnings to the divine being and not to human beings. These men did not only raise their love above women, but they also directed it far above this worldly affair. They concentrated fully on the love of their Lord (Allah) who is their creator and they openly expressed this in their love poems.

The example of this type of Divine love poetry has been found in the two lines of poem composed by Al-Ḥallāj. The *Sūfī* says:

أنا من أهوى ومن أهوى أنا
فإذا أبصرتني أبصرته
نحن روحان حللنا بدنا
وإذا أبصرته أبصرتنا

Meaning:

- I am the beloved and the beloved is I, we are two souls occupying one body.
- When you look at me you see him, and when you look at him you see us (together).⁵⁹

The Muslim jurists did not welcome this type of poetry. According to their own understanding, it attempted to equate men with Allah. Some of the Sufis were accused of heresy. For example, Al-Ḥallāj was publicly executed on charges relating to his belief in incarnation and pantheism which he extensively described in his poetry. Thereafter, the ascetic love poets directed their poems to the Prophet and his companions. It was this development that gave birth to the doctrine of “Muhammadan Reality” (*Al-Ḥaqīqah Al Muḥammadiyyah*), which also occupied a very important place in the poetry of the Sufis, past and present.

According to the doctrine of Muhammadan reality, Prophet Muhammad is the very beginning of existence. He is regarded as the first prototype of Allah from which other creatures emanated. One popular Hadith which is often quoted by Sufis to support this belief is that which says:

A man came and said to the Prophet, O messenger of Allah, when were you made a Prophet? He (The Prophet) replied: ‘When Adam was between spirit and body.’⁶⁰

Zaki Mubarak and some other scholars assert that this doctrine is borrowed from a similar Christian doctrine, and that the latter had in turn been borrowed from Greek Philosophy. Some scholars have also suggested that the Sufis have adopted this doctrine as a means of arriving at their own form of pantheism.⁶¹ But Martin Lings holds a contrary view to this when he says:

“.... In this connection, it may be remarked that the source of the doctrine, which places the spiritual nature of Muhammad at the very summit of the created universe, with an opening on to uncreatedness, is unquestionably the Prophet's ascension (*Mi'rāj*) to that uttermost boundary, and where the divine creation was revealed to him. This ascent, the inverse of the process of creation was a re-absorption of his human nature into the spiritual nature. Therefore, since the path traced out by the *Mi'rāj* passes through the spiritual nature of Muhammad, or in other words through that aspect which may be called 'his' and since the *Mi'rāj* is the prototype of the *Sūfī* path, it is natural that the term *Al-Rūḥ Al-Muḥammadiyyah* (the Muhammadan spirit) should stand as a doctrinal sign – post to mark what is for the Sufis, the threshold of the end.⁶²”

Despite the strong condemnation of this type of poetry by non – *Sūfī* theologians and *Sūfī* antagonists, *Sūfī* poets through the ages continue to produce very fine poetry on it. In West Africa, for example, scholars have contributed significantly to this type of *Sūfī* poetry in Arabic. They also arose the enthusiasm of several Yoruba *Sūfī* scholars and writers in this regard.

A poem of this nature is the following poem attributed to Abdullah bn Rawāḥa Al – Anṣārī:

أرجو رضاك وأحتمي بحماكا	ياسيد السادات جئتك قاصدا
قلبا مشوقا لا يروم سواكا	والله يا خير الخلائق إن لي
والله يعلم أنني أهواكا	وبحق جاهك إنني بك مغرم

Meaning:

1. O the master of all masters, I have come to you directly expecting your favor and seeking for your protection.

2. I swear with God, O you the best of all creatures, surely, I have a yearning mind seeking for nobody else, except you.
3. I also swear with your honour, surely, I am infatuated with your love, and God knows that I am seriously longing for you.⁶³

Conclusion

According to the Sunnis, this type of poems contains hyperbolic statements and exaggerations. They say that tombs are to be visited without making plea to or asking for the favour from the owner of the tomb. They also contest that God created the world and all what is there in order to worship Him alone and not because of the Prophet as the poet asserts that:

انت الذي لولاك ما خلق امرؤ كلا ولا خلق الورى لولاكا

Meaning:

You are the one that without, nobody would have been created, never and never, without you nobody would have been created.

And there is another tradition which is reported by many Sufis as a tradition narrated from 'Umar bin. Al-Khaṭṭāb and this Prophetic tradition according to them is *marfū'* (traceable in ascending order of tradition aries to the Prophet Muhammad). The Scholars of Hadith confirmed that this tradition is unauthentic or narrated by any of the great hadith scholars or in any of the authentic corpus od hadith.

It goes thus:

قال صلى الله عليه وسلم: "يا عمر أتدرى من أنا؟ أنا الذي خلق الله عزّ وجلّ أول كل شيء نوري فسجد لله فبقي في سجوده سبعمائة عام. فأول شيء سجد لله نوري ولا فخر يا عمر أتدرى من أنا؟ أنا الذي خلق الله العرش من نوري، والكروسي من نوري، واللوح والقلم من نوري، والشمس والقمر ونور الأبصار من نوري، والعقل من نوري، ونور المعرفة "في قلوب المؤمنين من نوري ولا فخر"

Meaning:

The Prophet (S.A.W) said: "O 'Umar, do you know who I am? I am whose light was created first before any other thing, then my light prostrated before God (in worship) and remained on its prostration for seven hundred

years. Invariably, what bowed down first before God (in worship) is my light, I say this without boasting. O 'Umar, do you know who I am? I am the one from whose light the throne was created, and the seat (of God) was also created from my light, the Sun, the Moon, and the light of gnosis in the minds of believers were created from my light, I say this without boasting."⁶⁴

The Sunnis are referring to the personality of the Prophet concerning this discussion while the Sufis are referring to the light of the Prophet which is *Al-Ḥaqīqah Al-Muḥammadiyyah* (Muhammadan Reality). To the Sufis, the Prophet as a person is quite different from the light from which he was created and when they (Sufis) discuss this theme, they focus their attention on the Nur (light) and not the body that make up the Prophet as a human being.

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