

***MADH* Genre in Africa: An Incursion into Ibn Nafi’s Supplicatory Panegyrics to His Sufi Mentor, Shaykh Salahudeen Pelewura**

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Abstract

This article explores the place of *madh* amidst other traditional Arabic poetic themes in Africa with particular reference to Ibn Nafi’s panegyric ode on his *sūfi* mentor. It analyses the salient poetic features of supplicatory panegyric in Nigeria and the extent of its patronage by Yoruba ‘Ulamā. The study proceeds to chronicle the genesis of the fraternity between the poet and his patron. Analysing the structural pattern adopted for the composition, the author discovers that the poem is triggered not only by spiritual impulse but also betrothal connection between the author and his patron.

Keywords: Arabic poetry, Nafi’s supplicatory panegyrics

Introduction

The role played by poetry in the history of mankind cannot be underestimated. It is a major literary genre upholding the basic values and political ideals across cultures (Motoyoshi et al, 1999:222). Reading good poem engenders spiritual refinement, amiable mannerism and well cultivated civility. Before the advent of modern writing literacy, poetry remained the only viable tool for documentation of events and happenings. This was so because of its flexible nature which enhances committing such incidence into memory and its easy transmission from one generation to another. This lofty quality, perhaps informs why Sperl, as quoted by Omotoyoshi et al, describes poetry as being “lyrical and social rather than individualistic”.

Poetry in Nigeria, like other African communities, witnessed a paradigm shift with the coming of Islam whose early propagators doubled as poets. This development led to diversification and bifurcation of Nigerian poetry. While the content and language of Nigerian poetry, prior to the coming of Islam, reflected Afro-cultural traditions, the succeeding period, as postulated by AbdulRahmon and cited by Lawal (2007:5) was inspired by

Nigerians' acquaintance with classical pre-Islamic and Islamic Arabic poetries.

At the beginning, the majority of Arabic poets had access only to six or seven collections of poem known as *Mu'allaqat* of Pre-Islamic poetry through various works on Islam such as *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* (the biography of the prophet) and the religious poetry. This, according to AbdulSalam et al, (2017:26), speaks volume of the influence of both pre-Islamic and Islamic literature on Arabic poets of West Africa, in terms of their poetic techniques and styles. The situation also had its influence on the thematic genre commonly patronised by this set of new poets.

Islam which is a link between this linguistic community and Arabic poetic engagement played a significant role in restraining the tendency of unbridle adoption of the entire forms of poetry patronised in the pre-Islamic era. Some poetic genres such as satire and romantic poems were abdicated on account of their repugnancy to Islamic ideal while some other such as *madh* (Praise) and *fakhr* (Boasting) were adopted with some modification. *Madh* remained the most enduring poetic theme across the Arabised nations. (Ibraeem, 2004:13). Virtually all the Nigerian Arabic poets are fond of its exploration. (Jum'ah & Sadiq, 2012:520). The present study however aims at examining the extent of its patronage in Africa sampling Ibn Nafi *madh* poetics on his matron- Shaykh Salah Pelewura for analysis.

Historic Background of Ibn Nafi'

That renown Yoruba poet, Ibn Nafi' was a descendant of Obalayilumi, a prince of the founding father of the ancient Iwoland situated in the present Osun State, Nigeria. His name is Abdul-Hakim bn AbdulRahim. The sobriquet, Ibn Nafi' on which his popularity later hinged on was taken after his grandfather's name- Nafi', the first Muslim scholar ever evolved in the lineage of Layilumi dynasty. His father, AbdulRahim, a notable *dā'iyyah* and spiritual consultant, had a great influence in making ibn Nafi''s personality. He had the privilege of taking him through the basics of Arabic knowledge right from his birth until he finished his secondary education (AbdulBaqi, 2016: 2).

In one of Ibn Nafi's trips to Lagos, the erstwhile capital city of Nigeria, Ibn Nafi' was privileged to offer Jum'at service at Markaz Agege. The prayer was led by that great Islamic scholar, Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilori. The former got inspired by the latter's *khuṭbah* (Friday sermon) and had his interest in Arabic learning renewed. His father, though, felt enthused by the development, he preferred enrolling under the care of of Shaykh Ahmad Adedimeji, a leading student of Shaykh Adam in Iwo, as a *katātib* (informal) pupil. It was during this short period of hardworking that he started processing

Admission for higher studies in University of Ilorin, Nigeria (AbdulBaqi, 2016:4).

Ibn Nafi' love for his teacher was unparalleled. The reciprocity of such love manifested in his unreserved acquaintance with biological children of Shaykh, some of whom would invite him for private lesson to augment of his studies with their father. He was particularly in company with Dr AbdulHafiz Adeniyi who first taught him *Usul al-Fiqh* (Principle of Islamic Jurisprudence) The latter informed us that the first Arabic ode ever produced by the former was presented to him for vetting and the following stanzas were appended to it:

صحيح ما أتيت به صديقي ++ سليم كما أراه من الخطايا
حكيم في العبارة فقت حتى ++ أتتك لكي تؤدبها المطايا

My friend, fantastic is your composition. It is, based on my assessment, free from errors.

The expression is simple and the lesson instructive, drawing attention even of camels (Ibn Nafi', 1995:2).

The little period spent by Ibn Nafi' with his teacher was judiciously utilised; it really prepared him for further studies of Arabic at tertiary level such that he was adjudged one of the few best graduating students both at departmental and faculty levels. Despite the palpable sway of western ideology on Nigerian educational studies, Ibn Nafi's preconceived impression about Shaykh Adam and his inordinate desire to make him his model still remained intact. Like Shaykh Adam, he decided to carve out his own empire, free from control of any constituted authority. He adopted not only his teaching method but also his *da'wah* methodology. This cultivation was poetically expressed thus:

إذ قدوتي دعوتي هو شيخنا ++ شيخ شيوخ بعصرنا لا نلهب
أعني بذا شيخ الألوري آدم ++ عن نهجه وطريقه لا نذهب

...My model is our Shaykh, teachers of our time... who cannot be downplayed

I mean Shaykh Al-Aluri Adam whose path and methodology cannot be underrated. (Ibn Nafi', 1995:3)

The inspiration of Ibn Nafi', according to Shaykh Baniyamin, was not drawn only from Al-Aluri but also from his father. He remarks:

Ibn Nafi', like his father enjoys high degree of methodical presentation of idea, highly melodious and very shrewd in application of waka (indigenous Islamic poem). He can be described as an archive for the presentation of artefacts being orally transmitted from ages. (Interview with Alh.

Uthman)

He was skilled and talented in Yoruba poetic artistry. His extemporaneous composition of Yoruba *waka* largely aided his eventual development of Arabic poetics. Poetic themes found in profusion in his *dīwān* include: *al-Shi‘r al-Ijtimā‘ī*, (social poem) *Al-Rithā’* (threnody), *Al-Shi‘r Al-Ta‘līmī* (pedagogy), and *Al-Madh‘* (panegyrics) which this paper sets to explore. One of the ardent followers of Ibn Nāfi‘ informs us that poetic versification remains a cardinal hobby of him. A great deal of his Arabic odes got lost; some original scripts entrusted to visiting researchers were not released. So far, the last count of his poem recovered, as at his last breath was 500 items. However, the comment of Al-Khidr on his socio-cultural, *da‘wah* and intellectual activities provides subsequent researchers a vivid picture of his esteemed personality. He writes:

امتاز أسلوبه الخطابي في الدعوة بقوة التعبير البلاغي، ناهيك عن حلاوة صوته في تلاوة القرآن الكريم وقراءة النصوص الشعرية العربية، وفي الإنشاد الديني وقرض شعر "واكا" باللهجة المحلية، كما منح الله سرعة البديهة وقوة الذاكرة... قدرته الشعرية كانت محل إشادة وتنويه من الجميع، وكان يقرض الأشعار بالعربية على مستوى جيّد، وكما يرتجل قرض الشعر العربي في مناسبات كثيرة، وحدث بيني وبينه مراسلات واتصالات شعرية ونثرية خلال الثمانينات والتسعينات...

His *da‘wah* style is noted for rhetorical expression, coupled with melodious voice in the recitation of the glorious Qur’an and elegant rendition of Arabic poetic text as well as religious songs and *waka* composition in local dialects. He was talented with high intuition and strong memory. His imaginative power of poetics was superb and minds’ engaging. He composed good Arabic poem and often did that extempore in a number of occasions. I had both prosaic and poetic correspondences with him around 80s and 90s. (AbdulBaqi, 2000:1)

Arabic panegyrics: its concept and socio-cultural functions

Madh‘ is an Arabic term known in English parlance as act of praise and encomium showering. It is termed in literary domain as panegyric/eulogy. (Arabic English Dictionary: 1994:1054). It is one of the literary themes that stand the test of time across socio-political and religious ages. This literary genre treads not only poetic path but also had its way in prosaic realm.

كان... المدح أوسع أغراض الشعر العربي انتشارا في العصور الغابرة وحصل على ستين في المائة كثرة وجودة بين الأغراض

الأخرى، ولم يرزق أحد بعناية الشعراء والأدباء كمثل عنايتهم بفن
المدح من الأيام الطويلة

Panegyric is the most patronised and widely explored Arabic poetic genre in the past ages. It is rated 60% compared to other poetic genres and in view of its quality and quantity, as no poet or literati in the annals of history is bereft of attention to it (Al-'Ubaydi:2006:43).

This literary genre can be traced to royal court of *Jahiliyyah* (Stekevych 1999:162). It later developed to poem of conversion from which social Islamic mainstreaming poetry evolved. Of what distinguishes *madh* from other poetic themes of pre-Islamic era is that *madh* is somewhat inclusive of elements of other motifs. For instance, when Arab extolled the virtue of their clan particularly on the attainment of victory, good gesture, boldness and courage in the battle field they implore *fakhr* as poetic theme. *Fakhr*, aligning with the conclusion of Goled, as cited by Lawal(2007), is hardly achieved without recourse to *madh*.

Some literary Traditions have it that the exploration of *madh* during the era of *Manādharah*, *Ghashāshinah* and *Kindah* leaders assumed another dimension. It turned to a profession for which poets earned their livings particularly at the tail end of pre-Islamic era. Despite the paradigm shift, there were some poets such as Imru' Qays bn Hajar who did not subscribe to the development in spite of its attendant impacts on the refinement of the arts of poetry. Attesting to this, Ahmad Shawqi says:

...إن هذا الاتجاه دفع الشعراء المكتسبين بالشعر إلى أن يحرصوا
بقصائدهم بمثابة بالغة حتى تتحقق لهم ما يريدون من التأثير على
ممدوحهم

This new approach actually pushed those who earned living through their poem to do more in refining their odes in order to be more impactful on the supplicants' *mamduh* the praised (Al-'Ubaydi:2006:).

Notable among those in this category are: Umayyat bn Abi Salt, Al-Nabigah bn Adh-Dhibyani, Al-A'sha, Zuhayr bn Abi Sulma bn Thabit and Bashar bn Abi Khazim. It is note worthy that the coming of Islam enforced a paradigm shift on the Arabic poetry. The great deal of poetics with high patronage and flourishment had an encounter with Islamic tenet and were therefore commanded. Themes such as *ghazal al-Ibāhī* (erotic poems) and *hijā'* (satire) were condemned while some others like *wasf* (descriptive poem), *rithā'* (threnody) had to be repackaged to be in tune with Islamic precept (Ibraheem, 2014:3).

Supplicatory Panegyric Origin and Development

Supplicatory ode is termed as a subgenre of Arabic eulogy. It is triggered by a number of factors among which is seeking forgiveness as in the case of Nabighah who had an affair with Lakhmid king al-Nu'man - his patron and who, having composed *madh* ode on him got him re-instated. Similar to that was al-Burdah poem of praise composed by Ka'b bin Zuhayr on the Prophet on account of seeking the pleasure of Allah. Another popular reason for the composition is to request for cure as demonstrated by Stekevych. He writes:

Despite the socio-religious value of the motif and the poets' penchant for its rendition, it recorded a relatively low patronage during the prophetic and the classical eras compared to what obtained in the post classical period known as 'Asr al-Inhita' Decadence period (Stekevych,1999:162)

With the passage of time, certain instances were noticed in the art of *madh* composition by modern literati. The interconnection between the panegyric and elegy unravelled in the Hassan bn Thābit elegy on the Prophet served as a platform for the emergence of *madh* subgenre known as supplicatory panegyric. Elegy, as observed by Stekevych, (1999:163), can be viewed as a hybrid between elegy and panegyric; it can, to be precise, be termed as supplicatory panegyric ode, that serves as transitional poem towards the formation of *madh nabawi* (Praise of the Prophet)

Panegyrics in Nigeria Arabic Literary Production

Galadanci, in his research into the efflorescence of Arabic literary tradition in Nigeria, categorised Nigeria Arabic poets into two. He placed first the talented individuals in the indigenous poetic artistry. This set of poets, as Galadanci argued, had to re-channel such skill to Arabic literary production on learning the language. The second category is a medley of Arabic learners who later discovered their poetic potentials through Arabic prosodic training (Galadanci,1993:147).

Given the linguistic antithesis between Nigeria and Arab milieus, the Arabic poetic matrix of the two linguistic communities is incongruent. While the Arab's poetic ideology was normatively a dictate of their cultural matrix, the Nigerian poetic inclination was induced by Islam which originally brought them in contact to the language. It was, having attained an appreciable level of Arabic and Islamic education that they started producing Arabic poems. This predilection is couched in the words of Lawal (2007:6) "Nigerian Arabic poets are first scholars; they were inspired to converse in Arabic not only by their literary environment but their preoccupation to reading Arabic literature.

This religious factor informs why Nigerian Arabic poets had to pattern their poetic genre along such poetic themes goaded on religious basis such as *wa'z* and *Al-Irshad* (Admonition), *Jihad* (Struggle on the path of Allah) and *Al-Ta'lim* (Pedagogy). Even, when they paid attention to themes with social leverage such as *Madh* (Elegy), *Ritha* (Threnody) and *Hija* (Satire), they still observed some elements of religious caution. (Ibraheem, 2014:13).

The poetic involvement of 'Ulama' of this region was, according to AbdulSamad (2017:376), in quash-perspective of what obtained in Arab world. His words

“The values and ideals for which the Arabic poets of this region praised their subjects were of little difference from those for which Arab elsewhere wrote panegyrics. Qualities such as justice, loyalty, courage, generosity, nobility, pride, and protection of neighbours were attributes that Arab poets glorified.

By the 19th and 20th centuries, Arabic poets in west Africa had completely assimilated the Arabic language. This, as further argued by AbdulSalam(2017:), “gave them the ability to compose poetry in Arabic language in a way that was not much different from that of the Arab peninsula”

Shaykh Adam informs us that despite the unparallel development achieved by Nigerians particularly in the modern period, surfeit of traditional themes still found expression in modern literary engagements. Of such poetic themes, *Madh* remains the most enduring not only among the Arabic learners but also the consummate scholars. Uthman-Kamu observes that the genre has always been the initiating point of poetic attempt of majority of Nigerian budding poets who versified poem in appreciating their teachers (Uthman-Kamu, personal interview. 20-5-2017). Among the consummate scholars with admirable poem on eulogy are Shaykh Adam Al-Aluri, Shaykh Mudathir AbdulSalam of Ibadan, Shaykh Muahaliyy Badrudeen of Iwo, Shaykh (Dr) Daud Adekilekun and a host of others. It was this set of scholars that expounded the scope beyond student-teachers circle; they explored it to register their admiration for administrative performances of the monarchs and to welcome their co-‘*Ulamā* paying them visit.

With the coming of Isa Alabi, a Nigerian poet with African leverage, *madh* genre assumed another dimension; it extends to phenomenological instances, corporate organisations and individual philanthropists with profound impact on the society. Prominent among contemporary poets known for this innovation is Zakawi of Ilorin, Zambaki of Iwo and host of others. Ibn Nafi is another contemporary poet. His poem is selected for analysis here for two purposes: one, his uncommon literary style which ought to be documented for posterity; and two, to arrest his work from possible decay.

Digging down into Ibn Nafi' Connection with Shaykh Salahudeen Pelewura

Even though Ibn Nafi' was not a poetic profiteer, his poetic composition on *madh* motif forms a great part of his poetic genre. Besides his *madh* driven poems on some individual personalities based on their untainted profiles in their respective areas of calling, several other poetic motifs of his were permeated with some elements of *madh*. The motive for such composition has always been, either to congratulate, appreciate, commemorate and to encourage. Of the men of high profile eulogised by Ibn Nafi' was Shaykh Salahudeen Pelewura-his Sufi mentor. Ibn Nafi' intercourse with his mentor transcends religio-sufist connection.

Ibn Nafi' was more of a *daiyyah* than a Sufist. Even though he claimed to be a sufist, he neither had *Sawiyyah* nor was he a regular attendant of any. What perhaps brought him in contact with Shaykh Pelewura was his penchant for *Asrar* (spiritual power) for which the latter was known. Ibn Nafi', according to Sahibul-Bayyan, prior to his contact with the Pelewura, had got initiated into Tijaniyyah order through one Shaykh Nurul-Hakeen of Ilorin. Some mysterious performances of the latter which, to the former, were inexplicable and repugnant to the provision of *Shari'ah* made him to denounce the order (Sahibul-Bayan, personal interview. 20-5-2017). To Ibn Nafi', both *Shariah* and *Sufism* are two sides of the same coin. They are synthetic rather than antithetic. The following two stanzas of poem further explain the position:

إن الذي في دينه يتصوّف ## يجري هواه وراء ما في السنة
ويرى شريعة وصلة للغاية ## ويرى الحقيقة غاية في السيرة

Whoever practices *Sufism* as part of his religion should let his will follow the dictate of *sunnah* such should consider *Shariah* as a means to an end as he sees *al-haqiqah* as an end of his journey (Ibn Nafi', 1998:2).

After Ibn Nafi's demise, Shaykh Faruq, popularly known as Al-Miskinubillah, on the occasion of Mawlud al-Nabiyy hosted by one Ustadh Hakim Agbele of Iwo town, laid a claim to having initiated Ibn Nafi' to *Tijaniyyah* order. The story was found amazing by Ibn Nafi' followers in attendance; it was never heard of from their patron, even by a mere allusion. The strangeness of the story, in our opinion, does not hinder its veracity. Ibn Nafi' might not incline to share the story for personal reasons. The contact of the latter with the former, as opined by Alhaji Uthman Sutti was for the purpose of amassing *naql* (spiritual power). Still pushed by his inordinate desire to acquire *naql*, he finally got connected with Shaykh Salahudeen with whom he stayed glued until he breathed his last. The unbridled cling of Ibn Nafi' to Shaykh Salahudeen who re-introduced him into the order is

reminiscent of his behavioural pattern and modest way of life, which is in tandem with his parental and educational upbringing (Sutti, personal interview. 20-6-2017). Of the pleasing events frequently mentioned by Ibn Nafi' about his mentor is his timely wading to the rift between him and one of his followers. The incidence is poetically registered thus:

من بعد أن نزغت أبا ليس أخي ## بيني وبينك أحمد الله الذي
ردّ المحبة كي نسبحه معا ## شكرا لشيخ مرشدي ومن الذي
يرجون إصلاحا لذات البين فاذ ## كر قول ربك في الهدى ومن الذي
After the *Iblis* had caused the rift between me and
my brother, I thank Allah
Who has restored back the love, for us to glorify
Him together. Thanks to my Shaykh, my mentor
and other who attempted at mending the crack. So
remember the word of your Lord in the Qur'an
"that enjoins mediation"(Ibn Nafi', 1998:2).

The unpretentious peace-loving character of Shaykh really walked into the heart of Ibn Nafi' that, despite his stern nature, he submitted himself to him totally. He sees his mentor as a pragmatic symbol of co-optimization of *Shariah* with *Haqiqah*. Ibn Nafi' relationship got further concretised on the former's hook with the latter's daughter. He describes such relationship thus:

كانت مصاهرتي لشيخى بغيتي ## كعلي باب العلم صهر المصطفى
My target is to have a marital relation with my
Shaykh, like that of Ali, the gate of knowledge, the
in-law of the chosen (servant) (Ibn Nafi', 1998:3).

These multidimensional factors, put together, formed the Shaykh's inebriated love for his patron on whom he composed a number of *qasaidah* among which is *Haiyyah* that the present study seeks to analyse.

On the Content and Structural pattern of Ibn Nafi's Panegyrics

In this section, we focus on the *haiyyah* ode versified mainly to praise Shaykh Salahudeen Pelewura- a notable Tijaniyyah figure in Yorubaland, settled in Iwo township, Osun state of Nigeria. Recourse, for robust analysis, shall be made to other *madh* driven poems of the author with some elements of *madh* on the subject.

Al-Haiyyah contains just sixteen lines with a structure different very slightly from the model described by Ibn Qutaybah al-Daynawari and Ibn Rashiq al-Qayrawanī in their independent studies of poetics of pre-Islamic period. The Arabic poetry of the period, as postulated by the two authorities, begins characteristically "with an introduction professing love, followed by a lamentation of the ruins left behind by loved ones, such as traces of ditch and tent pegs, camel dung and ashes from the cooking pit of an old campsite..."(AbdulSamad et al, 2004:316)

However, despite the commonness of the style in the two literary periods regarded as inspirational poetic source of West Africa Arabic poets, Ibn Nafi's poetic composition ignores the model. He never, even for once, adopted it in any of his *qasidah* including those with love motifs composed to woo his second wife, at the period of courtship. Also, that African induced model which, in the study of AbdulRahmon, (1985:56) is referred to as Islamic doxology, did not appeal to the poet in this panegyric motif, even though he applied it elsewhere.

Panegyric versification is commonly classified into three troupes: the opening, the kernel of the composition and prayer. Our incursion into Ibn Nafi's supplicatory panegyric reveals that his style differs very slightly from the statuo-quo. Instead of opening the ode with Islamic doxology, he opens it with 'irfān (appreciation) motif triggered on deep internalization over unimaginable series of goodies attained from his mentor. Such goodies were considered weightier than what any word can adequately express. He says:

بما أشكر الإحسان ربّي تولّته ## فأنت شكور عالم أنت الله
 فكيف أوافي الشكر إحسان شيخنا ## لسانى به عي بل الشاكر الله
 أفوض أمر الشيخ صلاح ديننا ## إلى ربّه الهادي تباركت الله
 By what could I appreciate (my Shaykh)! O my Lord!
 help me do it.

You are appreciative, of knowledge, You are the Lord.

How possible to thank you enough for being good to our Shaykh! I am indeed tongue-tied but, on our behalf, Allah better does it.

I entrust the affairs of our Shaykh Salah to his Lord, the Guide. O Allah, your are Sublime (Ibn Nafi', 1998:2).

This introductory stanza is very pregnant in meaning; it points among other things to the lofty position that the poet places his Shaykh to an extent of charging Allah –the Creator with responsibility of reciprocating his benefactor- the created. The lofty attributes of Allah employed by the poet, such as *Shakurun* 'Alimun and the application of rhetorical device of confinement *alqasr* is also instructive. It evokes a notion that the link between the duo is beyond *Shaykh/Muridi* connection. This approach also appears as evolving from Yoruba matrix; a typical Yoruba man often considers closeness to elderly ones as an opportunity to be cautiously maintained. When favoured by an elderly one, the young one considered appreciating such gesture, at personal level, inadequate. This often lead to the latter asking the former's equals to express such appreciation on his behalf. This cultural norm informs the commonness of such respectful expressions among the young ones: "e bami dupe lowo wo gidigidi" Help me thank them so much and "a mo riri won

gan” We are really appreciative of them. That Ibn Nafi’s declares that no being can appreciate his Shaykh enough is an indication of the former’s *fana*’ in the latter. By this token, the poet regards his mentor as deserving all forms of praise (Ibn Nafi’, 1998:2). He says:

اصلاح كل المدح عرفان بره ## ومن شكر الإحسان يشكره الله
 Salah deserves all sorts of *madh* in appreciation of
 his goodness; whoever appreciates good gesture,
 Allah appreciates him.

Unlike those that Qur’an describes in (Q3:188) as *wa yuhibuna an yuhmadu bima lam yaf’alu* (those who want to be praised for what they did not work), his mentor never wanted to be praised. Ibn Nafi’s insistence on the need to praise him is hinged on his belief that the only means to reciprocate the gesture being enjoyed from his benefactor is to praise him. Pelewura is a well created being. He was as if, using the words of Hassan bn Thabit in his praise of the Prophet, created as he wished; he was Godly, a man of influence and affluence who was always ready to assuage the needy.

The poet, of all the illuminating aspects of his mentor’s life, delved mainly on his spiritual power and uncommon usage of *asrar*- the quality which initially attracted him to the corridor of spiritual realm. One of the common prayer books in Tijaniyyah fold of sufism is *Hirz Yamani*. *Hirz* and *Yamani* are two conjugated words meaning a Yemen Protection or a means of protection authored in Yemen. This book of prayer is commonly referred to as *sayfi* meaning a sword.

Among the insinuations regarding the functionality of this coded prayer is that its ardent user, though always well fortified against all forms of spiritual attack, often live in penury and pennilessness (Uthman-Kamu, Personal interview. 20-6-2017). It is often believed that the tongue of its constant user has to be always guarded from unnecessary utterances as any statement he utters comes to effect. Shaykh Uthman Kamu informs us that the same coded prayer is of multifarious functions including moneymaking and that Shaykh Pelewura is one of the respected individuals in Yoruba land for the knowledge of special usage of *Hirz Yaman*. The popularity of Shaykh Pelewura in the realm of spirituality, perhaps informs Ibn Nafi closeness to him.

The poet identified three major benefits drawn by his mentor from constant use of *hirz yamani*, to include among others: being drawn to the *hadhrah* (presence of Allah), free admittance into the cadre of the saints, unhindered access to the secret of Allah and a special light to blind the eyes of enemies.

Ibn Nafi’, having extolled the virtues of his mentor, proceeded to enumerate series of socio-spiritual benefits being enjoyed for being a sincere

follower of him, which include fulfilment of the need, being secured from the evils and human machination through the recitation of his *hizb*, being accommodated and getting connected with Allah.

The poet, in reciprocation of this good gesture, concluded the *madh* section with delicately lyric verse couched in prayer not only for his mentor but also the entire family of his. He prayed Allah to give him all his heart desires and that Allah should care for him as he did for the Prophet and Abubakre while in the cave of era. He then prayed for his children and all his followers.

Conclusion

The paper examined the extent of patronage of *madh* as poetic genre in Africa with special focus on the Ibn Nafi's versified encomium on his patron- Shaykh Salah Pelewura- an Iwo-based *sufi* figure. Its searchlight was beamed on the socio-economic and political roles it played in various Arab literary periods in general and Africa in particular where it served and still serving as a springboard for Yoruba budding poets. Ibn Nafi's approach to this piece of poem differs very slightly from both the common *nasib* (prelude) characterising Arab poetry and what is known as doxology in African Arabic poetry. Rather, it takes off with words of '*irfan* (words of appreciation) to his mentor imploring Allah to grant him good consequence in order to enjoy the rewards of his good deeds in the terrestrial world.

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Interview

17. Interview with Alhaji Adam Titilope Sahibul-Bayan at Iwo Central Mosque, Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria, 10/03/2017
18. Interview with Alhaji Uthman-Kamu Nafi in his office, Department of Arabic Studies, College of Education, Ila-Orangun, Osun State, Nigeria, 25/05/2017
19. Interview with Alhaji Sutti Uthman in his residence, at Lolo compound, Molete, Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria, 10/03/2017