

A NOTE ON °UTHMĀN B. FODIYE'S SO-CALLED °ISHRĪNIYYA

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In a recent paper on the Arabic *qaṣīda* in West Africa,¹ I drew attention to the influence of the °*Ishrīniyyāt* of al-Fāzāzī on a poem by °Uthmān b. Muḥammad Fodiye in *khumāsiyya* form. This poem of his, which opens: *A-yā man lahu a°lā al-°ulā mutabawwa°ā*, is sometimes known as the °*Ishrīniyya* of Shaykh °Uthmān; it is also, sometimes, attributed to his brother °Abd Allāh.² Certainly the °*Ishrīniyyāt* of al-Fāzāzī has had a profound influence on the writing of devotional poetry in Africa, and Shaykh °Uthmān was perfectly familiar with it. However, a poem that seems to have had a more direct textual influence on Shaykh °Uthmān's above-mentioned poem is another devotional poem in praise of the Prophet, the *Qaṣā'id witrīyya* of Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr b. Rashīd al-Wā°iẓ al-Baghdādī al-Shāfi°ī (d. 662/1264).³ The poem opens thus:

اصلي صلاة تملأ الارض و السما على من له اعلى العلا متبواً

The form in which this poem is best known is the *takhmīs* made of it by Muḥammad b. °Abd al-°Azīz b. al-Warrāq al-Iskandarī, known as Ibn Sha°bān al-Lakhmī (d. 680/1281).

- 1 John Hunwick, 'The Arabic qasida in West Africa: forms, themes and contexts', in Stefan Sperl & Christopher Shackle (eds.), *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa. I: Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, Leiden: E.J.Brill 1996, 90.
- 2 *ALA*, II, 69.
- 3 See *GAL*, S 1, 443-4.

According to his introduction to the *takhmīs*, the poet had seen the Prophet in a dream circumambulating the Ka^cba. The Prophet had showed him a copy of the *Witriyya*, and asked him what he thought of it. Ibn Sha^cbān asked permission to make a *takhmīs* of it, and the Prophet so authorized him. When he awoke he began his rendering of the poem in quintains.

The original poem contains twenty-one lines for each rhyming letter of the alphabet. Ibn Sha^cbān produces three hemistichs to add before each line of the original poem—the quintain consisting of five hemistichs. Thus the first complete quintain reads:⁴

بدأت بذكر الله مدحا مقدما واثنى بحمد الله شكرا معظما
واختم قولي بالصلاة وإنما اصلي صلاة تملأ الارض والسما
على من له اعلى العلا متبواً

The total number of quintains is thus 546, consisting of 2,730 hemistiches. This version was well known to the Fulani scholars of north-western Nigeria at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Shaykh's brother ^cAbd Allāh mentions it among the works he had studied.⁵

A comparison of the opening quintain of Shaykh ^cUthmān's poem with certain lines of the first section (*ḥarf al-alif*) of the *Witriyya*, reveals the close influence of the one on the other:

4 The edition used was published by Maktabat wa-Maṭba^cat al-Mashhad al-Ḥusaynī, Cairo 1383/1962.

5 See M. Hiskett, 'The state of learning among the Fulani before their *jihād*', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, xix, 1957, 565.

Shaykh °Uthmān's °Ishrīniyya, v. 1:

Witriyya, v. 1: الا من له اعلى العلا متبواً

اصلي.....على من له اعلى العلا متبواً

Shaykh °Uthmān's °Ishrīniyya, v. 2:

Witriyya, v. 2: الا من له حجب الجلال توطاً

وامست له حجب الجلال توطاً

Shaykh °Uthmān's °Ishrīniyya, v. 3:

Witriyya, v. 16: الا من له وجه من الشمس اضواً

زاد تشوقي.....الى من له وجه من الشمس اضواً

Shaykh °Uthmān's °Ishrīniyya, v. 4:

Witriyya, v. 21: اتيتك بزلاتي انك ملجأ

شقيت وما لغير وجهك ملجأ

Shaykh °Uthmān's °Ishrīniyya, v. 5:

Witriyya, v. 7: اغثني اجرني انت من ذاك منشأ

هذا عطاؤنا.....بغير حساب انت للحب منشأ

Although by Western canons of originality this might look like plagiarism, in the Islamic tradition to which this belongs,

it would merely be seen as reflecting Shaykh °Uthmān's admiration for Ibn Sha°bān's poem, and perhaps as a means of drawing not merely inspiration from it, but *baraka*.