

# Philosophical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate: The Case of Shaykh Dan Tafa<sup>1</sup>

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انى وازلم التحق بركاتهم      لمكثر فى ذكره ومطول  
ومرءا فى ذكرهم متمتع      منه وحثوا الركابوا جفلوا  
حسبى وازخفت فردا بعدهم      انى بهم متوسل متطفل

*And if their baraka I've not achieved  
I'll mention it at length and frequently  
There's joy in 'membering them repeatedly  
It spurs the rider on and gives him speed  
If after them, I'm left alone, enough for me  
Is that I cling to them dependently  
– Shaykh Dan Tafa<sup>2</sup>*

## Introduction

Two major theses, now mostly discredited, have implicitly structured the study of Islam in Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first is the thesis of decline, specifically intellectual decline from the so-called golden age of sophisticated and creative medieval philosophical, scientific, and metaphysical thinkers such as al-Farābī, Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Ibn Rushd, Ibn 'Arabī, and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī to a simpler, pietistic, anti-rational 'mystical', magical, and legalistic intellectual activity of the sixteenth century

<sup>1</sup> This article is dedicated to Shaykh Muhammad Shareef who first brought Dan Tafa's works to my attention and whose painstaking efforts to study, collect, transcribe, and translate Dan Tafa's works and transmit his legacy is the foundation of the present work and the source of much of its substance.

<sup>2</sup> This appears to be a poem by Dan Tafa, which he used to conclude a commentary on one of his own poems.

onwards.<sup>3</sup> Characteristic of this thesis is the assertion that Islamic philosophy ended (or ended in the Islamic West) with Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) (an assertion which, ironically, many twentieth-century Arab intellectuals adopted on the basis of these European sources) being eclipsed by dogmatic philosophy (*kalām*) and the mysticism of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*). In reality, the disciplines of *falsafa* (philosophy), *kalām* (theology), and *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) each took up theoretical discussions and arguments that would be considered ‘philosophical’ by almost any measure, and by the thirteenth century onwards, these disciplines had significantly interpenetrated each other.

More recently, this thesis has been updated to acknowledge the thriving traditions of *falsafa* in the Ottoman and Persianate Islamic lands after Ibn Rushd, and the significant philosophical activity of certain works of logic, theology, and Sufism in the Islamic West. However, it is still generally believed that *falsafa*, as an independent discipline, more or less died out in the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Arab heartlands by the thirteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, while

<sup>3</sup> See Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and A.J. Arberry, *Sufism, an Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950). For a critique of these positions, see the Introduction of Khaled el-Rouayheb’s *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> For example, the online West African Manuscripts archive ([www.westafricanmanuscripts.org](http://www.westafricanmanuscripts.org), accessed 14 July 2017) lists six works of ‘philosophy’ (three of which are logic primers) in contrast to 1,364 works of ‘theology’ and 2,319 works of ‘Sufism’. Oliver Leaman’s *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* says, ‘The death of Averroes saw the end of Peripatetic (*falsafa*) thought in the Islamic world for many centuries, until its rediscovery during the Islamic Renaissance or Naḥḍa of the nineteenth century’ (Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 28) and Nasr’s *Islamic Philosophy From its Origin to the Present* explains, ‘After Ibn Rushd, Islamic philosophy began to wane in the Maghreb but did not disappear completely. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn Sab’īn (d. 669/1270) wrote a number of important treatises based on the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the transcendent unity of being), and the Tunisian ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn (d. 780/1379) developed a philosophy of history in his *al-Muqaddimah* (‘Prolegomena’). The most important of these later figures from the Maghreb, however, was Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), expositor of Sufi metaphysics. Although not a philosopher in the sense of *faylasūf*, he is one of the greatest expositors of mystical philosophy in any time and clime, and he exercised a profound influence on Sufism as well as later Islamic philosophy. Although Islamic philosophy in the Maghreb seems to have come suddenly to an end, philosophical thought did

the study of and works on logic and philosophical theology in the Maghreb are beginning to receive the scholarly attention they deserve,<sup>5</sup> the tradition of theoretical or philosophical Sufism is also supposed to have more or less migrated east in the thirteenth century along with figures such as Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240) and Ibn Sab‘īn (d. 1271).<sup>6</sup>

The second structuring thesis, *Islam noir*, posited a racial and geographic divide between the ‘pristine’ Arab, rational, militant Islam of North Africa and the Middle East, and the magical, mystical, more peaceful ‘black Islam’ in which illiterate sub-Saharan Africans worshipped wonder-working marabouts.<sup>7</sup> While the theses of decline and *Islam noir* have been widely discredited, one of their corollaries remains: the assumption of the absence of noteworthy philosophical activity in Islamic sub-Saharan Africa before the postcolonial period. While this is more of an unstated assumption than a specific hypothesis, it has created an unfortunate lacuna in which scholars of Islamic intellectual history have by and large neglected sub-Saharan Africa, while scholars of Islam in Africa (most of whom were trained as historians) have largely neglected the philosophical dimensions of the works of sub-Saharan African scholars, focusing instead on their historical writings and socio-historical contexts. This has meant that the philosophical

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not disappear completely but took refuge mostly in philosophical Sufism and philosophical theology as we see also in much of the rest of the Arab world. This later phase has hardly ever been treated in general histories of philosophy but needs to be studied.’ (S.H. Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy From its Origin to the Present, Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006) 115.)

<sup>5</sup> For example, see El-Rouayheb’s *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*.

<sup>6</sup> For two different perspectives on ‘philosophical Sufism’, see M. Rustom, ‘Philosophical Sufism’, in C. Taylor; L.X. López-Farjeat (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2016) 399–411; and A. Akasoy, ‘What is Philosophical Sufism?’, in P. Adamson (ed.), *In the Age of Averroes* (London: Warburg Institute, 2011) 229–49. For the purposes of this chapter, we define philosophical Sufism as the discursive tradition of intellectual exposition of the doctrines and practices of Sufism that relies on philosophical terminology and arguments, and not only on appeals to the authority of tradition or mystical experience. While North and West African Sufism have received some scholarly attention, with a few exceptions, there is remarkably little scholarship on philosophical Sufism in the region (excluding Egypt) after the thirteenth century, especially in comparison to the central and eastern lands of Islam. In fact, some studies have even concluded that the Islamic literature of West Africa has ‘no philosophical depth’. See Abdul-Samad Abdullah, ‘Arabic Poetry in West Africa: An Assessment of the Panegyric and Elegy Genres in Arabic Poetry of the 19th and 20th Centuries in Senegal and Nigeria’, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 35, 3, 2004, 368–90.

<sup>7</sup> Vincent Monteil, *L’islam Noir* (Paris: Seuil, 1964).

dimensions of the works of figures such as Shaykh Dan Tafa, the current focus of this study, have lain in obscurity despite the fact that Dan Tafa and his works have been known to the West since the German explorer Heinrich Barth met with him in the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

In this chapter, I hope to contribute to filling in this gap by evaluating some of Shaykh Dan Tafa's works and their ramifications for our understanding of the history of *falsafa* and philosophical Sufism in West Africa, and the role of these two traditions in the intellectual history of the region.

### Brief Biography

‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Muṣṭafā al-Turūdī (d. 1864/1280), better known as Dan Tafa,<sup>9</sup> was born on the nineteenth of Dhu’l-Qa‘da 1804/1218 in Fankaaji, a village in what is today Northern Nigeria, but was then part of the Hausa city-state of Gobir. Dan Tafa was born in the middle of the *hijra* (migration) that marked the beginning of the Sokoto Caliphate into one of the most-renowned families of West African Islamic scholarship and politics, the Fulani clan of ‘Uthmān dan Fodio (d. 1817). As his name indicates, Dan Tafa was the son of Muṣṭafā ibn Muḥammad (d. 1845/1261), known as Mallam Tafa, and Khadīja (d. 1856), the oldest daughter of ‘Uthmān dan Fodio (d. 1817). Like her younger sister and student, Nana Asma’u, Khadīja was an accomplished scholar in her own right, translating the famous Mālikī *fiqh* text, the *Mukhtaṣar* of al-Khalīl, into Fulfuude. Khadīja, who was also known for her sanctity and spiritual attainment, was the daughter of ‘Uthmān dan Fodio’s wife ‘Ā’isha, known as *Iyya Garka*, a woman renowned for her piety and knowledge.

Mallam Tafa was a scribe and advisor of ‘Uthmān dan Fodio and was educated by the Shehu’s younger brother ‘Abdullah dan Fodio in several Islamic sciences and was considered one of the senior scholars of ‘Uthmān dan Fodio’s clan and new political order. Mallam Tafa was given a plot of land and was encouraged to set up his own school by Muḥammad Bello, the son and successor of ‘Uthmān dan

<sup>8</sup> Barth records that Dan Tafa was described to him as ‘The most learned of the present generation of the inhabitants of Sokoto’ (John Hunwick; Sean O’Fahey, *The Arabic Literature of Africa: Vol. 2 The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 221). The one notable exception to this oversight has been Shaykh Muhammad Shareef of the Sankore Institute, who studied the works of Dan Tafa with the latter’s descendants and has collected and digitized the manuscripts and created the critical editions of the texts of Dan Tafa cited in this chapter. This chapter would not have been possible without the pioneering work, assistance, and advice of Muhammad Shareef.

<sup>9</sup> Hausa for ‘ibn Muṣṭafā’.

Fodio, in Salame, a few miles north of Sokoto. Before Mallam Tafa died and was buried in Wurno (next to his friend Muḥammad Bello) in 1845, he named his son, Shaykh Dan Tafa, as his successor in governing Salame and running its school.

Dan Tafa was born shortly after the Fodiawa clan left Degel<sup>10</sup> the migration that marked the beginning of dan Fodio's jihād and the Sokoto Caliphate. In fact, 'Uthmān dan Fodio had his community halt their emigration for a few days so that his daughter Khadīja could safely give birth to Dan Tafa.<sup>11</sup> As such, Dan Tafa was considered a child of the *hijra* and the Sokoto reform movement, being born at its very inception. Shaykh Dan Tafa's education began with his parents, as he writes in *Tarjuma ba'd 'ulamā' al-zamān*, a biography of his teachers:

Now, as for my father, Muṣṭafā ibn Muḥammad, it was with him that I read most of what I transmitted and it was from him that I took most of what I studied. Rather, it was under his guidance that I excelled and became distinguished in knowledge. It was through his grace that I was able to awake and attain the fragrance of erudition.<sup>12</sup>

When Dan Tafa was fifteen, he began his spiritual training under the guidance of his maternal uncle, Muḥammad Sanbu (d. 1826),<sup>13</sup> for whom he would retain a lifelong devotion. As Dan Tafa writes in his *Bayān al-Ta'abbudāt*:

<sup>10</sup> The *hijra* dan Fodio and his community began when they left Degel on Thursday the 12th of Dhu'l-Qa'ada 1218 AH. They halted at Fankaaji on Tuesday the 17th, and Dan Tafa was born on the 19th of the same month.

<sup>11</sup> J. Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u (1793–1865): Teacher, Poet, and Islamic Leader* (London: Frank Cass, 1989) 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Tarjuma ba'd al-'ulamā' al-zamān ... Muhammad Shareef* (trans. and ed.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2010) 8.

<sup>13</sup> The *Infāq al-Maysūr* of Muḥammad Bello ('Uthmān dan Fodio's son and successor) describes Sanbu in the following terms: 'Among those necessary to mention from the children of the *Shehu*, was Muḥammad Sanbu. He is an erudite scholar who has successfully joined together the sciences of the *sharī'a* and the *haqīqa*. He is a genuine master of the science of spiritual purification. However, it is his custom to remain isolated from people, for sometimes he is in a state of spiritual constriction and sometimes in a state of spiritual expansion.' To which Dan Tafa adds the following description, 'He was our shaykh and spiritual master, the right acting scholar, the upright sage and knower by God. He had an immense station in sainthood (*wilāya*), a well-established footing in direct knowledge of God, and a genuine spiritual state in the realm of sincerity (*siddīqiyya*). He was the spiritual pole of the circle of reliance upon God. He possessed authentic spiritual unveiling and profound spiritual states, where he himself mentioned in some of his works that he was given the miracle of walking upon the surface of water, the ability to fly in the air and that he had witnessed the fabled land of Sesame and had entered its realm. The knowers of Allah say that this fabled land can only be entered by one who has attained the station of forty (*maqām'l-arba'īn*), a spiritual station which is

The first time I began to follow him [Muḥammad Sanbu] and became acquainted with him from the perspective of the spiritual path was in the year 1234 AH (circa 1819 CE), about two years after the death of Shehu ‘Uthmān. At that time, I was fifteen years old. The time between this first encounter and my attaining the level of spiritual mastery (*tashyīkh*) was three years only. From that moment, he continued to show me his spiritual states and directed me with the subtlety of his teachings, until I eventually became completely guided on the spiritual path and was able to be acquainted with all the customs of the divine realities (*rusūm al-haqā’iq*). And there occurred as a result, amazing matters about which I will not speak here. So have a good opinion or do not even ask about the affair. Then he ordered me after that to place myself in the service of the outward sciences and to be preoccupied with reading the books of those topics, because at that time his spiritual state was that he could not endure intermixing with people for long periods. Consequently, I continued to study with him the esoteric sciences of the spiritual path and divine realities as we did in the beginning. However, I would study other sciences with others as well.<sup>14</sup>

Dan Tafa also mentions his uncle and master first in his biography of his teachers, praising his high spiritual station and states and outlining the texts he studied with him:

As for Shaykh Muḥammad Sanbu, I took from him the path of *taṣawwuf*, and transmitted from him some of the books of the Folk [the Sufis] as well as their wisdom, after he had taken this from his father, Shaykh ‘Uthmān; like the *Ḥikam* [of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī], and the *Insān al-Kāmil* [of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī], and others as well as the states of the spiritual path. I kept company with him often and became completely inundated by him.<sup>15</sup>

This passage indicates that not only did Dan Tafa study al-Jīlī’s magnum opus of *Akbarī* philosophical Sufism (on which he wrote several commentaries), but that his teacher had studied the same work with Shaykh ‘Uthmān dan Fodio as well.

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well known with the People of God. Once he said about himself that his capacity to enter this mystical land flowed from the station of supreme sanctity (*maqām al-ghawthiyya*), although he later discounted these words during his states of spiritual sobriety. This is an immense spiritual station, which is essential to recognize for this shaykh, because these instances were well known and witnessed outwardly upon him by every possessor of knowledge (*ma’rifā*) who knew him.’ quoted in *Tarjuma ba’ḍ al-‘ulamā’ al-zamān* by Muhammad Shareef (trans. and ed.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2010), 5–7. Translation modified by author based on Arabic original.

<sup>14</sup> *Bayān al-Ta’abbudāt*, 2–3. Translation modified by author based on Arabic original.

<sup>15</sup> *Tarjuma ba’ḍ al-‘ulamā’ al-zamān*, 8.

Dan Tafa was also a pupil of his maternal uncles Muḥammad Bello and Muḥammad al-Bukharī, studying works of Sufism, poetry, the science of letters, medicine, and other disciplines with the former and grammar and the linguistic sciences with the latter.<sup>16</sup> He also studied logic, rhetoric, and jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) with Gidado ibn Aḥmad ibn Ghārī, poetry, prosody and the ‘sciences of the ancients’<sup>17</sup> with Shaykh Mudi ibn Laima, and received various Sufi litanies and prayers from Muḥammad Yero ibn Ghārī.<sup>18</sup>

In short, Dan Tafa was raised in the extraordinary milieu of the founding and early years of the Sokoto Caliphate in which ‘Uthmān dan Fodio was able to attract and train a significant cohort of scholars highly trained in various Islamic sciences. As a result, his grandson, Dan Tafa, was exposed to virtually all of the Islamic sciences transmitted in West Africa at the time, from medicine, mathematics, astronomy, geography, and history, to the sciences of the Arabic language, jurisprudence, prophetic traditions, and Qur’anic interpretation, to logic, theology, philosophy, Sufism, and the occult science of letters (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf*) amongst others.

Relatively little is known about Shaykh Dan Tafa’s life. We know he married two wives, both named Fāṭima (one of whom was the daughter of Muḥammad Bello) and had nine sons and two daughters with them.<sup>19</sup> We also know that

<sup>16</sup> Dan Tafa writes, ‘As for Muḥammad Bello, his brother, I studied with him the *al-Jawhar al-Maknūn* [of al-Akhḍarī], some of the poets, some of the teachings of the People of *taṣawwuf*, some of the books on the fundamental principles of medicine and other than that. As for Muḥammad al-Bukharī, I took from him the linguistic sciences and grammar, like *al-‘Imrīṭiyya*, *al-Mulḥa*, *al-Qaṭr* and *al-Khulāṣa* and he benefited me in many areas.’ quoted in *Tarjuma ba’d al-‘ulamā’ al-zamān*, Muhammad Shareef (trans. and ed.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2010) 10. Translation modified by author based on Arabic original.

<sup>17</sup> *‘ulūm al-awā’ il*: medicine, physiognomy, arithmetic, astronomy, geography, magic squares, the science of letters, geomancy, and others.

<sup>18</sup> Dan Tafa writes, ‘As for Shaykh Gidado, I studied with him the *al-Kawkab al-Sāṭi’* [of al-Subkī] and the *al-Niqāya* [of al-Suyūṭī] along with their commentaries, as well as the *al-Sullam al-Murawnaq* [of al-Akhḍarī] in the science of logic, the *al-Kifāya* of Ibn Malik, and one of his own works called *Kāshif al-Af’āl* in the science of metaphors, maxims and proverbs (*amthāl*); and other than that. As for Shaykh Mudi, I studied with him the *al-Rimāza* in the science of prosody (*‘arūd*). As for Muḥammad Yero, I took from him some of the litanies (*awrād*) and spiritual exercises (*wazā’if*). In short, I took transmission, learned and studied from the best scholars of my time.’ quoted in *Tarjuma ba’d al-‘ulamā’ al-zamān*, Muhammad Shareef (trans. and ed.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2010) 10–11. Translation modified by author based on Arabic original.

<sup>19</sup> Hunwick records his wives’ names as Khadīja bint Muḥammad Bello and Hushi, but Muhammad Shareef reports, on the authority of his descendants, that Dan Tafa’s

he never held (and seemed to never have vied for) a high political office in the caliphate,<sup>20</sup> merely succeeding his father in governing the town of Salame and running its school, which became highly regarded during his lifetime. However, Dan Tafa does seem to have been an important advisor of the amirs, wazirs, and sultans of the Sokoto Caliphate, as well as being widely regarded as its foremost scholar. The German explorer Heinrich Barth, who met him in 1853, described him as ‘the most learned of the present generations of the inhabitants of Sokoto ... On whose stores of knowledge I drew eagerly.’<sup>21</sup> Dan Tafa died in 1864 at the age of sixty and was buried next to his mother behind the school where he studied and taught for so many years.<sup>22</sup>

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wives were both named Fāṭima. See Hunwick; O’Fahey, *The Arabic Literature of Africa: Vol. 2*, 221 and Muhammad Shareef, ‘Ilaawat’l-Muttaalib Fee Shukr’l-Waahib al-Mufeeda’l-Mawaahib’ (Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2013), 15, <https://siiasi.org/shaykh-dan-tafa/shukr-l-waahib/>.

<sup>20</sup> According to an oral tradition recorded by Murray Last in his book, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, Dan Tafa became close friends with Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr Atiku, the son of the third sultan of Sokoto. Aḥmad promised to make Dan Tafa his wazir if he ever became sultan, but ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Gidado, the then-wazir of the fourth sultan of Sokoto (‘Alī Babba ibn Bello), wanted his own son, Ibrāhīm Khalīlu, to become wazir after him. So when ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Gidado got wind of Dan Tafa’s arrangement with Aḥmad, he refused to support the latter’s bid to become sultan unless he rescinded his offer to Dan Tafa and promised to make Ibrāhīm Khalīlu ibn ‘Abd al-Qādir his wazir instead. Aḥmad agreed and with ibn Gidado’s backing, became the next sultan after the death of Sultan ‘Alī Babba ibn Bello. ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Gidado served as wazir under the new sultan, Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr Atiku, for only forty days, whereupon he died. Upon ‘Abd al-Qādir’s death, Sultan Aḥmad honoured his promise to the late wazir and appointed Ibrāhīm Khalīlu to his late father’s post. Dan Tafa seems to have not contested this change of fortune. See Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (New York: Humanities Press, 1967) 162–5.

<sup>21</sup> Heinrich Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa* (London, 1858) vol. iv, 101. Barth also wrote, describing his encounter with Dan Tafa, ‘and here I first made the acquaintance of the learned Abd e-Kadar dan Tafa, whom I was most anxious to see, in order to obtain from him some historical information ... He paid me a visit in the evening, and furnished me immediately with some positive data with regard to the history of the dynasty of the Asaki, or Askia, the ruler of Songhay, which he had perfectly, in his head, and which were of the greatest importance in giving me an insight into the historical relation of the western countries of their regions with that of Central Negroland.’ A.H.H. Kirk-Greene, *Barth’s Travels in Nigeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) 260.

<sup>22</sup> M. Shareef, ‘The Life of Shaykh Dan Tafa: The life and times of one of Africa’s leading scholars and statesmen and a history of the intellectual traditions that produced him’ (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies, n.d.) 49.



## Works

Fortunately, we do know more about Shaykh Dan Tafa's works of which Hunwick records 72 titles (including works of poetry, although some of these are duplicates) and the Sankore Institute lists 44.<sup>23</sup> These works can roughly be grouped into seven categories: elegies/biographies, history, natural sciences, jurisprudence and teaching texts, philosophy (*hikma*), theoretical Sufism and theology, and practical Sufism.<sup>24</sup> Dan Tafa is best known in the secondary literature for his historical and legal works, especially the *Rawḍāt al-Afkār* ('Gardens of Thoughts') and the *Mawṣūfat al-Sūdān* ('Description of the Sudan'), which is a translation and augmentation of a Fulfulde poem of Nana Asmā'u describing the jihād of dan Fodio and events up to the date of its writing in 1842. The *Rawḍāt al-Afkār* describes the various states of Western and Central Sudan in the period leading up to dan Fodio's 1804 jihād, the jihād and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, and various events therein until the writing of the work in 1824. Interestingly, the work dates years from 1804 onwards in terms of years after 'Uthmān dan Fodio's *hijra*.<sup>25</sup>

This article is primarily concerned with the last three categories (philosophy, theoretical Sufism and theology, and practical Sufism), but before we delve into these treatises and poems that constitute these categories, it is useful to consider how Shaykh Dan Tafa himself understood and categorized his diverse intellectual pursuits. For this, we turn to two truly remarkable and unique works of his that give an overview of his entire intellectual career: the *Shukr al-Wāhib al-Muḥīd lil-Mawāhib* ('Thanking the Giver for the Overflow of the Gifts') and the *'Uḥūd wa Mawāthiq* ('Oaths and Promises'). These two short works broadly outline the various branches of Islamic learning Dan Tafa had mastered, as well as his categorization of and approach to them.

### *Shukr al-Wāhib*

According to the author, this poem of 67 lines was written to 'thank the Giver for the overflow of the gifts for which we were singled out with respect to sciences. This is in order to fulfill the obligatory right of giving thanks to Him, not for fame

<sup>23</sup> Shareef, 'The Life of Shaykh Dan Tafa'.

<sup>24</sup> These categories are largely heuristic, as some works of philosophy could also be classified as 'natural science', and many works of 'theoretical Sufism' contain practical advice and directions or could be classified as theology or philosophy.

<sup>25</sup> See Hunwick; O'Fahey, *The Arabic Literature of Africa: Vol. 2*, 228; and *Rawdat al-Afkaar: The Sweet Meadows of Contemplation*, Muhammad Shareef (ed. and trans.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 1991) 18.

or in order to boast of them, but rather out of desire for increase in them by means of it [giving thanks].<sup>26</sup> The work is divided into six sections describing six types of knowledge/sciences acquired by the author and how he acquired them.

The first section describes the ‘Sciences of the Sharī‘a’ which the author lists as linguistic sciences (morphology, grammar, and rhetoric), principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and theology (*kalām*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the Prophetic tradition (*Sunna*-[*ḥadīth*]), Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), other transmitted sciences (*dirāya*), as well as the Sufism of character development (*taṣawwuf al-takhalluq*).<sup>27</sup> He describes acquiring these sciences through transmission (*naql*), oral transmission (*sam’*), study (*ta’rīf*), memorization (*hiḍḍ*), and diligence (*ināya*).

The second section describes ‘the sciences of the ancients (*‘ulūm al-awā’il*) which he received by transmission (*naql*) and other means’. He lists these sciences as medicine, arithmetic, logic, the wisdom (*ḥikma*) of the stars (astrology) and physics, the science of magic squares and letters, various forms of divination.<sup>28</sup> He explains that he acquired some of these sciences by assiduously studying these texts on his own and others by transmission, studying texts with masters of these sciences.

The third section describes ‘the sciences/knowledge of realities’ (*‘ulūm al-ḥaqā’iq*) which the author lists as the knowledge (*‘ilm*) of Divinity and essences, attributes, and the Divine Essence, the knowledge of manifestation of the Divine Names and Qualities, the knowledge of the Mother of the Book, the knowledge of the spirits and the *malakūt* (unseen, formal, level of reality), and that of the Spirit of spirits and the *jabarūt* (unseen, supraformal, level of reality). He explains that he received these sciences or knowledge with ‘the help of the Real’, and that they are based on ‘realization (*taḥqīq*) and spiritual elevation (*taraqqī*)’. He also

<sup>26</sup> *Shukr al-Wāhib al-Muḥīd lil-Mawāhib*, Muhammad Shareef (ed. and trans.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2013) 5–6.

<sup>27</sup> A reference to the tradition ‘become characterized by the character traits of God’ (*takhalluq bi akhlāq Allāh*). In his *Faṭḥ al-Baṣā’ir*, ‘Uthmān dan Fodio (the author’s grandfather) divides Sufism into two kinds of parts: the ethical Sufism of character refinement (*taṣawwuf al-takhalluq*), which he identifies with the writings and ascetic traditions of al-Ghazālī and al-Muḥasibī, and metaphysical Sufism of realization (*taḥaqquq*), which he identifies with Abu’l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. A similar division is also found in the *qawā’id al-taṣawwuf* of Aḥmad Zarrūq. See *Faṭḥ al-baṣā’ir liṭaḥqīq Waḍ’ ‘ulūm al-bawāṭin wa’l-ḥawāhir*, Muhammad Shareef (ed. and trans.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 1996) 11.

<sup>28</sup> Including *khaff al-raml* (geomancy), and the *ziyārij*, circular divination tables, the most famous of which is attributed to the Marrakeshī Sufi as-Sabtī, and is described in detail by ibn Khaldūn in his *Muqaddima*.

mentions that he has ‘transmitted texts regarding the methods [of these sciences] from reliable authorities’.

The fourth section describes ‘the sciences/knowledge of the saints (*awliyā*’), which are the sciences/knowledge of secrets/mysteries, from the Sufi path’. He describes them as ‘sciences/knowledges for which there are neither written texts nor rational proofs’ and whose ‘elaborated exposition has been forbidden’ so he ‘must only mention them by allusion’. He then lists a number of symbolic names drawn from the Qur’ān, *ḥadīth*, and Sufi texts such as ‘divine attraction’, ‘annihilation’, ‘the tablet and the *nūn*’, ‘the pen’, ‘the shadow’, ‘the griffon’, ‘white pearl’, ‘the throne and the footstool’, ‘the lote tree’, etc. The author describes being granted perfect comprehension in these sciences by God and that their understanding comes from the direct experience (*dhawq*) of spiritual wayfaring (*sulūk*) and divine attraction (*jadhb*).

The fifth section describes ‘the sciences/knowledge of secrets/mysteries from outside of the Sufi path’. Again these ‘secrets’ are only alluded to by symbolic titles such as the knowledge of ‘the place of ascent of the luminous elements’, ‘the Holy Divine Sea of Jesus’, and ‘the living water of the spring of Khidr’, as well as the ‘knowledge of the letters at the opening of Qur’anic chapters’, and ‘the knowledge of the letters of His Tremendous Name’. These sciences/knowledges are described as being bestowed on the author by ‘The Wise, the Opener’.

The sixth and final section describes ‘the sciences/knowledge of secrets/mysteries that I have received from the sciences/knowledge of the greatest unveiling, which none but us have a chance of obtaining, and which none will disclose except for the Muḥammadan Seal, who is the Mahdi, peace be upon him’.<sup>29</sup> As with the other ‘sciences of secrets’, these knowledges are alluded to by symbolic titles such as ‘the knowledge of the manifestation of the night and the day’, ‘the sciences of the Throne’, ‘the universal circumference’ as well as some more familiar titles such as ‘the meanings of the Hidden Greatest Name’, and the ‘knowledge of the possessors of might (*ūlū-l’azm*)’,<sup>30</sup> and ‘the knowledge of the additions to the

<sup>29</sup> This statement of personal superiority perhaps should be taken with a grain of salt as the claims are often explained by Sufis as coming from a state of annihilation in a given spiritual reality, such as when Ḥallāj famously uttered, ‘I am the Real.’ Dan Tafa himself records (see note 13) that his master, Muḥammad Sanbu, made claims of being the supreme saint of his time (*al-ghawth*), but retracted these when he returned to states of spiritual sobriety. It is also notable that the author identifies the Muḥammadan Seal of Ibn ‘Arabi’s hagiology as the Mahdi. Tijānīs claim that Aḥmad al-Tijānī is Muḥammadan Seal, and various other Sufi masters from the thirteenth century onwards (including Ibn ‘Arabi) have claimed this title of supreme sanctity for themselves.

<sup>30</sup> Generally understood to be the Prophets Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and the Prophet Muḥammad.

sciences of the Prophets'.<sup>31</sup> At least one of these sciences is described as being attained in 'a true vision during sleep, without any difficulty'.<sup>32</sup>

The six-part schema is illuminating for a number of reasons, the first of which is that the author doesn't follow the standard 'aqlī/naqlī (rational/transmitted) division of the Islamic sciences, but instead divides the sciences based on their origins: the sciences unique to Islam, the sciences of the ancients taken up by Islamic scholars, the sciences/knowledge of spiritual realities and those of the saints derived from the path of the Sufis, those derived from outside the path of the Sufis, and finally, those derived from the 'greatest unveiling'. The first two categories are described as being acquired through textual study, the third through spiritual realization, the fourth through spiritual wayfaring and attraction, the fifth through Divine bestowal, and the sixth through true visions during dreams.

The first four categories are relatively straightforward, but the description of a whole category of knowledge of secrets coming from 'outside the way of the Sufis' (which is also distinct from the occult sciences of the second category) indicates that the author is using the term Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) in a way more precise than contemporary parlance, which as Carl Ernst has noted, tends to use 'Sufism' as a catch-all term for certain contemporary orientations towards certain ethical and metaphysical elements of the Islamic tradition and against Salafism.<sup>33</sup> For example, although their works have been subsumed into the broader category of 'Sufism', Andalusian mystics such as Ibn Masarra and Ibn Barrajān did not consider themselves 'Sufis' but rather 'contemplatives' (*mu'tabirūn*).<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Ibn 'Arabi reserved the term 'Sufi' for a kind of intermediate saint, preferring the terms such as 'verifier' (*muḥaqqiq*) or 'Muḥammadan' (*muḥammadī*) for those like him. Parallels can also be found in the works of Ibn Turkah and other 'lettrists' who distinguished Sufism from these kabbalistic sciences and mysteries, arguing that the latter went beyond and encompassed the former.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the last three

<sup>31</sup> Perhaps a reference to the structuring concept of Ibn 'Arabi's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, and the Sufi doctrine of the saintly inheritance of sanctity and knowledge from particular prophets, each Sufi saint being described as being 'on the foot' of a particular prophet.

<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this work, see the commentary by Muhammad Shareef entitled "'Ilaawat'l-Muttaalib Fee Shukr'l-Waahib al-Mufeeda'l-Mawaahib', Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2013, <https://siiasi.org/shaykh-dan-tafa/shukr-l-waahib/>

<sup>33</sup> See Carl Ernst, 'Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Problematizing the Teaching of Sufism', in Brannon Wheeler (ed.), *Teaching Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 108–23.

<sup>34</sup> See Yousef Casewit, *The mystics of al-Andalus. Ibn Barrajan and Islamic thought in the twelfth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> See M. Melvin-Koushki, 'The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy

categories of Dan Tafa's work are distinguished from the first three in that they are designated as secrets/mysteries (*asrār*) which the author states must and cannot be expressed through ordinary discursive means or rational proofs. Nevertheless, Dan Tafa does discuss some of these secrets in his other works, especially his '*Uhūd wa mawāthīq*' ('Oaths and Promises'), which further outlines his approach to these secrets and other forms of knowledge.

### *'Uhūd wa mawāthīq*

In this short treatise written in 1272 AH/1855–6, Dan Tafa outlines a series of oaths he has taken 'at the hand of the greatest *Nāmūs* and the most noble teacher' (probably a reference to the archangel Jibrīl and/or the Prophet) which he has recorded to 'remind himself of them' and tell others who wish to follow him in taking these oaths, described as 'part of the Muḥammadan character and angelic virtues'.<sup>36</sup> Ahmad Kani describes this work as being 'an apologia ... to his critics among the orthodox scholars who viewed philosophy with skepticism'.<sup>37</sup> This

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of Šā' in al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī (1369–1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran', PhD diss., Yale University, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> The first oath of this text reads, 'I have taken upon myself an oath and covenant to spread the wing of mercy to all things in creation; and to view them with the same eye which the Real viewed them when He desired to create them. In this, I desire all good and sympathy for them; and to extend affection and kindness to all of them; regardless of whether they be believers, disbelievers, righteous, sinful, human, jinn, animals, plants, stones or mere clods of dirt. To this extent, I have made it obligatory to daily make an all-embracing supplication for the good of the whole of creation by saying: "Oh God be merciful to the whole of Your creation and suffice them where they are incapable." I say this three times every day and intend by it to fulfill this oath with the duty of holding back evil from them to the best of my ability.' '*Uhūd wa mawāthīq*, Muhammad Shareef (trans. and ed.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2016) 4. Translation modified by author based on Arabic original. Amongst other similar ethical oaths of this sort are: 'I have taken an oath and covenant that I will not contend with anyone in a way in which that person may dislike, even when the bad character of that person requires me to. For, there is clear discourtesy and harm in contending with others in ways that are disliked. This oath is extremely difficult, so may God assist us in its fulfillment by His benevolence and kindness.' And 'I have taken an oath and a covenant that I will not take honor in any thing of excellence or lineage or worldly accidents or otherworldly actions, but rather my taking honor will only be in what I have of knowledge of the Real (*ma'rifa al-Ḥaqq*) and companionship with His Messenger and nothing else. So I ask God to aid me in this by His kindness, for He has power over whatever He wills.' ('*Uhūd wa mawāthīq* trans. and ed. by Muhammad Shareef, 5.)

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Hunwick; O'Fahey, *The Arabic Literature of Africa: Vol. 2*, 230. However, the work also consists of several oaths of an ethical nature such as 'I have taken an

may very well be the case, as several of the twenty-one oaths that comprise this work concern his practice and teaching of philosophy (*falsafa*), occult sciences, and secrets (*asrār*) and are somewhat defensive and apologetic in nature. For example, Dan Tafa writes:

I have taken an oath and covenant not to call anyone from the people to what I have acquired from philosophy (*falsafa*) and the sciences of the ancients; even though I took these sciences in a sound manner, rejecting the erroneous perspectives within them. Along with that, I will not teach these sciences to anyone in order that they may not be led astray; and errors will thus revert back to me, may God protect me. On the contrary, I will call them to sound knowledge (*ma'rifa*), the Qur'an, the *Sunna*, jurisprudence and Sufism.

and

I have taken an oath and covenant not to utilize anything from the sciences of spells (al-*sīmīyā'*), incantations (al-*'azā'im*), circles, subjugations (al-*irṣā'*) and the use of jinn for either advantage or protection. On the contrary, I have abandoned these all together, even though I acquired and mastered the essentials of these sciences.

I have taken an oath and covenant in line with the above vow, not to implement anything from the science of letters and names, in a way which could cause harm to Muslims. However, when it can bring benefit to me, I will utilize it on the condition of it being appropriate for attracting benefit or for defense.

and

I have taken an oath and covenant not to search into the unseen by means of divination (al-*ajfār*), divinatory tables (al-*ziyārij*), astrology, or any other prohibited (*maḥzūra*) means. Yet apart from these sciences, I have obtained knowledge of the unseen by means of the true dream. For nothing has occurred in these times except that I have seen it effortlessly in my dream before it actually occurred.

I have taken an oath and covenant to keep secret what I possess of the sciences of the spiritual realities and secrets, and to conceal my works regarding these. This is because these sciences are an exalted class of sciences for the spiritually elite and are only designated for those who are spiritually prepared from among the People of God.

Perhaps most tellingly, the second oath reads:

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oath and covenant not to dishonor anyone among the Muslims whoever he/she may be; and even if they exhibited intense enmity towards me. I have taken an oath and covenant not to be arrogant, not to be oppressive, and not to act haughty in order to safeguard myself with the eternal veil of God as a protection.'

I have taken an oath of covenant to construct my doctrine upon the verses of the Qur'an and not upon rational proofs or theological opinions. In this position I am a follower (*muqallid*) and the source of my following is the infallible Qur'an.<sup>38</sup> If I were asked, for example, for the evidence of the temporal creation of the cosmos, I would not answer with: 'The temporal creation (*ḥudūth*) of the requisite accidents (*al-a'rāḍ al-mustalzama*) is due to the temporal creation of the essential entities (*al-'ayān*).' Nor would I [answer with something] other than this from theological perspectives. Rather, I would say: 'God says: *'God is the Creator of everything.'*' For there is no evidence for me other than that. Therefore, I would explain this evidence from God having absolute certainty in the reality of the Qur'an and no other; since I have seen that the rational evidence in no way leads to the direct knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of God. The evidences of reason are limited to establishing the existence of an incomprehensible deity and that Its attributes are such and such. But the evidences of reason cannot fathom in any way Its essential reality. As for the Qur'an, it emerged from presence of God by means of Jibrīl to His messenger Muḥammad; and that is a matter which is decisive. So realize that.<sup>39</sup>

While this last oath represents a position common in the school of Ibn 'Arabi<sup>40</sup> (and was also held by the great Ash'arī theologian, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī at the

<sup>38</sup> Probably a reference to 'Uthmān dan Fodio's refutation of the widely-held theological opinion (of al-Sanūsī's massively influential *Umm al-Barāhīn*) that equated belief with rational proof of the essential matters of *'aqīda* (doctrinal creed), and inversely, equated *taqlīd* (typically, a negatively-charged term) with the inability to provide rational proof and unbelief. In his *Ḥiṣn al-Afhām*, dan Fodio defends *taqlīd* in belief, explaining its necessity for the commoner and scholar alike, and drawing on Sufi critiques (such as those mentioned here) of the capacity of rational proofs to lead to knowledge of God. (B. Fodiye, *Ḥiṣn al-Afhām min Juyūsh al-Awhām*, F.R. al-Ṣiddīqī (ed. and trans.) Kano: Quality Press, 1989.)

<sup>39</sup> This does not imply any contradiction between the proofs of reason and the authority of the Qur'an for Dan Tafa, as another oath reads, 'I have taken an oath and a covenant to weigh all of my understanding with the verses of the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, and I have been given a special capacity in this, so that I understand nothing save that its origin in the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* is also clear to me. Whoever doubts this, then let him try me (*falyajribbahu 'alayya*).' (*al-Uhūd wa Mawāthiq*, 5). Amongst other oaths in this work, the author also promises not to reveal 'the knowledge of secrets by which God established this Sokoto government. The authority in the government is not befitting to anyone in this community except for the one whom this secret has become an established fact. For this secret moves freely among them as it wishes, so realize that.'

<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Ibn 'Arabi wrote, 'By God, were it not for the Sharī'a brought by the divine report-giving, no one would know God! If we had remained with our rational proofs – which, in the opinion of the rational thinkers, establish knowledge of God's Essence, showing that "He is not like this" and "not like that" – no created thing

end of his life<sup>41</sup>) the work does seem to be written for an audience somewhat hostile to philosophy, occult sciences, and the ‘sciences of the ancients’, but may also be a sincere expression of the author’s approach to these traditions. Perhaps Dan Tafa really did refuse to teach anyone philosophy (*falsafa*) because he feared leading them into error, or perhaps his milieu was so hostile to philosophy and the sciences of the ancients that he had to make these oaths public.<sup>42</sup> However, the fact that he composed works on these topics, in verse, indicates that he may very well have taught these sciences to others, perhaps before taking this oath. In any event, the fact that he wrote down such an oath is compelling evidence that he did in fact study works of *falsafa*.<sup>43</sup>

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would ever have loved God. But the tongues of the religions gave a divine report saying that “He is like this” and “He is like that”, mentioning affairs which outwardly contradict rational proofs. He made us love Him through these positive attributes.’ (Quoted in W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989) 180.)

Moreover on the eternity of the world, Chittick explains, ‘By having recourse to the fixity of entities (*al-‘ayān*) in the divine knowledge, Ibn ‘Arabī is able to say that the dispute between theologians and philosophers over the eternity of the world goes back to their perception of the entities. Those who maintain that the world is eternal have understood that “the Real is never qualified by first not seeing the cosmos, then seeing it. On the contrary, He never ceases seeing it.” Those who maintain that the world is qualified by new arrival (*hudūth*) “consider the existence of the cosmos in relation to its own entity”, which is nonexistent. Hence they understand that it must have come into existence (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt*, 1911 edition, 2:666.35).’ William Chittick, ‘Ibn Arabī’, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/ibn-arabi/>. Dan Tafa appears to be alluding to this latter point.

<sup>41</sup> In his last testament, Al-Rāzī wrote, ‘I tried the methods of *kalām* and *falsafa*, and I did not find in them the profit which I found in the great Qur’an; for it calls to ascribing all greatness and majesty to God, and prevents from delving deeply into the preoccupation with objections and contradictions. This is so only because of our knowledge that human minds come to nothing and fade away in these treacherous defiles and hidden ways.’ Quoted in Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 201.

<sup>42</sup> Given ‘Uthmān dan Fodio’s condemnation of the occult sciences in some of his writings (despite what seems like the widespread teaching and practice of these sciences amongst the scholars of his family), it seems probable that these disciplines would be controversial in the Sokoto Caliphate. See Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, 208.

<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the fact that he calls this discipline *falsafa* and not *ḥikma* is significant, since the former was used to refer to Hellenistic and Avicennan traditions, while the latter had a wider scope including works of Sufism, philosophical theology, and more mystical philosophical traditions (such as al-Suhrawardī’s).



### Works of *Falsafa*

Hunwick's catalogue lists several works of philosophy by Dan Tafa, including a *manzuma* or introductory poem to the science of philosophy (*ḥikma*), as well as *al-Futūḥāt al-Rabbāniyya* ('The Divine Openings'), a work which Kani characterizes as 'a critical reception of the materialists', naturalists', and physicists' perception of life ... matters relating to the transient nature of the world, the existence or non-existence of the spirit, and the nature of celestial spheres are critically examined in this work'.<sup>44</sup> The Sankore Institute also has what appears to be an incomplete copy of Dan Tafa's *Kulliyāt al-ālam al-sitta* ('Universals of the Six Worlds'), a brief but dense philosophical poem about the origins, development, resurrection, and end of the body, soul, and spirit, as well as a discussion of *hyle* (prime matter).<sup>45</sup> These works are quite different from theological works that incorporate philosophical arguments and terminology, and may indicate the presence of a heretofore unexplored tradition of *falsafa* in West Africa through the nineteenth century. The vocabulary and structure of these works indicate that they may be derived from or at least influenced by Athīr al-dīn Abharī's (d. 1265) *Hidāyat al-ḥikma*,<sup>46</sup> which Maghrebi scholars such as Abū Sālim al-'Ayyashī (d. 1679) studied in Medina with the great Kurdish scholar and defender of Ibn 'Arabī, Ibrāhīm Kūrānī (d. 1690).<sup>47</sup> This work or others like it may have made their way from the Hijaz to the Sokoto Caliphate with scholars returning from

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Hunwick; O'Fahey, *The Arabic Literature of Africa: Vol. 2*, 222. I have as yet been unable to obtain a copy of this work.

<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, Dan Tafa appears to identify *hyle* with the '*ayān al-thābita* (fixed entities) of the *Akbarī* tradition. Ibn 'Arabī makes a similar identification writing, 'God is identical with the existence of the things, but He is not identical with the things. The entities of the existent things are a "hyle" for the things, or they are their "spirits"' (*Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 89). See the appendix at the end of this chapter for an original translation of this work of Dan Tafa's.

<sup>46</sup> See Andreas Lammer, 'Eternity and Origination in the Works of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī and Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī: Two Discussions from the Seventh/Thirteenth Century', *The Muslim World* 107, 3, 2017, 432–81. And Nicholas Heer, 'Al-Abhari and al-Maybudī on God's Existence: A Translation of a Part of al-Maybudī's Commentary on al-Abhari's *Hidayat al-Hikmah*', 2009, <http://faculty.washington.edu/heer/abhari-sep.pdf>. Abharī's introductory work on logic, *Kitāb al-Isaghūjī fī Manṭiq* (a commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*), was known and studied in the region, especially in the form of its versification by the Algerian 'abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhḍarī (d. 1575), *al-Sullam al-murawnaq fī 'ilm al-manṭiq* ('The Ornamented Ladder in the Science of Logic'), which Dan Tafa studied with Shaykh Gidadu.

<sup>47</sup> El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*, 51, 254. Al-'Ayyashī also apparently studied the Illuminationist philosopher Suhrawardī's (d. 1191) *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* with al-Kūrānī.

*hajj* such as al-ḥājj ‘Umar Tāl, or they may have come from Moroccan, or more likely, Egyptian sources (given the long-standing networks of trade and scholarship connecting Egypt to local centres of learning such as Kanem-Borno, Agadez, Katsina and Kano). For example, Jibrīl ibn ‘Umar, one of ‘Uthmān dan Fodio’s teachers, studied and received an *ijāza* from the famous Cairo-based scholar, Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791).<sup>48</sup> However, further research is needed to verify these speculations as to which texts of *falsafa* Dan Tafa studied, with whom, and from where they came.

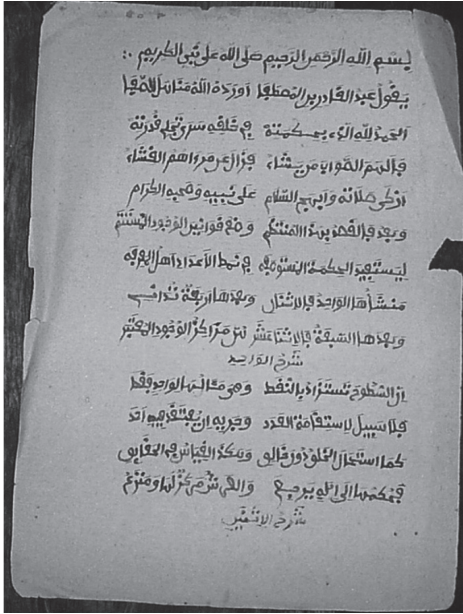
### Works of Philosophical Sufism

Closely related to these works of *falsafa* are Dan Tafa’s works of theoretical or philosophical Sufism, a term which the author does not use himself, but which has been used, in one form or another, by its proponents and detractors since the thirteenth century to distinguish the tradition of theoretical, philosophical exposition of Sufi doctrine from the more practical works on Sufi method, ethics, and hagiography.<sup>49</sup> In the tradition of Ibn ‘Arabi, these works often involve sophisticated discussions and arguments that critically engage with the philosophical and theological traditions. As in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabi, Qunawī, and Jīlī (all of whom Dan Tafa quotes in these works), these works of Dan Tafa’s draw on the concepts, vocabulary, and arguments of *falsafa*, including the natural and occult sciences. For example, Dan Tafa’s *Muqaddima fī ‘ilm al-marā‘i wa ta‘bīr* presents an introduction to the science of dreams and their interpretation from the perspective of both natural philosophy and philosophical Sufism, which contains interesting arguments about the relationship between spirit (*rūḥ*), soul (*nafs*), and body (*jasad*).<sup>50</sup> Similarly, his *Nazm al-qawānīn al-wujūd* (‘Poem

<sup>48</sup> Stefan Reichmuth, *Murtaḍa al-Zabīdī (1732–1791): Life, Networks, and Writings* (Oxford: Gibb Memorial Press, 2009) 64, 90.

<sup>49</sup> A variant of the term ‘philosophical Sufism’ (*taṣawwuf al-falāsifa* – literally ‘the Sufism of the philosophers’) was used pejoratively by Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzī and others to criticize figures such as Ibn Sab‘īn, Qunawī and the *Akbarī* school, and Ibn ‘Arabi (although to a lesser extent) whose ideas and methods they found dangerously erroneous, identifying these errors as importations from Hellenic philosophy. Taking their cue from Ibn Taymiyya, this term is also used by contemporary opponents of the school of Ibn ‘Arabi to contrast it with so-called ‘Sufi Sufism’ or even ‘Salafī Sufism’ – forms of Sufism they find more tolerable. See A. Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Traditions: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

<sup>50</sup> For example, in this work, Dan Tafa argues that the soul does not leave the body during sleep, as certain other thinkers had claimed, but rather encompasses the body, and is encompassed by the spirit (*al-rūḥ*). According to Dan Tafa, the soul’s



**Figure 6.1** Dan Tafa’s ‘Origin of Existents’, Folio 1 of *Nasab al-mawjūdāt*, archive of Shakyh Bello ibn Abd’r-Raazqid ibn Uthman ibn Shakyh Abd’l-Qaadir Dan Tafa (Credit: Muhammad Shareef)

of the Rules of Existence’) presents a Pythagorean description of the unfolding of various levels of existence according to the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 12, while his *Nasab al-mawjūdāt* (‘Origin of Existents’, see Figure 6.1) describes the origin of each existent thing in terms of its essence, its attributes, its governing principle (*nāmūs*), and its nature.<sup>51</sup> These are the theoretical perspectives underlying several of the occult sciences, as Dan Tafa explains in his *Kashf al-Kunūz wa Ḥall al-Rumūz* (‘Unveiling of the Treasuries and Solving of the Mysteries’, which could be considered a work of *falsafa* and/or the natural/occult sciences of the ancients) in which he explains the cosmological and metaphysical

symbolism and spiritual/astrological realities represented in various *jadwals*, or talismanic charts/diagrams.<sup>52</sup>

This category of Dan Tafa’s writings shows the substantial influence of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, especially his *al-Insān al-Kāmil* (‘The Perfect Man’). In fact, perhaps Dan Tafa’s earliest work, the *Manẓuma Iṣtilahāt al-Ṣūfiya* (composed

apparent dwelling in the body is the result of its focus on or regard (*naẓar*) towards the body during the waking state, and thus during the state of veridical dreams, the soul or spirit turns its focus from the body towards the angelic world of dominion (*ālam al-malākūt*). *al-Muqaddima fī ‘ilm al-marāṭ wa l-ta’bīr* (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute) 3. Similar notions can be found in earlier Sufi literature, such as Ibn ‘Atā Llāh’s ḥikam #246, ‘The cosmos envelops you in respect to your corporeal nature, but it does not do so in respect to the immutability of your spiritual nature.’ V. Danner, *The Book of Wisdom* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) 107.

<sup>51</sup> Discussions similar to these two works can be found throughout Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Futūḥāt al-Makkīya*, see W. Chittick, *Self-Disclosure of God* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).

<sup>52</sup> B. Muṣṭafā, ‘abd al-Qādir (Dan Tafa), *Kashf al-Kunūz wa Ḥall al-Rumūz*, Muhammad Shareef (ed.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, n. d.).

in 1821, when the author was just 17 lunar years old), summarizes the technical vocabulary and concepts of Jīlī's magnum opus. As Dan Tafa writes in his *al-Kashf wa'l-Bayān limā ashkala min Kitāb al-Insān* ('Unveiling and Clarification of what is Confusing in the Book of [the Universal] Man'):

I took this book [Jīlī's *al-Insān al-Kāmil*] by means of transmission from my spiritual master, the righteous teacher, the ascetic sage and Knower by God, my maternal uncle, Muḥammad Sanbu. And in turn, he took it by means of transmission from his father, Shehu 'Uthmān dan Fodio, may God have mercy on both of them. Due to his frequent study of the issues of the book, he benefited me incredibly greatly. Then, I myself began a deep study of the text repeatedly until I completely possessed it, realized it and extracted from it innumerable rare extractions. Among them was a poem which I composed regarding the technical vocabulary of the book based upon its chapters, composed in thirty verses. I then composed a commentary upon this poem with reliable teachings. Among these works of mine extracted from this book is a poem I composed which was like an introduction to the study of the text, which I lost many years ago. Among them also was a small tract that I composed in about three folios in which I assembled much benefit. And there were other works of mine as well. God gave me openings in this book, which He had not given to others. Rather, I do not know anyone in these times, after my abovementioned spiritual master, who had uncovered the secrets with which I had become acquainted from studying this book.<sup>53</sup>

This short poem and its commentary discuss the nature of the Divine Essence, Attributes, Qualities, Names, and the technical meaning of other Qur'ānic terminologies such as the 'Throne', 'Footstool', 'the Two Feet', 'the Pen', 'the Tablet', 'the Lote Tree', etc.

*al-Kashf wa'l-Bayān limā ashkala min Kitāb al-Insān* presents a more in-depth discussion of thirteen problematic or difficult topics from Jīlī's work: 1) God's existentiating of the cosmos from Himself like ice from water; 2) Divine Oneness in the multiplicity of manifestation likened to waves of the ocean; 3) The identity of the will of creatures with the Divine Will and their differentiation; 4) How the Real's knowledge of Its own unknowability does not limit Its knowledge; 5) The Qur'ānic request and unique kingdom and power granted to the Prophet Solomon; 6) The relationships between the Divine Throne, the Divine Tablet, and the Universal Soul; 7) The universal and the particular in Divine Knowledge; 8) The nature and cessation of Hellfire; 9) The pleasures experienced in hell by its denizens; 10) The return of everything to its Divine Origin, particularly Iblīs and

<sup>53</sup> B. Muṣṭafā, 'abd al-Qādir (Dan Tafa), *al-Kashf wa'l-Bayān limā ashkala min Kitāb al-Insān*, Muhammad Shareef (ed.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2010) 4.

the people of hell; 11) The position of the Prophets Noah, John, and Jesus in the heavenly spheres; 12) The sphere of the fixed stars in Ibn ‘Arabi’s cosmology; 13) The worship and felicity and punishment of the infidel in view of their origin from and return to God.<sup>54</sup>

Hunwick lists several other works in this category including *Ḥaḍrat al-Hāhūt wa wāḥidiyya al-Lāhūt* (‘The Presence of the Level of Divine Ipseity and the Oneness of the Level of Divinity’), whose title shows the clear influence of the terminology of Ibn ‘Arabi and Jīlī, and a work entitled *Maqāmāt al-anbiyā’* (‘Stations of the Prophets’), which he describes as an ‘expansion of an earlier work on the same subject which the author claims was based on divine inspiration not transmitted knowledge’.<sup>55</sup> Hunwick also lists treatises on ‘The Superiority of Men to Angels’ and a commentary on al-Ghazālī’s famous statement on ‘the best of all possible worlds’.

### Works of Practical Sufism

Several of Dan Tafa’s works on Sufism include or are entirely focused on its practical dimension. Among these works are his *Kashf al-ghitā’ wa l-rayb fī dhikr anwā’ mafātiḥ al-ghayb* (‘Removal of the Veil and Doubt by the Mention of the Kinds of Keys to the Unseen’), which briefly describes six keys or methods to obtaining knowledge of the unseen utilized by six different classes of people: 1) the Luminous Key for the worshippers of God and the prophets; 2) the Spiritual Key for the people of spiritual exercises; 3) the Astral Key for the astrologers and astronomers; 4) the Imaginal Key for the possessor of true dreams; 5) the Ideal/ Archetypal Key for the people of benefits (*fawā’id*); and 6) the Auditory Key for the people of God.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Dan Tafa’s *Ma’rifat al-Ḥaqq* (‘Knowledge of the Real’) describes eight doors to the existential/direct knowledge of the Real: 1) Primordial Human nature/innate disposition (*fiṭra*); 2) Reports (*khabr*); 3) Rational reflection (*naẓar*); 4) Contemplation of Divine Majesty (*Jalāl*); 5) Contemplation of Divine Beauty (*Jamāl*); 6) The Qur’ān; 7) Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*); and 8) the spiritual states of direct experience (*al-aḥwāl al-dhawqīya*). This work is a commentary upon a well-known Fulfulde poem of Shaykh ‘Uthmān dan Fodio.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See the appendix to this chapter for an original translation of certain sections of this work.

<sup>55</sup> Hunwick; O’Fahey, *The Arabic Literature of Africa: Vol. 2*, 224.

<sup>56</sup> B. Muṣṭafā, ‘abd al-Qādir (Dan Tafa), *Kashf al-ghitā’ wa l-rayb fī dhikr anwā’ mafātiḥ al-ghayb*, Muhammad Shareef (ed.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> B. Muṣṭafā, ‘abd al-Qādir (Dan Tafa), *Ma’rifat al-Ḥaqq*, Muhammad Shareef (ed.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2003).

This indicates the derivation of some Arabic texts from 'Ajāmī ones, in contrast to the commonly assumed direction of knowledge and literature from Arabic to 'Ajāmī.

Perhaps most interesting of the works of this category is Dan Tafa's *'Ibādāt Shaykh Muḥammad Sanbu* or *Bayān al-ta'abbudāt* ('The Worship of Shaykh Muḥammad Sanbu' or the 'Clarification of Worship'), which describes the spiritual practices and method of his own shaykh and uncle (and presumably his as well). This work was inspired by a dream in which the then-deceased Muḥammad Sanbu instructed the author to explain his method of worship. Amongst other things, this method is distinguished by the centrality of true dreams, the concealing of miracles and spiritual states, and asceticism and solitude, and offers a uniquely precise and detailed account of the spiritual methods and perspectives of some of the founders of the Sokoto Caliphate. This work also contains an illuminating discussion of certain technical terms of Sufi vocabulary.

## Conclusion

As the works above demonstrate, the early Sokoto Caliphate was host to traditions of *falsafa / hikma* (philosophy) and philosophical Sufism, which were often combined with traditions of the natural and occult sciences. It is clear that not only Dan Tafa, but also Muḥammad Sanbu, Shaykh 'Uthmān dan Fodio and others were well versed in the philosophical Sufism of Jīlī and perhaps in the traditions of Avicennan philosophy through the medium of Abharī's summation. Dan Tafa's works testify to the vitality and integration of these various disciplines in the early years of the Caliphate, although his work 'Oaths and Promises' may indicate a somewhat hostile environment to some of them. Most of Dan Tafa's works are characterized by a density and concision that seems to necessitate an oral commentary. The wit and rhetorical force of the rhyming couplets in his poetic works cited above and in the appendix is also quite striking and, unfortunately, beyond my skill to capture in translation.<sup>58</sup> This may be a regional style (from the eighteenth century onwards, West Africa witnessed an explosion of summary versifications and dense, didactic texts and commentaries in fields such as *fiqh* and *'ilm al-tawḥīd / kalām*), or it may indicate that these texts were meant to be taught with an oral commentary, or it may indicate a degree of hostility or mistrust in his milieu towards some of the topics dealt with in these dense treatises, or perhaps this style is meant to protect these works from the unworthy or unqualified. All of these factors probably exerted an influence, to one degree or another, on his distinct style. As Dan Tafa himself wrote at the end of his commentary upon his own

<sup>58</sup> I have tried my best to approximate this notable aspect of Dan Tafa's literary style in the poetic epigram to this chapter.

poem on technical Sufi vocabulary (*iṣṭilāḥāt*), 'I have made this commentary very condensed as a precaution against unwanted incursion and dissension (*fitna*).'<sup>59</sup>

This fact underscores the importance of orality in knowledge transmission in the Islamic sciences. Perhaps because of the publish-or-perish paradigm in which we operate, there is a tendency in contemporary scholarship to assume the equivalency of literary production and creative intellectual activity.<sup>60</sup> However, as the traditions of oral commentary and teaching in the Islamic sciences, especially philosophy and Sufism, demonstrate, there can be significant, creative intellectual activity that does not necessarily leave behind written traces.<sup>61</sup> Recall that Dan Tafa vowed in a written oath to 'keep secret what I possess of the sciences of the spiritual realities and secrets, and to conceal my works regarding these. This is because these sciences are an exalted class of sciences for the spiritually elite and are only designated for those who are spiritually prepared from among the People of God', and that his teacher, Muḥammad Sanbu, left behind almost no written works aside from a few poems. When it comes to these traditions, the absence of written evidence is far from the evidence of absence. Thus, Dan Tafa's few written works and mentions of his studies of *falsafa* may just be the tip of the iceberg of a much deeper tradition of Islamic philosophy in the region.

<sup>59</sup> B. Muṣṭafā, 'abd al-Qādir (Dan Tafa), *Manzuma Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, Muḥammad Shareef (ed.) (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2006), 6. This is something of a tradition in Islamic philosophy and philosophical Sufism as Seyyed Hossein Nasr notes, 'In order to avoid the criticism and condemnation of certain exoteric *'Ulamā'* and also the uneducated who might misconstrue their teachings, most philosophers couched their ideas in deliberately difficult language whose meaning they then taught orally to their chosen students. Although there are exceptions in this matter, as one sees in the case of Mulla Sadra, the majority of the masters of Islamic philosophy practised this art of dissimulation through a deliberately complicated language, the key to whose understanding remained in the hands of those well acquainted with the oral tradition which alone could elucidate the meaning or the levels of meaning of the technical vocabulary (*al-iṣṭilāḥāt*). That is why books such as the whole class of *al-Iṣṭilāḥāt al-sūfiyya* by 'Abd al-Razzāq Kashani and others, *al-Ta'rifat* by Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn* by al-Tuhawī, and other works on terminology have been so important in the history of Sufism and Islamic philosophy.' S.H. Nasr, 'Oral Transmission and the Book in Islamic Education: The Spoken and the Written Word', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 3,1, 1992, 3.

<sup>60</sup> We even commonly speak of knowledge 'production', a conceptualization quite alien to Dan Tafa's epistemology in which knowledge is not 'produced', but rather 'transmitted' or 'unveiled'.

<sup>61</sup> This is by no means limited to Islamic philosophy, as many of the founders of major schools of ancient philosophy such as Socrates, Diogenes the Cynic, Pyrrho, and Carneades left behind no writings.

Or it may not; more research must be conducted to determine the exact content and sources of Shaykh Dan Tafa's works, and whether he was a lone exceptional figure or if he was a part of a larger network of scholars studying and producing works not only of logic and jurisprudence but also of philosophy and philosophical Sufism. If so, this could radically alter our understanding of the intellectual landscape of precolonial Islamic West Africa, as well as developing our understanding of the history and spread of Islamic philosophy and philosophical Sufism. While much more work remains to be done, Dan Tafa's oeuvre does clearly demonstrate the presence of philosophical Sufism in the region, the importance of al-Jīlī in transmitting the *Akbarī* tradition in West Africa, and they may indicate a heretofore unexplored tradition of *falsafa* in the region. I hope further study of Dan Tafa and figures like him will also shed light on the philosophical texts that were studied and transmitted in the Islamic West during the period in which this tradition was long supposed to have died out (fourteenth to nineteenth centuries).

## Appendix: Selected Translations of Dan Tafa's Works

### The Unveiling and Clarification of What is Difficult in the Book of the Perfect Man

#### On God's Knowledge:

The Fourth Issue: 'Is God's knowledge limited by the fact that He knows that He is unknowable?'

Among the difficult topics of this book is his statement in the 25th chapter on Perfection (*Kamāl*): 'For He, may He be exalted, perceives His quiddity (*māhiyyatihi*) while He perceives that it is not perceived, for if it has no limit from His perspective and from the perspective of other than Him, then this limitlessness of His in His Essence, may He be exalted, is that it is not perceived, and so it has no limit from His perspective.'

In this, the difficulty is apparent in its negation of perception from the perspective of God, because God, transcendent and exalted, encompasses all things, the eternal and the created as he explained in his statement 'He perceives it', but then he undercuts this by saying, 'it has no limit from His perspective nor from the perspective of other than Him'.<sup>62</sup> This is due to the absence of limitations of His Perfections while distinguishing, in general and in application, between the encompassing of knowledge and the absence of limitations of the Divine Perfections. This is the site of the difficulties of his statement, so understand, and

<sup>62</sup> The classical definition of knowledge is the 'encompassing of the known by the knower', which would be impossible for something with no limits. Hence the unlimited is equivalent to the unknowable.



prior to that, of the differences and difficulties in the books of the theologians. Al-Sanūsī asserted the limitation of the Divine Perfections with regards to His Knowledge [i.e. The perfection of Divine Knowledge is limited in that it cannot know the Divine Essence, which is absolutely unknowable]. However, It [the Divine Essence] has no limit from the perspective of our knowledge, due to the necessity of the comprehensiveness of [Its] knowledge, and this is the correct way, so understand and God facilitate your guidance.<sup>63</sup>

#### The Seventh Issue: 'The Particular and Universal in God's Knowledge'

Among the difficult topics in this book is his statement in the 52nd chapter: 'So know, may God grant us and you success, that the Real, it is not possible for It to be understood comprehensively or exhaustively, ever, neither the eternal nor the temporally created [aspects of It]. As for the eternal, this is because His Essence does not fall under the purview of an attribute of His Attributes, namely, knowledge. So it [knowledge] does not encompass It [the Essence]. The existence of the universal in the particular does not necessarily follow from this, and God is exalted above the universal and the particular, so knowledge cannot exhaust It [the Essence] in any sense.'<sup>64</sup> – to the end of his statement.

The essence of the difficulty in this is its assertion of the absence of the encompassing of knowledge of the essence of the existent thing.

The like of this has been introduced earlier along with the explanation of the disagreement amongst the theologians on this point, although the correct

<sup>63</sup> I believe Dan Tafa is arguing here that any statement we make about the Divine Essence's knowledge of Itself is necessarily part of our knowledge of It, which is limited because it cannot encompass the Divine Essence. So even our assertion that Divine Knowledge encompasses the Divine Essence or not, is to limit It according to our knowledge, which cannot encompass it. We cannot speak from the perspective of the Divine Essence, so the best thing is to assert the absolute limitlessness of It and Its Knowledge from our perspective. Ibn 'Arabī's statement at the end of the *Fuṣūṣ* provides a different perspective on this problem that I believe is relevant here: 'But the Absolute Divinity is not encompassed because it is identical with things and with Itself. You don't say that a thing encompasses itself or doesn't encompass itself, so understand!' (Faṣṣ Muḥammad, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam Li Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī*, ed. Abū al-'Ala Affīfī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'Arabī, 2002) 226).

<sup>64</sup> The assertion here seems to be that since God is neither a universal nor a particular, He can neither be known as a universal nor as a particular, and so He cannot be known. It could also be a rejection of a perspective that describes the Essence as universal and Divine Knowledge as a particular. Moreover, since the Real is the essence of everything, that means the essences of particular things cannot be known – a seeming refutation of God's knowledge of particulars – a celebrated debate between the philosophers, theologians, and Sufis. Dan Tafa's response, building on the earlier issue, is that God knows everything with Self-Knowledge.

approach is the limitlessness of the comprehensiveness of knowledge, so know this. This issue is like the problems in the issues of theology (*kalām*) and Sufism (*taṣawwuf*). And I have not found a satisfactory explanation [in any other work], so whoever finds it, let him attribute it to this place and not conceal the fact that I called for the necessity of the particular and the universal being included in the knowledge of Itself/the Essence. But, in the first place, the absence of the applicability of the universal and particular is not necessary for Itself/the Essence. This is because knowledge is not among the transitive attributes, such that the inclusion of itself requires a [separate] locus under its own rule, like the attribute of power, for example, for it requires in the inclusion of itself, a locus because it is a transitive attribute. So understand! May God facilitate our guidance and yours.<sup>65</sup>

### On Eschatology:

#### The Eighth Issue: 'The Nature and Cessation of Hellfire'

Among the difficult topics in this book is his saying in the 58th chapter in mentioning the Fire: 'The portion related to him by His name *al-Qāhir* (The Dominant), is that from which the Fire was created, and this is from a secret of the manifestation of His Name, *al-Ghāfir* (the Forgiving). So its people [of the fire] rely upon this to provide them good in the afterlife, as the Prophet narrated about the fire, 'that *al-Jabbār* (the Compeller) will put His foot in it [the Fire] and it will say, "enough, enough". Then the *Jirjīr*<sup>66</sup> tree will sprout in it.' He also says the same chapter in the final section: 'So know that *al-Jabbār* (the Compeller), whenever it manifests to them, is from the perspective of the Divine Power, it reveals to them the appropriateness which is the cause of connection in everything. So the foot of compulsion is placed on the Fire, and then comes the statement of the Most High, and He says about that, "Enough, enough". This speech is the state of the essence under the dominion of Glory, by this expression he means, "so it ceases". Then He says, 'Know that since the Fire is not original in existence, it disappears in the end. The secret of this is that the attribute from which it was created is preceded

<sup>65</sup> It seems that Dan Tafā is arguing that since the attribute of Knowledge does not leave an effect upon the object of knowledge, it does not require a separate entity or locus to exercise itself (self-knowledge is not like self-power or control because knowledge can know itself whereas power must have an effect on something else), then the Real knows Itself fully with this kind of self-knowledge which includes both the universal and the particular, because these are not other than the Real, which is the very Essence of both, although the Real is not limited by either category.

<sup>66</sup> Its name is similar to that of the watercress (*jirjīr* or *jarjarīr*) mentioned in other *ḥadīths* about the cessation of Hellfire.

[by something else], and the statement, “My mercy precedes my wrath” attests to that.’ – to the end of his statement.<sup>67</sup>

There has been a lot of talk disparaging what is mentioned here, so he said in the last section of the chapter mentioned (the 58th): ‘Know that the Fire is as mentioned’ then he said in the last section of the chapter mentioned (the 58th): ‘Know that the Fire, since its affair is an accident in existence, its disappearance is permissible and [this is true of everything] except for impossibilities. It [The Fire] disappears only when the burning leaves it, and with the leaving of the burning, the angels of the Fire leave, and with their leaving, the angels of bliss return, and so with the arrival of the angels of bliss, the *Jirjir* tree sprouts in it. It [the tree] is green, and green is the most beautiful/best color of paradise. So what was Hell is reversed to become blissful.’ – to the end of his statement.

The essence of the problem in this is obvious in its assertion of the lifting of burning and punishment from the people of the Fire without restriction because it is the fire of disobedience. This is different from what is known from the Book and the *Sunna* about the eternity of the punishment of the disbelievers, [which is] like the eternity of the bliss of the believers. However, I solve this problem with his statement in the chapter about the level of the disbelievers, ‘Then God, Most High, created the gate of this level of disbelief and idolatry (*shirk*) as He said, *Truly the disbelievers among the People of the Book and the idolaters are in the fire of Hell, abiding therein; it is they who are the worst of creation* (98:6), and [the Fire] will say, “*Is there more?*” (50:30) without ending.’ So this text of his, may God be pleased with him, is useful for its preceding assertion about the fire of disobedience.<sup>68</sup> So with this you can bring his view into line with that of the people of the *Sunna*.

<sup>67</sup> This references a *ḥadīth* from Bukhārī which reads, ‘As for the Fire, it will not be filled till God puts His Foot over it whereupon it will say, “Enough, Enough”. At that time it will be filled, and its different parts will come closer to each other; and God will not wrong any of His created beings. As regards Paradise, God will create a new creation to fill it with.’ Book 65, *ḥadīth* 4850.

<sup>68</sup> Although Dan Tafa is somewhat circumspect here, he appears to be alluding to the Qur’ānic passage, ‘*As for those who are wretched, they shall be in the Fire, wherein shall be for them groaning and wailing, abiding therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure, save as thy Lord wills. Surely thy Lord does whatever He wills. And as for those who are felicitous, they shall be in the Garden, abiding therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure, save as thy Lord wills – a gift unfailing*’ (11:106–8). The key qualification ‘as long as the heavens and the earth endure’ seems to imply a kind of end or cessation to the Fire, as Dan Tafa explains in the following sections.

### The Ninth Issue: 'The pleasure of the people of the Fire'

Among the difficult topics in this book is his statement in the chapter mentioned above (the 58th): 'Truly, for some of the people of the Fire, there is a pleasure which they enjoy in it.' So that he mentions that it is joined with some of the people of the Fire. He said, 'I saw the Garden given to them as a replacement [for the Fire], but they hated it.' And he also mentioned, 'truly, some of the people of the Fire perceive some things among the Divine Realities that other than them amongst the believers do not perceive.'

The answer to what he mentioned about the pleasure of the people of the Fire and their realization of Divine Realities is familiar to us and it is an existential matter of spiritual realities. As for me, God informed me of the meaning of that, but it is not proper to unveil the like of that because it would lead to the rending of the people's veils, and so we keep silent about it, so understand! May God facilitate our guidance.

### The Tenth Issue: 'On the salvation of Iblīs'

Among the difficult topics of this book is his statement in the 59th chapter in mentioning the affair of Iblis in His saying, '*Indeed, My curse is upon you until the Day of Judgement*' (38:78) and his saying, '*until the Day of Judgement*' is a limit. So when the Day of Judgement has passed, then there is no curse because of the lifting of the ruling of natural darkness on the Day of Judgement. And we have already explained what is meant by the Day of Judgement in the final chapter of this book. So Iblis is not cursed, which is to say that he was only expelled from the [Divine] Presence before the Day of Judgement because of what his origin required of him. It is only the obstacles of nature which prevent the spirit from realizing the Divine realities, but after that, the natural elements are themselves among the perfections, and so then there is no curse, but rather pure nearness. So at that time, Iblis will return to what he had with God of Divine Nearness, and that is after the cessation of Hell, because everything that God created must return to what it was in this origin from which it was separated, so understand!'

The reason for the problem in this statement is obvious from its positing the return of Iblis to what he had with God of Divine nearness. Felicity is not fitting for Iblis then because we assert the perpetuity of his wretchedness and torment because he is a wretched, accursed *kāfir*, far from the mercy of God as is known in the religion by necessity. So I say that this statement is deeply problematic for those who have no realization among the people of the transmitted sciences because they do not accept its interpretation. But as for the verifiers/realizers there is no problem for them because they know that for every existent there is a known, specified level with God, from which it is created and to which it returns. So this level (*rutba*), if it is among the loci of Divine Beauty, its possessor is destined for

felicity in its existence, and if it is among the loci of Divine Majesty, its possessor is sentenced to wretchedness. Then when the wheel turns for this creation with the manifestation of the matter in full swing, and with the realization of the realities, each reality among the realities of existents returns to the level which it had with God, and that is the Divine nearness mentioned [above]. And in this, Iblis is no different from others, and a disbeliever is no different from a believer. However, the return of believers is by way of the Beauty from which they were created, and it is this which necessitates their felicity; while the return of the disbelievers is by way of the Majesty from which they were created, and it is this which necessitates their wretchedness, expulsion, and Divine Nearness. Each of the two parties is fixed when they return to Him. He says, '*To Him are you returned*' (29:21). Were this nearness not established for the people of the Fire in the afterlife, then the speech of the Real would not be fulfilled concerning them, and Its response to them as [is stated] in the verses of the Qur'ān, which are addressed to the people of the Garden and their speech as well as to the people of the Fire and their speech. However, the Real addresses each in accordance with what is required of its station and its reality. So He says to the people of the Garden, '*Peace be unto you, you have done well [so enter it to abide]*' (39:73), and He says to the people of the Fire, '*Begone therein [and speak not to Me]*' (23:108).<sup>69</sup> So let us halt this discussion at this point since there is no way to reveal this secret. So understand! The people of misery are only veiled in the afterlife from direct witnessing, not from the witnessing of nearness and discourse.

So when you realize [the meaning of] the preceding sentence, the difficulties will be unravelled for you all at once, unless you are constrained by the fetters of your thinking and veiled by the force of your blind imitation. So if you are like that, then know that there is no way for you [to realize] these realities, so remain in the company of your thought, and stay in the place of your reason, for that is safer for you.

### Introductory Poem on the Universals of the Six Worlds

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate  
 Prayers and peace upon he after whom there is no prophet  
 Praise be to God who has established  
 The rules of existence and taught us ... [illegible]  
 The purest of his prayers upon the people of perfection

<sup>69</sup> This entire passage, through its vocabulary, also implicitly alludes to the discussion of the afterlife at the end of Surah Hūd (11:103–19).

Muḥammad and the prophets and 'the Men' (*al-rijāl*)<sup>70</sup>  
 And so, the Intellect holds what grants  
 Since each known object by its judgement ... [illegible]  
 The men of old did not cease  
 To work towards its perfection by state (*ḥāl*)  
 And how not? Since it is that which roams free  
 After this body ... [illegible]  
 This is a poem, a wonderful recital  
 Of the wisdom entrusted to the intellect [illegible ... ]  
  
 In exile it is thrown down so that it descends  
 into the form of the body, by ordainment [illegible ... ]  
 To its separation from limitations  
 That drag it down into the troubles of fate

#### On the Soul and the Intellect:

The soul is that which is in man of thoughts/spirit (*ma'ānīn*)  
 And the intellect is that which by it collects the sweetness of  
 understanding (*bayān*)  
 Its origin is from the world of spirits  
 It was deposited into the forms of the human figures  
 The natural elements come together  
 In the world of the spheres in an aspect/mode (*al-ḥaythiya*)  
 It is, when life is gone,  
 Transferred, as it is not dead  
 Here it manages alone  
 As in the first affair, so take instruction!

#### On the Body (*jism*) and body (*badan*):

The body is composed of compounded natures  
 And it is returning back to them  
 It is composed of particular elements  
 Created, made, particularly for it  
 And they, that is, the above-mentioned elements  
 Are composed of natures which are formless  
 And this is prime matter and it is a fixed entity (*'ayn thābit*)  
 From it, the varieties of existence are established

<sup>70</sup> This term does not refer to gender, but rather to spiritual attainment and maturity.

### On the Body's Share of Life:

The life of this body is from warmth  
 It does not remain for its essence is its evaporation  
 It boils up in infants, what for youth –  
 What does not oppose the multitude of flame  
 Without it, in manifestation in youth  
 And in old age, the body of this gate  
 [In it] appears an inward/contained coolness  
 So the inward/contained heat is weakened  
 And illnesses become plentiful in the wounds  
 Of the body, then death approaches  
 Until when the heat comes to its end  
 And its life is ended by its death

### On the Soul's Share of Life:

Its share is from the glance/consideration of the spirit  
 Reflecting/corresponding to the formal structure (*al-haykal al-ṣurī*) [the body]  
 It [the soul] is its [the body's] management and governance  
 And it makes it [the soul/life] visible and witnessed  
 Until when the warmth is gone  
 It is raised and separated from its abode

### On the *Barzakh* and the Afterlife:

The spirit in these two, its governance is apparent  
 Its site is elevated and its manner pure  
 The sweetness of knowledges and perfections  
 And the curse of imperfection and foulness of state  
 Here are so many possessors of might and primordial nature (*fiṭra*)  
 But the thinking of the ignorant about it is spoiled.

### On the Development of the Intellect:

The development of intellects is by firm patience  
 Its striving in actions ... [illegible]  
 It brings news of all matters,  
 And seeks to clarify what is required and what is supererogatory for them  
 And it holds your soul back from its lusts  
 And eliminates aggression to prevent injuries

And silence and reflection and contentment  
 And spiritual retreats of the aspirant for relaxation

#### On the Development of Souls:

The development of souls is through humility  
 From elevation due to rank  
 Restraining yourself from harming, and love of poverty  
 And holding yourself back from the prestige of pride  
 And the exile of the soul and asceticism  
 And sadness and generosity and restraint

#### On the Development of Spirits:

The development of the spirits is through ignoring [all else]  
 And your refusing the known through inattention  
 Your taking knowledge is equivalent to  
 its absence and opposition and adversary

#### The Journey of the Soul after Death:

Its journey is in accordance with its state  
 Of its lacking the necessary or its perfection  
 So its lack is its painful punishment  
 and its perfection, its eternal bliss

#### The Journey of the Body after Death:

Its journey is its return to its origin  
 Its return is also to its folk  
 Its determination is erased in that state  
 Due to its loss of [both] lack and perfection

#### On the Resurrection of the Spirit:

The resurrection of the spirits is their dispersal/unfolding  
 Seeking the centre that contains their final resting place  
 The problems of the forms of the body  
 Are the supports for calling on the Name

#### On the Resurrection of the Body:

Its resurrection is apparent in/by the spirit  
 It takes form in the spiritual world  
 It tastes the pleasures of the spirit  
 In accordance with its spiritual perfection



## On Prime Matter:

The [prime] matter is the fixed entities  
 Before their attributes are qualified by existence  
  
 And the continuous rain (*dīma*) is like the soul, from it arises  
 Warmth with coolness, and they spread  
 And so follows wetness and dryness  
 And the rest of four basic elements  
 Then appear the spheres and the planets  
 Orbiting them, and likewise the fixed stars  
 The motions perpetually traverse the spheres  
 Running with darkness and illuminating the kingdom (*al-mulk*)  
 Then from them appear the engendered beings [the kingdoms]  
 Which are multiple and composite  
 Like the mineral, plant, and animal [kingdoms]  
 They differ in their governing principle  
 From which they become hot and dry [fire], cold and wet [water]  
 And the inverse of these concomitants occurs [hot and wet (air),  
 cold and dry (earth)]  
 In accordance with natural transformation  
 At the places of land and sea  
 As for animals, their nature is different  
 As we mentioned, they have a difficult journey, so understand!  
 And likewise, the mineral kingdom and that  
 Has been clearly established, O keen one.  
 Then the plant kingdom, its nature and governing principles  
 Are different, as [its members] change position  
 Among it [the plant kingdom] are food, and medicine, and the like  
 And heat and cold and the coming of their opposites ...  
  
 [The manuscript ends here, but the lack of typical closing formulae  
 indicates that either this work or this copy are incomplete]