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**The Literary Works Of Shaykh Sīdī Al-Mukhtār
Al-Kuntī (d. 1811): A Study Of The Concept And
Role Of "Miracles" In *Al-Minna Fī i`tiqād Ahl Al-
Sunnā***

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Compulsory Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

This essay looks at the relationship between History and Myth in the literature of the grand shaykh of the Qādirī ṭarīqa of West Africa Shaykh al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī (d.1811). It explores the role that "miracles" played in his society and how he dealt with this concept in his literary works. By looking at one of his major works, this study wishes to determine how he combined historical fact with myth and what the underlying reasons were for his approach. While the conclusion suggests that the Shaykh indeed employed myth within his writing it further shows how he used this mechanism to maintain a careful balance between his role as a traditional Islamic scholar and as a leader, thus strengthening his position as the head of the Kunta clan and the Qādirī ṭarīqa.

Note on Transliteration

For the transliteration of Arabic terms I have broadly followed the English Transliteration System of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES). I have italicized all Arabic terms, including common words such as Islām, Shari`ah, etc. but excluded the names of personalities and places.

University of Cape Town

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Preface and Acknowledgements

During my visit to the city of Timbuktu at the end of 2006 I developed an interest in the writings of the renowned West African scholar Shaykh al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī (d.1811). At the time I was working on a translation of a short article about his life and works¹ by a leading contemporary scholar of Timbuktu, Shaykh Mahamane Mahamoudou (better known as Shaykh Hamou). The article primarily focused on the literary works of Shaykh Sīdī Mukhtār al-Kuntī, some of which I was fortunate to get a glimpse of in their original manuscript form at the Ahmad Baba Centre archives, previously known as *Cedrab (Centre du documentation et recherche Ahmed Baba)*, in Timbuktu.

Because of my interest in manuscript materials with historical content, the section in the article I was translating that particularly captured my attention, was the description of a book entitled *al-Minna fī I'tiqād Ahl al-Sunna*. This is a substantial work that numbers 251 folios. According to Shaykh Hamou's description of the book it was essentially a work of theological discourse, but it also contained a considerable amount of descriptive material on historical topics about the region where Shaykh al-Kuntī lived. This reference to historical events in a theological manuscript certainly seemed like a promising research opportunity. The Ahmad Baba Institute was kind enough to send a few months later a digitized copy of *al-Minna* to the Tombouctou Manuscripts Project office at the University of Cape Town, which enabled me to start with my project.

¹ The article is entitled, "The Works of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti," by Mahamoudou, M. (2008) in Jeppie, S and Bachir, S. eds. 2008. *The meanings of Timbuktu*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

After painstakingly reading through the entire manuscript of *al-Minna* (since there were neither content page nor an index) I discovered that the historical data in the work was not what I had anticipated. There were only a few accounts of some important events, which were not described in any detail. Fortunately, I did however discover something else that was interesting. I encountered extensive discussions of historical events in which some kind of *miracle* had a role. The wide-ranging discussion and narration of miracles, particularly those of the Kunta clan, are most noticeable in this work. I decided to look at *al-Minna* for a second time after creating my own index of the work. Subsequent readings of the work for my research were therefore not as difficult! I was now able to explore the numerous stories and discourses on the subject of miracles. I wondered why the author related so many miracles in his book and exactly what significance they had. How “historically sound” were these narratives and what impact did their narration have on a broader readership of the work and on the broader society? These were only a few questions, among many others that I wanted to explore. These questions evolved into the kind of issues I attempt to address in this study.

I divided my study into four broad sections: The concept of miracles within theological discourse in general, the life of Shaykh al-Kuntī, his works, and finally, the core of this study, a consideration of some of the miracles reported in *al-Minna*. This is very much how this study now appears. I also decided to learn something about miracles in other religions and also in modern historiography. I therefore give an overview of theories about the place and connection between history and myth in the introduction.

My research is primarily textual. The manuscript of *al-Minna* is my major primary source. It is a large work covering various fields of learning. It is rich in theological discussion and other

matters and it deserves detailed study. Although I did the translation of the relevant sections of *al-Minna*, one of the challenges that I faced, apart from the challenges and scope of translation work itself, was that I could only rely on this single copy of *al-Minna*, not having at my disposal any other copies of the text held in other libraries. I did, however, benefit from the work of H.T. Norris who supplied some translations of similar passages in his book on the Western Sahara. The important work of A. A. Batran was also valuable to my study.

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Shamil Jeppie, for his assistance and insight. His encouragement throughout the process kept me motivated and focused. I am also grateful for my colleague Dr. Auwais Rafudeen, as well as the research team at the Ahmad Baba Institute in Timbuktu. A special thanks to Shaykh Hamou, who during his visit to the University of Cape Town, helped me to understand some of the unclear passages in the text. This study would not have been possible without this kind of collaboration. Lastly, my gratitude also goes to my wife Qaanitah and our son Muhammad Yahya, who have patiently tolerated the late nights and often sacrificed their comfort in support of the completion of this project.

Introduction

Shaykh al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī was one of the most prolific scholars and writers of the eighteenth century. The evidence for this is the great literary contributions that he left behind, which can be found on the shelves of Timbuktu's manuscript libraries. He was undoubtedly an erudite scholar in the various Islamic disciplines such as *Fiqh* (Islamic law), *Ḥadīth* (Prophetic traditions), *ʿAqīdah* (Theology) and *Taṣawwuf* (Sufism). Very often these disciplines would all be included in one single volume, as in the case of *al-Minna fī I'tiqād ahl al-sunna*.

Shaykh al-Kuntī's works, like that of all authors, were certainly open to critique. He enjoyed high-ranking religious and political positions in his society and as a consequence faced opposition and criticism. His life was certainly filled with controversy and dispute. Apart from the many theological subjects that he addresses in *al-Minna*, he narrates countless stories about various Islamic saints and the miracles they performed, especially those of his ancestors. This was perhaps one way through which he dealt with some of his detractors and critics. It is however the historical questions relating to these narrations that lie at the heart of this particular study. It is important to ask the following: To what extent has myth been incorporated or mixed with the historical facts? What impact did this have on the perception of the society in which the *shaykh* lived? Is it the task of the historian to differentiate between myth and fact? Is it at all possible to separate myth from everyday life?

The debate surrounding the issue of myth and history has had significance since the ancient Greek period. While Herodotus (d. 425 BC) was very accommodating in the acceptance of myth, his contemporary Thucydides (d. 395 BC) called for an absolute and strict separation between

myth and "historical fact". The debate has continued ever since. The complex nature of these two discourses can be seen in the variant positions that historians have taken on this issue.

Many modern historians have not only come to accept myth as part of history but as a central element of the human condition. According to them, the two cannot simply be separated. In support of this view, Joseph Mali for example, pointed out that since many historians have not yet fully used what he calls the "mythical method" they have therefore not succeeded in developing a historiography that is, as he says "really and clearly 'modern' ".² In his view, the study of history cannot successfully be undertaken if it is separated entirely from the subconscious human mind, even if it appears to be irrational.

The nineteenth century historian, Jacob Burckhardt, and his colleague Friedrich Nietzsche, promoted the idea of presenting history as much more than the bare scientific facts. Nietzsche's main interest was the impact that myth has in the shaping of human culture. His primary argument entailed the idea that all cultures definitely lose its creativity if myth is removed from the discourse.⁴ In other words, the consideration of myth as part of history gives a more "complete" or "real" view of the human experience. Myths should therefore not be seen, as Ludwig Wittgenstein pointed out, as an explanation of what happens in the world, but rather as an expression of how humans perceive the world, especially in relation to their emotions and experiences.

² Mali, J. (2003). *Mythistory : The Making of a Modern Historiography*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 13

⁴ Mali, J. (2003). *Mythistory*. 15

Another important factor is the function of language. Scholars have shown how immensely difficult it is to separate between the description we give to the world and the stories we often create to illustrate how we perceive it and what we feel about it. According to Mali there is an intermingling of the two, yet we try hard to keep them apart. Citing Wittgenstein, Mali asserts that a whole mythology is inserted in the language we employ.⁵

Some historians developed another significant discourse around the relationship of myth and the oral tradition vis-à-vis the written tradition. Some scholars (like William Bascom) have insisted that myth constitutes only that which is verbally transmitted.⁶ Others, however, have argued that while myth and mythologies were - since ancient times - conveyed in both oral and written forms, the oral tradition often allowed for a greater variation of the content and narration of myths. The usage of oral narrations thus enabled the story-teller to render different versions of a particular narrative in accordance with different conditions and circumstances. The written text, on the other hand, afforded a different advantage. In a sense, the written text possessed a certain power to easily transform myths into a "more formal statement of belief".⁷ In many cultures, the written word is almost naturally seen as more "authentic" or more "authoritative" than oral narrations. If we look at Africa for example, some have claimed that it had no "authentic" history. One of the reasons provided is that there has always been little or no proliferation of the written tradition on the continent. This study itself disproves these kinds of claims, since this region of West Africa where Shaykh al-Kunti lived, enjoyed an overwhelmingly strong written tradition. An important area of enquiry would be to understand

⁵ Mali, J. (2003). *Mythistory*. 22

⁶ Csapo, E. (2005). *Theories of Mythology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 5

⁷ Holm, J. and Bowker, J. (1994). *Myth and History*. New York and London: Pinter Publishers. 4

how precisely Shaykh al-Kuntī used his written texts to his advantage and how this impacted on those who came into contact with them.

From a Western secular perspective then, the questions around history and myth has become an area of study that continues to arouse serious academic debate. Post modernism renders myth as part of the human experience and thus part of history itself. And because history is always presented in the specific way in which events of the past are interpreted, it implies that myth is bound to become woven into the overall fabric of the construction of history. The debate has certainly not become stagnant, and is bound to undergo further evolution and change.

From a religious perspective, followers of Judaism and Christianity (which I will discuss in Chapter 1) see themselves as the recipients of divine inspiration - one that is deeply entrenched in history. For Jews it was Moses who brought the revelation, and he physically lived in a specific era and place, and for the Christians it was Jesus. Due to the development in the theory of myth and history, the concept of myth has not totally been dismissed by either these two groups. Instead the debate gave rise to variant approaches and positions held by its adherents. Towards the end of the twentieth century for example, there emerged in Christianity what is called *Narrative Theology*. This entailed the idea of ordinary people giving meaning to the stories in the Bible in relation to their own circumstances. The text itself now became secondary, but it was the practical lessons in the narratives that Christians could relate to, which became the core of the teaching of Christ. The Bible became more accessible to the masses, since anyone could practice this kind of theology. Douglas Davis writes:

As people see their own local history as a narrative of events, often focused on elements of injustice, they find it easy to see the Bible as one large set of narratives concerning God's people...This approach shows the clear importance of history as the framework within which Christians see themselves as related to God. But it also involves a kind of myth-making activity, a sort of mythologizing of events which otherwise might be seen as economic, political, or ordinary social history.⁸

In Islamic historiography, the discourse on myth and its role in history has not been developed to the extent mentioned above. We find, for example, that scholars of *mustalaḥ al-ḥadīth* or *ḥadīth* methodology (verification of prophetic traditions) have insisted on following rigorous criteria for the acceptance of such traditions. Although the scope and detail of this discipline have not all been agreed upon, scholars largely agree that whatever the prophet "actually said" must be authenticated and separated from any "fabrications" or uncertainties. History and other (non-prophetic) disciplines have not enjoyed the same stringency in methodology. Dr. Nūruddin `Itr states in his book on Ḥadīth methodology that weak narrations may be used in matters other than those related to creed (`aḳīdah) or rulings of the lawful (*ḥalāl*) and unlawful (*ḥarām*). He further mentions that the narration of stories, admonitions, etc. have been allowed by the scholars of *ḥadīth* as long as they are not proven to be clear fabrications.⁹

Abd al-`Azīz al-Dūrī, a practicing historian, has illustrated this by attempting to analyse the development of historical writing among the Arabs. He argued that early Islamic historical writings contained elements of fact, popular stories for entertainment purposes as well as legendary reports derived from the pre-Islamic period. It was his view that without thoroughly

⁸ Holm, J. and Bowker, J. (1994). *Myth and History*. 67

⁹ `Itr. N. (1997). *Manhaj al-naqd fī `ulūm al-ḥadīth*. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr. 296

reviewing and reclassifying all historical sources that have survived until today, "history will be mixed with legend and belles-lettres, and early accounts and later reports will be regarded as being of equal value. Neither the logic of history nor historical method will permit this."¹⁰ As an example of myth in Islamic history, he dedicated a section of his book to the life of Wahb bin Munabbih (d.725) who was a Muslim storyteller interested in legendary tales from other religious scriptures of pre-Islamic times. He pointed out that Wahb's influence on the construction of the prophet's biography, for example, was insignificant, contrary to what many Orientalists believed. He based his argument on the fact that the prophet's biography was mainly developed on the basis of *ḥadīth* methodology and that the legendary element in this genre of Islamic history only appeared at a much later period.

Coming back to Shaykh al-Kuntī, although he was an ardent scholar of *ḥadīth* methodology, he appears to have been comfortable in merging historical fact with myth. This can be observed from his extensive narration on miracles related to the Kunta, which were neither historically well- documented nor orally transmitted by other than the Kunta themselves. The fact that it was common practice for them to relate these stories from one generation to the next must also be given its due consideration.

Understanding the motivating reasons for this occurrence is of paramount historical importance. A general exploration of the concept of miracles within religious thought is thus important in order to obtain a broader vision on the topic.

¹⁰ Duri, A.A. (1983). *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 9

I deal with this concept Chapter One, looking specifically at the views of Judaism, Christianity and Islām. In Chapter Two, I give a brief biography of Shaykh Al-Kunti, his scholarly career and his political and religious positions that he occupied within his society. It is crucial to investigate who the key figures were that impacted on his life and to look at those who helped shape his religious inclinations. This, together with the social and political setting in which he grew up, will assist us in understanding his approach to the issue of miracles. In Chapter Three, I look at his literary contributions, with the aim of seeing what the kinds of topics were that he focused on. In this regard I am specifically interested in themes around miracles and myth and to what extent it had deliberately been included. Finally in Chapter Four I describe his work *al-Minna*, highlighting and analysing the themes related to miracles. In this regard, I will select and translate a few examples for close study. These examples will give us an idea of some of the underlying discourses that Shaykh al-Kuntī wished to convey, particularly regarding the status of the Kunta being the beacon of spiritual and religious leadership. I hope to draw some conclusions on the views of Shaykh al-Kuntī regarding the concept of miracles, myth and history, and the social and political consequences these views had on his society.

Chapter One

Perspectives on Miracles

'And firmly establish miracles to the saints
And the one who rejects this, discard his words.'

This is a line from the famous didactic poem on Islamic theology "Jawhara al-tawḥīd"¹¹, which is a standard eighteenth century text on Asharī belief, usually prescribed to beginners to commit to memory. The concept of *karāma* (pl. *karāmāt*) or miracles has received a lot of attention by theologians and Sufis alike. Literature on Islamic creed or *ʿaqīda* almost always contain a chapter on miracles and the possibility of its occurrence, citing examples from the Qurʾān and other religious texts. The marking of its parameters, for example, by making clear distinctions between prophetic and other miracles (the former called *muʾjiza* and the latter *karāma*), has also gained prominence in these works.¹² In the Sufi tradition, however, the scope and significance of miracles extend far beyond these theoretical discussions. In many circles it has become the defining factor of the saint's spiritual achievement.¹³ In this chapter, I briefly look at the concept of miracles, with a particular focus on the various Islamic positions on the subject. I then contextualize Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī within the tradition and analyze his stance on the matter.

Rodney Stark reveals how people often enumerate miracles as proof of their religion:

How they recovered from cancer, how they overcame alcoholism or drug abuse, how they became reliable and faithful spouses, how they survived a catastrophic accident, or

¹¹ It was written by the Egyptian scholar Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī (d.1631)

¹² Schimmel, A. (1975). *Mystical Dimensions of Islām*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press. 206

¹³ Knysh, A. (2007). *Al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism*. Berkshire: Garnet Publishing Limited. 358

how their prayers for a dying child were answered are all cited as evidence that a religion “works,” that its promises come true. People often testify about their own experiences of God as proof that religious explanations are valid.¹⁴

Judaism and Christianity seem almost to be at opposite ends on the issue of miracles. This has, however, become a topic that has developed into a far more complex discussion than merely arguing for its possibility and occurrence, or proving the consequence of belief or disbelief in it. While theological positions are rigorously debated, human experiences have also become a significant and essential part in the understanding of miracles.

The subject of miracles was considered one of the most problematic areas of medieval Jewish philosophy. Many philosophers found it difficult to explain the Biblical notion of miracles in light of contemporary science. Although the concept of miracles does exist in Judaism, it exists only as an act of God. Humans may be seen only as the agents of miracles, but no special status is afforded to them.¹⁵ One of the earliest Jewish philosophers, Saadia Gaon (d. 942) who is considered to be the founder of Judeo-Arabic literature¹⁶, accepted the concept of miracles based on the concepts of creation and divine providence.¹⁷ His view is that the purpose of miracles is to confirm the status of a prophet as an emissary of God, but at the same time it confirms rational investigation regarding the existence of God.

¹⁴ Stark, R. “Economics of Religion” in *The Blackwell companion to the Study of Religion*.(2006). (Ed) Segal, R. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 56-57

¹⁵ Von Stuckrad, K. (Ed.) 2006. *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*. Leiden, Boston: Brill. 1230-1233

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saadia_gaon (3.3.2010)

¹⁷ Skolnik, F. (Ed.) (2007) *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Second Edition. Detroit: Thomson Gale. Vol. 14, 305-310

A later philosopher, Benedict Spinoza (d. 1677), had a famous dictum that read: *Deus sive Natura sive Substantia* – God is Nature is Substance. He opposed the notion of providence and declared it the 'height of blasphemy' if one believes that extraordinary events are beyond the laws of nature.¹⁸ He argued that, anyone who claims that miracles are events that have no natural cause, are acting in direct opposition to God. He considered it heresy to suggest that nature cannot be controlled, because this would mean that God lacks control of the world.¹⁹

It is clear that Spinoza, through the deductive reasoning that he is known for, did not accept anything to be supernatural i.e. not in conformity with the laws of nature. His thought coincides with the philosophy of naturalism that affirms that all phenomena occur on the basis of science, especially the theory of cause and effect and that any metaphysical explanations are not readily considered.

Many rabbis later believed that miracles were preordained alongside the act of creation. They further emphasized that life in itself, with all its daily occurrences, are full of miracles. What they were referring to is the fact that miracles that do not contradict any laws of nature abound in the human's daily experience, such as the swallowing of food, although man is totally unaware or heedless of its existence.²⁰ Interestingly, some contemporary commentators make identical remarks about Islām²¹ and its position on miracles. I will later point out the inaccuracy of these claims when reviewing the Islamic tradition.

¹⁸ Breslauer, S.D. "Philosophy in Judaism: Two Stances" in *Blackwell companion to Judaism*. 174-175.

¹⁹ Breslauer, S.D. *Philosophy in Judaism* 174-175.

²⁰ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 14, 305-310

²¹ See for example Manuba Naida in *The Encyclopedia of religion*, M. Eliade Vol. 9, 548

In the Bible it states that,

If there rise in the midst of thee a prophet or one that saith he hath dreamed a dream, and he fortell a sign and a wonder, and that come to pass which he spoke, and he say to thee: Let us go and follow strange gods, which thou knowest not, and let us serve them, thou shalt not hear the words of that prophet or dreamer.²²

Engaging in a discussion on any important aspect of Christianity (or Catholicism which I will concentrate on) without the mention of miracles would be considered one that is insignificant or void of any essence. One of the most popular genres in Christian literature, even in present times, remains the miracles of Mary and Jesus or that of the archangel St. Michael. Miracles are seen as exceptional i.e. not anyone can work them, and there are also limitations with regard to the publicizing of it by the miracle worker. These factors make them valuable and incite a craving for its occurrence.²³

Miracles are divided into three broad categories: physical (such as healing the sick), intellectual (like predicting the occurrence of events in the future) and moral which is a "manner or mode of deliberate action — on the part of either a single person or a group of persons — that notably surpasses the observed and constant level of human behavior."²⁴ It is interesting to note how the "moral miracle" compares to the Quranic description of a *waliyy* (saint), someone normally seen as a miracle-worker:

²² Deuteronomy 13, 1-3

²³ Auffarth, C. "Criticism of Religion, Nature, Relics (Veneration of), Symbol/Sign/Gesture, Veneration of the Saints" in *Brill Dictionary of Religion*.(2006) (Ed) Von Stucrad, K. Leiden, Boston: Brill. 1230-1233

²⁴ Carson, T. and Cerrito, J. (Eds.) (2003). *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia, Second Edition*. Detroit: Thomson Gale.
Vol. 9, 659

Verily the *awliyā* ' (pl. *waliyy*) of Allāh, no fear shall come upon them nor shall they grieve. They are those who believed and use to be conscious (of Allāh).²⁵

Here to be "conscious of Allāh" would mean to practice His teachings and to abstain from prohibitions i.e. to lead a morally conscious and responsible lifestyle.

Because the Catholic Church recognized the legendary nature of narratives about miracles but at the same time wished to maintain belief in the possibility of miracles, it developed the theory around miracles to such an extent that it devised certain rules or procedures to authenticate or accept miracles which could establish the holiness of a saint.²⁶ This includes the performance of at least two miracles that undoubtedly went against the laws of nature and that the procedure of verifying a miracle can only be considered fifty years after the death of the so-called saint. Medical affidavits must be signed if a person was miraculously cured from any disease through the effect of a saint. In the modern age, this seems to reflect a fair balance between the belief in miracles and the confirmation and usage of the advancement of science.

In this regard the Theologian Rudolf Bultmann (d.1976) has argued that miracles be demythologized if Christianity, with its biblical accounts of miracles, was to remain credible in a modern age. Discussing this point, he says:

...the miracle of Jesus' resurrection was to be understood not as an actual physical resurrection from the dead, but as the human Jesus having died in the expected manner

²⁵ Qurān Ch. 10 V. 62,63

²⁶ Auffarth, C. *Criticism of Religion, Nature, Relics (Veneration of), Symbol/Sign/Gesture, Veneration of the Saints* in *Brill Dictionary of religion*.(2006) (Ed) Von Stucrad, K. Leiden, Boston: Brill. 1230-1233

as a result of crucifixion, but the divine Jesus having 'risen again' in the preaching (*kerygma*) and faith of the community, so that he can be said to live on.²⁷

Writing on prophecies and miracles, the Philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe (d.2001) offers an interesting perspective on Christ's miracles and the problems surrounding its usage as proof for the truth of Christianity. She discusses the historical value of these miracles as seen by an "external judge" as she calls it, in comparison to an adherent of the Christian faith. She shows how it may be reasonable for the external judge to treat the issue of Christ's resurrection as any other historical fact, but at the same time it would also be acceptable for the Christian to believe in it without having to explain the reason for this belief. She bases this on the fact that it is quite common for miracles to be connected to the founders and heroes of any religion. Furthermore she contends that:

...it is probably common among us to believe in fulfilled prophecies and miracles *because* we believe the Catholic religion and they are part of our doctrines. Besides, the passage from Deuteronomy, as well as reasonable reflection on the requirements of faith, would incline us to say that a prophet or wonder-worker is to be judged in the light of the Christian religion.²⁸

Although most Muslim scholars defended the existence of miracles, there has never been complete consensus among them regarding the possibility of its occurrence especially if it occurs at the hands of ordinary pious men. Among those who rejected the entire idea of

²⁷ *Brill Dictionary of religion*, 1230-1233

²⁸ Geach, M. and L, Gormally (Eds). (2008). *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics*. Charlottesville: Imprint Academic. 25

karāmāt, on the basis that it would become confused with prophetic miracles (*mu`jizāt*), are Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī (d.1027) and Ibn Abī Zayd al-Mālikī (d.996).²⁹

It is interesting to note that the discussion on miracles is not found *per se* in the works of Abul Ḥasan al-Ash`arī (d.936), founder of the Ash`arite Sunni school of theology. The first Asharī adherent to allude to the word *karāma* is al-Bāqillānī (d.1013). In his '*al-Inṣāf*', he mentions it when he discusses the issue of *ru`ya* (having a vision of Allāh), something which the Mu`tazila vigorously rejected. He uses the word in a more general sense, pointing out that the act of "seeing Allāh is a *karāma* that He shall confer upon His believing servants".³⁰ His usage of the term here is very general, because it merely means a gift from Allāh which He shall afford to deserving recipients in the hereafter. The more fundamental point of interest in this study is of course the occurrence of extraordinary events in this earthly life that we find ourselves in. John Renard also mentions that al-Bāqillānī has extensively written about the crucial differences between *mu`jizāt* and *karāmāt*.³¹

In another Sunni theological school of thought that developed parallel to that of al-Asharī, the school of Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (d.944), their works make more explicit reference to the concept of *karāma* during that early period. Abū Ḥanīfa (d.767), whose philosophical thought al-Māturīdī drew from³², for instance, points out in his *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* that there is a marked difference between a miracle that is performed by a saint and one performed by "the enemies of Allāh such as Iblīs (Satan), Pharaoh, and the Antichrist".³³ He notes that Allāh grants this latter group the ability to perform certain miracles in order to delude them and then eventually

²⁹ Ibn Khaldūn. (1992) *Muqaddima ibn Khaldun*. Beirut: Maktaba Lubnān 50.

³⁰ Al-Bāqillānī. A. *al-Inṣāf*. 56

³¹ Renard, J. (2008). *Friends of God: Islamic images of piety, commitment and Servanthood*. 95

³² He commented on Abū Ḥanīfah's *al-Fiqh al-akbar*. See *Al- a`lām by Ziriklī*

³³ Bin Yusuf, A. (2001). *Al-Fiqh al-Akbar explained*. California: White Thread Press. 161

to punish them. Another scholar of this particular tradition is Al-Ṭahāwī (d.933), who makes numerous remarks on the subject in his *'Aqīda*.³⁴ Many later scholars such as al-Ghazālī, al-Suyūṭī and others have devoted specific sections in their works on *'aqīda* and *kalām* to discussions surrounding the occurrence of miracles.

The nineteenth century Egyptian liberal reformer, Muhammad Abduh (d.1905), who primarily revived the rational approaches of the Mu'tazila, devised a very sophisticated methodology around the concept of miracles. Although Muhammad Abduh as a general principle called for the acceptance of miracles, he declared "that every particular miracle claimed may be doubted with impunity, either on rational or historical grounds. Thus, one may reject all the miracles one by one, but one may not reject the possibility of miracles as a principle".³⁵

Although many of these works are very rich in theological content, they are however confined to topics such as the possibility, purpose, categories and parameters of *karāmāt*. They do not delve, and perhaps understandably so, into the social, historical or political impact that these miracles had or may have had on the society at large.

As I have pointed out earlier, the issue of *karāmāt* among the Sūfis is one of central importance and its discourse continues to receive great prominence even today. Interesting stories in the various paths or *ṭarīqas* continue to be told about the *shaykhs* and the *karāmāt* they performed or those they are able to perform. Fundamentally, Sūfī doctrine does not encourage that any emphasis be placed on either the occurrence of miracles or its narration. The phenomenon of extraordinary activity should rather be seen as a gift from God or even a test from Him.

³⁴ Yusuf, H. (2007). *The Creed of Imām al-Ṭahāwī*. California: Zaytuna Institute

³⁵ Lewis, B. et al (Eds.) (2008). *The Cambridge History of Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Al-Qushayrī (d.1073) points out in his famous *al-Risāla* that while the prophets are ordered to openly display their miracles, the saints are instructed to conceal them. This is so, he says, because the prophets are certain that the miracles are signs that confirm the truth of their message, but the saint however cannot guarantee why the miracle has occurred – it may be a plot (*makr*) from God against him.³⁶ We do find, however, that the narration of these miraculous events remains a strong element in the minds of the followers as well as the admirers of the spiritual masters.

Numerous scholars have pointed out that *karāma* in many Ṣūfī traditions in Africa is a very significant aspect that is very strongly articulated and narrated. For instance, Louis Brenner writing about the spiritual search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal, points out that there is

a range of beliefs and practices which will be familiar to many Africanists – for example, the significance of repeated recitations of certain prayers believed to have special efficacy, the belief in saints, miracles, and what are called 'secrets', the search for Baraka (Arabic for spiritual grace) and salvation through one's relationship to venerated shaykh, and the great significance placed upon dreams and visions.³⁷

Writing on Shaykh al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī and the *Qādiriyya ṭarīqa*, Batran makes it clear that the reason why Shaykh al-Kuntī had such a great impact on his society, besides being an erudite scholar of Islām, was because people looked at him as a powerful worker of miracles. According to Batran, Shaykh al-Kuntī "used his miraculous powers for the benefit of all and for the

³⁶ Al-Qushayrī, A. (1997). *'Al-risālah al-Qushayriyyah fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf'*. Lebanon: Dār al-khayr. 354-355

³⁷ Brenner, L. (1984) *West African Sufi: The Religious Heritage and Spiritual search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal*. London C. Hurst and Company. 5

enhancement of his authority over rulers and their subjects".³⁸ He further contends that since the masses expected the saints to perform miracles, although the latter did not pay any heed to it, miracles had to be seen emanating from the saints, or else they would have to be created for them. He says:

The *karāmāt* were therefore one of the main elements that formed the charismatic qualities on which the prestige of the saint, his influence and spiritual authority over the community depended. The greater the number of miracles attributed to a saint, no matter whether or not they directly affected people, the more the legend grew and the greater was the fear and love in which his followers held him.³⁹

Al-Kuntī in *al-Minna*, gives extensive accounts on numerous miracles (I shall analyse some of them later). He also looks at theological questions surrounding this phenomenon. It is an accepted fact that he adhered to the Ash`arī School of theology, as most West African scholars did at the time, and his legal verdicts (*fatāwā*) indicate that he followed the Māliki School of Islamic law. He was also a reformer and grand leader of the *Qādiriyya ṭarīqa* in West Africa. These elements are all evident in his writing, especially in *al-Minna*, because it is a work that deals primarily with the discourses on Islamic Theology (*ʿaqīda*) and Islamic spirituality (*taṣawwuf*). When discussing the highest form of miracles, he writes:

Know that the greatest miracle of the saints is continuous success in the path of obedience and the protection against disobedience and contraventions. Abul Ḥasan al-Shādhilī⁴⁰, may Allāh have mercy on him, said: "The benefit of miracles is that Allāh introduces Himself to you by making apparent an extraordinary event at your hands." So

³⁸ Batran, A.A. (2001). *The Qadiriyyah Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara: The Life and times of Shaykh al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī (1729-1811)*. Morocco: Institut des Etudes Africaines. 79

³⁹ Batran, A.A. (2001). *The Qadiriyyah Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara*. 78

⁴⁰ d. 1258

there is a great difference between the one who Allāh introduces Himself to by means of His light, and the one He introduces Himself to through his intellect. So because it (i.e. the miracle) is a means of consolidation to the one who the miracle has appeared to, people who are at the beginning of the path may experience it while those who are at the end of the path may not, because of where they have arrived at with regards to steadfastness, certitude and [spiritual] capability. So they are not in need of any consolidation, just as the mountain is not in need of support. Through the bounty of Allāh most High, miracles remove the instability of doubt.⁴¹

Here al-Kuntī expresses the classical theological view that the occurrence of miracles should not be seen as the ultimate goal, but rather as a means that should lead the person to virtue and uprightness. In other words, the concept of miracles should not become the most important discourse that people engage in, but at the same time its significance must not be undermined or ignored in any way. This is precisely why we find scores of accounts in *al-Minna* that portray many miraculous events, especially those attributed to his forefathers. They are seen as a display of power that these saints possessed, although “theologically” they are not very important to narrate. It is interesting how al-Kuntī calls up a key figure in Sufism i.e. Abul Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d.1258), to substantiate his view, which illustrates the variant perspectives that he is familiar with i.e. the blend between classical theology and spirituality. It would seem that from a theological perspective, he wishes to remain classical in his approach, but he also wants to remain loyal to the Ṣūfī perspective on the discourse.

⁴¹ Kuntī. M. *Al-minnah* 251

Writing on the hagiography genre in Moroccan Sufism Vincent Cornell makes some interesting comments relevant to the discussion here. He refers to Thomas Heffernan who has constructed a theory called "biographical dualism". In it he argues:

In the hagiographer's construction of the saint, overemphasizing the supernatural might cause one to lose sight of the person. On the other hand, overemphasizing the ordinary might cause one to lose sight of the saint. To arrive at a happy medium the hagiographer had to employ his rhetorical skills to convey how he wanted the saint to be perceived.⁴²

In a sense, al-Kuntī also wishes to arrive at this amicable compromise whereby the narration of the miracles are not overemphasized (theoretically, at least), but at the same time the status of the saints and their powers are not to be underemphasized, hence the large corpus of miracles narrated in *al-Minna*.

In another text, Al-Kuntī has also responded very strongly to those who reject the occurrence of miracles when he writes:

It has reached some of the *shaykhs* that the Rawāfiḍ [i.e. the Shiites] and those who follow their desires as well as some extremists of the *mutakallimūn* [the scholars of Theology] insulted the saints and their miracles. This has even led them to reject some of the miracles that are mentioned about the messenger of Allāh (peace be upon him)

⁴² Cornell, V.J. (1998). *Realm of the Saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Texas: University of Texas Press. 65

like the splitting of the moon which is mentioned in the text [i.e. of the Qurān], and the crying of the tree trunk and the speech of the trees and stones.⁴³

Here again he presents the classical theological view, according to the Sunni creed of both the Asharites and Māturīdis, regarding the issue of miracles and the possibility of their occurrence at the hands of either the prophets or the saints. He further alludes to the serious error of someone who rejects the texts (i.e. those relating to the prophetic miracles) in which these miracles are mentioned by referring to them as disbelievers (*kāfir*) and being arrogant (*mukābir*).⁴⁴ These remarks are then followed by a display of his literary skill (or rhetorical skill as Renard calls it), where in eighteen beautifully composed poetic lines⁴⁵, a *nūniyya*⁴⁶ in style, he responds to the issue regarding the rejection of miracles.

This response adds a significant dimension to the discussion here. Although in this particular discourse it seemed quite clear that his attention was focused on the status of those who outrightly reject the occurrence of prophetic miracles or *mu`jizat*, and for that he subsequently called them arrogant disbelievers, it is evident from his response that he was also equally (and arguably more) keen in defending the saints and their miracles (*karāmāt*). It appears that he was indirectly trying to extend the same status that he earlier afforded to the rejecters of *mu`jizat* (i.e. that they are arrogant disbelievers) to the rejecters of *karāmāt*, and he did all of this in a very subtle and eloquent way. Since the defense against the rejection of *mu`jizat* would be a relatively manageable and easy task, defending the saints and their rank, especially as miracle workers, would require more assertiveness and eloquence, hence the eloquent

⁴³ Kuntī. M. *Al-minnah* 253

⁴⁴ Kuntī. M. *Al-minnah* 253

⁴⁵ Kuntī. M. *Al-minnah* 253-254

⁴⁶ The last word of each line ends with the letter *nūn*

response. This would, of course, also then imply a defense on behalf of himself (being a saint and a worker of miracles) as well as his saintly forefathers.

A question that arises here is: What was the need for Shaykh al-Kuntī to emphasize the importance of the miracles of the saints, over and beyond the usual theological scope of the possibility of its occurrence? Were there perhaps underlying social or political factors that prompted him to narrate so many miracles in *al-Minna*, especially those of his forefathers of the Kunta scholarly clan? Why was it not sufficient for him to narrate their status as outstanding erudite scholars in the various disciplines of Islām?

As I have mentioned earlier, Batran's thesis indicates that the laymen needed to be aware of the miracles performed by the scholar in order for them to gain confidence in him. In order for the scholar, on the other hand, to be an effective leader or statesman, he had to display his ability in the form of miraculous powers or extraordinary events. Another factor that could possibly explain al-Kuntī's extensive argument on *karāmāt*, especially surrounding his own family, is the political rivalry that was consistently developing between the Qādiriyya Ṣūfī path to whom al-Kuntī belonged, and the newly-formed Tijāniyyah (established by Aḥmad al-Tijānī d. 1815), which was very quickly gaining prominence in the region. The exploration of all the factors that led to this rivalry is beyond the scope of this study, but I will nonetheless make some general remarks on the topic.

Unlike earlier expressions of Sufism in the Islamic East, which developed a private notion of Sufism, in most instances in West Africa the Sufi masters drew followers around them and then a whole movement developed around them. Different Sufi movements therefore would come to

“compete” for influence over public space, wherein its specific kind of Sufi expression could be established and propagated. Norris remarks that “Islamic mysticism (*taṣawwuf* or *ṣūfiyyah*) in the Western Sahara has rarely taken the private and personal form which once characterized the way of life of Muslim mystics in the early days of Islam.”⁴⁷

Historically, the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa* (established in Baghdad by Shaykh ‘Abdul Qādir Al-Jīlāni d.1165) was much older than that of the Tijāniyya, the former having been practiced in West Africa for a much longer period of time. So because of its sequential precedence, it was most likely seen by its adherents as being superior and worthier of following. Also from a geographical perspective, the area that the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa* originated from most likely afforded it greater legitimacy, since its roots could be traced back to the Arab world, the area where Islām originated from. The Tijāniyya, on the other hand, was established in Africa itself. In other words, its origin was far more local, which perhaps made it gain popularity through an unintended renewal and expression of African Muslim identity, i.e. it being African, while at the same time being rooted firmly in Islamic values and principles. Writing on the spread of the Tijāniyya in South Africa for example, Lliteras points out that “the Tijaniyya *tariqa* in Cape Town naturally exemplifies the characteristics and complexities of what could be termed an African Muslim identity”.⁴⁸ She further mentions that it was one of the primary objectives of the *ṭarīqa* to bring about the notion of an “African Islam” which South African Muslims could easily relate to.

Furthermore, from a theological point of view, the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa* directly challenged the “orthodox” trends of Sufism practiced by the Qādiriyyah and other Sufi paths. By way of illustration, a debate that is often seen as the basis of dispute between the Tijāniyya and its

⁴⁷ Norris. H.T. 1986. *The Arab Conquest of the Western Sahara*. London : Longman Group Limited . 251

⁴⁸ Lliteras. S.M. 2006. “The Tijaniyya Tariqa in Cape Town,” in *Journal for Islamic studies*, Vol 26. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. 89

antagonists is one of origin and orthodoxy. The founder of the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa* claimed that he had seen the prophet in a vision while awake during the daytime, and that he had received his instruction directly from him which included the famous *Tijānī* invocation known as *Jawharat al-kamāl*, "The jewel of perfection."⁴⁹ It is also during this encounter that he claims the prophet had given him the title of *al-quṭb al-maktūm*, the hidden pole.⁵⁰

When one looks at the structure of most other *ṭarīqas*, it is quite clear that the authority of *shaykhs* are only accepted if they have a *silsila*, a continuous chain that historically links them to their *shaykhs* until it reaches back to the prophet. On the other hand, the Tijāniyya saw this - the fact that their leader had a personal and direct link with the prophet - as an extraordinary privilege which was given *only* to him. They thus regarded him as being superior to others,⁵¹ since he did not need a long historical chain linking him to the prophet, but rather had a direct one, linking him to the prophet without any intermediary. Based on this, the Tijāniyya considered themselves, as P.J. Ryan points out⁵², as an elitist group in comparison with other Sufi brotherhoods. These elitist claims that the Tijāniyya made, developed into an area of serious debate between them and other *ṭarīqas* (as well as anti-Sufi proponents), but the Tijāniyya vigorously defended its position regarding these contentious matters.

Based on the above, one may argue that there was, in principle, a conflict inherently present in the perspectives of these two Sufi *ṭarīqas* at that time. This then resulted in each movement finding the need to devise various methods to propagate and defend its viewpoints and stances on certain religious aspects of Islām and Sufism.

⁴⁹ Al-Tijānī, M.S. undated. *Ghāyat al-amānī fī manāqib wa karāmat aṣḥāb al-shaykh Sayyidī Aḥmad al-Tijānī* Beirut: Al-maktaba al-sha`biyya. 46

⁵⁰ Al-Tijānī, M.S. *Ghāyat al-amānī fī manāqib wa karāmat aṣḥāb al-shaykh Sayyidī Aḥmad al-Tijānī*. 46

⁵¹ Brenner, L. West African Sufi: *The Religious Heritage and Spiritual search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal*. 40

⁵² Ryan. P.J. 2000. "The Mystical Theology of Tijani Sufism and its Social Significance in West Africa," in *Journal of religion in Africa*, Vol 30

Coming back to al-Kuntī and his extensive use of miracles in his prose, it can be argued that he did so in defense of the Qādiriyya *shaykhs*. At the same time he was creating legitimacy for them in the minds of the ordinary West African Muslim. While al-Kuntī has the ability to present the orthodox theological views on matters pertaining to miracles in *al-Minna*, he has also ably and convincingly showed the importance, significance and occurrence of various miraculous events specifically at the hands of the Qādirī *shaykhs*.

The Tijāniyya too had also adopted similar methods to elevate the status of their *shaykhs*. Brenner points out that although `Umar Tāl (d.1864), the first active Tijāni missionary, followed a more orthodox view in warning against seeking miracles and regarding it as a trial that diverts away from spiritual efforts, this orthodoxy was quickly lost on the majority of Tijānis. He says: "The occurrence of miracles was accepted as fact by all Tijānis; and these miracles were manifested through holy men and were believed to be signs of their closeness to God. It should come as no surprise that 'miracle mongering' was widespread amongst those who wished to prove the powers of their particular shaykh".⁵³

By exploring the discourse on miracles within religious thought, I have tried to highlight the complexities that surround this phenomenon. The diversity of opinions and the variant positions about the acceptance of miracles clearly illustrate this point. Regardless of these complexities, it may be argued that discourses about miracles have always aroused special interest, for those who wish to use them in their own narratives, as well as those who simply come into contact with them through whatever means. A possible explanation is that the notion of miracles constitutes an interesting yet powerful means to propagate, defend, and convince others about a specific belief. One of the ways that Shaykh al-Kuntī, as the grand leader of the Qādiriyya

⁵³ Brenner, L. (1984) *West African Sufi: The Religious Heritage and Spiritual search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal*. 120

ṭarīqa, managed to maintain the loyalty of his *murīds*, was by continuously arguing for the credibility of miracles. He does this with a special focus on the miracles that occurred at the hands of all Kunta luminaries of the past. This would then imply that the *shaykh* himself was no different to any of his ancestors. This then also explains why he related so many instances of miraculous events in most of his literary works. In the following chapter I will give an historical account of the life of Shaykh al-Kuntī and further illustrate what role the notion of miracles played in the life of the *shaykh*.

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Chapter Two

An Introduction to the Kunta and Shaykh Sīdi al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī

The Kunta family network of West Africa had so many roles in their societies that it is hard to describe them precisely. Besides being amongst the leading Islamic scholars of the region between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, they were also prominent adherents (*murīds*) and propagators of the Qādiriyya Sufi path (*ṭarīqa*)⁵⁴, to the extent that Shaykh Sīdi al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī extensively spread and revived the *ṭarīqa* during the eighteenth century.⁵⁵ He also later developed his own branch of the Qādiriyya known as the Mukhtāriyya.⁵⁶ They were also keen merchants who developed an economic stronghold stretching over a large territory, often controlling the salt trade, from Morocco to Black Africa.⁵⁷

The Kunta were also committed to gaining political influence over the inhabitants of the region. For example, one of Shaykh al-Kuntī's grandsons, namely Aḥmad al-Bakkāy, struggled against the Fulbe of Hamdullahi in the mid-nineteenth century and later also against al-Ḥājj `Umar al-Fūtī. Shaykh Al-Kuntī himself was not only seen as a religious figure, but also as a political head.

In this chapter I sketch the biography of al-Kuntī, drawing extensively on the research of Aziz Batran, who has probably given the most comprehensive account of al-Kuntī in his study.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Hunwick, J. (2006). *West Africa, Islam and the Arab World*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers. 28

⁵⁵ Brenner, L. (1984). *West African Sufi: The Religious Heritage and Spiritual search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal*. London: C. Hurst and Company. 201

⁵⁶ Martin, R.C. (Ed.) (2004). *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim world*. USA: Thomson Gale. 402-403

⁵⁷ Ould el-Bara, Y. (2008). "The Life of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kuntī", in Jeppie, S and Bachir, S. eds. 2008. *The meanings of Timbuktu*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. 193

⁵⁸ The book is entitled: '*The Qadiriyya Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara: The Life and Times of Shaykh al-Mukhtar al-Kuntī (1729-1811)*'. I will more specifically rely on his chapter entitled 'Making of a Qadiri Saint', which is particularly relevant to this study. An abridged article of his book appears in J.R.Willis' '*Studies in West African Islamic History: The Cultivators of Islam*'.

Early Life

Very little is known about the early life and family of Shaykh Al-Kuntī, and much that has been reported about it is more legendary than historical. He was born in a place near Arawān called Kathib Ughalu in 1729. The desert region of Azawād (situated in present-day Mali, north of Timbuktu) which had Arawān as its capital, was a strategic route linking the settlement and the Niger river, to the salt mines. It was thus an important point of contact between the Arabs, the Tuareg and the peoples of the middle Niger. Although Shaykh al-Kuntī grew up here as an orphan, his mother Lalla Mbarka al-Hamilyya died when he was four or five, and his father Baba Ahmad ibn Abī Bakr died when he was ten years old, he grew up in an area that was known to be a retreat for scholars. Norris says:

Several of the most distinguished scholars of the Western Sahara, among them Shaykh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī, were either born in Azawād or made it their permanent residence. It was strategically placed, yet at the same time it was sufficiently remote to afford sanctuary and tranquility...⁵⁹

Being reared in the company of respected scholars and men who were said to possess spiritual powers, he was perhaps compensated for the difficulty he faced as an orphan. Shaykh Al-Kuntī had three brothers and a sister; all his brothers were known ascetics, men of profound piety and reputed miraculous powers. At the demise of his father his half brother, Abu Hamyya, took care of him. He grew up in a simple environment. It was a religious setting with an emphasis on learning the basics of religion while at the same time working as a shepherd for his family. His passion for learning later grew to such an extent that he regarded it incumbent upon every Muslim to migrate in the quest for knowledge. This kind of thinking was not strange to the

⁵⁹ Norris. H.T. (1986). *The Arab Conquest of the Western Sahara*. London: Longman. 77

Kunta, since one of their most distinguishing traits was that of mastering and teaching religious knowledge.

During his early life, he travelled from one camp to another in search of knowledge, studying under Tuareg scholars from the Kel Es-Suk, Kel Horma and others. But it was only in 1743 that he started to seriously develop his ability in the Islamic disciplines. It was under the tutelage of the Qādiriyya Shaykh Sidi Ali ibn Najīb of Timbuktu (with whom he remained until 1747/8), who claimed to be a descendant of the prophet as well as a descendent of the founder of the Shādhiliyya *ṭarīqa*, Abul Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, that he mastered thirteen disciplines of Islamic scholarship. He thereafter started studying Sufism intensively, receiving training particularly in the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*. He was given permission by his master Sidī Alī of Timbuktu to initiate others into the *ṭarīqa*, after four years of strenuous spiritual exercise (*riyāḍa*), and after he had proven to have the ability to overpower Satan and his temptations.

Disciplines mastered

Although it would be considered a known fact that he studied all the classical works on Sufism, Batran indicates that very little detail is mentioned about this, particularly in his son's work called *al-Ṭarā'if wa al-talā'id fi karāma al-wāliḍa wal wāliḍ*, which is a biographical account of his father. He also mentions that the reason for this is probably connected to the idea that Sufis always strive to protect their secrets, an aspect that others are not supposed to discover or know about. Besides the science of Taṣawwuf, Shaykh al-Kuntī mastered many other disciplines including *Tafsīr* (Qurān exegesis), *Ḥadīth* (prophetic traditions), *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) especially that of the Mālilki school of thought and the Arabic language. He probably read all the

major classical works in these fields, perhaps more than once, with different experts and masters. In a poem⁶⁰, he describes the preference of certain disciplines above others:

The best of knowledge if you desire to benefit

Is the knowledge of the book and of law, so do comply!

Then syntax and morphology of structures and also

The science of principles without aberration and argument,

Even if you are a linguist, competent and eloquent

Then also prophetic traditions – authenticating it, no foolishness!

Whatever is besides that is futile and jest

And a type of sleep and a calling towards failure

What is interesting here is that the subjects associated with the Arabic language namely *Naḥw* (Syntax) and *Ṣarf* (Morphology) ranked higher than some religious subjects, such as *Ḥadīth* and the *Uṣūl* (principles) of Jurisprudence and Theology for example. This is interesting taking into consideration that the Kunta were mainly an Arabic speaking people and that their scholars composed most of their works in classical Arabic. The area of Azawād where many of the Kunta resided was regarded as part of the Arabic-speaking region of Shinqīt.⁶¹

Another observation about the poem is that there is no significance attached to the subject of *Taṣawwuf*, although the Kunta are seen as a group that had a "rare ability finely to balance the

⁶⁰ Manuscript no. 7880 of the Aḥmad Baba Collection in Timbuktu

⁶¹ Norris. H.T. (1986). *The Arab Conquest of the Western Sahara*. 77

duties towards the interpretation of the Shari`ah canonic law on the one hand, and, on the other, the austere and ascetic path of Sufism, especially the Qādiriyya ṭarīqah".⁶² Again, an explanation could be that the Sufis guarded their secrets and spiritual powers, to possibly remain influential and surpass others in the sphere of spiritual or political strength. As Yahya Ould al-Bara states:

One of the important aspects of the career and activity of the saint was this interaction between the tribal and religious concerns in all stages of his life. Religious prestige, which was expressed in the formation of a tariqa, was quick to transform itself into political leadership. In fact, in the region of the Moorish tribes the founders of the brotherhoods were often leaders of tribal bodies.⁶³

So although *taṣawwuf* was the most important part of a scholar's development, as can be seen by the rigorous training that Shaykh al-Kuntī had to undergo before he could be authorized to initiate others in the *ṭarīqa*, it would appear that its intricacies and secrets had to be concealed from others who were not pursuing the same path. This was done for all sorts of reasons, including political considerations.

The teachers of Shaykh al-Kuntī conferred upon him their authorizations or *ijāza*. Apart from it being a special pact between teacher and student, it acknowledged the student's transformation into a teacher himself, who may now also confer his own *ijāzas*. It also meant that the *baraka* or blessings remained in the chain of authorized teachers connected to the original authors, passed on from one generation to another. The chain itself is called the *sanad* (pl. *asānīd*). In most of the *asānīd* of Shaykh al-Kuntī, names of well-known scholars such as Ahmad Baba and

⁶² Norris, H.T. (1986). *The Arab Conquest of the Western Sahara*. 128

⁶³ Ould el-Bara, Y. (2008). *The Life of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kuntī*. 200

his teacher, Muḥammad Baghayugu featured prominently. This afforded the *sanad* more authenticity and recognition.

His first return to his kinsmen as a shaykh

Upon returning to his family, he did not immediately receive the welcome or recognition that he had expected, especially now that he had become a *shaykh*. The reason for this is that his father, who was very influential among the Kunta, had died a long time ago, and also his immediate family did not have the influence to advance his position. He realized that he had a difficult road ahead, but through a vision that he experienced, he decided to migrate to Wallata, the land of his glorious ancestor, Sīdī Aḥmad al-Bakkāy Bū Dam. Upon arrival, he immediately had the opportunity to prove his status to them, by giving to the people of Wallata the glad tidings about the coming of a caravan that they had lost and were trying to locate. This instantaneously granted him the recognition as a saint, taking the place of the last great saint of that region, Sīdī Aḥmad al-Bakkāy Bū Dam.

He strategically positioned himself close to the tomb of Sīdī Aḥmad where he taught the various disciplines and initiated new *murīds* into the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*. The mausoleum of Sīdī Aḥmad was at the time also the most important meeting place for all of the Kunta, apart from it being close to the economic center of Azawād, because it represented a place of pilgrimage for all Kunta to pay their homage to their common ancestor Sīdī Aḥmad al-Bakkāy Bū Dam. Shaykh al-Kuntī seized this opportunity by forging strong spiritual relations with them, something that would tremendously benefit him in the future.

Towards the end of 1747 or the beginning of 1748, Shaykh al-Kuntī set out on a propagation campaign to spread the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*, a trip that prepared him to become the grand *shaykh*

of the *ṭarīqa*. He travelled the whole of present day Mauritania (which was known at the time as al-Maghrib al-Aqsā), winning over many groups to the *ṭarīqa*. The first ethnic group that joined his movement *en masse* was the Mashdhuf, a Berber group who claimed Arab descent, in an area known as Hodh between Wallata and Tichit. Other groups included the Awlad al-Fahfah, Awlad Dawud ibn 'Aroug and Awlad al-Nasir, who had been acquainted with the Kunta for a long time. The largest group in this region of Hodh however, the Awlad Bella Arabs and their allies, who were the most powerful and populace residents of the region, did not convert to the Qādiriyya at a satisfactory rate. It was only after considerable struggle and confrontation between the *murīds* of Shaykh al-Kunti and the Awlad Bella that he became successful as the spiritual head of that region.

In an area called Taganit, where Shaykh al-Kunti's kinsmen, the Kunta al-Qibla resided, his interventions as mediator between rival factions proved to be very successful (His mediation skills started developing at the age of eighteen while he was still under the tutelage of Sīdī 'Ali bin Najīb). This success resulted in the Awlad Bu Saif, who belonged to this group, giving recognition to him as the supreme *shaykh* of the Qādiriyya. This in turn led to other groups and holy men of the region, particularly from the Tajkanat Zwaya families, to develop resentment towards Shaykh al-Kunti. Their main problem that they had with him was the claim (which he approved of) that was given to him as the *Shaykh al-tarīqa* i.e. the supreme leader of the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa* especially in relation to his young age and inexperience. They disliked the fact that so many people were starting to follow him and give recognition to him as their *shaykh*. They thus collaborated against him and challenged him to an open debate where they would be able to show their superiority over him in knowledge. They prepared intricate questions to be posed to him. According to tradition, (perhaps of the legendary ones as we had mentioned earlier) Allah gave him a vision of the questions and its responses, which he sent to them in the

form of a satirical poem before the appointed time of the debate.⁶⁴ Because they were so amazed with his deep knowledge and the quality of the answers that he provided, not only did they acknowledge his status and superiority in knowledge, but they also apologized to him, expressing their loyalty to him as the new *shaykh* of the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*. Because of these events that unfolded while the *shaykh* was among the Kunta al-Qibla, he was seen as the symbol of strength and unity for all those affiliated to the Kunta.

His second return to his birthplace

In 1753, at the age of around twenty four, the *shaykh* returned to his birthplace in the Azawād. This time his ability as an erudite scholar and mediator and his status as a master of the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*, had already spread far and wide. Upon his arrival, he once again had to exercise his arbitration skills in order to bring peace between certain factions of the Awlad Sidi al-Hajj Abū Bakr. For the first few years after returning to the Azawād, he was mostly occupied as a mediator between the Kunta of Azawād and that of Mauritania, as well as between the Kunta themselves in Azawād. Through his preaching and writing, he tried to appease all the differing factions and to bring unity amongst them by affording equal status to many of them. This he did with the aim of strengthening and directing the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*, as well as strengthening his position as leader of the entire Kunta group. It was in 1756 that he took on the title of grand *shaykh* of the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*, "thus affirming his superiority over all the other Qadirite masters' wirds (litanies) which existed in the Sahara and especially in the Tuareg and Moorish areas".⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Batran, A.A. (2001). *The Qadiriyyah Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara*. 71

⁶⁵ Ould el-Bara, Y. (2008). *The Life of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti*. 199

Although the *shaykh* was largely successful in bringing about unity amongst the various groups, he could not bring harmony between the Awlād al-Wāfī and the al-Ḥammāl group. But in order to show his impartiality he moved to a neutral area called al-Ḥilla. Here he constructed a *zāwiya* and a mosque, which later became a very important center of knowledge known as *Ḥillat al-shaykh al-Mukhtār*. This move was symbolic because it affirmed the *shaykh's* neutrality in the disputes related to the Kunta, thus strengthening his role as mediator and arbitrator. Because many devotees now travelled to al-Hilla to seek the *baraka* of the shaykh, the size of this small town grew considerably, while the fame of its founder increased.

The shaykh's role as a waliyy and a mujaddid

Although the shaykh was considered in West Africa as the most erudite scholar and writer of his time, it was his status as a saint of Allāh, a *waliyy*, which afforded him the most credibility. Batran makes it clear that the Kunta regarded his status to be equal to that of Shaykh Abd al-Qādir al-Jaylānī of Baghdad. Shaykh al-Kuntī himself, through his writings and teaching, continually stressed the importance of the notion of *wilāya* or sainthood. At the same time, he also believed that saints are not recognized by ordinary people. They should live normal lives, mix with others, marry, trade and their appearance must not be distinct to the rest of their kinsmen. He disliked scholars who outwardly displayed symbols of piety or learning. For him the people of *taṣawwuf* were not above the rules of Islamic law. Adhering to the *sharī`a* is something that he strongly propagated. His son writes:

Contrary to what happens in other brotherhoods, it is forbidden to us to abandon ourselves to game, conspicuous displays of ascetism, fainting, dance, or exaggerated

shouting to praise God. On the other hand, many of our shaykhs do not forbid or condemn singing. We must not wear special garments.⁶⁶

He regarded it possible that a person may be a saint while not being aware of his own status, though other saints would be able to recognize him. With regards to his own position as a *waliyy*, Shaykh al-Kunti made it clear to those around him that he was fully aware of his saintly rank that was conferred upon him. He considered it a birthright of all the Kunta to be favored with the status of sainthood. According to him, a person could attain this rank either through the right of birth, through divine attraction (*jhadhb*) or through strenuous spiritual exercise and devotion (*riyāda or mujāhada*). As I pointed out earlier, Shaykh al-Kuntī only became an authorized *shaykh* after the completion of *mujāhada*. This means that he attained *wilāya* in more than one way (i.e. birthright and *mujāhada*), which suggests stronger legitimacy to his position as the leader of the Qādiriyya.

It is interesting to note that he preferred to describe his *wilāya* as a birthright rather than as a result of *mujāhada*. The reason for this is that Sufis regard sainthood or *wilāya* as being an extension of *nubuwwa* or prophethood. So if prophethood is something which cannot be acquired by any person through his own efforts, as the classical view in Islamic Theology suggests, but through Allāh's pure selection of certain individuals to fulfill the role of prophets, then it also means that sainthood cannot be attained by an individual on account of his own personal achievement but rather on account of a divine choice that was decreed by Allah. In other words, Shaykh al-Kunti considered it a divine decree from Allāh to select the Kunta for the sacred duty of sainthood, and more especially him as their spiritual head, as opposed to it being something that they acquired through spiritual exercise or *mujāhada*. It would appear that this

⁶⁶ Ould el-Bara, Y. (2008). *The Life of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti*. 201

argument i.e. the superiority of the saint directly selected by Allāh *vis-à-vis* the one who espouses sainthood through his own spiritual efforts, afforded more legitimacy to the *waliyy* according to the belief of Shaykh al-Kuntī.

As I have mentioned in Chapter One, the laymen needed to be aware of the miracles performed by the saint/scholar in order for them to gain confidence in him. Furthermore, in order for the saint/scholar to be an effective leader or statesman, he had to display his ability in the form of miraculous powers or extraordinary events. There are countless miracles attributed to Shaykh al-Kuntī. Although he himself did not explicitly speak much about it, his son and successor Sīdī Muḥammad al-Khalīfa (d. 1826) wrote an extensive treatise on this topic entitled: *Kitāb al-ṭarā'if wa al-talā'id fī karāmāt al-shaykhayn al-wālida wal wālid*' [The book that recounts the rare and the exquisite regarding the mother and father]⁶⁷. An interesting observation in the title is that it speaks about the miracles of his father as well as his mother. This reflects the inclusivity of women regarding the performance of miracles, which was an acceptable phenomenon amongst the Kunta. There are countless other Kunta women who were also regarded as saints, including the wife of Sīdī Muḥammad al-Khalīfa, son of Shaykh al-Kuntī.

Legendary stories about the *karāmāt* of Shaykh al-Kuntī were circulated widely. They included acts such as flying, understanding the language of inanimate objects, thought-reading and many others. He believed that these occurrences were natural to him, because he was born with this extraordinary ability, and he could recall the names of the people who congratulated his mother on the day that he was born. The important point to make here is that the extraordinary happenings ascribed to Shaykh al-Kuntī were largely accepted and embraced by the people around him. As Batran states:

⁶⁷ This is an unpublished and uncatalogued manuscript at the Ahmed Baba Institute

what is of ultimate importance is that many people believed in Sidi al-Mukhtār's charisma, and Sidi al-Mukhtar believed that Allah bestowed upon him His divine favours. In the absence of such beliefs and confidence, the Shaykh would never have attained such commanding stature.⁶⁸

Another title that Shaykh al-Kuntī proclaimed was that of reformer or *mujaddid*. According to him, he received the information pertaining to this duty through a divine message in the form of a dream, given to him by the prophet. What most likely prompted him to make this claim was probably what he saw as a deep decline in adherence to the principles and practice of religion. He placed the blame on the shoulders of those whom he referred to as *'ulamā al-sū'* or "evil scholars". According to him, they interpreted the laws of Islām in a way that suited their own interests and evil agendas, thus misguiding the *umma* at large. He also claimed that the prophet had foretold that this would at some stage occur.

The origin of the notion of *tajdid* or renewal stems from a prophetic tradition that says: "Allah will send to this *umma* (nation) at the beginning of every century, someone who will revive its religion".⁶⁹ In his commentary on the *ḥadīth* collection of al-Bukhārī (d. 870), al-Asqallānī (d.1449) mentions that the prophet did not specify that one specific person in every era and in any specific region would assume this responsibility (i.e. of being the *mujaddid*). He argues that because the notion of revival is not restricted to one particular aspect of Islām, different people may revive different aspects of Islām, although `Umar b. `Abd al-`Azīz is believed to have revived the religion in all its dimensions at the turn of the first Islamic century.⁷⁰ Levtzion and Voll also

⁶⁸ Batran, A.A. (2001). *The Qadiriyyah Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara*. 83

⁶⁹ Abū Dāwūd. (undated) *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*. Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-`arabī. Ḥadīth 4293, Vol. 4, 178

⁷⁰ `Asqallānī, I. (undated) *Fatḥ al-Bārī*. Vol. 20, 370. Beirut: Dār al-ma`rifa See <http://www.al-islam.com>

contend that renewal in the history of Islām took on various forms according to special circumstances of time and place.⁷¹

Shaykh al-Kuntī defined the duty of revival as being the renewal of the teachings of Islam as contained in the Qurān and the prophetic traditions, which people from time to time ignored or neglected. Thus we find the importance of sacred knowledge (*ilm*) being very prominent in the teachings of the *shaykh*. The *mujaddid* had to be an expert on all exoteric and esoteric disciplines of Islām, to the extent that should all the books of religious disciplines be destroyed and its knowledge forgotten, he would be able to revive all of that and he would be most able to produce new works similar to those that had been lost.

We find in the writings of Shaykh al-Kuntī, as well as that of Aḥmad Baba of Timbuktu, claims that many reformers from the tenth Islamic century came from West Africa and the Western Sahara. Aḥmad Baba, for example, considered his own teacher, Muḥammad Baghayugu as the *mujaddid* of his time. This would suggest, according to Shaykh al-Kunti and Aḥmad Baba, as Batran indicates, that West Africa at that time was not situated on the periphery, but rather was at the heart of the Muslim world where Islamic culture and scholarly achievements were undisputed and perhaps unprecedented. This is also reflected in the fact that all the figures that feature prominently in the *asānīd* of the books that Shaykh al-Kunti studied, were all from West Africa and not from the East or even from the Maghrib (i.e. North Africa).

The process of *tajdīd* took on numerous forms: The dissemination of “uncorrupted” education, the issuing of correct *fatāwā* (legal verdicts), the composition of legal works and the vigorous preaching to larger audiences, exposing the corruption of the *‘ulamā sū’*, who were either individuals or groups of people. Although these “corrupt scholars” appeared to the layman as

⁷¹ Levtzion, N and Voll, J.O. eds. (1987). *Eighteenth century renewal and reform in Islam*. NY: Syracuse University Press. 6

men of religion and piety, they were easily recognizable to the *mujaddid*. According to the *shaykh*, they used their knowledge to acquire material gain instead of regarding it as an act of devotion. He placed them in numerous categories (sixteen in total) including those who mastered the outward sciences but failed to control their inner desires, and those who restricted themselves to the issuing of *fatāwa* for their own personal reasons, neglecting all other important disciplines. There were those who did not practice what they preached and others who studied the Arabic language for its own sake, and not for the understanding of religion and its sciences. He also condemned those scholars who concentrated solely on the branches of *fiqh* (*furū`*) while forgetting the *uṣūl* i.e. the principles of deducing these rulings using the tools of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Although he was a Mālikī adherent⁷², he was also a strong proponent of *ijtihād* (juridical reasoning), stressing on its importance and significance at all times. Most scholars of the region also followed the Mālikī *madh-hab* at the time.

He assured the masses that the untainted knowledge of Islām was only found in his center or *zāwiya* in al-Ḥilla, as well as in all the other *zawāyā* which he established all over West Africa and the Western Sahara. He claimed that all his efforts, including the numerous works that he wrote, served the purpose of bringing about the revival of Islām, the *tajdīd*, in West Africa which was required for the social and religious advancement of that time.

In 1811 Shaykh al-Kuntī died at the age of eighty four and was buried at Bulunwar in Azawad, about 400 kilometers from Timbuktu. His wife and four of his eight children are buried at the

⁷² He wrote a huge four-volume work on Mālikī law entitled: *Fatḥ al-Wahhāb `alā hidāya al-ṭullāb* Mahamoudou, M. (2008). *The Works of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kuntī*, in Jeppie, S and Bachir, S. eds. 2008. *The meanings of Timbuktu*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. 215

same tomb. Just before his death, he gave his prayer beads to his son Sīdī Muḥammad. This was a common practice amongst *shaykhs* to indicate who their successor (*khalīfa*) after them would be. In this case it was Shaykh al-Kuntī's ultimate plan to ensure that the continuation of his *ṭarīqa* and the spiritual power that accompanied it, would reside amongst the Kunta, more particularly amongst his direct descendants.

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Chapter Three

The Literary Works of Shaykh Sīdī Al-Muktār Al-Kuntī

Shaykh al-Kuntī wrote works on various subjects and disciplines. His main focus in his writings, as I stated in the previous chapter, was to bring about a revival (*tajdīd*) in the practice of Islām, particularly in West Africa and the Western Sahara. Although he did not always articulate this theme of *tajdīd* explicitly it is quite evident from the numerous works that he produced on *fatāwā* or legal verdicts, as well as *ajwiba* (responses) to various problems. We find, for example, in John O. Hunwick's catalogue⁷³ genres such as *Waṣāyā*, testaments or exhortations of counsel (ten titles), *Rasā'il*, correspondence or epistle (twenty eight titles) and *Naṣīḥa*, advice (four titles). We also find titles such as *al-Irshād fī maṣāliḥ al-'ibād* (The directive in [looking at] the interest of the servants) and *al-Risāla al-'ajība wa al-naṣīḥa al-badī'a ilā Sayyid Bāba Aḥmad* (The strange treatise and profound advice [given] to Sayyid Bāba Aḥmad). All of this shows how much importance Shaykh al-Kuntī attached to the notion of "correcting the perception of people" and guiding them to the ideals of Islām. In this chapter I will review some of the works of Shaykh al-Kuntī, as presented in Hunwick's catalogue.⁷⁴ I especially look at his *al-Minna fī I'tiqād ahl al-sunna* (The Divine Favour Concerning the Beliefs of the People of Tradition) which is the basis of this thesis. I will further rely on an article on the works of Shaykh al-Kuntī, written by one of the most prolific and respected contemporary scholars of

⁷³ The work is entitled: *Arabic Literature of Africa: The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa*. I have relied on Hunwick's catalogue here because it dedicates an entire section on the literary works of the Kunta and deals with it in considerable detail. There is currently no catalogue solely devoted to the Kunta. There is most likely much more literature on the Kunta in the libraries of the region.

⁷⁴ Hunwick, J. (2003). *Arabic literature of Africa: The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa, Volume 4*. Leiden, Boston: Brill. 69-94

Timbuktu.⁷⁵ By reviewing some of these literary works, I draw some conclusions on the contributions that the Shaykh made, and how this impacted on the society of eighteenth century West Africa.

Overview

The Azawad and Timbuktu, where Shaykh al-Kunti resided, was an important region for Islamic learning and teaching. Although no formal institutions of learning were established or endowed as waqf, as far as we know, the traditional method of passing on *ijāzāt* or authorizations in all Islamic disciplines proliferated in this area. The dissemination of knowledge was not restricted to teaching; but also in the literature written by religious scholars or *ʿulamā*. Most books were written in Arabic. The two fields of knowledge that enjoyed the most prominence in these writings were *fiqh* (Islamic law), more specifically *fatāwā*, which continued into the twentieth century, and histories of the region. Undoubtedly, the most celebrated works on history are the two chronicles, *Tārīkh al-fattash* and *Tārīkh al-sūdān*, both written in the middle of the seventeenth century.

Hunwick points out that "Arabic writings of Western Sudanic Africa may be classified under four headings: historical, pedagogical, devotional and polemical".⁷⁶ Levtzion gives a slightly different categorization: "The reformers produced a huge mass of devotional, didactic and legal literature in Arabic and in local languages".⁷⁷ The addition of "legal literature" as an independent category is useful when reviewing the writing of Shaykh al-Kuntī, since it contains a large corpus of *fatāwā* or legal opinions.

⁷⁵ Mahamoudou, M. (2008). "The Works of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti", in Jeppie, S and Bachir, S. eds. 2008. *The meanings of Timbuktu*. Cape Town: HSRC press. 213-229

⁷⁶ Hunwick, J. (2003). *Arabic literature of Africa*. 3

⁷⁷ Levtzion, N. (2000) in Levtzion, N and Powells, R.L. eds. 2000. *The History of Islam in Africa*. Ohio: Ohio University Press. 12

Hunwick also attempts to define the meaning and role of the above-mentioned categories in that society. The historical works, for example, helped preserve the identity of the Muslims who were living side-by-side with larger non-Muslim communities. The conquest of Timbuktu by the Moroccans and its administration by the *Arma* during the last part of the sixteenth century also stirred on writers to record their own history. About this, David Conrad writes that, "In Timbuktu there were Muslim scholars of Soninke descent who wanted to defy their conquerors by recalling the glories of the Songhay Empire. Their writings are still among the most important sources for the history of Songhay".⁷⁸

The pedagogical writings provided suitable literature for those who pursued the study of Islām. Classical texts on *fiqh* and the Arabic language were often abridged by local teachers and then circulated among their students. Devotional writing included prayers, invocations, litanies and praises of the prophet. Shaykh al-Kuntī wrote quite extensively on this subject (which I will look at later), especially since he assumed the position of the grand *shaykh* of the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*. He added new litanies or *awrād* to the *ṭarīqa*, which made them distinct from other regions that also followed the same *ṭarīqa*. The polemical writings surfaced in the middle of the nineteenth century, with the advent of the establishment of the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa*. They were seen as a rival group by the Qādiriyya, who had the most influence over the region at that time. Another cause for the proliferation of these polemical writings was the Wahhabī doctrine that appeared during the twentieth century. These doctrines were disseminated mainly to challenge the widespread adherence to Sufism, but more specifically that of the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa*.

⁷⁸ Conrad, D. (2005). *Great Empires of the Past: Empires of Medieval West Africa*. New York: Facts On File, Inc. 51

Shaykh al-Kunti's works

Devotional writing

The *shaykh* wrote in Arabic on a range of subjects and topics. Many Muslims, of course, consider the Arabic language to be “global, divine and culturally neutral”.⁷⁹ The first category that Hunwick lists is '*Ad`iya wa aḥzāb`*⁸⁰, which consists of fifteen works, some of which are untitled. This fits in with the broader category of devotional writings earlier mentioned consisting of prayers, etc. Knut Vikor pointed out that, “A survey of manuscripts in some major collections of West African Islamic manuscripts recently catalogued shows that works on piety and praise of the Prophet equal those of *fiqh* in number”.⁸¹ Shaykh al-Kunti is no exception in this regard. Since the main theme of his writing was *tajdīd*, it is thus understandable why he authored so many works on piety and personal behavioral development.

Some of the titles such as '*Ḥizb al-asrār`* (The litany of the secrets) and '*Du`ā al-awliyā`* (The supplication of the saints) represent some of the special litanies written by the *shaykh*, which are perhaps peculiar to his branch of the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*. There are also certain invocations that served as means of protection or as a cure for certain illnesses, such as the one “Written for a student in a state of mental confusion”.⁸²

David Owusu-Ansah has noted⁸³ that these were widespread means to address common illnesses and diseases in African societies. Religious personalities were seen by the public as having strong healing powers. Because these notions were common before the coming of Islam

⁷⁹ Newell, S. (2006). *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading*. NY: Oxford University Press. 47

⁸⁰ Hunwick, J. (2003). *Arabic literature of Africa*. 69-71

⁸¹ Vikor, K.S. (2000). “Sufi Brotherhoods in Africa”, in Levtzion, N and Powells, R.L. eds. 2000. *The History of Islam in Africa*. Ohio: Ohio University Press. 464

⁸² Hunwick, J. (2003). *Arabic literature of Africa*. 70

⁸³ In an essay entitled: *Prayers, Amulets and Healing*.

to Africa, Muslim healers sometimes had to compete for this public arena. As an example, he cites al-Bakri's report of the Islamization of Malal, a Malinke kingdom of the Western Sudan:

"When all local remedies failed to redress the calamitous condition of drought, the ruler Malal found it necessary to try out a prayerful solution offered by the visiting Muslim Holyman. The dramatic effectiveness of the Muslim remedy over that performed by sorcerers led to the destruction of palace shrines and to the monarch's house accepting Islam as an alternate religious practice".⁸⁴

Although these practices were not free from any controversy (Maghīlī in the sixteenth century, for example, advised the Askia to get rid of such practices), these devotional works of Shaykh al-Kuntī indicate that until the eighteenth century, the notion of spiritual healing was common and used by members of that society.

Legal works in the form of fatāwā or ajwiba

The only major work in Islamic law (*fiqh*) that is mentioned by both Hunwick and Mahamoudou is a large four-volume book on Māliki jurisprudence called '*Fatḥ al-wahhāb `alā hidāya al-ṭullāb`*' (The aid of the Giver for the guidance of the seekers). Not much description is given about this book except that each volume consisted of more than seven hundred pages.⁸⁵

The only category that contained many legal documents (i.e. related to Islamic law) is that of *fatāwā* (legal verdicts) and *ajwiba* (responses). The category of *ajwiba* in Hunwick's volume

⁸⁴Owasa-Ansah, D. (2000). "Prayers, Amulets and Healing", in Levtzion, N and Powells, R.L. eds. 2000. *The History of Islam in Africa*. Ohio: Ohio University Press. 479

⁸⁵Mahamoudou, M. (2008). *The Works of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti* 215. According to Hunwick, the only copy of this work is found in Niamey. See Hunwick, J. (2003). *Arabic literature of Africa*. 75

comprises of a list of seventeen works and a list of eighteen works under the category of *fatāwī* (legal opinions also called *fatāwā*). Both these categories are answers to legal questions on matters related to the *sharī`a*. The titles of these works vary from answers to general *fiqh* questions on prayer, almsgiving, trade, family law (i.e. marriage and divorce), reciting the Qurān loudly in the presence of another worshipper and the confiscation of stolen goods from robbers (*luṣūṣ*) and marauders (*muḥāribūn*) and whether a distinction should be made between these two groups of people.

The answers to these and similar questions suggest the importance that the Muslim community, but more so the reformers like Shaykh al-Kuntī, attached to the observance of the laws of the Sharī`a as prescribed in the sphere of *fiqh* or Islamic law. Because this became one of the main ideals that the Shaykh wished to achieve, he authored major works in this regard, e.g. '*Al-burad al-muwashshā fi qaṭ` al-maṭāmi` wa al-rushā`*' (The embellished garments in the eradication of greed and corruption). In an atmosphere where the teachings of Islamic law had almost become alien to society, he saw the need for reviving it through his preaching as well as his writings. Writing about reform and the Qadiriyya, Levtzion states:

In the Sudan, the opening up of commercial connections with the Mediterranean and the Red Sea toward the end of the seventeenth century encouraged the development of towns and the rise of an indigenous urban-based middle class. The new class needed the stabilizing influence of the Sharī`a. A rise of literacy in Arabic, public prayers, and conformist dress gave this urban society an entirely new cultural and ethnic identity as

Arabs. Observance of the rules of Islam became the criterion to evaluate one's status as a Muslim.⁸⁶

It is likely that titles such as: "The failure of women to observe ḥijāb [Islamic dress]", "On attempting bribery", "On treachery", etc. were aimed at reforming society and changing practices that were prevalent at the time.

Taking the above into consideration, it is interesting to observe the numerous responses on issues related to healing through spiritual means. The following are a few titles: "On writing Qurānic verses for a fee for a sick person who then dies", "On seeking cures through writing of Quranic verses", "On stipulations a sick man makes about healing" and "On the *fiḍya* of him who recites Qurān for the dead".⁸⁷ These titles clearly indicate the existence of a debate that was prevalent at the time surrounding these issues. The fact that people were seeking clarity on these topics means that there was to some extent some confusion on the religious validity of these matters. The following *fatwā* of al-Maghīlī (d.1503) demonstrates the point:

"Be they condemned to death any sorcerer or sorceress or whosoever who [sic.] claims to create wealth, divert armies, or perform other actions of this type through talismans, magic formulas or other procedures. Whosoever amongst them returns to their senses should be left alone. Whosoever on the other hand, refuses must be killed. Whosoever pretends to write words from the book of God or holy words in this goal or in any other

⁸⁶ Levtzion, N. (2000) in Levtzion, N and Powells, R.L. eds. 2000. *The History of Islam in Africa*. Ohio: Ohio University Press. 10

⁸⁷ Hunwick, J. (2003). *Arabic literature of Africa*. 71-75

goals of like genre should not be believed. He is but an impostor. He must be driven out".⁸⁸

Shaykh al-Kuntī, on the other hand, regarded the usage of incantations as permissible, especially (but not exclusively) if the words are from the Qurān, as long as the user is pious, possessed the required *baraka* (blessings) and his religious status well-known. He also considered the result of such actions as the criteria for its permissibility or impermissibility. If the results were good and positive, the action will be judged accordingly, but if it were negative then the ban on these actions should be imposed.⁸⁹

It appears that Shaykh al-Kuntī was quite careful in his approach when it came to certain customs and norms that were contrary to normative Islamic practice. Some of these customs he outrightly rejected, while others he overlooked, and sometimes even encouraged. The issue of incantations, for instance, was an issue that a large number of scholars condemned and rejected (including ibn Khaldūn and al-Maghilī, who was a Qādiri, someone who Shaykh al-Kuntī revered deeply in his book *al-Minna*). Shaykh al-Kuntī not only condoned these practices, but also made it an intrinsic part of his branch of the Qādiriyya.

Another important genre of writing that also clearly articulates the need that Shaykh al-Kuntī saw for social change and religious adherence, are those whose titles include words such as *naṣīha* (advice), *waṣīyya* (exhortation or testament) and *risāla* (correspondence or epistle). These works were sometimes addressed to entire groups such as the whole Kunta clan: *'Naṣīha*

⁸⁸ Ould el-Bara, Y. (2008). "The Life of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kuntī", in Jeppie, S and Bachir, S. eds. 2008. *The meanings of Timbuktu*. Cape Town: HSRC press. 203

⁸⁹ For more details see Ould el-Bara, Y. (2008). *The Life of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kuntī*.

al-batt li jamī` ahl-al-Kunta` (Conclusive advice to all [the people of] Kunta), *'Risāla ilā abnā` Ali bin Najīb`* (Correspondence to the sons [of his teacher] `Ali bin Najīb). Sometimes they were directed at particular individuals, e.g. *'Risāla ilā sultān al-Almadī al-Mukhtār Baba al-Kunti`*. Hunwick described this correspondence as follows: "Letter to the chief of the Ullimiden asking him to mediate in a war between the Kunta and the Iguellad".⁹⁰ The content of these writings also varied, taking on one of two forms. Sometimes it comprised of general information or advice on a specific topic such as *'Kayfiyyat ziyārah al-shaykh`* (How to visit the *shaykh*) and *'Risāla ilā kulli mu`min wa mu`mina`* which is on women's dress and comportment.⁹¹ They were not always addressed to his own following or murīds, but sometimes to his foes, e.g. *'al-Risāla al-maymūna`* also known as *'Sabīl al-hudā wal rashād fī naṣiḥa al-`adā` wal hūssād`* (The path of guidance and righteousness in advising the enemies and the envious). These can generally be looked at as treatises on various subjects.

The other form consisted of actual correspondence or letters (the literal meaning of *risāla* being a letter), written to specific groups or individuals, on a range of issues such as politics e.g. *'Risāla ilā jamā`at Kel Antaşar`* (Inviting the Kel Antaşar to arbitration after they attacked Kunta)⁹² and ethics e.g. *Risāla ilā abnā` Shaykh Sī Aḥmad Ṣāliḥ fī sha`n kaff Kel Antaşar `an al-fasād`* (Correspondence to the sons of Shaykh Sī Aḥmad Ṣāliḥ in the matter regarding the stopping of Kel Antaşar from corruption).

This category of correspondence could become an important source of alternative historical narratives of events that occurred at the time. It is usually the larger works or chronicles (such

⁹⁰ Hunwick, J. (2003). *Arabic literature of Africa*. 89

⁹¹ Hunwick, J. (2003). *Arabic literature of Africa*. 89

⁹² Hunwick, J. (2003). *Arabic literature of Africa*. 89

as the *Tārīkhs*) that are referred to when exploring the history of the region, but these 'smaller' testimonies may well provide a nuanced reading of the events, both from a political and religious angle. Shaykh al-Kunti was reported to have had a keen interest in the recording of history, and there are many traces of this in his academic writing (I will discuss some of it later when I look at his *al-Minna*). Batran writes:

His favourite topics of conversation were the endless biographies of the virtuous and noble figures of the past and he was often heard late in the night, after the conclusion of the *wird*, conversing on the issues of the day and on other diverse subjects, such as the history of Awlad Bu Saif and the lives of their distinguished personalities including Lamin ibn Baba, his brother Muhammad ibn Baba, al-Ma`zūz ibn al-Mukhtar ibn Sidi A`mr, Al-Talib Ahmad ibn Al-Hasan and the descendents of Sidi Ahmad Al-Bu Saifi. He also spoke and listened to accounts on the history of the Banu Hassan especially that of Al-Maghafra, Awlad Abdalla (the Brakna), Awlad al-Nasir and Ida-u-`Ish. *History* was thus close to his heart and he is reported to have written a book as yet not recovered, on the history of Banu Hassan that was called *Dhikr Bani Hassan*".⁹³

General themes

One of the major themes that run through most of the works of Shaykh al-Kunti is the importance of Sufism, more particularly, the significance of *wilayā* (sainthood) and *karāma* (miracles). The leading scholar of contemporary Timbuktu, Mahamane Mahamoudou, has illustrated the prominence of these topics⁹⁴ in most of the Shaykh's major works including: *al-*

⁹³ Batran, A.A. (2001). *The Qadiriyyah Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara* 118

⁹⁴ Mahamoudou, M. (2008). "The Works of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti", in Jeppie, S and Bachir, S. eds. 2008. *The meanings of Timbuktu*. Cape Town: HSRC press. 213-229

Minna fī I`tiqād ahl al-sunna (The gift in explaining the creed of *Ahl al-sunna* [followers of orthodox Sunni Islām]), *al-Jar`a al-sāfiya wa al-nafḥa al-kāfiya* (The purified dosage and sufficient fragrance), *Kashf al-lubs fī mā bayna al-rūḥ wal nafs* (Removing the confusion regarding the difference between the soul and the inner-self), *al-`Ilm al-nāfi`* (Beneficial knowledge), *Jadhwa al-anwār fī al-dhabb al-manāṣib awliyā Allāh al-akhyār* (Illumination on refraining from disrespecting the stations of the closest friends of Allāh), *al-Kawkab al-waqqād fī dhikr al-mashāyikh wa ḥaqā`iq al-awrad* (The piercing star in mentioning of the scholars and the realities of the litanies). The last two books are the most comprehensive accounts on the topic of *wilāya*. One of them (*Jadhwa al-anwār*) was written as a refutation of someone called al-Mukhtār ibn Bawn Ṣāhib al-Iḥmirār, who rejected the miracles of the saints. It is said that he repented and retracted all his previous statements after reading this response of Shaykh al-Kuntī.⁹⁵ Other discourses in these major works include:

- The saints, signs of sainthood, miracles of the saints and types of *awliyā*
- Religion only becomes victorious through the pious *awliyā*
- The grand status of the saints
- How someone becomes a saint and the saint's miracles
- Honoring and respecting scholars

I pointed out in other parts of this thesis why Shaykh al-Kuntī continually stressed upon the importance of the notion of *wilāya*. I alluded to the fact that because the laymen needed to be aware of the miracles performed by the scholar in order for them to gain confidence in him, the scholar had to display his ability to perform miracles in order to become an effective leader or statesman. The Shaykh made it abundantly clear to those around him that the saintly rank was

⁹⁵ Mahamoudou, M. (2008). *The Works of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti*. 222

indeed divinely conferred upon him. He then, from a theological point of view, further proved, developed and emphasized the notion of *wilāya* in his writings, in order to create full awareness and acceptance in the minds of the masses. This entailed firstly, acceptance of the legitimacy and supremacy of the ranks of the saints above ordinary people, and secondly, the acceptance of him in particular for having assumed and excelled in the rank of *wilāya* in that particular society.

Kitāb al-Minna fī I`tiqād ahl al-sunna (The Divine Favour Concerning the Belief System of the People of Tradition)

General description

This work of Shaykh al-Kuntī forms the basis of this thesis i.e. specifically the notion of *karāma* or miracles. Multiple copies of the manuscript are found at the Ahmad Baba Center (Iheri-ab) as well as the Mama Haidara library⁹⁶, both situated in Timbuktu. The digitized copy that I used for this research is Manuscript number 170 of the Iheri-ab collection⁹⁷, which consists of 253 folios and is in an excellent condition.⁹⁸ Each folio is 16,2 cm x 21 cm and consists of approximately 29 lines. The manuscript is written in beautiful, clear Ṣaḥrāwī script in blue and occasional red ink. According to the manuscript entry card at Iheri-ab, the date when the book was originally completed is unknown, but it was copied in 1840 for Sīdī Muḥammad bin Ṭālib al-Ghadāmisī by the copyist al-Khalīf bin Muḥammad al-Bukhār. The book was abridged by Aḥmad bin Abil A`rāf

⁹⁶ According to Mahamoudou it is Manuscript no. 515. See Mahamoudou, M. (2008). *The Works of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti*. 228 Endnote 7 and 8

⁹⁷ According to Hunwick, the other copy of the manuscript is no. 415. See Hunwick, J. (2003). *Arabic literature of Africa*. 77

⁹⁸ According to Mahamoudou, it has 519 pages. He is referring to Manuscript no. 415.

al-Tinbukti under the title: *Ṭarīq al-janna fī fawā'id kitāb al-minna* (The path to heaven [in extracting] the benefits of *Kitāb al-Minna*).⁹⁹

Content

As the title suggests, the book deals with Islamic creed and belief or *'aqīda* of orthodox Sunni Islām. In his introduction Shaykh al-Kuntī says that the reason he compiled this work, was that someone requested him to write an easy manual on the tenets of faith and the unity of Allāh. He also alludes to the fact that many ignorant people spoke on this subject without knowledge, thus leading them to make *takfīr* i.e. claiming others to be unbelievers. How widespread this phenomenon was at the time is not exactly known, but Levtzion and Voll state that:

The spread of Islam was greatly aided by a broad and inclusive definition of a Muslim: whoever identified himself as such by pronouncing the *shahada*. However, the reformists sought to separate Muslims from non-believers and to delineate more clearly the boundaries of the Muslim community. For them, those who claimed to be Muslims but were associated with what the reformers believed to be non-Islamic beliefs and practices, were non-believers. The notion of *takfīr* (the act of declaring that someone is a kafir or unbeliever) was essential for Muslim militants, since *jihad* may be waged only against infidels.¹⁰⁰

The introduction of *al-Minna* shows that Shaykh al-Kuntī was certainly not one of those reformers who ascribed to the doctrine of *takfīr*. Brenner has argued along these lines when he

⁹⁹ Hunwick, J. (2003). *Arabic literature of Africa*. 78

¹⁰⁰ Levtzion, N and Voll, J.O. eds. (1987). *Eighteenth century renewal and reform in Islam*. NY: Syracuse University Press. 12

showed that although Shaykh al-Kuntī regarded al-Maghīlī as a *mujaddid* of the sixteenth century and a high-ranking *shaykh* within the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*, he virtually never quoted any of his legal opinions (contrary to Uthman b. Fudi), simply because he did not share al-Maghīlī's views on *takfīr*. He says: "Sidi al-Mukhtar was not overly concerned with questions of *kufṛ* in his efforts to renew Islam in the southern Sahara".¹⁰¹

The book *al-Minna* is largely consistent in discussing issues related to *'aqīda*. He presents the topics in the classical manner, like previous famous theologians have done, by looking at the three main divisions of *'aqīda* namely, *Ilāhiyyāt* (All doctrines related to Allāh and His attributes), *Nubuwwāt* (All doctrines related to the prophets and their attributes), and *Sam'iyāt* or *Ghaybiyyāt* (All doctrines related to the unseen world such as paradise and hell, the angels, etc.). He provides both textual and extensive rational proofs for these discourses, quoting extensively from the Qurān and prophetic traditions.

Shaykh al-Kuntī also touches on a range of other topics.¹⁰² One of my initial interests was the historical content alluded to by Mahamoudou in his article on the works of the *Shaykh*. One of the headings in *al-Minnah* that caught my attention was: *A discussion of al-Maghīlī and the fall of the Askiyah Empire*. However, upon closer reading of the said section, I discovered that the topic was not really a historical account or an analysis of the event, but rather a narrative on some of the virtues of al-Maghīlī and how he performed a prayer calling for the fall of the Askiya Empire. Here follows a brief translation of the event¹⁰³ according to *al-Minna*:

¹⁰¹Brenner, L. (1987). "Muslim thought in Eighteenth- Century West Africa: The case of Shaykh Uthman b. Fudi" in Levtzion, N and Voll, J.O. eds. *Eighteenth century renewal and reform in Islam*. 55

¹⁰² Topics include Sufism, biographies on some of the companions and some of their political disputes, history of the prophets, supplications, etc. Refer to my index of topics in Appendix 1

¹⁰³ I will discuss this event in more detail in the following chapter. H.T. Norris has also translated an identical piece from what is called '*The Golden chain*', which he describes as: "an incomplete manuscript

When they returned from their pilgrimage, Shaykh ibn `Abd al-Karīm [al-Maghīlī] discovered that one of the villagers from the people of Tuwāt had assaulted one of his sons and killed him. Shaykh ibn `Abd al-Karīm informed the Askiyah, who revered him and [always] sought to be at his service, about the killing of his son by the people of that village. He said to the Askiyah: "Kill his murderer". He replied: "I am not pleased with that [request] because all the people of that village collaborated in his killing". [Al-Maghīlī said to him:] "If you do not do that I will call on Allāh to destroy this city of yours and to strip you from your kingdom, and I will pray to Allāh against the people of this village in which he was killed. Their village will be destroyed and its fruits will be spoiled".

This angered the Askiyah. The *shaykh* then left until he reached a town called Kasina. The people here welcomed him with reverence and respect and studied the religion under him. When he saw this [how the people respected him], he sent a messenger to Gao, which was the city of the Askiyah and said to him: "If he [the Askiyah] asks you about me then tell him that the *shaykh* had died. If he is sad and makes *istirjā`*¹⁰⁴, I will leave him and his kingdom, and his city will remain prosperous until the end of time. But if you see him in a state that he shows no interest [about my death], then I will

which is preserved in Walāta and which was written by a Kuntah or Maḥājīb scholar there. The text appears to be an abridgement of a famous Kuntah work entitled, 'The book of uncommon and precious things, both acquired and inherited, as were displayed in the miracles and godly deeds accomplished by the two leading elders, the mother and the father, Shaykh Sīdī'l-Mukhtār al-Kuntī and his wife" [This book was written by his son Sīdī Muḥammad al-Khalīfa and he probably took the information from al-Minna]. See Norris. H.T. 1986. *The Arab Conquest of the Western Sahara*. London: Longman Group Limited. 227-241

¹⁰⁴ *Istirjā`* means to say: *Innā lillāh wa innā ilayhi rāji`ūn* (Qurān Ch.2 V.156) – From Allāh do we come and to Him is our return. It is recommended for a Muslim to utter these words when afflicted by a calamity.

transfer [the prosperity of] his kingdom to Kasina, here, and his city will be ruined until the end of time”.

When the messenger of the *shaykh* came to him [i.e. the Askiyah] and he enquired about him [i.e. al-Maghīlī], he said: ‘The *shaykh* died, may Allāh have mercy on him. He replied: ‘I do not care!’ So when he returned to the *shaykh* and informed him about that, the latter pointed toward Gao and said: ‘Destruction to Gao and may the Songhay empire perish! We have transferred its prosperity to Kasina and it will remain prosperous until Allāh’s command arrives.’¹⁰⁵

It is nearly impossible to verify any of this narrative. The historical content and imagination are mixed together. Elsewhere, Mahamadou has perhaps also overstated, through his eloquent usage of Arabic, some of the topics contained in the book *al-Minna*. It is only after the actual reading of the contents that one is able to formulate certain arguments and draw conclusions. By looking at the contents of topics related to *wilāya* and *karāma* in *al-Minna* one can, for example, see Shaykh al-Kuntī’s consistent defence of these particular doctrines, for the reasons mentioned earlier. As an illustration of this, here are some of the topic-headings in this regard:

- The proof that all the companions of the prophet (saw) are saints
- Of the miracles that prove their sainthood
- The highest miracle is steadfastness in the obedience of Allāh
- The rejection of the Rawāfiḍ and the extremists of the scholars of *‘ilm al-kalām* [Islamic theology] of the saints and their miracles

¹⁰⁵ Kuntī. M. *Al-minnah* .271

In this chapter, I have shown the literary contributions to scholarship of Shaykh al-Kuntī. The range of topics that the *shaykh* wrote on displays the depth of knowledge that he possessed in the Islamic disciplines. The issue of *tajdīd* is visible in his work, articulated clearly in the genres of *naṣīḥa* and *waṣāyā*. We have also seen the prominent role that miracles play in his writing, especially in relation to *wilāya* or sainthood. The extent to which he emphasized the occurrence of miracles and the countless arguments that he used to challenge his detractors shows his keenness to instill the concept of miracles into the minds of both the *murīds* and the skeptics alike. It appears that “historical authenticity” was not always a priority for the *shaykh*; for as long as the Kunta were venerated the traditions narrated about them remained unquestioned. Much more in-depth research on the works and writings of Shaykh al-Kuntī and other Kunta scholars is needed to fully unravel these and other contentions. In the final chapter I attempt to start this process by analyzing some of the arguments and narratives connected to miracles in one of the major works of Shaykh al-Kuntī.

Chapter Four

A Discussion On The Miracles In 'Al-Minna'

One of the major themes in Shaykh al-Kuntī's works is sainthood which is, of course, connected to the concepts of *karāma* and *wilāya*. He wrote a few works in which he particularly focused on the role and significance of *karāma* and *wilāya*. The main work I have used, *al-Minna*, is no exception. In this book, which primarily deals with Islamic creed, he deals with the issue of *karāmāt* in two ways: Firstly, he speaks about some theoretical issues related to the topic, and secondly, he cites numerous incidents to illustrate the prevalence of *karāmāt* amongst his forefathers of the Kunta, as well as other saintly figures. In this chapter, I will review and analyse some of these discourses, from both an historical and social perspective. In doing so, I will rely on my own translations of selected passages of *al-Minna*.

In his book on Shaykh al-Kuntī, Batran dealt with the subject of *karāma* and *wilāya* in relation to the Shaykh. As I previously mentioned, he pointed out the reasons why the notion of *karāma* was so important for the image and stature of the Shaykh. He also alluded to the types of miracles that were attributed to the Shaykh, which included:

flying, revival of the dead, travelling across long distances in a very short time [*tai al-makan*], thought reading, foretelling events and unveiling inner secrets and mysteries, da'wa [curse], understanding the language of solids, seeing beyond the range of the physical eye, relieving natural disasters such as drought and famine, appearing in two

places simultaneously, hearing voices warning of imminent danger, curing the sick transfiguration etc.¹⁰⁶

These, of course, were not reported or written directly by the Shaykh, but by others including his son Sīdī Muḥammad Khalīfa in the work that he wrote about his father¹⁰⁷. Batran did not say much about the nature of the miracles portrayed in the works of Shaykh al-Kuntī, except by mentioning them as part of the historical account of certain saintly personalities. It is this angle that I am interested in, particularly in the work *of al-Minna*.

John Renard and his study on the Friends of God

In this study, I have found the work of John Renard, who has done an excellent study on sainthood in hagiographical accounts, quite useful. He dedicated an entire chapter of his book to miracles.

Renard divided the study of miracles into three major areas namely: scope of the miracle, its type, and its theme. According to him, understanding the scope of the miracle allows us to make a distinction between the miracles that benefits the saint directly (which he calls reflexive) and that which may benefit others (which he refers to as transitive). This latter category may either involve humans, nature or the unseen worlds.

Discussing the type of miracles performed, Renard divides miracles into two major categories: Those involving knowledge and those related to power. Knowledge or epistemological miracles would include the saint's ability to have an extremely powerful awareness and knowledge of hidden truths, such as predicting the future and "knowing" others' thoughts. Power miracles on

¹⁰⁶ Batran, A.A. (2001). *The Qadiriyyah Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara*78

¹⁰⁷ The work is entitled *al-Ṭarā'if wa al-talā'id fi karāma al-wālidā wal wālid*.

the other hand refer to the saint's ability to control wild animals or the forces of nature, as well as the control over time and space. These two types of miracles are transitive in nature, since it demonstrates interaction between the saint and other creatures.

According to Renard, categorization of miracles according to a particular theme allows one to make a clear distinction between those related to knowledge and those related to outward power. The former would include divine protection from all forms of danger, while controlling the jinn and the wild beasts and challenging negative forces will be considered to be power related.¹⁰⁸

He further points out that the preference that is given to certain types of miracles above others may differ from one region to another. Writers or hagiographers may prefer to shed more light on certain types of miracles than others. In Morocco, for example, he says, hagiographers focus their attention more on knowledge-related miracles instead of those related to power. This would mean that for a saint to sustain his position, he would have to prove what he can or had accomplished in terms of the knowledge that he acquired.

As I will show when reviewing some of the miracles in *al-Minna*, there is certainly a strong presence of all these categories which Renard mentions. It is, however, very difficult, as he himself admits, to consistently fit these miracles into the aforementioned categories. It is quite inevitable that overlap will occur, and also some miracles would not fit into any of these categories. There may also be a strong sense of similarity that exists between the miracles in *al-Minna* and that which were depicted about the saints of earlier times including the prophets, since the saints, in their own view, are none other than the ardent followers of these prophets.

¹⁰⁸ Renard, J. (2008). *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment and Servanthood*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 92

Theory of miracles in al-Minna

The case of the companions

The main theoretical issue related to the topic of *karāma* which Shaykh al-Kuntī looks at in al-Minna, is the permissibility of the occurrence of miracles at the hands of the saints. One of the interesting discussions that he engages in is the sainthood of the first generation of Muslims i.e. the companions of the prophet. In this regard he cites numerous examples of miracles that they performed, thus affording all of them the highest rank that any saint could ever achieve. The approach that he takes to argue and to prove that all the companions of the prophet are saints, is to recall all the *karāmāt* that they performed. He narrates accounts of both individuals, especially the first four caliphs Abūbakr, `Umar, `Uthmān and `Alī, as well as of the companions in general. An example of a collective account is as follows:

Of the clear *karāmāt* that indicate the sainthood of the companions of the prophet (saw) is what al-Ṣuyūṭī narrated (as previously indicated) in his book *al-Ṭabaqāt* when he relates the narration of Abū Dharr. It shows that Mu`āwiyah wanted to extract a water spring from the land of Ṭā'if, which would run pass the mountains of Tahāmah. When it reached the graves of the martyrs of *Uḥud*¹⁰⁹, he gathered the people of Mādīnah and said to them: "I want this spring to run to the end of [the land] but there is no way [to do this] except over the graves of the companions. Whoever has a deceased family member [buried] there let him come to me". They came forward, opened up the graves and the bodies were found to be intact. Something touched the foot of Ḥamzah and blood came out of the wound. They found a man from amongst the martyrs who was holding his hand on a wound on his head. They took his hand away

¹⁰⁹ A mountain range situated near Madina. The second battle fought in Islām is named after it.

and the wound started to bleed. Abū Dharr said: “No one can doubt after this, neither in the resurrection, nor in the miracles of the saints, except if he is arrogant and a disbeliever”. [In the above incident], some claimed that they were already buried for fifty years, while others said forty years. The latter is the more correct opinion.¹¹⁰

The book that Shaykh al-Kuntī quotes from here is al-Ṣuyūṭī’s *Ṭabaqāt*. The *ṭabaqāt* refers to a genre of historical works that deals with the biographies of scholars in a particular field of study. So there are, for example, the *ṭabaqāt* of the *mufassirūn*, the scholars of Quranic exegesis, the *ṭabaqāt* of the Sufis, the grammarians, etc. The word literally means “generation” or “layer”, so the scholars mentioned in these biographical dictionaries would be categorized according to the time-lines or centuries that they lived in. This discipline became especially important in the subject of *ḥadīth* or prophetic traditions for the recognition of narrators as well as their teachers and students.

In the famous reference dictionary, *Kashf al-zunūn ‘an asāmī al-kutub wal funūn*, Ḥājji Khalīfa ascribes seven *ṭabaqāt* titles to al-Ṣuyūṭī: *Ṭabaqāt al-uṣūliyyīn* (scholars of fundamentals), *Ṭabaqāt al-bayāniyyīn* (scholars of Rhetoric), *Ṭabaqāt al-khaṭṭāṭīn* (calligraphers), *Ṭabaqāt al-faraḍiyyīn* (scholars of inheritance), *Ṭabaqāt al-kuttāb* (classes of professional secretaries), *Ṭabaqāt al-lughawiyyīn wal nuḥāt* (grammarians), *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn* (exegetes).¹¹¹ Most of these works are not in publication, so it is difficult to ascertain from which book he quoted this particular event. There are however similar versions of the event narrated in *al-Bidāya wal nihāya*¹¹² of ibn Kathīr (d.1373) and *Tārīkh al-Islām wa wafayāt al-mashāhīr wal a’lām* of al-

¹¹⁰ Kuntī. M. *Al-minnah* 222

¹¹¹ Khalīfa, H. (undated). *Kashf al-zunūn ‘an asāmī al-kutub wal funūn*. Beirut: Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-‘arabī. 1096-1107.

¹¹² Ibn Kathīr. I. (1997). *Al-Bidāya wal nihāya*. Cairo: Dār ibn Hajar. Vol. 4, 49

Dhahabī (d.1348)¹¹³, narrated by Jābir b. `Abdillāh instead of Abū Dharr as stated by al-Kuntī. This gives an indication that the event quoted by Shaykh al-Kuntī was one that was well documented in the classical sources of Islamic history. This in turn gives more credibility to the event and therefore strengthens the argument that Shaykh al-Kuntī wishes to present i.e. that the occurrence of miraculous events at the hands of the companions prove their sainthood.

The discourse concerning the *karāmāt* of the companions have remained quite an important one for the antagonists of miracles and *wilāya*, right up to the modern age. One of the arguments that are waged against those who claim that some *shaykhs* have performed certain miracles, is the following: Why were the companions, who were the best of generations, unable to perform these types of miracles, while it is possible for later generations who are living in a time of corruption and deceit? Are the companions more superior in rank or the *shaykhs* of later generations? Shaykh al-Kuntī, of course, disproves this notion by simply demonstrating that there are countless historical examples of the companions that proves their ability of performing *karāmāt*, thus affording them the rank of sainthood. Others have given a different response in order to defend the position of the permissibility of *karāma*, especially in later times. Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hāshimi (d.1961) leader of the Shādhilīyya *ṭarīqa* in Syria for example, was asked this question by the then *muftī* of Iraq and he responded (in summary) as follows:

First, the answer to this question is the same as that given by the eminent Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, may Allāh's blessings and peace be upon him, who said: "The faith of the Companions was strong and so they did not need something additional to strengthen their faith, whereas the faith of others who came late became weak in their respective times and so it needed strengthening through the manifestations of miracles"...

¹¹³ Dhahabī, M. (1986). *Tārīkh al-Islām wa wafayāt al-mashāhīr wal a`lām*. Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-`arabī. Vol. 2, 212

Second, it may be that reporting the saintly miracles of the prophetic companions was dispensed with because of their finding sufficiency in their tremendous ranks and their absorption of the behavior of the Chosen one, may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him, and their adherence to the path of moral rectitude, which is the greatest of all saintly miracles".¹¹⁴

The first point made by Shaykh al-Hāshimī justifies why the occurrence of miracles are so important in later times, because it is a mechanism that helps increase one's faith, an aspect that the religion requires. The second point is also particularly interesting, because it highlights the fact that the true miracle is moral reform and not necessarily the extraordinary events that people are looking for. This was precisely what Shaykh al-Kuntī argued in *al-Minna*, as I pointed out in the chapter on the theory of miracles. It is important for al-Kuntī and for al-Hashīmī to create the impression of balance with regards to the belief in miracles, in order not to shift the focus away from the person to the actual event.

'Umar and the Persians

Another miraculous incident that Shaykh al-Kuntī mentions, which relates to the previous discussion on the companions, is what happened at the time of the second caliph Umar. `Umar is seen in the Islamic tradition as a great worker of miracles. His oft-repeated feat is regarded as a classic, and that is when he stood on the pulpit in Madina's mosque while delivering the Friday sermon and he suddenly yelled: "O Sāriya, the mountain! The mountain!" He was warning the General of the army of an imminent danger. The latter heard him while being

¹¹⁴ Guezzo, M. (2009). *Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hashīmī: His Life and Works*. London: Viator Books. 146

thousands of miles away in the Iranian province of Nahawand.¹¹⁵ In *al-Minna*, Shaykh al-Kuntī writes about another event that involves `Umar:

“And of the greatest *karāmāt* was the subservience of the Tigris River to the army of `Umar when they moved on top of it with their horses and on foot while throwing palm stumps into it. When the Persians saw this they said: ‘Verily you are manipulating the sea!’ They were shocked and ran away, no person waited for anyone else. The subservience of the sea in the time of Mūsā and his people was for them to escape, while this [event] was to cast terror [in the hearts of the Persians]. There is a considerable difference between the two [incidents]. Salmān said: ‘I saw the horsemen landing on the surface of the water with their horses as if they were landing on the surface of the ground, and they were speaking [to one another] as if they were on land. The waves of the water were creating foam as big as mountains’. So this *karāma* that Allāh showed at the hands of the companions of Muḥammad, no other miracle, not even that of the [previous] prophets were equal to it”.¹¹⁶

Hereafter he describes the happening in more detail, explaining exactly how it occurred.

Unlike the previous example, Shaykh al-Kuntī does not supply any reference for this happening. Although Ibn Kathīr mentioned it on numerous occasions in his *al-Bidāya wal nihāya*, the details that he provided were considerably less than al-Kuntī’s extended narrative in *al-Minna*. The type of miracle that is displayed here is certainly one related to power i.e. the power of the Muslim army versus that of the Persians, as well as control over natural phenomena (in this case the sea). This miracle also appears to suggest a strong similarity with the event of prophet Mūsā and his encounter with the Pharaoh, although Shaykh al-Kuntī explicitly states that there are

¹¹⁵ Bin Yusuf, A. (2001). *Abu Ḥanīfa’s Al-Fiqh al-Akbar explained*. California: White Thread Press.

¹¹⁶ Kuntī. M. *Al-minnah* . 215

clear differences between the two. Establishing a similarity between the two events means that just like the struggle in Mūsā's time was between the forces of oppression and justice, here too the same struggle exists between these opposite forces. It is not unusual for the miracles of the saints to have prophetic counterparts, as Renard states, that there are "explicit hagiographical efforts to relate marvels of Friends to prophetic counterparts".¹¹⁷

A bold comment that al-Kuntī unapologetically makes here is the fact that this particular miracle of the companions is superior to that of even the prophets (excluding Muḥammad, of course]. This understanding may arise from the Qurānic verse: "You are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind".¹¹⁸ He diverts slightly from Ash`arī orthodoxy by comparing the prophets with ordinary people and saying that some aspect of the latter may be superior to the former. The Ash`arites have generally stated that Muḥammad is the best of all God's creation, and immediately after him, the rest of the prophets.¹¹⁹ This stems from the fact that all prophets are deemed to be infallible *'ma ṣūm'*, a quality which no ordinary human being can ever acquire.

Although Shaykh al-Kuntī cites numerous examples of the companions' miracles to disprove the claims of his antagonists, the above statement is further employed by him (although subtly) to strengthen his viewpoint, even if it goes against the grain of orthodoxy *per se*. Shaykh al-Kuntī has also shown this kind of bold initiative regarding the method of instruction in the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*, where he added a number of rituals to its existing system, which later developed into a completely independent and unique strand of the *ṭarīqa*. It is interesting to note how other

¹¹⁷ Renard, J. (2008). *Friends of God*. 96

¹¹⁸ Qurān Ch. 3, Verse 110

¹¹⁹ Rajab, B. (1996). *Tawdīh hidāyat al-murīd ilā sharḥ jawhara al-tawḥīd*. Publisher unknown. 98

ṭarīqas have differed in their approach regarding this issue. Writing about the Shādhilī *ṭarīqa* in Syria during the nineteenth and twentieth century, Guezzo remarks:

“A Sufi master is an inheritor, custodian and perpetuator, not an innovator. He inherits the grace and teaching of his master, through all the previous masters of the chain of transmission back to the prophet, Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him. The responsibility of training disciples is a trust. A trust must be handed back to its proprietors intact. A Sufi master is also a perpetuator because continuity is of the essence in Tradition and traditional knowledge. He invents nothing, and teaches nothing that has not been taught before by his predecessors. Originality, as understood today by the profane, is only a figment of imagination of ‘system builders’. However, Sufi masters have nothing to do with man-made systems, nor are they free, independent thinkers”.¹²⁰

The above approach is clearly much more conservative than the one adopted by Shaykh al-Kuntī on the issue of innovation. The question that arises here is the following: Is this a case where in the “heartland” of Islām, the expectations of normative Sufi practices are higher than, for instance, Africa and elsewhere which are considered to be on the “peripheries”? Contemporary studies about Islām in Africa have examined the relationship between Islamic practices peculiar to Africa and global Islamic tendencies. An example of this research is that of Rosander. She pointed out that while “African Islam” was often portrayed as accommodating and flexible, an increase in reformist tendencies that wish to “purify” Islām from innovative practices has also been observed.¹²¹ This is what Charles Stewart and others were referring to when they wrote about the notion of “popular Islam” that is often cited in explaining

¹²⁰ Guezzo, M. (2009). *Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hashīmī: His Life and Works*. 36

¹²¹ Westerlund, D. and Rosander, E.E. (eds). (1997). *African Islam and Islam in Africa*. London: Hurst and Company. 1

widespread religious practices in Africa. It is a notion whose presence should be taken seriously, particularly in relation to the expansion of Islam during this century.¹²²

From Arabia to Africa: The story of the famous trio: `Umar al-Shaykh, al-Maghīlī and al-Suyūṭī

One of the most detailed and intriguing stories that Shaykh al-Kuntī narrates in *al-Minna* is the events that involve one of his ancestors Umar al-Shaykh (d.1552), `Umar al-Shaykh's teacher Muḥammad b. `Abd al-Karīm al-Maghīlī (d.1503/1504) and the famous sixteenth century Egyptian scholar Jalāluddīn al-Suyūṭī (d.1505). He describes at length the travels of the first two personalities followed by their encounter with the third. The story is fraught with miraculous feats, at times quite violent, and it contains an impressive display of intellectual skill or knowledge-related miracles, as we previously categorized, it by the respective *shaykhs*. I will first present a complete annotated translation of the narrative¹²⁴, thereafter provide an analysis thereof, looking particularly at the historical value of the piece.

From the saints of Allāh who were known for their knowledge and sainthood was his¹²⁵ *shaykh*, our grandfather Sīdnā `Umar known as '*al-shaykh*'. It is reported through multiple transmissions that before he reached the age of maturity, he memorised one

¹²² Peel, D.Y. and Stewart, C.C. (eds). (1985). *Popular Islam South of the Sahara*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 363

¹²⁴ This piece was also translated by Norris. See footnote 103

¹²⁵ He is referring to someone called Abūbakr al-Tūjī who he previously discussed. Batrān remarks: "Kunta traditions assert that the origin of Sidi Abu Bakr was obscure, for when he was questioned on his background he gave no answer. Nonetheless, Sidi Abu Bakr was reputed for his sanctity and miraculous powers that his descendants inherited from him. He accompanied Sidi `Umar al-Shaykh on his missionary campaigns and when the master died, Sidi Abu Bakr settled in Sijilmasa and later died somewhere in Southern Morocco". See Batran, A.A. (2001). *The Qadiriyyah Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara*. 120

thousand volumes in various disciplines of knowledge. He went to al-Maghrib al-Jawani¹²⁶ from al-Maghrib al-Aqsā¹²⁷ in search of knowledge after his father and shaykh Sīdī Aḥmad al-Bakkāy [d.1502] had reared him. He travelled to all the towns of al-Maghrib but he did not find anyone that could teach him something from any of the disciplines of knowledge. He then travelled to Syria and there also he did not find anyone that could benefit him or who he could learn from. Instead, everyone else took the disciplines from him.

He then performed the *ḥajj*¹²⁸ and returned to al-Maghrib and then wandered in the towns of al-Takrūr¹²⁹ until he met the honourable *shaykh*, the complete pole Sīdī Muḥammad b. `Abd al-Karīm al-Maghīlī. He had come from the country of the Hausa to travel to al-Takrūr and al-Maghrib al-Aqsā. His journey was for the purpose of calling toward Islām and guidance, to command the good and prohibit the evil and to return people back to the prophetic tradition and to segregation.¹³⁰ The two of them exchanged knowledge¹³¹ and he [al-Maghīlī] said to him [Sīdī `Umar]: “From where did you come young lad?” He replied: “From al-Maghrib al-Aqsā; it is my place of birth and my permanent place of residence.” He then said: “The land from which someone like you came and [especially if he is] as young as you, is not in need of someone like me”.

¹²⁶ Norris simply calls it the Western lands

¹²⁷ Literally it means the furthest Maghrib. In the past it referred to what is known today as Morocco. Other terms include *al-Maghrib al-adnā* which referred to Tunisia and some parts of Eastern Algeria. Algeria was known as *al-Maghrib al-awsaṭ*. See *Ta`rīf bil a`lām al-wārida fil bidāya wal nihāya* at <http://www.al-islam.com>. Vol. 1, 260

¹²⁸ Holy pilgrimage to Mecca

¹²⁹ Located in the Senegal Valley, along the border of present-day Senegal and Mauritania, it was a trading center that prospered throughout the 9th and 10th centuries. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takrur>

¹³⁰ i.e. between the sexes

¹³¹ He was very impressed with his level of knowledge. According to Batran: “Kunta traditions proudly relate that the outstanding erudition of `Umar al-Shaykh convinced Al-Maghili that the missionary work he planned to undertake in the Middle Niger and Southern Mauritania was not needed”. Batran, A.A. (2001). *The Qadiriyyah Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara*. 111

They then continued exchanging knowledge regarding the esoteric disciplines and he [Sīdī `Umar] discovered that Shaykh Muḥammad b. `Abd al-Karīm surpassed him. He remained in his company for thirty years.

The two of them then left toward the east and they arrived at Barqah¹³², [they found out that] one of the chiefs of the Arabs of Barqah married from his [al-Maghīlī's] family. When the *shaykh* saw him, he rebuked him and said: "Oh accursed one, you contravened the Book, the tradition and the consensus of the *umma* through what you have done". He attempted to stab the *shaykh* with his spear but the *shaykh* merely pointed to him with his finger and his head fell from his body.

They then pursued their journey until they reached the city of Egypt¹³³ on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea from the side of Barqah. Here they found the eminent *shaykh* Sīdī `Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī. He asked them about their coming and what they had experienced on their way. They informed him what had happened between them and the Arabs of Barqah and how he [one of the chiefs] died at his hands through the permission of Allāh.

He said: "Verily from Allāh do we come and to Him is our return". He [al-Maghīlī] said to him: "Do you think oh `Abd al-Raḥmān, that we came in order to seek your assistance? If I wished, I could cast this village of yours in the ocean". While they were talking like that, there came a request for the two of them [al-Maghīlī and Sīdī `Umar] to come out. They came out and al-Maghīlī pointed to the ground. Through the power of Allāh the Most High, it split open in front of them. When they saw this, they asked for forgiveness

¹³² This is a huge area consisting of many towns between Alexandria and Africa. See *Mu`jam al-buldān* in *al-Maktaba al-shāmīla* [software]. Norris translates it as Cyrenaica.

¹³³ Norris's translation specifies it to be Assiut, al-Suyūṭī's birth town.

and the two of them said: "There cannot be forgiveness except through repentance and you must vow never to return to the same act that your chief has committed. You must not confront the *ḥājj* [i.e. the pilgrim referring to themselves] as long as you live". They made a pact and agreement with them and the ground returned to the way it was before. The people then left and returned to their families, following the same route from where they came.

The two of them then returned to al-Suyūṭī in his mosque and Shaykh ibn `Abd al-Karīm said to Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī: "What disciplines do you have with you `Abd al-Raḥmān?" He replied to him: "I have encompassed all the traditions¹³⁴ of the prophet (saw) from beginning to end". He said to him: "Perhaps you are lying, and if you are truthful I shall ask you about the traditions that are authentic narrations from the prophet, peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him". So he started quoting to him a tradition upon which he [al-Suyūṭī] replied: "This did not reach me". Then he stood up until he passed by one of the pillars of the mosque and returned to them and said: "You have spoken the truth", until he [al-Maghīlī] narrated to him five hundred traditions. Sīdī `Umar then said to Shaykh al-Maghīlī: "Why is it that he does not accept your tradition until he passes by the pillar?" He said to him: "He is not able to see the prophet, peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him, until he passes the pillar, then he sees the prophet, peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him, asks him about the tradition and he says to him that it is from me [i.e. that it is a tradition narrated by me]. Had the prophet, peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him, for one moment been absent from me, I would not consider myself from amongst the believers". From that day on, al-Suyūṭī acknowledged the virtue of ibn `abd al-Karīm's knowledge and his sainthood and each one of them

¹³⁴ Referring to what is known as the subject of *ḥadīth* i.e. the words, actions and tacit approvals of the prophet.

took litanies (*awrād*)¹³⁵ from the other. Ibn `Abd al-Karīm first only called him `Ubayd al-Raḥmān¹³⁶, and when he authored his *al-Talqīn*¹³⁷ he said: “The student `Abd al-Raḥmān has now become a scholar”. And when he wrote his *al-Itqān*¹³⁸ he said: “Sidi `abd al-Raḥmān has now [only] penetrated deeply into the disciplines”.¹³⁹

The historical controversies

Shaykh al-Kuntī does not provide any reference for this event, nor are any dates supplied, like many of the other narratives in *al-Minna*. Although some historians have accepted the meeting between the three¹⁴⁰, many have questioned its historicity. Batran says that although the latter position is justifiable according to the available evidence, the disciples of the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa* in West and North Africa, especially amongst the Kunta, have regarded it as an indisputable fact, since this affiliation between al-Maghīlī and al-Suyūṭī afforded their *ṭarīqa* in that part of Africa the necessary repute to propagate it amongst the masses. Therefore the “prestige which the *silsila* gave to the Kunta as *shaykhs* of the Qadiriyya was passed on to the *murids* and the

¹³⁵ This refers to the set patterns of rituals and invocations that Sufi *ṭarīqas* ascribe themselves to. It was on account of this exchange of the Qādiri litanies, that many believed that “al-Maghili was al-Suyuti’s direct spiritual disciple” as Batran indicated. Batran, A.A. (2001). *The Qadiriyyah Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara*. 112 . Writing on Shaykh `Uthmān b. Fūdī, Louis Brenner makes an interesting comment on this topic when he says: “The Qadiriyya-Mukhtāriyya [i.e. the branch of the *ṭarīqa* of Shaykh al-Kuntī, author of al-Minna], is the only *ṭarīqah* known to attribute Sufi status to al-Maghili”. See Brenner, L. (1987). *Muslim thought in Eighteenth-Century West Africa: The case of Shaykh Uthman b. Fudi* in Levtzion, N and Voll, J.O. eds. *Eighteenth century renewal and reform in Islam*. 54

¹³⁶ It means the little servant of the Most merciful

¹³⁷ This title is not listed in *Kashf al-zunūn* and other famous reference books as one of Suyūṭī’s works.

Norris’s translation has it as ‘*al-Burhān*’ instead.

¹³⁸ *Al-itqān fī `ulūm al-qurān*, a book dealing with the sciences of the Qurān. See *Kashf al-zunūn* by Ḥājji Khalīfa

¹³⁹ Kuntī. M. *Al-minnah* 268-269

¹⁴⁰ See for example, R.G. Jenkins in his paper entitled “*The evolution of Religious brotherhoods in North and Northwest Africa 1523-1900*”, in Willis, J.R. 1979. *Studies in West African Islamic History - The Cultivators of Islam*. London and New Jersey: Frank Cass and company Limited. Vol.1, 51. Here he states that al-Suyūṭī initiated both al-Maghīlī and `Umar al-Shaykh into the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*.

'usefulness' of this distinction seems to have been a decisive factor in the widespread acceptance of the Kunta claims".¹⁴¹

During the period of the meeting of the three scholars, relationships were certainly established between certain scholars and rulers of West Africa and Egypt. It is through this relationship and on account of the exposure that West African *'ulamā* had, that they became less parochial than their counterparts in North Africa concerning religious matters, especially matters related to the following of the Māliki *madh-hab*.¹⁴²

Stefan Reichmuth points out that al-Suyuti was indeed the most prominent Egyptian figure to make contact with scholars and rulers of Bornu and Songhay.¹⁴³

This conclusion is obviously not sufficient to suggest that the above incident is authentic, although it creates a possible background for its narrative and thus for its acceptance. What further strengthens this idea is the fact that there is tangible evidence that shows that al-Maghīlī and al-Suyūṭī definitely corresponded with each other by way of writing letters to each other. The scholar who indicated this was Norris, who provided an interesting hypothesis on this issue. He points out that the "popular literature" of the Kunta, "were primarily homiletic and hagiographic. Their function was to provide an ideal example of the devout believer".¹⁴⁴

On account of this, not only does he question the historicity of the meeting between the three scholars, but also the long-standing companionship between al-Maghīlī and his student Sīdī 'Umar al-Shaykh, , which he claims is only narrated in Kunta sources. By looking at two of the

¹⁴¹ Batran, A.A. (2001). *The Qadiriyyah Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara*. 112-113

¹⁴² See Levtzion, N. (2000) in Levtzion, N and Powells, R.L. eds. 2000. *The History of Islam in Africa*. Ohio: Ohio University Press. 72-73

¹⁴³ Reichmuth, S. (2000) in Levtzion, N and Powells, R.L. eds. 2000. *The History of Islam in Africa*. Ohio: Ohio University Press. 427

¹⁴⁴ Norris. H.T. (1986). *The Arab Conquest of the Western Sahara*. 129

earliest documents (the first dated 1440 or 1470 and the second 1460) that make reference to the Kunta, he shows that Sīdī `Umar at best could have been a young novice of al-Maghīlī. In formulating his hypothesis as to how this came about, he illustrates that Sīdī `Umar al-Shaykh was “given the identity” of another scholar by the name of Ayd Aḥmad al-Tazikhti. This figure was definitely (according to historical documents) a pupil of al-Maghīlī, he definitely met with some Egyptian scholars and he travelled with al-Maghīlī to Katsīna. These were all claims that were made about Sīdī `Umar al-Shaykh. Norris remarks:

If confusion of fact, of date, of lineage one and all, have to be accepted as endemic in such texts, Kuntah or non-Kuntah, then the following hypothesis, a lineal transplant of an early date has to be faced as a possible explanation. That is that Ayd Aḥmad was possibly the prototype figure upon whom the Kuntah story tellers fashioned their story. Unlike these others, Ayd Aḥmad was a figure with several historical documents to substantiate his life and attainments.¹⁴⁵

The fact that there are many inconsistencies surrounding the friendship between al-Maghīlī and his disciple Sīdī `Umar al-Shaykh, as well the alleged meeting that transpired between the two of them and al-Suyūṭī, raises many issues. Why, for example, would al-Maghīlī accept to be initiated into the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa* by al-Suyūṭī, while the former (according to the above passage in al-Minna) purported to have much more knowledge than the latter? But if Norris 's theory indeed holds true, then there remain a number of pertinent questions. For example: Why has this story remained so popular amongst the Kunta? Why would an erudite scholar like Sīdī Mukhtār al-Kuntī insist on narrating it with such confidence? Is it really simply a display of prestige or is it perhaps part of the tradition not to delve into these matters pertaining to the ancestors, but rather to accept them unconditionally? Is the evidence to prove either case

¹⁴⁵Norris. H.T. (1986). *The Arab Conquest of the Western Sahara*. 129

conclusive or is more evidence required before drawing any such conclusions? What these questions certainly indicate, is that the socio-political conditions definitely play a significant role in the way history is narrated and documented.

In other words, how events are reported and then later interpreted depends largely on the socio-political condition of the role-players involved. Those who subsequently narrate the events and the circumstances under which the reports were formulated must obviously also be given due consideration. The inconsistencies that sometimes surface in historical reports are perhaps not always of importance, but rather how the historian have understood and analysed the reasons for those inconsistencies that occurred in the narration of the event.

A discussion on the content

There are two main issues related to miracles in this particular extract from al-Minna. The first depicts the intellectual ability of both Sīdī `Umar al-shaykh and al-Maghīlī, while the second portrays the miraculous power that the true saint possesses, here in the form of al-Maghīlī. Shaykh al-Kuntī shows how Sīdī `Umar had mastered most of the sciences at a young age, but continued to pursue the path of knowledge until he met al-Maghīlī. To claim that nobody in the regions of al-Maghrib and al-Shām could teach him anything, and that al-Suyūṭī was almost insignificant in comparison to al-Maghīlī, are bold statements. The region of al-Shām especially, was known to have produced the most reputable scholars over the centuries. There is clearly a sense of pride in Shaykh al-Kuntī's description of Sīdī `Umar as well as Maghīlī, which seeks to create the impression that the Kunta and its affiliates are indeed the most scholarly establishment in that region.

There is perhaps an interesting similarity in this aspect of the story and the encounter that ensued between Khidr and the prophet Mūsā. Sufis very often use Khidr as the prototype of the true saint, especially since even Mūsā felt inadequate in his interaction with this great saint of God. Renard writes that "Traditional sources often identify Khidr as a Friend of God to whom God granted a higher form of knowledge than he gave even to Moses. In hagiographical literature, one of Khidr's main functions is to visit those in need of guidance and spiritual initiation into a Sufi order outside of the ordinary process".¹⁴⁶

The similarity is linked to the idea that just as Mūsā claimed to be the most knowledgeable on the face of the earth, but later discovered that there were certain things about Khidr that he could not understand, many scholars (like al-Suyūṭī and others) may have claimed that they were the masters of certain fields of knowledge, but it was definitely the Kunta and their affiliates that have been endowed with a special knowledge that very few others were able to attain. This can clearly be observed when al-Maghīlī questioned al-Suyūṭī about the authenticity of some narrations of the prophet, which al-Suyūṭī were unaware of.

Another interesting aspect of this incident is that al-Suyūṭī retreated to a specific area of the mosque after every question that al-Māghīlī asked him, apparently to meet the prophet there and to enquire by him the status of the *ḥadīth* that was narrated to him by al-Māghīlī. This is then followed by al-Maghīlī's explanation that al-Suyūṭī had to go there in order that he may meet the prophet, whereas he (al-Maghīlī) claimed that he would consider himself as a disbeliever if the prophet was not constantly present with. This stems from the following contentious theological question: Can a person meet and see the prophet while he is awake

¹⁴⁶ Renard, J. (2008). *Friends of God*. 85

(i.e. not in the form of a dream)? Although most of the Sufi *ṭarīqas* affirm this particular doctrine, it was the Tijāniyya that seriously adopted this concept as a measurement of spiritual advancement.

Now historically, the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa* directly challenged the “*orthodox*” trends of Sufism practiced by the Qādiriyya and other Sufi *ṭarīqas*. As a reaction to this, it can be intimated that the Qādiriyyah saw them as an intruding force and a threat to the authoritative public and religious role that the former have played for so many decades, a role that many people hitherto largely accepted. An example of this “unorthodoxy” would be that the founder of the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa*, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī, claimed that he had seen the prophet in a vision while awake (i.e. not in a dream), and that he had received his instruction directly from the prophet which included the famous *Tijānī* invocation known as *Jawharat al-kamāl* (The jewel of perfection).¹⁴⁷ It is also during this encounter that he claims the prophet had given him the title of *al-quṭb al-maktūm*, the hidden pole.¹⁴⁸

On the other hand, when one looks at the structure of most of the other *ṭarīqas*, it is quite clear that the authority of *shaykhs* are only accepted if they have a *silsila*, a continuous chain that historically links them to their *shaykhs* until it reaches the prophet. The Tijāniyya, however, regarded the fact that their leader had a personal and direct link with the prophet, as an extraordinary privilege which was given *only* to him. They thus considered him to be far more superior to others¹⁴⁹, since he did not need a long historical chain linking him to the prophet, but rather had a direct one, linking him to the prophet without any intermediary. Based on this,

¹⁴⁷ Al-Tijānī, M.S. undated. *Ghāyat al-amānī fī manāqib wa karāmat aṣḥāb al-shaykh Sayyidī Aḥmad al-Tijānī*. Beirut: Al-maktaba al-sha`biyya. 46

¹⁴⁸ Al-Tijānī, M.S. *Ghāyat al-amānī fī manāqib wa karāmat aṣḥāb al-shaykh Sayyidī Aḥmad al-Tijānī*.

¹⁴⁹ Brenner, L. West African Sufi: *The Religious Heritage and Spiritual search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal*.

the Tijāniyya considered themselves, as P.J. Ryan points out¹⁵⁰, as an elitist group in comparison to other Sufi brotherhoods. These elitist claims that the Tijāniyyah made, developed into an area of serious debate between them and other *ṭarīqas* (as well as anti-Sufi proponents), but the Tijāniyya vigorously defended its position regarding these contentious matters.

Coming back to the above claim that al-Maghīlī made in the narrative of Shaykh al-Kuntī. Although there is no historical account indicating that Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī and Shaykh al-Kuntī met each other, the two *shaykhs* were contemporaries and the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa* reached Mauritania as early as 1789¹⁵¹. It is thus possible that Shaykh al-Kuntī became aware of the ideas of the newly formed *ṭarīqa*. In light of this, the above narration of al-Maghīlī's comment, could then be read as an attempt from Shaykh al-Kuntī to create the impression that the Qādirī *shaykh* al-Maghīlī had a special ability of constantly meeting the prophet, unlike those (i.e. the Tijāniyya) who occasionally received this privilege in specific times and under specific conditions. The legitimacy and supremacy afforded to the Kunta affiliates here, once again alludes to the credibility and superiority of the Kunta Shaykhs, including Shaykh al-Kuntī himself.

¹⁵⁰ Ryan. P.J. 2000. "The Mystical Theology of Tijani Sufism and its Social Significance in West Africa", in *Journal of religion in Africa*, Vol 30

¹⁵¹ See for example <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tijaniyyah>

Conclusion

The remarkable intellectual capacity of Shaykh al-Kuntī can be seen in the range of works that he produced in the various fields of Islamic learning. His excellent organizational and leadership talents afforded him further prominence amongst the masses.

But due to the high-ranking positions that he held, and due to the challenge of changing circumstances, he had to create a careful balance between what one may term a “traditional approach to Islām” and the need to come up with innovative ways to further his cause. New elements that he introduced into the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa* of which he was the grand shaykh serves as an example of this innovation. In a sense, he created for himself the image of being an independent thinker and scholar, yet remaining a traditional Muslim cleric and leader.

It is my contention that he occasionally presented his knowledge in such a way that would serve both the tradition as well as his position as the highest-ranking religious persona of his clan and the *ṭarīqa*. The discourse on miracles within his writings, as I have presented, constitutes the basis for this argument. While Shaykh al-Kuntī was fully aware of the constraints that *ḥadīth* methodology imposes on the narration of historic statements and events, he was mindful of the distinction that some Muslim scholars make between prophetic statements and other historical material. While the former had to be uncompromisingly well authenticated, the latter did not necessarily have to follow the same stringent criteria. So by taking this distinction into consideration, he comfortably narrated numerous accounts of miraculous events, mainly occurring at the hands of the Kunta shaykhs or its Qādiri affiliates.

In *al-Minna*, Shaykh al-Kuntī manages to subtly authenticate these events in a number of ways. Firstly, he eloquently argues for the existence of miracles in a general way, and establishes the idea that this forms an essential part of Islamic belief. This mechanism, together with the

vociferous responses that he gives to those who reject the concept of miracles, are repeatedly reinforced in his writing. Secondly, he cites numerous miracles of the first generations of Muslims, the companions of the prophet and their successors, and that of well-known saints of the past. This creates further credibility in the mind of the ordinary person, since these early figures are viewed (at least by members of his community) as exemplary role models. It also serves as a precursor for the acceptance of the miracles belonging to the Kunta *shaykhs*. Thirdly, all of this is presented in a very scholarly way, alongside fundamental discussions on the Qurān and the prophetic traditions. The formalization of these events through the usage of formal writing, serves as a tool that augments the entire process, thus finally removing all doubts regarding these narrations. The possibility of it being a mere story or myth is therefore considerably minimized.

Does this mean that we should ignore or dismiss these miraculous accounts? Does this indicate that Shaykh al-Kuntī's position as a critical scholar is under scrutiny? It was not the intent of this research to answer these questions. This was a preliminary attempt to understand the ambiguous relationship between history, miracle and myth in relation to the writings of Shaykh al-Kuntī. The fact that he lived in a society where people were continuously in search of *shaykhs* who were able to perform miracles, and the fact that a *shaykh's* influence on the masses would be determined by the extent to which he could provide them with miraculous feats, must be given careful consideration. This complex integration of myth into the lives of ordinary people and the sophisticated ways in which leaders respond to that, sometimes possibly to further their own course, makes it difficult under any circumstances to define the barriers between the "factual" history of a people and the "myths" that occupy their minds.

Much more enquiry into Shaykh al-Kuntī's other works is however required in order to draw more substantial conclusions. Even this, however, will not resolve the long-standing conflict

between history and myth. It would nonetheless provide us with a broader insight into how and why the grand *shaykh* was able to maintain a harmonious interaction between these two supposedly diametrically opposing concepts.

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Appendix 1

An index of *Al-Minna Fī I`Tiqād Ahl Al-Sunna* by Shaykh Sīdī Al-Mukhtār Al-Kuntī Al-Kabīr based on ms 170 (Iheri-ab). Prepared by Ebrahiem Moos.

No	Topic	Page	Line
1	Introduction	1	1
2	Reason for writing the book	1	10
3	A believer does not become a disbeliever if he is merely ignorant	1	19
4	Those who prays facing our direction is considered Muslim	2	3
5	<i>Tawhīd</i> must be tasted and is a gift [from Allāh];it cannot [really] be learnt and studied	2	21
6	The story of the people of the cave <i>`aṣḥāb al-kahf</i>	3	4
7	Of those whom Allāh had cast faith in their hearts: Qiss bin Sā`ida al-Iyādī	8	17
8	Of those whom Allāh had also guided: Zayd bin`Amr bin Nufayl, `Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb's uncle	9	3
9	Using destiny as an excuse is incorrect	10	7
10	The quality of speech attributed to Allāh is of three kinds	11	5
11	The proof that Allāh is different to His creation	12	1
12	The revelation of chapter 112 – <i>al-ikhlāṣ</i>	13	14
13	Rational judgement is divided into three categories	15	16
14	The ruling of the faith of one who blindly follows (<i>muqallid</i>)	15	24
15	The importance of contemplating the meanings of the qurān	16	21

16	The story of Nabī Ibrāhīm (as)	17	26
17	The necessity of believing in certain qualities of the prophets	25	10
18	The necessity of believing in the vision of Allāh in the hereafter	26	4
19	Allāh aided the prophets through His miracles	29	7
20	The necessity of believing that the prophet (saw) was sent to all creation	30	18
21	The intercession of the prophet: major and minor	30	26
22	The permissibility of superiority of some verses over others and the superiority of the Qurān over other scriptures	34	19
23	The explanation of āyat al-kursī	35	3
24	The qualities of the innovators: The Khawārij	40	22
25	The oneness of Allāh	44	12
26	Belief in the angels	50	13
27	The belief of Allāh being over his throne	52	19
28	The etiquette of supplication	57	1
29	The necessity of believing that Allāh shapes the human while it is still in the womb	59	10
30	The necessity of believing that sustenance lies in the hand of Allāh	67	21
31	The infallibility of the prophets	80	24
32	The necessity of believing that anyone who faces the qibla does not leave the fold of Islām if he sins	83	8
33	The distinction between major and minor sins	84	22
34	The necessity of believing in the 'scale' <i>al-mīzān</i>	96	10

35	The necessity of believing in the 'bridge' <i>al-ṣirāt</i>	100	11
36	Allāh has prohibited the fire to burn the limbs that prostrated	107	1
37	The necessity of believing in judgment and reckoning	108	21
38	The necessity of believing in the divine decree ' <i>al-qaḍā wal qadr</i> '	111	22
39	The rejection of all faiths except Islām	115	19
40	The corruption of fire-worshipping	123	14
41	Rejection or ' <i>kufr</i> ' consists of four types	124	22
42	The story of Nabī Sulaymān (as)	128	5
43	The necessity of believing in the signs of the last hour	140	11
44	The rising of the sun in the west	143	26
45	Gog and Magog	144	30
46	The final day	147	22
47	The superiority of some prophets over others	165	13
48	The encounter between the <i>nabī</i> (saw) and the delegation of Najrān regarding the oneness of Allāh	168	8
49	The necessity of revering and respecting the saints	172	12
50	The first saint of this nation was Abū Bakr	176	1
51	Of the miracles of Abū Bakr	177	11
52	If there had to be a prophet after me it would have been `Umar	178	20
53	The status of Uthman	185	4
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55	The battle between `Alī and Mu`āwiya	190	21
56	The response of `Umar b. `Abd al-`Azīz on the dispute between `Alī and Mu`āwiyya	193	26

57	The necessity of believing in the innocence of `Ā'isha (ra)	194	7
58	The scholars differ on who is more superior in rank: `Ā'isha (ra) or Khadīja (ra)	197	10
59	The choice that Allāh gave to wives of the prophet (saw) in order to show their high rank	200	11
60	The scholars differ on who is more superior in rank: Āsiya and Maryam or the wives of the prophet (saw)	205	17
61	Allāh has made this nation superior (men and women alike) by granting them victory	208	13
62	Of the greatest miracles is that the army of `Umar rode with their horses over the river of Dajla	215	26
63	The food glorified Allāh in the prophet's hand	216	28
64	The proof that all the companions of the prophet (saw) are saints	217	8
65	Of the miracles that prove their sainthood	222	27
66	The virtue of the household of the prophet (saw)	230	7
67	Of the miracles of `Ali Zayn al-`Ābidīn	231	24
68	The narrations about Al-Ḥasan b. Ja`far al-Ṣāmgḥānī	237	17
69	The dangers of this world	239	21
70	The virtues of the people of honour	241	30
71	What the shaykhs have said about the miracles of Abū Madyan	246	1
72	The highest miracle is steadfastness in the obedience of Allāh	251	19
73	The key to success lies in revering those who are close to Allāh - the prophets and the saints	252	8

74	The rejection of the Rawāfiḍ and the extremists of the scholars of <i>ʿilm al-kalām</i> of the saints and their miracles	253	20
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76	The narrations about the saints that live in the mountains and in caves	256	3
77	The virtues of those who know Allāh on the day of judgment	261	7
78	Of them is Abūbakr al-Tujī, student of Sidī `Umar (known as al- Shaykh) b. Sidī Aḥmad al-Bakkāy b. Sidī Muḥammad al-Kuntī	267	18
79	Of the saints is our grandfather Sidī `Umar (known as al-Shaykh)	268	7
80	The incident of Shaykh `Abd al-Karīm	271	1
81	Of the saints is Sidī Abūbakr b. `Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Mukhtār al-shaykh	274	28
82	Of the saints is Sidī Aḥmad known as al-Fayram b. al-Sayyid `Umar al-Shaykh	275	22
83	Sidī Muḥammad al-Raqqād	276	7
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86	Shirk is divided in three categories: minor, medium and major	293	1
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88	Al-fanā': Annihilation consists of three categories	305	14
89	The description of the human with regards to the issues of religion are divided into two categories: outer and inner	310	6
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93	Of the signs that indicate the love for Allāh is to constantly remember Him	323	20
94	The reality and benefits of knowledge	327	27
95	Whenever <i>ʿilm</i> is mentioned in the sacred text it refers to beneficial knowledge accompanied with the fear of Allāh	329	25
96	The interpretation of the verse of light	346	1
97	The scholars differed on the interpretation of the comparison in the verse	349	14
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99	The most profound parable that Allāh makes concerning the deviant sects that oppose the religion of Islām	357	20
100	The saint of Allāh; al-Sanūsī	362	1
101	Factors that sustain the faith	370	24
102	The best remembrance is the remembrance of the heart	371	21
103	The first person who uttered "lā ilāha illā Allāh" was Nūḥ (as)	374	15
104	The difference between <i>ḥamd</i> and <i>shukr</i>	376	14
105	The virtues of the word of <i>ikhhlās</i> "lā ilāha ill Allāh"	382	1
106	The dhikr of "lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata lillā bi Allāh"	383	17
107	Various prayers and supplications for various circumstances from	387	25

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109	The prayer when dressing	389	13
110	The prayer when clipping the nails	389	18
111	The prayer when taking ablution	389	21
112	The prayer when going to sleep	391	3
113	What to recite in the middle of the night	394	3
114	The virtue of praying at night	398	8
115	What to recite when leaving the house	398	15
116	What to recite when entering the mosque	398	22
117	What to recite when entering the house	398	25
118	What to recite when entering the toilet	399	22
119	What to recite when the wind blows	400	10
120	What to recite when it rains severely	400	16
121	What to recite when there is an eclipse of the sun	400	23
122	What to recite when embarking on a journey	401	19
123	What to recite when having a headache	403	24
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125	The second supplement of faith: having modesty	405	2
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127	Patience and silence	411	21
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129	The prophetic statement: Every good action is a charity	419	7
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133	The necessity of believing that Allāh created all creation before the heavens and the earth by a million years	435	22
134	The necessity of believing in the bodily night journey of the prophet (saw)	438	16
135	The virtue of seeking forgiveness: <i>istighfār</i>	446	11
136	The prayers to be recited in the mornings and evenings	447	14
137	The virtues of beneficial knowledge	448	26
138	The reality of faith	449	10
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142	The signs that indicate love for the prophet (saw)	483	19
143	The story of Mūsā (as) and Khidr	485	2
144	The taste of faith	497	2
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Appendix 2

Extracts from sections of *Al-Minna* translated and discussed in this study. Images are from ms 170 from the Iheri-ab collection.

المولى سبحانه عليها واعلم ان الامات الاستقامة على منها هـ
 الكتاب والسنة وما درج عليه سلك منه الامة **قال ابن عباس**
 كل ما خفي للعجم والكنى امات فانه لا ينفع له ان يسخر اليه ولا ان يعول
 عليه فان في العلم والعباد الفاعلية في عبوديته ولم يزلوا حتى
 كالتب الاستقامة لا كالتب الكرامة فان تفسد تطلب منه الكرامة
 ومولايها يطالبها بالاستقامة وتتشوق لها يطالبها به مولاي اوليها
 تشوقها لما تطلبها به تفسد ومولايها وكذا قال ابن عباس الله في العلم
 تشوقها الى ما يظن فيك من العيوب خفي وتتشوق الى ما يحب عنك والخبير
قال العنبري في رسالته ظهور الكرامة علامة لكونه عليه
 في احواله وذكره في شئيه وجوب ستر الكرامة واخفاءها وان المولى لا
 يريها ولا يرفع يكونها كرامة لجواز ان يكون ذلك المكنى واستمر اجاب
 ثم قال واعلم انه ليس للعنبري مساكنة الى الكرامة التي تكثر ولا ملاحظة
 وزمان يكون لهم في ظهور جنسها قوة فيهم لظهور ان في العلم فعلم سبحانه
 فيستتر لونه بزالت على حجة مانع عليه من العباد ثم قال وكل كرامة للعنبري
 فانها موحية لتبنيه ان لو لم ذلك المكنى لكانت له علم من قبله كرامة
 وكل من ينظر بصادق في الاسماع لا ينظر عليه كرامة ثم قال والكرامة انواع
 وفقر تكون اجابة دعاء او ظهور كحلح في اوقات جلالة وما في وقت عظم
 او تسهيل فروع المسافة الطويلة في مرة قليلة او تخليص او عرو او سماع
 خلاص من هلاك او غير ذلك من انواع الاعمال النافعة للعبادة **واعلم**
 ان من اجل الكرامات للاولياء في احوال التوفيق للمعاني والعبادة
 والمعاني والحقايق **قال ابو الحسن الشاذلي** في رحمه الله تعالى
 وقابرة الكرامات تعرف الله تعالى اليك يا خبير الخارفا على بريا فشتان
 ما يبر من تعرف الله تعالى اليه بقورك وم تعرف الى الله تعالى بعقله ومن اجل انما
 تبييت لم تخبرت له انه زما وجرها اهل البدييات وقرها اهل النمايات
 بفسما مانع عليه من السوخ والغير والتخيم فلا يخترجوا مع ذلك الى قبيتها
 كما لا يحتاج الجليل الى رسالت فالكرامة راجعة الى كرامة الشط بسلام الله سبحانه

واعلم

في سويراه فلو يعم فلامن لم في ذلك تعظيم المنتهية الى الله وافيها لم
 عليه بالكلية فبذبحوا وارتفعوا كما يشهد له قوله عليه السلام
 على قدر التعظيم تكون البركة وفي رواية اخرى لو اعترفتم في هذا الحج لا يتبع
 به **وي** ان رجلا من اهل النبي اذ اتى زائر الارضه الشريفه فلما كشف له
 عنها سرورها اجللا لسالكها عليه رحمة والمصراع **واخرج البيهقي**
اه رجلا من الخمسة اتى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم وقال له يا رسول الله ان الله
 فر فضلك علينا بالنبوة والكتاب وحسن التكميل واللون والمنطق فهل
 ان اسلمنا وصدقنا بما جاء من الله تعالى وعبرنا الله كما عبرتموه ان تكون
 مثلك في الجنة والنكر الى وجهه الكريم وقال له يا رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم
 اني والله انك مثل الذي لنا فلما سمع ذلك اخبر النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم
 بشيئ شديقه واحده ثم جئت منها وجهه وقال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم
 هو بي لحم الاسود فان الله يعثه يوم القيامة ووجهه كالقمر ليلة
 البدر وان لا اراه الا ابواب السموات وقد فتحت له وارى الخلائق
 قد اقبلت جميعا وانما اعتما به وجهه وعضو جنازة فلما فصر غيبه
 وكفنه هذا النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ليصل عليه وابتاه عليه والمصراع اقبل
 بوجهه عليه في التفت عنه فسالنا عن سبب انبعاثه قال التفت لانا
 زوجته في الجور العير اتت في قبلة ودخلت بين اركانها والتفت حياء من
 ذلك **وفر قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم** الولي في قومه كالنبي وامته وكلما
 يحب للنبي على امة والنبي والنبي في قومه كالنبي وامته وكلما
 هو له رغبة في النبي الله وله في قومه معارف الله **ولما بلغ بعض المشايخ**
 الر واقع في اهل الاهورا وبعض غلاة المتكلمين في اولياء الله وكراماته
 حتى ارضى بهم في ذلك الا انهم في بعض المعجزات الواردة عن رسول الله صلى الله
 عليه وسلم كانا في القوم الوارد بالنعص وخبير الجزع وكلام الشيخ والحج قال
 اكثر بالعلم ومحتجا عليهم بالنصوص التي لا ينكرها الا كما في مكمل
 • لا تسترنا بكنامات تخص بها من انفس الله في سر واعماله
 • فلا سمع سماعا لم تروا منتمنا • عن مضمي في الافكار والمثلا

الاصحاح

دوس

والله اعلم

- وامن ومنهم يتكلم بالمشرك به • في شأن في ايها بكال عمران
- وقيمة الكعب في ايرفا المحمديين • بعد الميم كما تملوا المحسبان
- وعرف بلقيس في ايرفا له عيسى • ما يبرم عنه جنسي وانسان
- انتباه فقرة الرجم في زمن • حتى استقر في يوم سلیمان
- علم الخطاب واعمال لموجبه • اعداد اصد في اقول وارقان
- كانت مصارعة الجنم سبعة • فاجر السبع من العلم انتان
- وكلم ليل باقوال الرسول لنا • فيما وكلم حجة فيما وبرهانا
- في الكرامة انواع اذ انزلت • كما في في حصر ايرفاض والوان
- دشني على الماء او في الجوف نغلا • وشبه في سغيا اوري حنجان
- وكلم احييا ولي جبر في حوته • وكلم اعيت ولو في واد اعلا
- وفيهم في حبيبه الحجاد ومن • يعيب عن في اسماع واجفان
- وفيهم في في المختار وملك • ومن في المصم في اهل اخوان
- وكلم في في مقاطع مكرمة • من المم قلته منها كعضوان
- وهو اخصر فوادنا الواعده مستقيم • والمم في حسيه ايه سائلا حسان
- في عيشة اروي في حطانت رفوسهم • وقد تموت رفوسه ووه ابران
- في فعل كقولهم في في القرم • الفضل في في القرم والدران
- في ان عجزت في البحر القرم • في صمت في ليس في القرم كالوان

فصل فيما ورد في الخبر عن الخضر رضي الله عنه

ويعرفنا به كانه قال التاج في شرح ابو علي الطوسي عن احمد بن محمد الطائفي انه قال بينما انا جالس في بيت المقدس عن ياب سليمان عليه السلام في يوم جمعة بعد العصر اذ اقبل علي شيخنا جليلنا احمد بن محمد بن خلفه خذقنا والاف في عظيم الخلقه عن يقر الجيمية وفيما اثن في فة فسلما علي وجلس الاثر جانبا فقلت للرجل من اتي الي جنبه وانت في فة الله قال انا الخضر قلت فزاد قال اخي الياسر فليقع في يابو فقلت من الي عيب فارتعدت وقال الخضر للياسر علي لولا انك جيت ما جئتنا فقلت له ما انت من انما الله يوفيه ثم قلت له اكل وبي لله في الارض تعرفه قال اطار المعروفون في فة فقلت له في المعروفون قال اعلم انه ما في فة

فلما رجعا معهما وجد الشيخ بن محمد الكريبي في بيتهم اهل ثقات فزعموا
 على اربابهم وقتلوه وكان استكيا بجل الشيخ بن محمد الكريبي وتخرمه فلا خير
 رقتل هل تلك الغريبة لولده فقال له ارفقت فانه فقال لا ارضى بواله فبان
 اهل الغريبة كالمع نالوا على قتله ولم يبقوا لادعوه الله ولم يبق
 مودة ولم يزلهم دونها وبلاد عوة الله على اهل الغريبة المقتول فيها فبطلوا
 وخرقوا وبنتم في بلادهم بها فبعضها بالاشكيا فانصر والشيخ
 حتى بلغ مدينته يقال لها كاشي فبأقروا عليه بالتعظيم والاجلال واخذ
 الرعي عليه فلما رأى ذلك اذ بالارد صاحبها الرعي كوكو وطمى مدينته استكيا وقال اخذ
 سببا عنه وقال ان الشيخ فرمات بان حرم واسترجع مدينته ودولته
 وبقيت مدينته عامرة التي اخرج الدم وان رايقه في بيال فان ارفقت ولتة الاشكيا
 مدينته فبقيت مدينته خرابا التي اخرج الدم فلما اتت له صاحب الشيخ مساله عنه
 وقال ان الشيخ قد توفي رضى الله عليه فقال لا املك فلما رجع الى الشيخ
 واخبره بذلك اشار بحمته ثم قال كوكو خرابا ودولة تسغى تبا بان قلت
 عما رتبها الى كاشي هي عامرة حتى ياتني ام الله **وروي** انه وجد
 يهوديا ساجرا اذ اقبل النار في بلاد ثقات فباتا له فقال له انك راى
 فخرج له راسه وكوة فلام الحماري مخمفة بلا سغيات به وقال له ارا طلفت
 النار للمسلمين والاعنفه الحماري حتى توت فبأهل النار فلما اطلعت
 اشار بيده الى عنقه من الراس عن عنقه وقال للمسلمين ان الرضة قد رقت
 من اليهود لانهم قد قتلوا العمود واقتتلوا بالسيف وقتل منهم عدد كثير
 وبعثوا ليعلم النصة والنار والخوف الاسود واذ علم رضى الله عنه حتى لا
 رضى الله عنه في ما كالتوا عليه من الصالح والطالح ولما توفي رضى الله عنه جمع من
 الناس وقال لهم من يرضى بكم او يبعثا فليبعثا فليبعثا فليبعثا فليبعثا فليبعثا
 اكل ما عنكم اكل الراسان للتمرة باكل التمرة وبلغت الثوات فلما مات
 الشيخ الميملي استمر بسنته سيم عمر الشيخ في الدعوة الى الله وارشاد
 الظالمين تعليم الجاهل والامم بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر واقامة الموسى
 والمحيطة على الصغار والمساكين وزجر الطغاة والاعنف على ابيهم وكان
 يامر بنيته بواله ويحضر عليه ويستغفر له في ذلك فلما كان في آخر عمره
 وفاج بنوه بطاح اعلمته خبره للعبادة حتى مات وهو على ارجل من جبال

السوس

الا اسقيط منه فالاحاجة له فيه فالت سودة سبحانه الله لغرضه فقال قلت لعل اسكن
 اخرجهم مسلم وغيره فقول جبرئيل بن عبد الله بن علي بن ابي طالب عليه السلام ومعه اكلت
 نخله العري وفيه تغير العسل من في الخاتم ان الله تبارك وتعالى يذكر الامة نحو بقا لارواح النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم
 والجماعا لم يرد فضل الله وقال صلى الله عليه وسلم مثل اللزير كسر وامر الة فوج وامر الة لوط كانت تحت
 عبر من عمادنا طاجين فحاننا مما لم يغنيا عنهما من الله شيئا وفيل اذ خلا النار مع الراجلين
 ويمرنا عقل ضم به الله تعلم للباطح والصلح الحيات والنساء والرجال وانه لا يرفع العاصي كما عه
 بخيره ولا يصر المطيع معصية غيره وان كانت الفريضة متصلة بينهم وان الافان كالا جانب
 بل ايعروا ان كان الفريب الذي يتصل به الكافر نبيا كما امر الة فوج وامر الة لوط كما خانتها لم يغريزان
 الى سواله وامر انهما شيئا وقطع بمنزلة الامة مجمع من تكبي المعصية ويظن ان ينعقد صلاح غيره
 وفي هذا المثل نوح بن يمامي المومنين على بشة وعبسة وهاجر منهنما وتغزير الهمما على اغلة
 وجه وانشره ثم ضرب مثلا واخر يتضم ان معصية الغير لا تنصر اذ اكان مطيعا وان وصلتة المسلم
 بالكلية لا تنصر فقال صلى الله عليه وسلم مثل اللزير واليهوا امر الة في عون وهي اسية بنت فراسع قال المعصون
 لما علم موسى السحرة وامنت به امر الة في عون فلما تير لعون اسلاهما او تير يريها ورجليها
 باربعة اوتاد والفاهاج الشمير فكانت تعذب بالشمير فاذا انصرفوا عنها اخلتها الملايكة
 اذ قالت رب ادر لع عنرك بيتا في الجنة فكشف الله لهما بيتها في الجنة وفيلها في عون ام بحجة
 عظيمه لتغني عليهما فلما اتوها بالحقية قالت رب ادر لع عنرك بيتا في الجنة فابصرت بيتها في
 الجنة مدرية ايضا وانزع الله روحها فالقينة السحرة على جسد لاروح فيه ولم تجر لها وفيل
 رجع الله امر الة في عون الى الجنة وهي تلاك وتشر فيهما ثم سالت الله تعالى ان ينجيها في الدنيا
 والاخرة فقالت وتخت في عون وعمله ونجته من الفوم الخلفير ثم اتبعها بذكر مريم فيراها معا
 رهنها في اليهود في العاشقة فقال ومريم ابنت عم اراثة احصت في جماع العوا حشر في فحننا
 فيه اية في جيبه رعبا ولوا العا كمر الكناية في روحنا في ونجته جيم بلو الا لافة تليد وتنتشر في
 كيننا الله ونافة الله ثم مرصا بتمام الايمان فقال وصرفت بكلمت ربه اية بالشر ابع الله نشرهما
 لعباده بكلماته المنزلة على انيسا به وكشفه اية المنزلة على ابراهيم وموسى وداوود وعيسى
 عليهم السلام وكانتم في الفتنير في العالين لانها كانت فروع فانتم اية مطيعين ومهم رهطها
 وعاشيرتها لانهم كانوا اهل بيتها صلاح وكاعة الله **ور حديث** انسرين على رضي الله عنه انه
 قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم حسبي من نساء العالمين مريم بنت عمران وخرجت بنت خويلد
 وفاحة بنت عبد الواسية امر الة في عون اخرجته الترمذي وقال حديث صحيح **ور** انكر اعادة البلمات
 الاللة على ولاية الحجاب رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ما تفرغ من اخرجته السيوطي في اللغات من حديث اذ
 ان معاوية لما جرى العير الر فاء التي استنمطها من رض الفار في فوج بها جمل انما هتت
 اذ بلغ بها فورا الشهر اهل اجد استفرخ اهل المدينة فقال لهم ان ابراهيم بن ابي بكر العير

صلى الله عليه وسلم
 في الحديث

قال في شخص خلفه الله ورضي وجهه في حيازة اخيه بقين اذ به بعد قلت والنسوة التي كرس
 في المقام النخل على حاله النعيم فيم استوجبه الخ قال بحلا زمن الصلوات الخمس قلت فقلت
 قال في شخص خلفه الله وسوا خلفه قلت في النسوة التي كرس على منابر من نور وهو من نور
 وشباب من نور فيم استوجبه الخ قال في العناية الالهية والارادة الصمراية في المقام تساه
 بحر صلي اليه كليلهم وبناته ومن ارضه ومن اعطيه من تفرغ عليه كرس في النسوة ونساء النبيين
 المومنت قلت في الشخص الاسود الذي حال بينه وبينه الخ المقام قال الخ الخ شخص خلفه الله في
 حرس على الرنبا وطلبه للرئاسة قالت في تشبهت وانما على منزه الحالة ثم اقبلت على البكاء
 والتبكي والتفرغ ثم اقبلت على بوجوههم فقالت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت
 في حاجتهم الخ الخ في حجة فليمة الى مكة حرسها الله فلما كان العلام الفبا في حجة حاجا فيسما
 انما كود بالبيت في سواد الليل انه سمعت صوتا يقطع القلوب رقة فابتعدت الصوت فاذا انما
 بامر الة فتعطفه باستار الكعبة وهي تقول يا موهوب واناله يا موهوب وانابه يا موهوب علمي وانابه
 عليه يا موهوب وانابه فوجفت وقلت يا هذرة في هذا المقام تقولين هذا القول فقلت اني
 وتبسمت وقالت يا ابا السماي ملائكتي في كل كلمة اما قولك يا موهوب وانابه فقولك يا موهوب
 له امة واما قولك يا موهوب وانابه فهو مشعق وانابه وانثقة واما قولك يا موهوب وانابه عليه
 فهو على فقولك يا موهوب وانابه فقولك يا موهوب وانابه فقولك يا موهوب وانابه فقولك يا موهوب
 وقلت احسنت في العلم ان اجواسمى قالت لاله لاله الله ارفع النكران بعز المعرفة وقلت
 من انتم في حجة الله حجة فلتها فانه اهم اج صجوان وقلت ملائكتي اذ اجدك الحي في منزلة السرة
 فتبسمت وقالت هل رايت وزير ابيوح بسم الملأ وقلت كمالا وضم بصيغة الجر مدح هلا على قلبه
 وقلت في الشيخ وهو من شيا بك وانت فقيم على زهوا وعجا بيا يرض بالثقوى سواد كتابا
 واسمع صوت الراعي بالشيب او اذاع وناعى يا شيخ اعلمت ان الرنبا يسمون ومجالسهم فيها
 ما هو ادع الى فرج الرجم ومنها ما هو فابن الية الشيطان وهو سم العصيان وجميعهم اهل عبرت
 لان انتقال اللسكون لم يلهي من بينهم اخسر ووقع في الملاحة ومن لم يلهي عز خرفا فباز بالسلامة عندها
 والغنمة بها ان لها ان تنصرف في مجلسه فلامنت الى المجلس في افتك ومفاجات ربا مع ما عيبت من
 نزم الشيب الذي لا يدس معه ارتكاب العيما وفتلكة الرب فيم تشك بعز السني الا ان تسقى بكاس
 المنية فلا تنفع حينئذ التوبة والارض العز وقلت لعل ربي وقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت
اعظم الكلى احاطت تشجير حيلة ليمش عم حتى ساروا عليه تخيلهم ورجلهم وركابهم وهو من في
 الكرى ان يوجد وقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت فقلت
 البير لموسى وفوه المهر ومن الرعي فشتت ان ماير الطالاب والمطلوب قال سليمان انه شاعر
 العوارس يرفعون تخيلهم على ظهر الماء كما يرفعون على وجه الارض يتحركون كما هم على الارض وان
 موجه البير لم يعرف الزبر وهو لا يجال بمنزلة الكرى امة التي انهم هذا الله على ابي الخاب محمد لم تذكر

شرح

نواز بها

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كان بعد العشاء اللاحية دخل علينا واذ الله الموضع فبينما ان نسئله فلما
 رجعنا الى البيت سألنا اهلنا وقلنا لهم منى خرج وعندهم ابو بكر البارحة
 فقالوا صلى العتبة وخرج وعادة البلدان تغلق ابوابه بعد المغرب فقال
 يوسف بن يحيى حرقى الثقات ان ابا بكر التوحى مات في مسجد بطبرستان
 واصبح الناس وفتحوا البقعة واخرجوا من قبره فيستامه كذا اذا
 احتفظ به بن ابيهم وطلبوه فلم يجروه فصحوا واعولوا وقالوا لو اراد الله
 بنا خير لتولينا جثمانه من العبر الصالح وكان قبره فينا ورواها **البلد**
تعلو المشهور في العلم والولاية فتيته وحدثنا سيرنا في الملعب بالشيخ
 تواتر عنه انه حقه قبل الهجرة الى بلد في جميع فنون العلم وانه ذهب الى
 المغرب الجواني من المغرب الاقصى في طلب الافادة بعرضه في اموه ونشأه
 ميمر احمد بكاي وطاف جميع بلاد المغرب فلم يجزم بعينه في مسئلة في جميع
 فنون العلم ثم عمل الرحلة الى بلاد الشام فلم يجزم بعينه كذا ولا يعلم عليه
 بل كانوا يفتخرون عنه العلو ثم حج ورجع الى المغرب في حال في بلاد الفخر ور
 حتى لقي الشيخ الجليل القطب الكامل سير محمد بن عبد الرحمن الخليل وقد
 اقبل من بلاد مصر في بلاد المغرب والاقصى وكانت رحلته على راسه في
 الناس الى الاسلاط والمري والام بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر وحمل الناس على
 السنة والنجاب فبقوا في العلم فقال له من ابي اقبلت يا فتى قال له المغرب الاقصى
 وهو مشفق راسي ومخالف فانت فقال ان ارضيات منها فتلعب في مصر سنة
 لا يتفاجح الرضا ثم تقاوت في علم الباكي فوجد الشيخ السير محمد بن عبد الرحمن فر
 ارضي عليه فلابد من ثلاثة سنة في توجها الى المغرب فلما بلغه انه قد اذن له من راسه
 في سنة فمضى في سنة فبلغه في السنة فوجه اليه فلما رآه ونشأه
 وقال له يا ملعون خالفت الكتاب والسنة واجماع الامة بما فعلت
 تحمل عليه ليعتبه به فاشارة اليه الشيخ يا صبيح لسفك راسه في حنة
 في حنة اشارة اليه فصارا على وجهي ما حتى بلغا في قصة على شاكي في الرو
 من حنة في فوجرا فيها الشيخ العاضل السير محمد بن عبد الرحمن فسالهما عن
 فقرهما وشارا في طريقهما فاجبه بما وقع بينه وبين غيره فموت على يديه
 يا ذن الله تعالى فقال ان الله وانما اليه راجعون فقال له اني يا عبد الرحمن انا فر

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