

A Timbuktu Manuscript Expressing the Mystical Thoughts of Yusuf-ibn-Said

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Abstract

This article is based on a Timbuktu manuscript listed in a digital form on the Library of Congress – Global Gateway. The authors of this article were involved in the translation and exegesis of the manuscript.

Of significance, aside from the translation, is the exegetical analysis of the manuscript which was translated and written simultaneously in a poetic form so as to bring forth the intended beauty of the author of the manuscript. From the eighty-eight lines, eighty-three are dedicated to theosophical ethical thoughts as well as to the spiritual sarcasm of the author.

The context addresses a reciprocal relationship between God and humanity and how humanity can experience the highest form of happiness in this world and the hereafter. Therefore this manuscript is not only a mystical text but also contributes to Islamic ethics. In the exegesis of the translated work, Qur'anic verses were incorporated to lend support to the text where necessary.

Keywords: Timbuktu, ascetism, ethics, mysticism, Islam, Sufi

Introduction

History records that Africa had its first taste of Islam in 612 CE. This occurred when the Prophet Muhammed sent a group of Muslims to Ethiopia to seek refuge from persecution by the inhabitants of Mecca.

In the middle of the 8th CE Islam flourished and made its way from the North Africa across the trans–Sahara trade routes to West Africa (Clarke 1992:9; Vine 2007:74-75). At the establishment of the Mali Empire, after the disintegration of Ghana in the 11th CE, King (1986:85) records that many Muslims were scattered abroad. According to him, some of them settled in Timbuktu while others settled in Jenne. These two cities developed into the intellectual capital for Muslim scholarship. King (1986:85) regarded Timbuktu as ‘a university town at least as long as has Oxford’. Presently Timbuktu is located in the West African country of Mali close to the Niger River ‘at its northern-most bend, on the fringes of the Sahara desert’ (Minicka 2008:145).

Intellectual and Scholarly Development in Timbuktu

Even though Timbuktu was established in the 12th CE (Online 1) – although Clarke (1992:48) suggests it was in the 11th CE (see also Bovill 1999:88) – Timbuktu was only recognised as an intellectual hub in the 14th CE.

It was under the Songhai Empire (1468-1591) and due to their patronage that local intellectual activity began to flourish. The scholars in Timbuktu began to write books on religion as well as secular subjects. They wrote commentaries on classical works which they stored in their libraries together with manuscripts that were imported from North Africa. Added to the libraries were also texts copied in Cairo and Mecca when they returned from their pilgrimage. Timbuktu therefore did not stand in isolation from other intellectual centers within the Islamic intellectual tradition. It needs to be ‘viewed in the context of an established tradition of Islamic learning throughout the whole of the West African and Sudanic region’ (Minicka 2008:145,146). It was only during the 16th CE Timbuktu became the center for trading books (Online 1).

Gleaning from the above history, it can be said that, ‘Africa enjoyed unparalleled scholarship and intellectual revival under Muslim rule. Cities such as Cairo, Timbuktu and Kairouan were academic and cultural hubs which attracts scholars and travelers alike’ (Online 2). Diagne (2008:20)

describes this phenomena very eloquently when he says that, ‘a new era of African intellectual history was opened when scholars such as those who authored the manuscripts in Timbuktu and elsewhere started writing didactic poetry and prose on jurisprudence, theology, Sufism and other areas...’. He states further that, ‘Science and scholarship in Africa have a history prior to colonialism and prior to the introduction to European languages’. The manuscripts are not only in Arabic. They are also in local languages using Arabic script (2008:26).

The rest of this article is dedicated to one such manuscript that was discovered in Timbuktu and was subsequently digitalized and listed on the World Digital Library webpage from where it can be accessed (see Online 3 in bibliography). This digitalized copy was downloaded from this World Digital Library and examined, thus forming the basis of this article (see appendix 1 for a copy of the manuscript).

Description of the Manuscript

The Manuscript, which was digitalized by the World Digital Library, is a six page Arabic document composed of 88 lines. In the first 5 lines the author introduces himself and presents the title of his manuscript. The remaining 83 lines form a mystical rhymed prosody, which depict the theosophical nature of the context, and the spiritual sarcasm of the author. It should also be noted that the pages were not enumerated and that the manuscript was perused as found on the World Digital Library.

Given the nature and volumes of the libraries in Timbuktu we currently have very little access to assess if there are any other manuscripts of the same author. This copy of the manuscript was certainly a copy of the original as stated above. Further investigation of the manuscript reveals footnotes, margin notes and notations which are of a different handwriting to the manuscript itself. One can draw the conclusion that this certainly indicates that the manuscript was transmitted and passed on to others who used the manuscript as an educational reference for topical discussions within educational settings and further self- teaching.

The manuscript also follows the trend of most Sufi teachings which can be stated as follows: Take the least from the world and prepare for the next world, always keeping your gaze on the connection with God. Further

to this, the use of poetry and the eloquence of the writing indicate the clarity of thought and focus of Yusuf ibn Said, who is the author of this manuscript, within the Sufi tradition. The use of didactic poetry enables easy memorization and transmission of the manuscript. The reciting in gatherings make the poetic nature pleasing and the depth of the meanings can be discussed and explored.

The context is a genius ascetic approach on how to earn the pleasure God and to be pleased by Him, as well as how to achieve the ultimate happiness in both holistic worlds. Thus his work is not only a mystical text, but also contributes to Islamic ethics.

One needs to keep in mind the neutrality of gender when reading the text. The use of words, such as ‘man’, ‘his’ and ‘he’ are indicative of gender neutrality and therefore should not be understood in the masculine but rather in the neuter.

Explanation of the Title

The Original title of the book ‘*Adurar al munazamah fi tadmim addunya al muqabaha*’ has been translated by the World Digital Library as ‘*The prosody of pearls that limit the deleterious effects of the abhorrent world*’ (Online 4).

The library of Congress - Global Gateway - translates the title as ‘Benefits of repentance’ (Online 5). One can only speculate on the reason for this translation. It would seem that the content and context of the manuscript makes strong references to repentance for the degenerate person. For the purpose of this article, the title of the manuscript was dispensed with in favour of giving expression to the author’s mystical thoughts within the Sufi tradition. It is for this reason that this article is titled ‘A Timbuktu Manuscript Expressing the Mystical Thoughts of Yusuf-ibn-Said’. The reason for the manuscript was to leave advice from Yusuf ibn Said’s to his students. The advice is of such a nature that it had no specific target audience. The translation portrays both the *Sufi* nature of the context as well as the *sahrawi* (from the Sahara) origin of the author.

Introduction of the Author

The Author introduced himself as Yusuf Ibn Said al Filani, the Imam (Yusuf, the son of Said of the Filani tribe) (Community Leader), Al Aalim (Scholar),

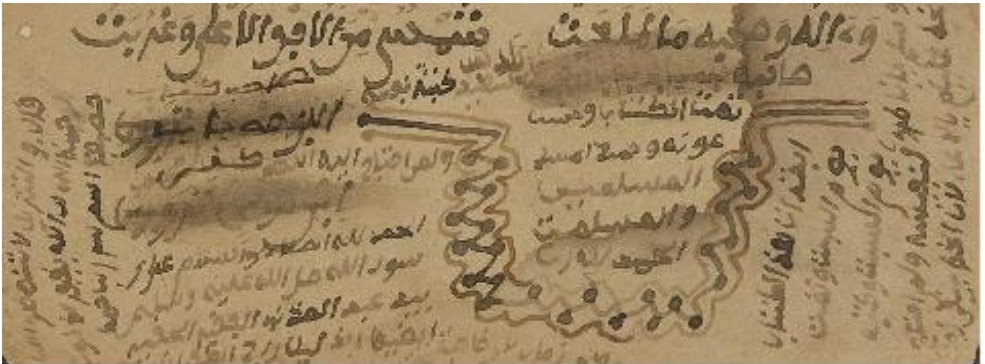
Al Allaama (Confirmed Scholar), Azzahid (the Ascetic), Al Ouaraa Al Mukshif (the Spiritual Peer), and Al Muhaqiq (the Gnostic). Research into the authenticity of the author and whether he was involved in any other works proved difficult with the limited access as well as the huge volume of manuscripts still needed to be discovered and translated.

Nevertheless the references above reflect the status of the author as a source of pedagogy and as an enlightenment to the Timbuktu community, to the seekers of truth as well as to the Fulani tribes scattered across sub-Saharan continent. It also reflects the author's contribution to the theological, judicial and social fabric of Timbuktu in the 17th CE.

Explanation of the Footnotes

At the top and on the sides of each line, footnotes are written in a faint calligraphy to either elaborate on a word or to provide synonyms or theological comments about the sentence. This therefore makes it easier for the researcher to understand the sentence. Since the handwriting of the footnotes differs from the author's one, one can safely conclude that this text was used to teach in Timbuktu schools and Madrassas at some later period.

At the end of the manuscript are large footnotes created by the author which are self-explanatory and translated as follows:



I am Yusuf ibn said al Fulani, the original author of this work, I started writing it on a Saturday, and completed it the following Saturday, the

calligraphy of the text is my own hand writing... I composed it to be studied by those in need, may Allah make it a means of forgiveness for me and them, and for all the believers... I humble myself before God and ask Him to accept my work... and salutations upon His prophet, amen'.

Challenges Posed by the Calligraphy in Translating the Manuscript

In general, there are many translation theories which can be applied to different texts and nuances. Similarly many scholars and academics emphasize various difficulties in translating the Timbuktu manuscripts due to the usage of the (*A'jami*) foreign local languages, mainly Songhai, Tamashek, and Bambara, as well as the usage of the (*A'jami*) local Arabic spoken dialect. Bobboyi (2008: 130) expresses these same sentiments when investigating this literature. He says that, 'I have examined the difficulties of tracing the history of the *a'jami* Islamic verse in the Central Bilad al-Sudan and addressed the argument that it might have been the Sokoto Caliphate which gave this literature its current identity and character'.

In the case of this manuscript, the challenge was the author's handwriting or his personal calligraphy. Per example he writes the letter (qaf) q in Arabic as (fa') f which changes the word 'dayq' (that means in Ascetism the extreme tenacity to abstain from the luxury of this world) to the word 'dayf' which translate to neighbor. In another case he writes the letter (nun) n as (ra') r which changes the word saakin (accomplice) to the word saakir (intoxicated), as well as the letter (sheen) ch as (seen) s, per example the word shaaqin (austere) might be wrongfully translated to saaqin (driven) or shaafin (healed) and eventually changes the context of the manuscript.

Throughout the text, due to the author's unique calligraphy, the translator might find it difficult to read and figure out the words, but once he gets more familiar with the substance and the nature of the text, and with the help of the footnotes, the task becomes much easier. In order to honour the poetic nature of the manuscript and to safeguard its beauty, we decided to end-rhyme the translation for the pleasure of the reader and the researcher. This was purely an aesthetic decision to capture the beauty of the manuscript.

The translated manuscript in end-rhyme form follows below.

The Mystical Thoughts of Yusuf-ibn-Said

*Renounce this world; you'll be at ease,
Only a fool it seeks to please.
Gather from it only the least,
Coz at the end, it turns to beast
For wise men, it's a land of weed,
For God it weighs a mustard seed.
The ignorant are deceived by its beauty,
Until he tastes its veiled cruelty.
So old the world is in its hide,
But seems to look like a young bride.
Its bitterness is sweet, and its sweetness is bitter,
It turns a friend to foe in the hereafter.
The joy of this life is followed by misery,
And its charm is brewed with agony.
Like a trip, brief! It never last,
Who yearns for it remains in lust.
Treacherous, faithless, and vile,
It pours nectars blend with bile.
Refrain from it! With your body and soul,
Abstain from its amity on the whole.
(Folio 1)*

*The lover of this world dwells in misery,
On judgment day, his state is jittery.
A decent lad grows to a wild dog,
To be goaded near hell's fog.
That is a ruse, schemed and disguised,
Who's snagged by it, will be despised.
Oh guided one! Decry it, you'll be secure,
Avoid it, and live in harmony for sure.
From its pleasures, the hearts thrive,
Into the oceans of sins, hence dive.
Man accumulates wealth, fears poverty,
Resides in the comfort of this world bounty.
To a narrow grave, he shall depart,
And leaves behind his property and craft.
In the grave, sorrow is his inmate,
From his past action and trait.
All the money and wealth he did gather,
Surely to him, does no longer matter.*

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*Man will be judged of the wealth he had,
Coz he dealt in it with his own hand.
'As he sowed, so shall he reap',
Sad and scared, so shall he weep!
Shackled and dragged with a chain,
To a hell of a punishment and pain.
The suffering is continuous never cease,
None to intercede, not even a cool breeze.
Surely corruption is driven by three,
Greed, intolerance and vainglory.
Another three veil the heart's vision,
From divine guidance and ambition.
(Folio 2)*

*The love to rule, the love to possess,
And the blind love of woman, one should assess.
Honored the one whom God has blessed,
To renounce this world, purify his chest.
Pleased with his sustenance and his destiny,
Refuses status and material scrutiny.
Of his food, clothes, and his mansions,
Of his knowledge, lineage and his actions.
Man is constantly a target for old age,
And keeps forever running from its bondage.
To which extent, oh! Intellectual man!
Will you serve your decreasing lifespan?
Don't you fear the Almighty's dire?
Neither His punishment, nor hell fire?
Many sins you proudly commit,
And God's warnings you did omit.
Oh! Poor soul! Ponder and reflect,
Upon yesterday's food you ate.
So delicious! Last night you crave to taste,
The meals today that turns to waste.
All the fancy pleasures in the mind,
Dangerous fantasies that stay behind.
The food vanished, the bill remain,
Grieved the one who feels the pain.
Of his unlawful earning and income,
Surely, will easy go what easy come!*

The Mystical Thoughts of Yusuf-ibn-Said

*Oh! Seeker of the truth! We advise thee:
To serve your Lord with honesty.
Dear friend! It's the essence of every divination,
And God's command in each revelation.
(Folio 3)*

*Sincerity is compulsory before any action,
To every sage: a reminder and a fashion.
It's an honor for those who believe,
Lawfully earn, consume and give.
Which false excuse and manner you adopt,
You dodge the truth, until you flopped.
You chase the world without compulsion,
Social evils become your compassion.
Oh! Son of Adam! No brain! No heart!
You desire to remain, but you will depart!
Destined to a grave, dark and narrow!
Filled with loneliness and sorrow!
You never learned from those who left,
Until you taste the sudden death!
Ponder about their actual homes,
Coffins full with ash and bones!
Accountable for what they had,
From previous sins, they grieving bad!
Each person is occupied by his own,
Prepare yourself for the unknown!
Before the soul from your body separate,
Before it's gone, before its late!
Where are the apostles? Where are the saints?
Where are the Prophets? Where are the greats?
Where are the lords? Where are the barons?
Where are the tsars? Where are the tyrants?
Surely, every soul shall taste death,
For every boy and girl is a threat!
The angel of death is destined to you,
When you least expect him, he comes through!
(Folio 4)*

*He landed in your home, oh! Poor guy!
And you never felt he is near by!*

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*Deceived by negligence and false hope,
You thought from death you will elope!
You wish to live forever and happily,
You might die tomorrow, or even instantly!
I'll die of old age: you used to say,
You forgot the angel of death is on his way!
Persevere in the trial of your departure
Remember it is God's will and nature!
Guide yourself to the right path,
When inflicted by misery and wrath!
Tribulations might lead you astray,
Only patience will show you the way!
The test of this world prevents the worshiper,
From his success in the hereafter!
Man disobey God in every aspect,
One day his actions, he shall regret!
What God decrees, will be your life,
If you want Him pleased, you should strive!
You are truly blessed by the one above,
As a sign of His mercy, gratitude and love!
Honored those who have patience, and endure,
Their souls are chaste, their hearts are pure!
They persevere for heavenly paradise,
Prudent, tenacious and wise!
Determined to reunite with the Almighty,
They shroud themselves with piety!
Convinced God has the master plan,
They abstain away from the evil of man!
(Folio 5)*

*Remembering death, their souls are cleansed,
Before they die, their hearts are pleased!
Worried about their comfort and amenity,
They never find peace and tranquility!
Their food and drink become prayer and devotion,
Bored to tears with grieve and supplication!
The luxury of this world, they don't desire,
Seems like embracing hell's fire!
Concerned about their final consequence,
They excel with tenacity and obedience!*

*Make us steadfast in Your worship, oh! God!
By the sacredness of the book, dear Lord!
Hopefully, am standing at Your door,
Your Mercy and Grace, am begging for!
Forgive my parents, forgive my neighbors,
Shower us with Your Blessings and Favors!
Am begging by Your honored messenger,
Save my poor soul from your anger!
Forgive my teachers, forgive my family,
Forgive them all, unconditionally!
Through Your love, bestow your believers,
With a status of the great achievers!
Greeting s and salutations upon your prophet
The most kind, generous and honest!
Upon his family, upon his companions,
Beyond any sphere, beyond any horizons!
(Folio 6)*

The End.

An Explanation of the Ascetic Context in which this Manuscript has been Written

Ascetism in Islam

Theosophy [tassawuf] is defined by some adherents as the inner ‘*mystical*’ dimension of Islam while others contend that it is a perennial philosophy of existence that predates religion, the expression of which flowered within Islam. Its essence has also been expressed via other religious and meta-religious phenomena (Pratt 2005:39).

There has been theories as to the origins of ascetism, but, according to Christmann (200:63) it was only in 1906 that R. A. Nicholson became the first British scholar to claim that ‘‘Sufism of the ascetic and quietistic type...owes comparatively little either to Christianity or to any foreign source’, which led him to conclude that ‘this type of mysticism was—or at least might have been—the native product of Islam itself’. Moreover, he not only declared asceticism a prestage of Sufism but regarded it as an integral part of ‘Islamic mysticism’, a historical phenomenon that had witnessed several historical and intellectual transformations’.

Ascetism is considered as one of the Sufi paths to fulfil the inner search for God, by renouncing all material desires, it allows the seeker to reach the Divine Truth, embrace it and annihilate oneself into its oceans of beauty and majesty. Imam Ali, in Nahjul Balagha, makes reference to zuhd when he says, ‘O people, zuhd means curtailing of hopes, thanking God for His Blessings and Bounties, and abstaining from that which He has forbidden’ (Al-Jibouri 2009:94). He adds that, ‘All zuhd is summarized in two sentences of the Qur’an: so that you may neither grieve on what has escaped you, nor over-exult on what He has given to you. And Allah does not love any self-admirer, over-proud,-.’ [57:23].

Whoever does not grieve over what he has lost and does not rejoice over what comes to him has acquired zuhd in both its aspects (Al-Jibouri 2009:94). Zuhd encompasses both the Islamic concept of Ascetism and more specifically the concept of renunciation. It involves a life of deprivation that lacks certain comforts and luxuries. Early ascetics were often characterized by their poverty.

The Qur’an is inundated with verses that remind believers that life is fleeting and the hereafter everlasting. It also holds in great esteem, ‘The servants of the Rahman (the All-Merciful, Allah) are those who walk on the earth humbly, and when the ignorant people speak to them, they reply peacefully, and those who pass the night prostrating themselves and standing before their Lord, and those who say, .Our Lord, avert from us the punishment of the Hell; indeed, its punishment is a persisting affliction ...’ [25:63-65].

Exegesis of the Author’s Ascetism in the Manuscript

In explaining each page of the manuscript priority will be given to some of the author’s reflections which are of cardinal importance in the message he wants to portray. In order to substantiate his thoughts and messages, the authors of this article made references to passages in the Qur’an. This was done to show that the thoughts and messages of the manuscript have its derivation from the ethics of Islam, and that they are purely theological rather than philosophical or pre-Islamic.

Folio 1

The author begins his prosody by comparing the world to a woman and advises that, 'If this world has to be your wife, you should divorce her thrice, without intention of taking her back, or embracing her again, so that you might find inner peace and tranquility'. This parallel is in line with the aspect of divorcing a woman in Islam and, once divorced, all physical contact between the two individuals is forbidden. He meant that a seeker of the divine Truth (haqqat) should remove all desires of this world from his heart, to balance his emotions and psyche in order to reach the state of Gnosticism (maarifat) and to attain heavenly paradise. The Qur'an alludes to this when it states: the ones who believe and their hearts are peaceful with the remembrance of Allah. Listen, the hearts find peace only in the remembrance of Allah... [13:28]. whereas for the one who feared to stand before his Lord, and restrained his self from the (evil) desire [79:40].

In making reference to the fool [qabeeh], he contends that such a person is absorbed into the glamour of this world and therefore omits to serve God. The Qur'an is clear in this when it mentions that: then for the one who had rebelled, and preferred the worldly life (to the Hereafter), the Hell will be the abode. [79:37-39]. Also those, 'who had taken their faith as play and a game, and the worldly life had deceived them. So, we shall forget them today, as they had forgotten to face this day of theirs, and as they used to deny Our signs' [7:51].

In comparing the fool to the wise man, he explains that if this world had to be a farm, then for the wise man it is just a dumping site, which is sterile and unfruitful. For God, it is just a worthless, minute land, the size of a mustard seed. Contrary to the fool, his advice to the believers is to rather befriend God and seek the tilt of the hereafter. The Qur'an supports this advice when it mentions that: Whoever intends (to have) the harvest of the Hereafter, We will increase in his harvest; and whoever intends (to have) the harvest of the world (only), We will give him thereof, while in the Hereafter he will have no share [42:20].

In this same vein of thought, the author finally emphasises that success lies in the purification of ones soul and abstaining from material and capitalistic people. He finds support for this in the Qur'an: Success is surely achieved by him who purifies himself', [87:14], as well as, 'O you who believe, fear Allah, and be in the company of the truthful' [9:119].

Folio 2

The author reminds his students to be aware of the nature of man [nafs], and to control their animalistic desires. The Qur'an supports this caution: Indeed man is created weak in courage, very upset when touched by evil, and very niggard when visited by good (fortune) [70:19-21]. Then inspired it with its (instincts of) evil and piety [91:8]. He then sarcastically warns of becoming such a person with material desires, who spends his limited life in accumulating wealth and worldly commodities, and suddenly departs to a narrow grave where he is lonely, sad and helpless.

This warning is found in the Qur'an: 'You are distracted by mutual competition in amassing (worldly benefits), until you reach the graves. No! (This is not a correct attitude.) You will soon know (the reality). Again, you will soon know. No! Only if you knew (it) with a sure knowledge!' [102:1-5]. 'O man, you have to work hard constantly to reach your Lord, and then you have to meet Him [84:6]. The Day when neither wealth will be of any use (to any one) nor sons, except to him who will come to Allah with a sound heart' [26:88-89].

The author concludes this page by defining the three major 'diseases' that corrupt the heart of man: ego, showmanship, and intolerance to others. These 'diseases' prevents him from recognizing God. This kind of arrogance is condemned in the Qur'an: Invariably, Allah knows what they conceal and what they reveal. Surely, He does not like the arrogant. [16:23]. Hence, enter the gates of Hell to live in it forever. So evil is the abode of the arrogant. [16:29].

Folio 3

On this page the author highlights three veils that blinds the vision of the heart [baseera] from the divine light and leaves man in the obscurity.

The *first* is the love to rule, to lead and to be superior, as it contradicts the concept of Ascetism [zuhd] based on self-denial and getting rid of one's ego just as Satan did when he refused to prostrate to Adam and exclaim: We have made the night and the day two signs, then We made the sign of night marked by darkness and the sign of day bright, so that you may seek grace from your Lord, and that you may know how to number the years and how to compute, and We have expounded everything in detail. [7:12]. It

happens that the reins of power, the intoxication of control seizes a man that he then acts unjustly, like pharaoh, who initially was a poor man but when he assumed the throne and became rich and powerful, he ‘gathered [his people] and called out: I am your supreme lord. So, Allah seized him for an exemplary punishment in the Hereafter and the present world. Indeed, there is a lesson for him who fears (Allah)’ [79:23-26].

The *second* is the love to possess (the author uses the love of the dirham), meaning to accumulate wealth regardless of its source and the manner of its acquisition, as well as not to give charity and share with others. The Qur’an is explicit in this: No! But you do not honour the orphan, and do not encourage one another to feed the needy. And you devour the inheritance with a sweeping gulp, and love wealth, an excessive love. [89:17-20].

The *third* is the love blind of women. The author here uses the Arabic word [ta’atu nisaa] meaning obedience and submission to women fulfilling the role of a spiritual leader, judge or a governor. This statement can be regarded as controversial. The text in the Qur’an which supports this understanding has come under significant scrutiny: ‘Men are caretakers of women, since Allah has made some of them excel the others, and because of the wealth they have spent. So, the righteous women are obedient, (and) guard (the property and honour of their husbands) in (their) absence with the protection given by Allah. As for women of whom you fear rebellion, convince them, and leave them apart in beds, and beat them. Then, if they obey you, do not seek a way against them. Surely, Allah is the Highest, the Greatest’ [4:34].

This verse, at face value, seems to present a right of the husband over the wife. Upon a hermeneutical application, it is clear that this verse actually points to a right of the wife and an obligation of the husband. The word for ‘in charge of’ in Arabic indicates also support, protection and responsibility on the part of the husband for his wife. This does not just mean that he is the ‘boss’ or the dictator in the house and whatever he says goes (Online 7). According to Wadud (1999:69-73) this verse, does not intend to elevate men over women but they do have a responsibility to fulfil their responsibilities toward women who bear children. Therefore women are not to be expected to work and support the family *as well*.

The author then advises not to become such a man who goes to great extents to lavishly serve his body which is perishable and yet does not invest in his soul which is eternal. Such a person will eventually be judged about his

knowledge, his wealth and his youth: The Qur'an is clear on such behaviour:

That day the people will come back (from the place of reckoning) in different groups, so that they may be shown (the fruits of) their deeds. So, whoever does any good act (even) to the weight of a particle will see it. And whoever does evil (even) to the weight of a particle will see it. [99:6-8]

He then testifies that the prerequisite for human being's success in both worlds is honesty, obedience and tenacity. For man's actions to be acceptable to God, his intentions should be pure and sincere, his income must be lawful and he should generously donate to the needy. These actions find its basis in the Qur'an with reference to the following verses: O you who believe, shall I tell you about a trade that saves you from a painful punishment? That you believe in Allah and His Messenger, and carry out Jihad in His way with your riches and your lives. That is much better for you, if you but know. [61:10-11]. While they were not ordered but to worship Allah, making their submission exclusive for him with no deviation, and to establish Salah and pay Zakah. That is the way of the straight religion. [98:5].

Folio 4

On this page the author sarcastically warns not to emulate such a person who is careless about his demise from this world, and thinks he will live forever until the angel of death suddenly knocks at his door. This warning is found in the Quran: *O you who have believed, let not your wealth and your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. And whoever does that - then those are the losers.*

And spend [in the way of Allah] from what We have provided you before death approaches one of you and he says, 'O you who believe, your riches and your children must not divert you from the remembrance of Allah. And those who do that are the losers. And spend out of what We have given to you before death overtakes one of you and he says, .My Lord, would you not give me respite to a near term, so that I should pay Sadaqah (alms) and become one of the righteous?' [63:9-10]. O you who believe! Spend from what We have given to you before a day comes when there will be no trading, no friendship and no intercession, and it is the disbelievers who are unjust. [2-254].

He then concludes that one might walk on the face of this earth with pride and arrogance. This earth does harbour many previous great leaders and emperors; but he asks, 'Where are they now?' He answers it by suggesting that they have decomposed and vanished; from dust to dust! So shall we, regardless of gender or status. The Qur'an is very clear on this: Everyone who is on it (the earth) has to perish. And your Lord's Countenance will remain, full of majesty, full of honour. [55:26-27]. Every soul has to taste death. It is on the Day of Judgement that you shall be paid your rewards in full. So, whoever has been kept away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise has really succeeded. The worldly life is nothing but an illusionary enjoyment. [3:185].

Folio 5

On page 5 the author highlights the trials and tribulations of this world, as is found in the Qur'an: Surely We will test you with a bit of fear and hunger, and loss in wealth and lives and fruits, and give good tidings to the patient [2:155].

All praise belongs to Allah who created the heavens and the earth, and made darkness and light; yet those who disbelieve equate (others) with their Lord [6:1].

The author does offer the key on how to overcome the tests by suggesting the following: in form of tenacity (*sabr*); through the fear of God (*khawf*); and the desire to meet God (*raja'a*). These keys find its support in the following quotes from the Qur'an: O you who believe, seek help through patience and prayer. Surely, Allah is with those who are patient. [2:153]. Surely, for those who have awe of their Lord without seeing (Him), there is forgiveness and a big reward. [67:12]. Whoever hopes to meet Allah (must be sure that) Allah's appointed time has to come, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. [29:5].

The author ends this page by describing the qualities of God's faithful and genuine worshippers. The Qur'an is inundated with such references. The following are some of the verses from the Qur'an: who, when a suffering visits them, say: .We certainly belong to Allah, and to Him we are bound to return. Those are the ones upon whom there are blessings from their Lord, and mercy as well; and those are the ones who are on the right path. [2:156-

157]. Listen, the friends of Allah shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. Those who have believed and have been fearful of Allah. For them there is the good news in the worldly life and in the Hereafter: there is no change in the words of Allah. That is the great achievement. [10:62-64].

Folio 6

The author concludes his manuscript in the same manner in which he began. He insists that in remembering death, renouncing the world, serving others and self-denial, one can reach ultimate divine success - which is to be eternally in the company of God. These eschatological references are based on Islamic Ethical values. The author re-emphasises the ascetic life which is demanded by God, yet depended upon God. He advises that one should appreciate God's favours, and not to dwell in the comfort and the luxury of this world.

He concludes his manuscript by asking God to not only forgive him, his family, his neighbors, his students and all those who believe, but also to bless them 'with a status of the great achievers'.

Conclusion

This manuscript is a jewel amongst thousands in the libraries of Timbuktu and was written within an Islamic ascetic context considered as one of the ascetic paths for fulfilling the inner search for God. It is definitely a contribution to the ethics of Islam, and a pyramid of the African heritage. It allows individual, social and human reform as instructed in the holy Qur'an that God does not change the condition of a group, until they change their behaviors individually.

Ascetism is one of the highest levels of worship and piety, and could be the straightening line for those who spend all their efforts and money in the hair splitting issues, and grey matters rather than serving mankind. One has to be mindful though that not all within the theology of Islam would agree with these Sufi tendencies that have been explored above such as the Ansardine which is a Muslim sect, that belong to the Salafi Wahabi school of

thought¹. They condemn ascetism as a form of monasticism (rahbaniat), magic and astrology as apostasy (kufr), and the veneration of saints as idolatry (shirk).

The salient points that this manuscript emphasizes and which I conveniently expressed in all six folios are as follows:

- A seeker after truth must divorce worldly desires.
- Animistic desires within one's nature should be controlled.
- Be careful of the three loves that blinds the heart – the love to rule, the love to possess and the blind love of women.
- Do not follow one who is careless about the demise of the world.
- Be aware of the dangers of trials and tribulations which are inherent in the world.

It therefore behoves those who are peaceful and sane to explore these fundamental teachings found in manuscripts such as these to understand and expound on the theologies which grew within the African continent.

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¹ For more information on the history and ideology of the Salafi Wahabi, please see the Congressional Research Services report RS21695 prepared for members and committees of Congress in the USA. The report was compiled by Christopher Blanchard titled: *The Islamic Tradition of Wahhabism and Salafyya*.

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