

A Treatise on Practical and Theoretical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate

Shaykh Dan Tafa's Exposition of Devotions (Bayān al-Ta'abbudāt)

Oludamini Ogunnaike

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, USA

oo4qw@virginia.edu

Abstract

This article presents an annotated translation of *The Exposition of Devotions*, a short text by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir ibn Muṣṭafā (1218–1280/1804–1864) about his spiritual master and maternal uncle, Muḥammad Sambo (1195–1242/1782–1826). Muḥammad Sambo was the son of 'Uthmān ibn Fūdī (also known as Usman dan Fodio), the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, one of the largest pre-colonial polities on the African continent. While modern scholarship has tended to focus on the political, legal, social, and economic dimensions of the jihad movement that created the Sokoto Caliphate, this text provides a brief, but detailed account of the spiritual practices and discussions amongst Usman dan Fodio's clan (the Fodiawa), demonstrating the centrality of the Akbarī tradition in technical discussions, as well as the unique developments of this tradition in thirteenth/nineteenth century West Africa. The work begins with an account of a dream of the then-deceased Muḥammad Sambo that occasioned its composition, and after a brief discussion of the status of dreams and their importance, gives an account of Sambo's spiritual method and practices. The short treatise concludes with the author's summary of Sambo's responses to several technical and highly esoteric questions posed to him by the author, illustrating the profound mastery and unique perspectives developed on these topics by the Fodiawa. Combining oneirology, hagiography, practical and theoretical Sufism, this short treatise is an illuminating window into the spiritual and intellectual traditions of the founders of the Sokoto Caliphate.

Keywords

Shaykh Dan Tafa – Muḥammad Sambo – ‘Uthmān ibn Fūdī – Ibn al-‘Arabī – ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī – philosophical Sufism – Sokoto Caliphate – Islam in Africa – unity of being – Islamic philosophy

1 Introduction¹

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Muṣṭafā (1218–1280/1804–1864), known as “Dan Tafa,” was widely considered the most erudite of the second generation of scholars of the Sokoto Caliphate, the largest polity and one of the most important centers of Islamic scholarship in thirteenth/nineteenth century West Africa. Dan Tafa was born in the middle of the *hijra* (emigration) that marked the beginning of Sokoto jihad. His mother, Khadija, was the daughter of ‘Uthmān ibn Fūdī (known as Shehu Usman dan Fodio), the leader of the Sokoto jihad and one of the most revered and influential scholars and Sufis in the region.² Khadija was a revered scholar in her own right, and translated the famous Mālikī *fiqh* text, the *Mukhtaṣar* of al-Khalīl, into Fulfulde. Dan Tafa’s father, Muṣṭafā ibn Muḥammad al-Tūrūdī (d. 1261/1845), known as Mallam Tafa, was Shehu Usman’s student and personal secretary, and became one of the most revered scholars of the Sokoto Caliphate, founding the respected school and *ribāṭ* (fortified border-town) of Salame, a few dozen kilometres northeast of the capital city of Sokoto (in contemporary Northwest Nigeria). Dan Tafa received his early training from his parents,³ and at the age of fifteen, was initiated into

1 The research for this article was funded by grants from the American Philosophical Society and the University of Virginia.

2 For an introduction to the history of Usman dan Fodio, his family, jihad, and the Sokoto Caliphate see Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usman Dan Fodio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (New York: Humanities Press, 1967); Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman’s Jihad: Nana Asma’u, Scholar and Scribe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); and Ibraheem Sulaiman, *The African Caliphate: the Life, Works & Teaching of Shaykh Usman dan Fodio (1754–1817)* (London: Diwan Press, 2009).

3 Notably, Dan Tafa eulogized and praised his mother and grandmother for their scholarship and sanctity. Of his mother Khadija, Dan Tafa wrote that “She was permanently established in fulfilling every right and traveled the path which led to the ultimate spiritual Goal.” (qtd. in Muḥammad Shareef, *‘Ilāwat al-muṭālib fi shukr al-wāhib al-muḥīd al-mawāhib* [Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2013], 66). The great twentieth century Sokoto scholar Waziri Junaydu b. Muḥammad al-Bukharī described Khadija bint Shehu Usman in his *‘Arf al-rayḥān*: “She was from among the *awlīyā*’, and the righteous and humble ascetics. She was among the daughters of the Shehu who made the *hijra* with

Sufism by his maternal uncle, Muḥammad Sambo⁴ (1195–1242/1782–1826), the son of Usman dan Fodio.

Widely regarded as the greatest scholar of the Sokoto Caliphate of his time, Dan Tafa was a product of the extraordinary milieu of the early years of the Sokoto Caliphate in which Usman dan Fodio was able to attract and train a significant cohort of scholars well-versed in a wide array of Islamic sciences. As a result, his grandson, Shaykh Dan Tafa, was exposed to virtually all of the Islamic sciences transmitted in West Africa at the time: from medicine, mathematics, astronomy, physics/natural sciences, geography, and history, to the sciences of the Arabic language, jurisprudence, prophetic traditions, and Qur'anic interpretation, to logic, theology, Sufism, various occult and esoteric sciences, and unusually, Avicennan philosophy as well.⁵ Dan Tafa spent his life teaching at the school in Salame founded by his father, which he took over shortly before the latter's death. Although he frequently advised the leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate, its emirates, and neighboring polities, and was at one time promised the position of vizier, he never held and never seems to have vied for

him from Degel. She was famous for her virtuous spiritual states, pleasing character, copious learning and magnificent comprehension of the Divine realities (*haqā'iq*). She possessed a well-established foothold in many diverse sciences, and was from among those disciples of the Shehu who had been spiritually instructed to reach the goal of *ma'rifa* of God, Most High ... She also produced many poems in the Fulfulde language, among them was her famous poem on the 'Signs of the Appearance of the Mahdi'; her elegy for her husband, the erudite Muṣṭafā b. Muḥammad al-Turūdī, the father of the renowned sage, 'Abd al-Qādir; her poem, 'A Supplication for the Village of Wurno,' which the Commander of the Faithful, Muḥammad Bello used to recite and translated into Arabic himself; her poems on the science of jurisprudence; filial piety; grammar; and others which cannot be enumerated." (qtd. in Shareef, *Ilāwat al-muṭālib*, 200–1). Dan Tafa also concludes one of his hagiographical works on the spiritual elites of his time with a description of his maternal grandmother 'Ā'isha, known as *fyā Garka* (Hausa for "Lady of the House"), "Among them was my maternal grandmother, 'Ā'isha, the wife of Shehu 'Uthmān and mother of my uncle and spiritual guide, Shaykh Muḥammad Sanbu. She possessed an abundant share of righteousness and goodness, and was firmly rooted in this affair [Sufism]. The previously-mentioned Shaykh Abdullahi [Mujan Mahu] related that she possessed exalted spiritual states and stations. She attained the utmost degree of asceticism, righteousness, scrupulous piety, with complete spiritual struggle and discipline. In conclusion, she was among the righteous servants of God and among the select of the devoutly obedient of the Umma." ('Abd al-Qādir b. Muṣṭafā, *Sabwat al-aḥzān fī dhikr ba'd al-khawāṣ min ahl hadha al-zamān* (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2013), 24. Translation modified by author based on the Arabic original.

- 4 Sometimes transliterated as Sanbu due to its Arabic spelling *thanbu*, Sambo is traditional Fulani name given to a second son.
- 5 See Oludamini Ogunnaike, "Philosophical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate: The Case of Shaykh Dan Tafa" in *Islamic Scholarship in Africa: New Directions and Global Contexts*, ed. Ousmane Kane (Rochester: James Currey, 2021), 136–68; and Shareef, *Ilāwat al-muṭālib*.

prominent political positions. This seems to be in keeping with the spiritual method of his shaykh, Muḥammad Sambo, who explicitly shunned positions of power out of principle. A short poem attributed to Sambo describes these principles of his method:

O you who desires brotherhood, love, and good advice
 Listen to my words, for I have attained victory over all lower aspirations
 I took a covenant with my Lord to follow Muhammad
 In every affair with pure sincerity out of genuine love for him
 For I have been guided by his light in performing
 Commands, avoiding prohibitions and dubious deeds
 As well as austerity in this lower world, because it
 Is pure deception, and distraction from the Hereafter
 And openhanded, abundant tolerance along with contentment
 Being cheerful for the sake of the Lord, and excellent companionship
 Humility, nobility, and courageousness
 And visiting the sick, as if these were all second nature
 Love for the destitute and love for orphans
 Behaving excellently towards subordinates without showing irritation
 Purifying of the inner secrets, and constant remembrance
 It was love for the master [Muḥammad] which saved me from mishaps
 As a result, I reached the Divine Presence by means of his light
 Until I walked in the shade of intimate friendship and love
 I have been guided by his light in all my supplications
 to God, following in that, the path of the elite.
 And combining the reality and the law
 And concealing Divine Secrets from the masses
 By avoiding everyone who conflicted with the luminous Sunna
 And every follower of the path of heretical innovation
 And by avoiding evil scholars and rulers
 And the false ascetic, who acts treacherously by craving leadership.⁶

In addition to studying with and training renowned scholars of the Sokoto Caliphate, Dan Tafa corresponded with the famous Shaykh Aḥmad al-Bakkāʾī (d. 1865) of the Kunta family of Qādirī shaykhs of the Timbuktu region and castigated the scholar Nūḥ ibn al-Ṭāhir of the Massina empire of the inland Niger Delta region, stretching from Segou to Timbuktu in present-day Mali, for

6 Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Salwat al-aḥzān*, 8.

the latter's grand claims about the empire's founder, Aḥmad Lobbo.⁷ Even further afield, during his sojourn in West Africa, German explorer Heinrich Barth sought out Dan Tafa based on his reputation as "the most learned of the present generation of the inhabitants of Sokoto" and published an account of their 1853 meeting, praising Dan Tafa's erudition.⁸

Barth was mainly interested in Dan Tafa's knowledge of the region's history and politics, and due to certain disciplinary biases and blindspots, Europhone scholarship has continued to follow suit. As is the case for many Islamic scholars of Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa, Dan Tafa's historical and legal writings have received some scholarly attention, while his works of theology, philosophical Sufism, philosophy, and natural/occult sciences, have been almost completely ignored.⁹ Thankfully, this lacuna is now being addressed as Europhone scholars of Islam in Africa turn their attention from "texts to meanings"¹⁰ and scholars of Sufism and Islamic intellectual history are redressing their neglect

7 Mauro Nobili, *Sultan, Caliph, and the Renewer of the Faith: Aḥmad Lobbo, the Tarīkh al-fattāsh and the Making of an Islamic State in West Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 220–24.

8 Heinrich Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, 5 vols. (London, 1858), 4:101. 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." (qtd. in A.H.H. Kirk-Greene, *Barth's Travels in Nigeria* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962], 260).

9 To my knowledge the lone exceptions to this trend are the pioneering works of Shaykh Muhammad Shareef of the Sankore Institute (<https://siiasi.org/shaykh-dan-tafa/>) and Ahmed Kani (Ahmed Mohamed Kani, *The Life and Works of Abd Al-Qadir b. Al-Mustafa. A Critical Edition of his Works and Historiographical Approach*, PhD dissertation, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, 1987 and Ahmed M. Kani, "The private library of 'Abd al-Qadir b. al-Mustafā (d. 1864)," in *Sixth Interim Report, 1979–1981* [Zaria: Northern History Research Scheme, 1987]), and a brief description and catalogue of Dan Tafa's works by the late John Hunwick in a 1996 article in *Sudanic Africa* and the *Arabic Literature of Africa: Vol. 2*. See John Hunwick, "A Supplement to Infāq al-Maysūr: The Biographical Notes of 'Abd al-Qādir b. al-Muṣṭafā," *Sudanic Africa* 7 (1996): 35–51 and John Hunwick, *The Arabic Literature of Africa: Vol. 2. The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 221–30. Brief mention of one Dan Tafa's works concerning Muḥammad Sambo can be found in Shehu Abdur-Rahman Aboki's "Understanding Of Sokoto Jihād Leaders On Some Major Sūfi Concepts And Their Impact On The Society," *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science* 6.9 (2018): 22–32.

10 Amir Syed and Charles Stewart, "From Texts to Meanings: Close Reading of the Textual Cultures of Islamic Africa," *Islamic Africa* 9.1 (2018): 1–9.

of regions such as Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa that were once considered peripheral. Dan Tafa's works show frequent references to the later Akbarī tradition, particularly the writings of 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. c. 832/1428), and the fertile cross-pollination of Ash'arī theology (*kalām*), Avicennan philosophy (*falsafa*) (including natural and occult "sciences of the ancients" [*ulūm al-awā'il*]), and Akbarī Sufism that characterizes so much of later Islamic intellectual history. In his works, Dan Tafa describes studying al-Zarrūq's *Uṣūl al-ṭarīqa*, al-Jīlī's *al-Insān al-kāmil* and Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī's *Hikām* with Muḥammad Sambo, who studied these works with his father, Usman dan Fodio.¹¹ Indeed, Shaykh Dan Tafa's first known work (written when he was just 17 lunar years old) was a poem and auto-commentary summarizing and explicating the technical terminology and key concepts of al-Jīlī's magnum opus. Dan Tafa later wrote a work discussing in greater detail thirteen difficult issues in al-Jīlī's book, such as the salvation of Iblīs, the felicity of the people of the Fire, and God's knowledge of universals and particulars.¹² While much more work needs to be done on Islamic intellectual history in the region to contextualize Dan Tafa's oeuvre, these texts are known and studied to this day in elite circles around the author's descendants in Salame and Sokoto, and are taught by his descendants in the Sokoto caliphate-in-exile in Maiurno, Sudan, where Shaykh Muhammad Shareef studied, collected, transcribed, and translated many of them. Shaykh Muhammad Shareef, who studied many of these texts with the author's great-grandson, Shaykh Muḥammad Bello ibn Shaykh 'Abd al-Rāziq ibn Shaykh 'Uthmān ibn Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir ibn Muṣṭafā, now teaches and transmits many of these works along with their tradition of oral commentary to his students throughout the continent and the diaspora and in his publications through Sankore Institute, currently based in Bamako, Mali.¹³ It is through the generosity of Muhammad Shareef and the Sankore Institute that I was able to obtain photographs of the manuscript of this short treatise, *The Exposition of Devotions (Bayān al-ta'abbudāt)*.

11 'Abd al-Qādir ibn Muṣṭafā, *Tarjuma ba'd al-'ulamā' al-zamān*, trans. and ed. by Muhammad Shareef (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2010), 8.

12 'Abd al-Qādir b. Muṣṭafā, *al-Kashf wa'l-bayān limā ashkala min kitāb al-insān*, ed. Muhammad Shareef (Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2010) and Ogunnaike, "Philosophical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate," 155–56, 159–64.

13 See <https://siiasi.org/shaykh-dan-tafa/> and especially Shaykh Muḥammad Shareef's extensive commentary upon a poem of Dan Tafa's entitled *Ilāwat al-muṭālib fī shukr al-wāhib al-muṭīd al-mawāhib* ("The Increase of the Spiritual Aspirant in Gratitude of the Benefactor for the Divine Overflowing Given to Those He Favors").

2 Overview of the Text

This manuscript of *The Exposition of Devotions* is housed in the Sokoto State History Bureau and appears to be a unicum of twelve pages in a clear hand in the Central Sudanic script typical of authors of the Sokoto region (contemporary Northwest Nigeria), but it does not appear to be in the author's hand (see Figure 1). In some sections, there appear to be some omissions and errors in transcription and these have been indicated in the following translation.



Sokoto State History Bureau

FIGURE 1 First folio of the manuscript of *Bayān al-ta'abbudāt*
COURTESY OF MUHAMMAD SHAREEF, SANKORE INSTITUTE

The Exposition of Devotions was completed on the 24th of Muḥarram, 1256 (March 28th, 1840) when Shaykh Dan Tafa was 37 years old. In the beginning of the text, the author recounts that the treatise was occasioned when the then-deceased Shaykh Muḥammad Sambo came to a disciple in a dream and instructed him to tell ‘Abd al-Qādir to explain Sambo’s method of worship. Dan Tafa then gives a brief overview of traditions relating to dreams, their veracity and importance to explain the reason for the text’s composition.¹⁴

The next section of the text gives a brief account of Sambo’s character, states, spiritual method, and practices. Some of these descriptions can also be found in another short treatise, written as a supplement to Muḥammad Bello’s famous historical work, *Infāq al-maysūr fī tarīkh bilād al-takrūr* (“The Easy Expense of the History of the Lands of Takrūr”), where Dan Tafa provides the following biographical sketch of Muḥammad Sambo:

Among them is Shaykh Muhammad Sambo, mentioned by the author of the *Infāq*, who said: “Among those who were distinguished among the sons of the Shaykh [Usman dan Fodio] was Muhammad Sambo, the scholar, the most learned one (*al-‘allāma*) who combined law and reality, the Sufi. However, he would sometimes become unapproachable and shut himself off, then later he would return to his normal state.” I say, adding to what he said: He is our shaykh and our master, practicing scholar, the righteous, the saint, the knower. He has a tremendous station in sanctity (*wilāya*), and a firm rooting in *ma’rifā* and a true state in righteousness (*ṣiddīqiyya*).¹⁵ He was the spiritual pole of the circle of reliance (*al-tawakkul*). He had unveilings and true states. In some of his writings he mentioned that he had been granted the miracle of walking on water and flying in the air, and that he had witnessed the earth of the sesame and entered it.¹⁶ The knowers say that this land is only entered by those

14 Shaykh Dan Tafa wrote another treatise, *Muqaddima fīl-‘ilm al-marā’i wa ta’bīr* (“Introduction to the Science of Dreams and Interpretation”), which discusses the science of dreams and their interpretation, combining natural philosophy and philosophical Sufism and presenting interesting arguments about the relationship between spirit (*rūḥ*), soul (*nafs*), and body (*jasad*). For example, Dan Tafa argues that the soul does not leave the body during sleep, as was commonly assumed, but rather encompasses the body, and is encompassed by the spirit (*al-rūḥ*). According to Dan Tafa, the soul’s apparent dwelling in the body is the result of its focus on or regard (*naẓar*) towards the body during the waking state, and during the state of veridical dreams, the soul or spirit turns its focus from the body towards the angelic world of dominion (*al-‘ālam al-malākūt*). See ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn al-Muṣṭafā, *al-Muqaddima fīl-‘ilm al-marā’i wa ta’bīr* (Mairuno: Sankore Institute), 3.

15 One of the highest ranks of sanctity, referred to in Qur’an 4:69.

16 Dan Tafa refers to Sambo’s entry into this earth of sesame in a similar passage from the *Salwat al-ahzān*, “In one of his texts, this master explains that Allah gave him the miracles

who have attained the station of the forty, and the station of the forty is well known among the folk of God.¹⁷ He mentioned once about himself

of flying in the air, walking upon water, and he had the highest state in striding [across the earth at miraculous speed]. He also witnessed with his eyes the earth of the White Sesame, leftover from the clay from which Adam, upon him be peace, was created. This earth is located on the edge of the imaginal world (*'ālam al-khayāl*), which runs parallel to the sensory world. The relationship of this earth [of sesame] to this [sensory] earth is like that of the animating spirit to the body. None of the saints can enter this world except those that have attained the station of the forty. The spiritual station of the forty is well known with the spiritual masters of this affair" (Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Salwat al-aḥzān*, 18). Translation modified by the author based on the Arabic original. This earth of sesame refers to the "earth of reality" (*arḍ al-ḥaqīqa*), sometimes called "God's vast earth" (in reference to Q. 4:97) described in the 8th chapter of Ibn al-'Arabī's *Futūḥāt al-makkiya* as being created from a small remnant of clay, the size of a sesame seed, leftover from the creation of Adam and his "sister" the palm tree. It is described as a land so vast that all of the cosmos compared to it is like a ring in a vast desert, and is identified with the world of Divine imagination (*al-khayāl*) where spirits take on tangible forms and all tangible forms are animate. See William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 333, 357–58; Claude Addas, *The Quest for the Red Sulphur*, trans. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 117–20; and Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shī'ite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 135–43, 148–59. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, whose works Sambo taught to Dan Tafa writes, "I said to him, 'Oh my lord, what is this world called the sesame left over from the clay of Adam?' 'That is the subtle world,' he said to me, 'a world forever imperishable, a place that does not pass away with the succession of nights and days. God created it from that clay; he selected this seed from out of the whole mould, then he invested it with an authority that extended to everything, to the great as to the humble.... It is an Earth where the impossible becomes possible, where the pure figures of Imagination are contemplated with the senses.'" (qtd. in Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 155). Connecting this land to the miracles of walking on water and flying in the air mentioned in this passage, Al-Jīlī also writes, "From this manifestation [namely, the manifestation of the divine attributes] come the miraculous powers of the People of Aspiration (*taṣarrufāt ahl al-himam*); and from this manifestation comes the world of imagination (*'ālam al-khayāl*) and the strange, wondrous inventions (*gharā'ib 'ajā'ib al-mukhtara'āt*) that take form within it; and from this manifestation comes exalted magic (*al-sihr al-'ālī*); and from this manifestation things take on whatever colour (*yatala-wwan*) the People of Paradise (*ahl al-janna*) want, and from this manifestation come the wonders of the sesame seed (*'ajā'ib al-samsama*) that was left over from the clay of Adam, which Ibn al-'Arabī mentioned in his book; and from this manifestation comes walking upon the water (*al-mashī 'alā al-mā'*) and flying through the air (*al-ṭayrān fī al-hawā'*) and making the little much and the much little (*ja'l al-qalīl kathīran wa-al-kathīr qalīlan*), and other miraculous breakings [of the natural order] (*khawāriq*)." (qtd. in Fitzroy Morrissey, *Sufism and the Perfect Human: From Ibn 'Arabī to al-Jīlī* [New York: Routledge, 2020], 63).

17 The "station of the forty" (*maqam al-arba'īn*) could refer to the 40 nobles (*nujabā'*) of al-Jīlī's hierarchy of saints, or to the famous site on Mt. Qāsiyūn overlooking Damascus where the 40 substitutes (*abdāl*) of some versions of Akbarī saintly hierarchy are believed to meet. It could also refer to the completion of various forty-day fasts and/or retreats.

that his receptivity (*qābīlīyyatihi*) qualified him for the station of the Succor (*maqām al-ghawthīyya*), although he discounted this statement in states of spiritual sobriety.¹⁸ This is a tremendous station for which the shaykh should be recognized – but he knows more about this matter – that can be clearly witnessed by all possessing knowledge (*maʿrifa*) who know him. Peace.¹⁹

Some of the descriptions and accounts found in *The Exposition of Devotions* also appear to be drawn from Dan Tafa's earlier hagiographic work on the great Sufis of the Sokoto Caliphate entitled *Sabwat al-aḥzān fī dhikr baʿḍ al-khawāṣṣ min ahl hadha al-zamān* ("The Easing of Sorrows by Mentioning Some of the Elites of the People of This Age"), written shortly after the death of Muḥammad Sambo.²⁰ In this text, Dan Tafa provides a fascinating description of Muḥammad Sambo's spiritual instruction, again referencing "the earth of sesame"/imaginal world:

He used to impart spiritual training by means of his aspiration (*himma*) and states [without uttering a word]. However, this spiritual training was designated only for the elite of the slaves among the spirituals and some of the righteous among the jinn. He had a secret assembly in which they would assemble, where a chair of teaching was set up for him in the lower levels (*darakāt*) of the imaginal world. He would reveal what he willed to his aforementioned companions. Being present in body or frame was not a condition of this assembly. The arrangement of the courtyard of his assembly was known by the fragrant breezes from the gifts of Beauty or the storms of Majesty. On the right side of his assembly the breezes would be present, causing elation, repose, and delight. While on the left side, the storms of sorrow, anguish, affliction, and pain would make themselves present. Sometimes, I would enquire whether the assemblies of the right were present with him, but sometimes I would forget, and

18 Hunwick's version of this text reads, "He mentioned to me regarding himself that his spiritual capacities (*qābīlīyyatuhu*) made him eligible for the rank of the ghawth. This statement was uttered by him in a state of sobriety, and this is a great rank which it is possible to recognize in the shaykh, but he knows more about this matter [than I]. The testimony to this is apparent in him to all who truly know him," while the Sankore Institute's manuscript reads as above.

19 Qtd. in *Tarjuma baʿḍ al-ʿulamāʾ al-zamān*, 3 and 5–7, and Hunwick, "A Supplement to Infāq al-Maysūr," 39–40 and 44–45. Translation modified by the author based on the Arabic texts.

20 In 1242/1826.

I would detect them by smell. [When those of the left were present] I would be overcome with a kind of grief and anguish that is impossible to describe. Sometimes I would get a headache or sore eyes, but this would soon pass. My knowledge of this affair came from an indication from the shaykh, may God have mercy on him. As far as I know, no one other than me was aware of that [affair].²¹

After this hagiographic description of Shaykh Muḥammad Sambo, the next and final section of *The Exposition of Devotions* recounts his responses to some of Dan Tafa's questions about certain spiritual and esoteric matters. While this latter work contains unique discussions, as in the previous section of the work, some of this material is also found in the *Salwat al-aḥzān*. The *Salwat* also contains a few discussions not found in the *Exposition*, such as the following:

I asked him about the knowledge of realities and he said to me: "Remove the form and release being (*inza' al-ṣūra wa atliq al-wujūd*)!"²² This statement contains all of the knowledge of realities with the utmost transcendence. He told me one time, when I asked him from where the cosmos originates, "Recite His saying, *Have you not seen your Lord, how he extends the shadow, had He willed he would have made it still, [then we made the sun its driver and then we withdraw it to us with a gentle withdrawal]* (Q. 25:45). That sufficed me and I was contented."²³

And

I asked him about what the Sufis claim about the vision of the Presence, and he said to me, "Know that the Presence is a locus of manifestation of essential life, and a place of self-disclosure of living perfection. It takes form in the pre-temporal obscurity, wrapped in the robes of the first self-disclosure."²⁴ No eye falls upon it, and for it, no how nor where can be perceived. But it has a manifestation in the forms of some of the beliefs

21 Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Salwat al-aḥzān*, 17.

22 Technically, this means to remove all formal delimitations, qualifications, and restrictions from being (conceptual, physical, and otherwise) in order to know reality as it is. Compare to Plotinus' famous dictum "take away everything!" (ἀφελε πάντα). https://www.loebclassics.com/view/plotinus-enneas/1966/pb_LCL444.135.xml.

23 Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Salwat al-aḥzān*, 19.

24 This appears to refer to Ibn al-'Arabī's description of the Cloud (*al-'amā'*), "The Cloud is identical with the Breath of the All-merciful. It is a breathing (*naḥkh*) in the Being of the Real, so through it creation takes shape (*tashakkul*) within the Real. Hence it is the Real through whom takes place the creation of the forms of the cosmos which become manifest within it and the diversification of the divine self-disclosure which appears within

of servants – it appears to them in the form in which they believe. It is not the case that they see it really and truly, but rather imaginalized (*takhayyulan*) and as images (*mithālan*).²⁵ However, its vision in these forms is restricted to the heart whose character is free from impurity and harm.” So know this and believe it! Know that my discussions with this master and my questions to him were many, but this will suffice as an indication of his rank since our goal is to summarize it in the sense of being specific not in the sense of being comprehensive.²⁶

These highly technical questions and responses indicate and illustrate the profound influence of the tradition of Ibn al-‘Arabī (particularly that of al-Jīlī) in the Sokoto Caliphate in both the vocabulary and overall style of discussions of philosophical Sufism, as well as the mastery and unique development of this tradition in nineteenth century West Africa. Such texts will hopefully put to rest some of the lingering racist myths of the “non-intellectual” nature of Saharan and Sub-Saharan African Islam and the “decline” of Sufism from profound philosophical speculation to “ethical-ascetic” pietism and wonder-working, particularly in West Africa.²⁷ Combining oneirology, hagiography, practical and theoretical Sufism, this short treatise is an illuminating window into the spiritual and intellectual traditions and practices of the founders of the Sokoto Caliphate.

3 Translation

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, God’s blessings be upon the noble prophet. All praise be to God aside from whom there is no other god and apart from whose blessings nothing is hoped for, and blessings and peace be upon him after whom there is no other prophet. And so:

So says the one in need of the mercy of God and His pardon, ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Muṣṭafā ibn Muḥammad:

it.” (qtd. in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1989], 134).

25 This refers to a central doctrine of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s, the “gods created in belief,” in which the Real is manifest in the hearts of people according to their preparedness through the power of imagination, which delimits and determines the manifestation just as the shape of a mirror determines the image that is manifest within it. See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 335–55.

26 Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Salwat al-aḥzān*, 20.

27 For example, see J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 151–61.

Some of the students among our select companions of the [spiritual] way had seen our shaykh and maternal uncle who combined the *sharīʿa* (law) and *ḥaqīqa* (reality), Muḥammad Sambo, the son of the Shaykh, the Imam ʿUthmān ibn Fūdī, in a dream vision containing witnessing and speech. And in this dream, they witnessed this verse recited by the presence of the Shaykh [Muḥammad Sambo]:

*Will you not tell ʿAbd al-Qādir ibn Muṣṭafā
To explain my worship for he who is knowledgeable?*

He understood at that time from this vision of the shaykh that he desired to send this verse to me, recited upon his [the dreamer's] tongue commanding me to explain his mode of worship for the people of knowledge, the qualified of the people of the spiritual path among them. So he woke up remembering this verse and jotted it down on a paper just as it was [recited to him] and brought it to me. So I said to him, "This dream is true, if God wills," for I had a good opinion of it because I saw in him desire for this path in addition to his being marked by righteousness. For it is known that good dreams are transmitted from the people of righteousness, as the Book and Sunna testify to that. But [good dreams are even transmitted from] other than the people of righteousness as in the story of the dream of king of Egypt,²⁸ and that of Nebuchadnezzar, the dream of the muezzin²⁹ and others, but the dream of the believer is more trustworthy.

The two shaykhs³⁰ related, on the authority of Anas (may God be pleased with him), that the Messenger of God (God's blessings and peace be upon him [abbrev. saws]) said, "The dream of the believer is one forty sixth of prophecy." Ibn Māja related, on the authority of Abū Saʿīd (may God be pleased with him), directly from the Prophet (*marfūʿan*): "the dream of a righteous Muslim man is one seventieth part of prophecy." Al-Ṭabarānī related, on the authority of al-ʿAbbās (may God be pleased with him), that he (saws) said: "the dreams of a righteous believer are glad tidings from God and they are one fiftieth of prophecy."

Al-Tirmidhī cited, on the authority of Abū Razīn that the Messenger of God (saws) said: "The dream of the believer is one fortieth part of prophecy and

28 A reference to the story of Yūsuf in the Qur'an, particularly 12:43–50.

29 The call to prayer (*adhān*) was reported to have been revealed to ʿAbd Allāh b. Zayd, one of the Prophet's Companions in a dream. See Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1991), 130–31.

30 Bukharī and Muslim.

it is attached to the foot of a bird until it is spoken of, and when it is spoken of, it falls. So do not speak of a dream except to one who is wise or beloved." Al-Ṭabarānī and al-Ḍiyā' related, on the authority of 'Ubāda ibn al-Ṣāmit, going back to the Prophet [that he said]: "The dream of the believer is a speech by which the servant is spoken to by his Lord during sleep." Ibn Māja related, on the authority of Umm Karza al-Kūfiyya who said, "I heard the Messenger of God (saws) say: 'Prophecy has gone and all that remains are glad tidings.'" Ibn Māja also related on the authority of 'Ubāda ibn al-Ṣāmit, who said, "I asked the Messenger of God (saws) about the statement of God, Most High, *for them are glad tidings in the life of this world and in the hereafter* [Q. 10:64], and he said: 'these are the true dreams which a Muslim sees, or which is seen about him.'" And Ibn Māja also related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās who said, "The Messenger of God (saws) drew aside the curtain when he was sick and the people were in rows behind Abū Bakr. He (saws) said, 'O people, nothing remains of the glad tidings of prophecy save for the true dream which a Muslim sees or which is seen about him.'"

'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī said in *Laṭā'if al-minan*: "Sīdī 'Alī al-Khawāṣṣ said, 'These events which occur to human beings in sleep are an army of the armies of God which strengthen the belief of their possessor in the unseen if the person is deserving of that, even though that is a deficiency in regard to the right of belief.'³¹ And he also used to say, 'Only an ignoramus would be negligent of what he sees in sleep. For everything the believer sees in his sleep is part of the revelation of God (*wahy Allāh*) upon the tongue of an angel of inspiration (*ilhām*). This is because he [the believer] could not bear the burden of revelation in waking, nor could he endure the beauty of the angel, so he brings it to him by way of the common sense (*sensus communis/al-ḥiss al-mushtaraka*)³² in sleep, except that the governing principle in this case is spiritual, not physical. It is known that the spirits are among the classes of angels, and angels have the power of hearing the speech of the Real without intermediary. The Most High says, *It is not for any mortal that God should speak to him save by revelation or from behind a veil or that he should send a messenger in order to reveal what He will by His leave* [Q. 42:51], so understand from this verse that were it not for the veil of mortal humanity (*bashariyya*) upon the slave, God Most High would speak to him in terms of the knowledge of the spirits."

31 That is belief (*īmān*) in the unseen should not require the support of such dreams.

32 See F. Rahman, "AVICENNA vi. Psychology," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 111/1:83–84, available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/avicenna-vi> (accessed on 30 December 2012).

So if you have understood what I have said above about the station of the dream – that it is transmitted from both the righteous and other than them – then you will understand why I strove to confirm the dream of this man and realize it by mentioning the explanation which the shaykh ordered me regarding his devotions and the meaning of his devotions in what I understood of the way upon which his devotions and actions with his Lord Most High were based. I have [previously] mentioned some of this in other writings, so, with God's help, I will quote some of that here which cools the eyes and waters them. After I describe his spiritual pedagogy (*tashyikhihi*) with me, which is what I discuss first, I will conclude with some of the questions and discussions that occurred between me and him in which are benefits for the people of ascension (*ahl al-tarqiya*).

Know that I began to follow him and become acquainted with him in terms of the spiritual path in the year 1234 A.H. (c. 1819 AD) about two years after the death of Shaykh 'Uthmān. I was fifteen years old at the time, and from the time of my first attachment to him to the attainment of spiritual mastery (*tashyikh*) took three years. From that moment, he continued to show me his states and directed me with the subtlety of his statements until I was guided on the spiritual path and was informed of all of the customs of the reality (*rusūm al-ḥaqīqa*). And so there occurred that which I will not mention, so have a good opinion or do not even ask about it. After that, he ordered me to put myself in service of the outward sciences and busy myself with reading their books in order to reinforce [my station], not to distract from putting them into practice. For his state at the time did not allow him to mix with people constantly, so I continued to study with him, as I did in our early days, books of the [spiritual] path and reality, while I studied the rest of the sciences with others.

Let us proceed in describing his way upon which he based his worship. Know that this shaykh combined spiritual rapture (*jadhb*) and wayfaring (*sulūk*), and it was upon these two principles that his way was based. In the beginning of his affair he was the possessor of spiritual states (*aḥwāl*) and raptures (*jadhābāt*) through which he was trained in his youth. However, as time wore on, he refrained from them, embracing courtesy/etiquette (*adab*) and adhering to slavehood (*'ubūdiyya*). This was his state for several years. After that, he had control over his states most of the time, although sometimes his [spiritual] intoxication and estrangement caused him to withdraw from people, and this was towards the end [of his life]. The way of his wayfaring was based upon sleeplessness, hunger, the remembrance of the heart, watchfulness, and realizing the seven stations of the path, which are: 1) renunciation (*zuhd*), 2) reliance (*tawakkul*), 3) consignment (*tafwīd*), 4) resignation (*taslīm*), 5) patience (*ṣabr*), 6) contentment (*riḍā*), and 7) love (*maḥabba*).

Part of his way was the lifting of his aspiration (*himma*) from creation, with all of his heart, to the reality of the solitary ones (*ḥaqīqat al-afrād*) by God, the Great, the Exalted. Part of his way was extreme hunger over several consecutive days. He would neither eat nor drink, without decreasing or increasing [his activities] until forty days had passed without food or drink. That is only [possible] with the support of God and His granting success while nourishing the spirit with the lights of invocations and the lights of presence and witnessing of the heart. To further explain that, his strength neither decreased nor weakened, rather he came and went and carried out [his activities as usual]. But he later left that practice when he attained [spiritual] perfection and did not return to it for a long time. However, in the last year of his life, he resumed it.

Part of his way was casting off pretense and arrogance from himself, since he would carry his own goods to market and sell them there, then he would take up his belongings on his shoulders and return. Part of his way was total asceticism and abstinence from the world and its causes, completely. This was not out of his own desire to abstain from this world nor out of disdain for its affairs. Some people would bring him worldly things as a form of charity and place them next to him in the assembly. He would pray for them, and when they left, he would get up and leave those things where they were placed. Whoever wanted to would take them, even if they were plentiful or precious. He did this often.

A part of his way was secrecy, hating to appear before people most of the time out of desire to remain unknown. As the people of the spiritual path have said, "It is incumbent upon the sincere aspirant to do what conceals his mention as long as it is not forbidden, and that is among the conditions of the spiritual path." Part of his way were numerous spiritual retreats in remote places, in order to connect his soul with his Lord and cut off the evil whispers arising from mixing with people and to establish the light of remembrance (*dhikr*) in his heart. For the heart is a subtle reality such that the least thing affects it, from the glance of a person to hearing a voice, so the sincere aspirants, the people of spiritual wayfaring, have emphasized the importance of spiritual retreats in order to be alone with their hearts, escaping from sensory limits and preoccupations. For this reason, some of them insist on closing their eyes during invocation (*dhikr*) and performing it in a place far from the voices and sight of people.

Part of his way was combining guiding and following in his actions, so he was scrupulous in preserving the courtesy (*adab*) of the *sharīʿa*. He continuously practiced this along with that which helped him while his heart was united with his Lord, so that he did not depart from the approved customs, following the example of what the Sufis have arranged and devised for themselves. [For

the discipline of Sufism], they laid down rules, principles, and comprehensive analogies and reasons, just as the scholars have done in the disciplines of legal theory (*‘ilm al-uṣūl*) and principles (*‘ilm al-qawā’id*), developing its branches and legal issues. So this shaykh combined the two by the power of his inquiry, strength of his intelligence, and profound study of the sciences of the outward and the inward and their rules.

Part of his way was concealing his states and hiding miracles and the breaking of natural laws from all save the elite among the worthy of his companions. For he would show them what he wished and inform them of what he wished, and we had in this station with him, a wide open field and sweet drink [e.g. we were among those with whom he shared much]. Part of his way was imparting spiritual training by state (*ḥāl*), aspiration (*himma*) and spiritual power, and it was in this way that he trained me until I was guided. This level of description suffices as an explanation of his way.

In conclusion, his way, all of it can be summed up as knowledge and guidance. Its knowledge was Sufi courtesy (*adab*) and its guidance was experiential lights, with which the possessors of inner hearts³³ are familiar. Whoever falls short of these lights has fallen short behind the veil. May God grant us success in putting [his way] into action, being guided by it and furnished with its states, for He grants success.

As for the questions and discussions that occurred between me and him, they are too many to enumerate or collect in a record, but we will mention a portion of them here, a few among the many. Once I asked him about absolute oneness (*al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa*), because I had studied with him the statements of Ibn al-‘Arabī al-Ḥātīmī and his shaykh,³⁴ al-Qūnawī, the master “the people of oneness” (*ahl al-waḥda*) in Konya. It seemed that he had understood their discourse, and I was not content with just repeating the words of Qūnawī and Ibn al-‘Arabī, so I only wanted what he had [knowledge of the reality of their discourse]. So he began speaking about the knowledge of forms and their existential loci of disclosure [by giving an example]: Let’s say that there are thirty existential forms – their reality is one, while their loci of manifestation (*mazāhir*) are multiple. And he said to me: “Do you deny this thing?” I said, “No.” So he said to me, “Like this are the [relationships] between loci of manifestation and the reality, although they are varied, they are [actually] one

33 The Qur’anic *ulū’l-albāb*, literally, “the possessors of kernels” (2:197, 3:7, 3:190, 5:100, etc.).

34 This reversal of the roles of Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Qūnawī is most likely a scribal error but it could possibly be reflective of the author’s impression of the two, most likely mediated by al-Jīlī’s writings.

reality. My heart was relieved by this discourse and I never had problems with the knowledge of oneness ever again.

I asked him about The Supreme Light (*al-nūr al-a'zam*) and he said to me: "It is the essence of what is manifest in your form and witnessing and what remains of the meanings of His holy attributes that have been developed in you existentially while they do not have any appearance. God prevails over His command (*amrihi*)." So I said to him, "Since He prevails over His command and His command is His spirit, and His spirit is His self, and His self is His essence, then how can He prevail over His own essence?" So he said, "The command is the totality of the shadows of the Attributes. The essential light descends from its origin and falls as an intermediary in between the spheres of Divinity and the groups of createdness (*al-aflāk al-lahūtiyya wa'l-aslāk al-khalqiyya*). It is not, in reality, the Essence, and God knows best the essence of the necessarily existent (*wājibat al-wujūd*), do you understand? I said, "yes, and my difficulties have been lifted."

I asked him one day about the fire which appears to the people of retreats and he said, "It is the light of being, beautiful when it dawns and the majestic when it burns, and it is the beginnings of the shocks of real unveiling and the spiritual emergence which the Mosaic seek to acquire³⁵ and in which the Muhammadan is clothed.³⁶

And I asked him about the difference between a state (*hāl*) and a station (*maqām*) in relation to the Divine Presence, and he answered: "the determinations of the levels such as Divinity (*al-ulūhiyya*), Mercifulness (*al-raḥmāniyya*), Eternal Self-Sufficiency (*al-ṣamadāniyya*), and Might (*al-ʿizza*) and Self-Subsistence (*al-qayyūmiyya*) have the relationship of stations to Him, Most High. Whereas, the recurrent affairs (*al-shuʿūn al-mutakarrira*) are like states to Him. These affairs are what He brings forth from His Will. When their roots are unfolded, the entities (*aʿyān*) of the world appear in the interstices of the Cloud (*al-ʿamāʾ*), which is the White Pearl, and it is the primordial water from which the whole world is created. As for the branches [of these affairs], they comprise two relationships: a) the Divine relationship, which is the fixed decree (*al-qaḍāʾ al-muḥkam*) that will never change and is in the Preserved Tablet in its entirety, and b) a creational relationship, which are the existential entailments (*al-muqtaḍiyyāt al-kawniyya*) and the established decree (*al-qaḍāʾ al-mubram*), which can perhaps be replaced by something else or transformed without being replaced. This replacement or transformation occurs by the

35 An allusion to Q. 27:7.

36 This is a reference to different categories and stations of sanctity in Akbarī hagiology with the Muhammadan being the highest and most complete.

tongue of the world and its requests, while its archetypes (*ummuhāt*) are on the Preserved Tablet in an undifferentiated form because it [the decree or event that could be changed or transformed] is located on the Tablets of Effacement and Establishment. So perhaps [these events] will occur or perhaps they will occur in a mode which does not resemble creation's request. So understand, and God facilitate our guidance and yours.

And I also asked him about the meaning of arrival (*al-wuṣūl*) which the Sufis claim when they say, "so-and-so arrived" and "so-and-so has not arrived." By this do they mean arriving at God in reality? For veiling remains established between the servant and his Lord as long as mortality (*al-bashariyya*) remains in him, even a tiny part of mortality as long as it has not changed. And he, may God be pleased with him, answered: "What they intend by arrival (*al-wuṣūl*) is arrival at the light of the Real and not the reality of the Essence for that is realized by no one except after death and resurrection of the afterlife which is the spiritual gathering to the Universal Soul (*al-naḥs al-kullīyya*).³⁷ As for His lights, it is possible to arrive at them and their vision if the rational soul (*al-naḥs al-nāṭiqā*) is established in the spiritual station, having reduced its sensory preoccupations. The divine discourses which the knowers (*'urāfa'*) attain are from the presence of these lights. None comprehend the difference between the light of the Real and Its Essence save the angels and the perfect among mortals. By these Divine lights, arrival is attained, nay, they are what is arrived at. These [lights] are the veil itself, that by which the veil manifests and by which it covers. If not for these lights, all of the world would vanish and be crushed swifter and quicker than the blink of an eye due to the splendor of the Essence and its Majesty."³⁸ So know the reality of what we have mentioned.

And I asked him about the spiritual ternary (*al-muthallath al-rūḥānī*)³⁹ and he said to me: "it is a knowledge (*ilm*) and a power. The knowledge you are

37 A similar point is alluded to by the Safavid Sufi philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā in his *Kitāb al-ḥikmat al-'arshīyya*; see James Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 245–49.

38 A reference to a hadith, "His Veil is Light, and if He were to remove it, the glory of his Face would burn whatsoever His sight reaches." (Ibn Māja 196, Muslim 179). See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner Dagli, Maria Dakake, Joseph Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom, eds., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 1891.

39 This is possibly a reference to the cosmological principles underlying the 3x3 magic squares commonly called *muthalath* and related astrological and alphanumeric ternaries. However its description here and in the following footnote is reminiscent of Ibn al-'Arabi's description of manifestation from the earth of reality/imaginal world to the physical world: "We will explain to you an image for the form of the extension of the side of this earth [of reality] that is adjacent to the world. When someone gazes at a lamp, or

already familiar with, and the power is among embedded qualities of preparedness by which it receives the being of the all-Merciful in accordance with the Divine measure. So it becomes, then, like the mirror by which various forms – black, white, red, green, and blue – are received, and so the receptivity of this mirror is another mirror – is this not how all these things appear in it?" And I said, "It is even so." Then he gave me other examples of different sorts, all of which carried [different shades of] meanings, so understand this.⁴⁰

I also asked him about the distinctions amongst the rectangular, the wide, the round, square, and cornered lights in the luminous self-disclosure (*al-tajallī al-nurānī*). He replied, "They are temples (*hayākil*) of holiness and Divine horizons characterized by flashes. They have registries (*dawāwīn*) whose angels appear with the laws that overflow (*al-nawāmīs al-fayyāda*)⁴¹ from the

the sun, or the moon, and when he makes his eyelashes intervene between his gazing eye and the luminous body, he sees something like numerous lines of light coming from the luminous body to his eyes and joining the lamp to his eyes. When he lifts the eyelashes from before his gazing eye little by little, he sees those extended lines being brought in to the luminous body. The luminous body is an image for the site that is designated for those forms in this earth. The gazing eye is an image for the world. The extension of those lines is like the forms of the corporeous bodies to which people are transferred during sleep, after death, and in the Market of the Garden. What puts on the forms is the spirits. Your intention to see those lines through that act-by letting the eyelashes intervene between the gazing eye and the luminous body is an image for the preparedness. The rising up of those lines in this state is the rising up of the forms in the preparedness. The bringing in of the lines to the luminous body when the obstruction is removed is the return of the forms to that earth when the preparedness disappears. There is no clarification after this clarification!" (qtd. in Chittick, *Self-Disclosure of God*, 358). The ternary here is: 1) the site of the form in the earth of reality (luminous body), 2) the preparedness of the loci in this word (the squinting of the eyes), 3) the gazing eye (this world).

- 40 In a similar passage from an earlier work, *Ṣawwāt al-aḥzān*, Dan Tafa writes, "I once asked him about the spiritual ternary and he said to me: "It is both a knowledge (*ʿilm*) and a power. As a knowledge, you are already familiar with it. It is from the attributes of preparedness by which it receives the existence of the All-Merciful based upon the Divine Scale, which percolates down to it from the direction of the Holy blowing (*al-naḥkh al-quḍī*). Its establishment is like a mirror in which divergent and contrasting images take shape insofar as this mirror is the place for their manifestation. Then it and what is in it of these divergent images take a likeness in a mirror standing opposite it. Is it not the case that all of this is able to appear in the mirror?" I said: "Indeed." I then said to him: "In that case if the primary scale is divine; then likewise is not the mirror also with respect to its receptivity?" He said: "That can never be due to the immense Divine Vastness." I then said: "Then existential contingency is receptive to it?" He then said: "Contingency is restricted and determined." I then said: "Does this idea have evidence?" He said: "Yes. It is the words of God, Most High, to His prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace: *Ṣay: 'my Lord increase me in knowledge'* (Q. 20:114)" (Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Ṣawwāt al-aḥzān*, 19–20).
- 41 The Divinely-revealed laws or *sharāʿī*ʿ.

depths of the night of the concealed essence of the Cloud (*al-‘amā’*) in the non-manifestation of the sheer Essence [down to] the starless sphere that is unobstructed by the stars of the Attributes and the shooting stars of the names of Its Majesty, which are the saying of “no god but God.” Its Perfection is the call to prayer whose seeker is destroyed in the fires of Ipseity (*al-hūwīyya*). [Then] the disposer emerges having the spouts of the essential affairs (*al-shu‘ūn al-dhātīyya*) of the realm of Ipseity (*hāhūtīyya*) in which the rapture of the angels is effaced. If not for the shadow of establishment on the throne of the realm of Mercifulness (*al-raḥamūt*)⁴² by which the sea of the Essence is specified ... [a section of the text is missing from the manuscript here]. This sea flows and it is the Spiritual Father which ordained the Gospel upon the two lips of its Christic spirit. From its reservoirs emerged the Tigris and the Nile, and the Euphrates, and the Oxus and the rivers of paradise and their fruits, and the tree of immortality,⁴³ and the temple of the soul. By it the custodianship of the universal standard is established over the presence of the Names, over the wisdom of Iblīs and the fire of deceit and the garden of the antichrist of the soul as far as it goes.

Know that none will understand this discourse save the people of hylic variegations (*al-talwīnāt al-hayūlīyya*)⁴⁴ because the human substance (*al-nasūt*) does not understand the spiritual tongue (*al-lisān al-malakūtī*), and the spiritual does not understand the divine tongue (*al-lisān al-lāhūtī*), and this discourse is in the tongue of the divines (*al-lāhūtīyyīn*), so understand and may God facilitate our guidance and yours.

And I asked him about the difference between vicegerency (*al-khilāfa*) and polehood (*al-qīṭāba*) and Maḥdiyya, and he replied: “vicegerency is a part of polehood but with the secret of free disposal (*taṣrīf*),⁴⁵ and this only comes

42 A reference to Q. 20:5 and 25:59.

43 Q. 20:120.

44 In another text, Dan Tafa follows Ibn al-‘Arabī in identifying *hyle* or prime matter with the immutable entities (*al-a’yān al-thābita*) whereas elsewhere he follows another schema of Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Jīlī’s in identifying it with a particular level (the Dust [*al-habā’*]) of the coming to be of the cosmos in the Cloud (*al-‘amā’*) of the breath of the All-Merciful (*naḥas al-raḥmān*) alluded to in the preceding passage. See Ogunnaike, “Philosophical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate,” 152, 165, 168. The people of hylic variegations seem to be the Muhammadans whose hearts are perfectly receptive and perpetually responsive to the ever-changing Divine affairs or tasks (*al-shu‘ūn al-dhātīyya*) and concomitant manifestations (*tajallīyāt*). But God knows best. See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 108, 333–81.

45 For a succinct overview of al-Jīlī’s similar discussions of vicegerency and free disposal (*taṣrīf*) in relations to the prophets David and Solomon and the poles (*aqṭāb*) of Sufism, see Fitzroy Morrissey, *Sufism and The Scriptures: Metaphysics and Sacred History in the Thought of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 119–22.

about in the presence of the Acts. As for polehood, the establishment of its essence gives life to the worlds of sorcery and faithfulness, extending from the world of sorcerers and power so that it encompasses all forms.⁴⁶ This is not in the after-life because it [polehood] is an intermediary and connection, and these two are absent in the afterlife. As for Mahdiyya, it is a supreme circle comprising the station of sanctity (*wilāya*), the realities of the sciences, and the peak of dominion (*mulk*) over the means of profound inquiry and all-encompassing preservation. For only the Mahdi combines all the stations of sanctity, and only the Mahdi understands all of the realities of the sciences, and none but the Mahdi possesses the peak of dominion totally. Rather, dominion is distributed and apportioned from but one part of Mahdiyya, which is rooted in the station of the Mahdi.⁴⁷

So know what we have mentioned, may God facilitate our guidance and yours. Here ends What I intended to convey of our questions to the Master, and if we did not fear being tiresome, it would be much more comprehensive, but what we have mentioned is sufficient. This writing is finished by the grace of God on Sunday with six days left in Muḥarram in 1250 A.H. (March 28th, 1840), praise be to God and blessings and peace upon the Messenger of God, completely, and perfectly, and particularly.

46 See al-Jilī's comment previously cited in note 16: "From this manifestation [namely, the manifestation of the divine attributes] come the miraculous powers of the People of Aspiration (*taṣarrufāt ahl al-himam*); and from this manifestation comes the world of imagination (*'ālam al-khayāl*) and the strange, wondrous inventions (*gharā'ib 'ajā'ib al-mukhtara'āt*) that take form within it; and from this manifestation comes exalted magic (*al-siḥr al-'ālī*)...." (qtd. in Fitzroy Morrissey, *Sufism and the Perfect Human*, 63).

47 In another of his works, Dan Tafa identifies the Mahdi with the seal of Muhammadan Sanctity, the treasurer and distributor of all *wilāya* in some versions of Akbarī hagiology, as indicated in this passage as well. See Ogunnaike, "Philosophical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate," 146 and Shareef, *Ilāwat al-muṭālib*, 243–53. Here Dan Tafa and Sambo follow Shehu Usman dan Fodio in distinguishing the station of Mahdiyya from the eschatological figure of the "awaited Mahdi." As Dan Fodio famously wrote in a Fulfulde poem, "I am not the awaited Mahdi, but in his mantle I have been clothed / I do not deny that I am a Mahdi for this time, and I thank God that I have been granted this privilege / Every age has a Mahdi appointed for it, openly or secretly, so I have been taught / I am certain that there will be an awaited Mahdi, that is why I have been made to know him whom I have been made to resemble." (qtd. in Shareef, *Ilāwat al-muṭālib*, 251–52). A poem attributed to Dan Fodio's son, Muḥammad Sambo is even more explicit in the author's identification with the station of Mahdiyya and its connection to the person of the awaited Mahdi: "For I saw with the light of my secret that I was completely realized with Muhammad in my outward form / And I saw with the light of my secret that I was, Inwardly, the Mahdi, and God is the One who made this evidence clear / This is the reality, and in that, I could not care less about the objectors without sound knowledge of the path of the Companions" (qtd. in Shareef, *Ilāwat al-muṭālib*, 252).