



# A Treatise on Practical and Theoretical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate

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

Oludamini Ogunnaike

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, USA

oo4qw@virginia.edu

## Abstract

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

MADDE YAYIMLANDIKTAN  
SONRA GELEN DOKÜMAN

01 Haziran 2022



## Keywords

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

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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

- 1 The research for this article was funded by grants from the American Philosophical Society and the University of Virginia.
- 2 For an introduction to the history of Usman dan Fodio, his family, jihad, and the Sokoto Caliphate see Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usman Dan Fodio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (New York: Humanities Press, 1967); Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); and Ibraheem Sulaiman, *The African Caliphate: the Life, Works & Teaching of Shaykh Usman dan Fodio (1754–1817)* (London: Diwan Press, 2009).
- 3 Notably, Dan Tafa eulogized and praised his mother and grandmother for their scholarship and sanctity. Of his mother Khadija, Dan Tafa wrote that “She was permanently established in fulfilling every right and traveled the path which led to the ultimate spiritual Goal.” (qtd. in Muḥammad Shareef, *Ilāwat al-muṭālib fī shukr al-wāhib al-muṭīd al-mawāhib* [Maiurno, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, 2013], 66). The great twentieth century Sokoto scholar Waziri Junaydu b. Muḥammad al-Bukhari described Khadija bint Shehu Usman in his *Arf al-rayḥān*: “She was from among the *awliyā'*, and the righteous and humble ascetics. She was among the daughters of the Shehu who made the *hijra* with