

The Formation of Panegyric Discourse in Imam Sharaf al-Din al-Busiri's *Mīmiyyah*: A Reading of Its Poetic Structure

Dr. Chenak fadila*

University of Algiers 2 – Abou El Kacem Saadallah, Algeria

Email: fadila.chennak@univ-alger2.dz

Received: 3 July 2026 | Accepted: 2 September 26 | Published: 31 October 2026

Abstract—This study examines the *Mīmiyyah* of Imam Sharaf al-Din Muhammad ibn Saʿid al-Busiri as a poetic text that combines praise of the Prophet with the Sufi spiritual experience. It seeks to identify the manifestations of Prophetic love and the paths of spiritual purification within the poem's intellectual and artistic structure. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical method, examining poetic passages in relation to Qur'anic and Prophetic references and the literature of Sunni Sufism. The findings show that love constitutes the central axis around which the other Sufi stations are organized. The poem's structure follows a semantic progression that begins with ardent longing and culminates in emulation of the noble Messenger, while making artistic use of imagery, intertextuality, and rhythm. The study also demonstrates that the *Mīmiyyah* achieves a balance between literary beauty and doctrinal discipline, a quality that has contributed to its longevity and enduring presence in Islamic culture.

Keywords—*Imam Sharaf al-Din Muhammad ibn Saʿid al-Busiri; Mīmiyyah; Prophetic praise poetry; Sunni Sufism; Prophetic love; spiritual purification; intertextuality.*

Résumé:

Cette étude examine la *Mīmiyyah* de l'Imam Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Saʿīd al-Būsīrī en tant que texte poétique combinant l'éloge du Prophète et l'expérience spirituelle soufie. Elle cherche à identifier les manifestations de l'amour prophétique et les voies de la purification spirituelle au sein de la structure intellectuelle et artistique du poème. L'étude adopte une méthode descriptive et analytique, examinant les passages poétiques en relation avec les références coraniques et prophétiques ainsi que la littérature du soufisme sunnite. Les résultats montrent que l'amour constitue l'axe central autour duquel s'organisent les autres stations soufiennes. La structure du poème suit une progression sémantique qui commence par une ardente nostalgie et culmine dans l'émulation du noble Messenger, tout en faisant un usage artistique de l'imagerie, de l'intertextualité et du rythme. L'étude démontre également que la *Mīmiyyah* réalise un équilibre entre beauté littéraire et discipline doctrinale, une qualité qui a contribué à sa longévité et à sa présence durable dans la culture islamique.

Mots-clés : Imam Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Saʿīd al-Būsīrī ; *Mīmiyyah* ; poésie d'éloge prophétique ; soufisme sunnite ; amour prophétique ; purification spirituelle ; intertextualité.

INTRODUCTION:

Prophetic praise occupies a distinctive position in Arabic-Islamic literature. It was not merely a poetic genre intended to commend the Messenger of God (peace be upon him); over time, it developed into a religious and aesthetic discourse that combines emotional sincerity with depth of vision and expresses the Muslim community's attachment to its noble Prophet and its inspiration by his values and ideals.

As the spiritual experience evolved, this poetic art acquired new dimensions. The poem no longer confined itself to enumerating the Prophet's virtues and recalling his miracles; it became a vehicle for expressing a profound spiritual experience in which love intersects with knowledge, feeling with belief, and contemplation with spiritual discipline. Prophetic praise thus became a path toward self-purification and the refinement of conduct.

In this context, Imam Sharaf al-Din Muhammad ibn Sa'id al-Busiri (608–696 AH/1212–1296 CE) emerged as one of the leading figures of Prophetic praise in the Arabic-Islamic heritage. He developed a distinctive poetic experience combining powerful style, emotional ardour, and a profound yet moderate spiritual outlook. These qualities are particularly evident in his *Mīmiyyah*, *al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah fī Madh Khayr al-Bariyyah* (also known as *al-Burdah*), which acquired an exceptional place in the Muslim cultural and devotional imagination. It has been the subject of numerous commentaries and has been transmitted across generations in both the eastern and western parts of the Muslim world, becoming one of the poems most frequently encountered in scholarly gatherings, devotional assemblies, and celebrations of the Prophetic biography.¹

The *Mīmiyyah*'s value derives not only from its widespread fame but also from the nature of its artistic and intellectual construction. It is not a panegyric in the conventional sense; rather, it is a poetic text in which Sufi stations intertwine with Qur'anic and Prophetic authority. Love becomes an entry point to purification, the struggle against the self becomes a means of realizing servitude to God, and emulation of the Messenger (peace be upon him) remains the goal that orders all the poem's meanings. The *Mīmiyyah* therefore transcends emotional expression and becomes an educational project linking faith with conduct, and artistic beauty with doctrinal commitment.

This study begins from the observation that most studies of the *Mīmiyyah* have focused on its literary merit or its place in Prophetic praise, whereas the poem's Sufi structure—its internal progression and the unity of its spiritual stations—has not received the attention it warrants. This is especially true of the relationship between Prophetic love and the paths of spiritual purification within a moderate Sunni Sufi framework. The study therefore asks: How did Imam Sharaf al-Din Muhammad ibn Sa'id al-Busiri construct his Sufi experience in the *Mīmiyyah*? And how did his use of Qur'anic and Prophetic references shape his poetic vision and give it an educational and doctrinal dimension?

To address these questions, the study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach and draws on techniques of textual analysis. It examines poetic passages in their religious and aesthetic contexts and identifies the functions they perform within the poem's overall structure. This approach makes it possible to highlight the coherence and unity of the Sufi experience and to explain the artistic characteristics that have made the *Mīmiyyah* an enduring text in the history of Arabic-Islamic literature.

The study pursues several objectives, most notably identifying the Sufi elements that organize the *Mīmiyyah*'s intellectual structure; analysing the presence of spiritual stations in its poetic fabric; demonstrating the influence of Islamic sources on the poet's artistic vision; and explaining the educational and aesthetic role the poem has played in shaping religious awareness and literary taste across the centuries.

Having established the research problem and its aims, the discussion now turns to the principal manifestations of the Sufi experience in al-Busiri's Mīmīyyah. By tracing its spiritual stations and examining their educational and aesthetic dimensions, the analysis seeks to clarify the distinctive character of this text within the tradition of spiritually inflected Prophetic praise.

Section One: The Sufi Experience and the Stations of the Path (Love, Self-Struggle, and Repentance)

The Mīmīyyah rests on an integrated Sufi vision that is expressed not only in its doctrinal content but also in the artistic structure that accommodates that content. The spiritual experience becomes a poetic system in which love, purification, emulation, and intimate supplication overlap within a coherent network of meanings.

In Sufi thought, love lies at the heart of the relationship between the servant and the Lord. Love for the Prophet (peace be upon him) is a natural extension of that love, as it is the fruit of sincere faith and a sign of complete adherence to his example. Al-Busiri does not depict love merely as an emotional state; he reconstructs it within an educational framework in which it becomes the starting point for reforming conduct and disciplining the self. This accords with the Sunni understanding that the truth of love is demonstrated through complete emulation: spiritual reality is not separated from the Sacred Law, nor feeling from action.

Imam al-Busiri therefore does not treat love as an incidental topic in the Mīmīyyah. Instead, he builds the poem's intellectual structure around it, making it the point of departure for the other spiritual stations: struggle against the self, repentance, fear, and hope, culminating in complete emulation of the Messenger (peace be upon him). The Mīmīyyah should thus be read not simply as a poem of praise but as a spiritual journey that moves the self from the intensity of feeling to purity of conduct, and from emotional response to the station of purification.

The poet opens with a verse that conveys the sincerity of longing. He draws on the convention of the amorous prelude in Arabic poetry but empties it of its purely sensual implication and gives it a spiritual meaning:

"Is it from remembering neighbours at Dhū Salam that you mingled tears flowing from your eye with blood?"²

At first glance, this opening may seem to continue the traditional structure of the Arabic ode. A closer reading, however, reveals that the poet is not merely nostalgic for abandoned dwellings. Rather, he makes tears the language of spiritual love and a symbol of yearning for the Prophetic presence. The tears are not simply the result of human separation; they arise because the heart is filled with love until the body gives expression to what overflows from the soul. The opening thus becomes a psychological gateway to a Sufi experience grounded in longing for Muhammadan perfection and in the desire to draw closer to the model in which servitude to God reaches its fullest expression.

He reinforces this meaning in the following lines:

"Were it not for love, you would not weep over a trace of a dwelling, nor lose sleep at the mention of the ban tree and the landmark.

How can you deny love after the impartial witnesses of tears and illness have testified against you?"³

The poet uses a rhetorical question to assert that true love cannot be concealed, because its effects appear both outwardly and inwardly. Tears and sickness are not merely rhetorical images; they bear witness to a profound emotional experience that transforms the lover and reshapes his perception of himself and the world. This imagery conveys a Sufi understanding in which sincere love engenders humility and self-abasement and frees the heart from worldly attachments, making it more receptive to the light of guidance.

The feeling reaches its height in the following line:

“Longing has inscribed two lines of tears and emaciation on your cheeks, like safflower and anemone.”⁴

Al-Busiri transforms the lover's suffering into a vivid poetic tableau. The effects of sleeplessness and wasting away take visible form in a precise sensory image. Its value, however, lies not only in its aesthetic quality but also in the sincerity of the spiritual experience it conveys. From a Sufi perspective, pain is not an end in itself; rather, it is a natural consequence of a great love that takes possession of the heart and impels its bearer to examine and elevate the self.

Love here exceeds emotional intensity and becomes an educational station: love has no value if it does not produce adherence, and longing is meaningless unless it is accompanied by following the beloved's path. Sufi scholars have therefore maintained that sincere love bears the fruit of obedience. Whoever truly loves the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) should display the effects of that love in conduct and character. Love is not a claim repeated by the tongue; it is a practical commitment that translates the truth of faith into action. In the Mīmiyyah, love is consequently the beginning, rather than the end, of a long process of spiritual refinement.

This conception is consistent with the Shadhili school, which influenced al-Busiri. Its understanding of Sufism combines inward purity with adherence to the Sacred Law and connects spiritual experience with action, and love with emulation. This explains why the poet does not merely describe his feelings but makes them the starting point for reforming and disciplining the self. The poem therefore moves naturally from emotional intensity to reflection on the human self: a heart filled with love for the Messenger must first struggle against its own desires and free itself from their domination if it is to become worthy of that love.

Al-Busiri's movement from speaking about love to speaking about the self is not arbitrary; it is required by the nature of the Sufi experience itself. However intense love may become, it remains a claim that is incomplete unless it produces self-discipline and the reform of conduct. The poet leaves the realm of emotional response and enters the realm of spiritual education, affirming that the path to God begins inwardly and that the first field of struggle is the self, which the Qur'an describes as inclined to command evil because it is drawn toward desires and the promptings of passion.

This transition shows that the poet understands purification of the self not as a stage that follows love but as its natural fruit. When the heart is filled with love for the Messenger, it seeks to imitate his character and to free itself from everything that obstructs complete emulation. The following verse therefore functions as a concise educational principle that captures the Sunni Sufi approach to disciplining the self:

“The self is like a child: if you leave it, it grows attached to nursing; if you wean it, it will be weaned.”⁵

This is among the best-known lines of the Mīmiyyah, owing to the simplicity of its image and the depth of its meaning. The poet employs an extended simile, likening the self to a child who becomes accustomed to whatever habits are instilled in it. If left to its inclinations, it grows more attached to what harms it; if trained in patience and self-restraint, it learns virtue and becomes accustomed to it. The image does more than display eloquence: it establishes an educational view in which the self can be reformed when guided and disciplined. Upright conduct is not simply an innate trait; it is the fruit of sustained effort and perseverance.

This poetic construction suggests that struggling against the self is not an end in itself. It is a means of restraining the domination of desire so that the self becomes more receptive to the light of guidance. For al-Busiri, Sufi conduct is therefore a project of inner reform, not a call to withdraw from life or neglect its legitimate requirements.

The image also has a clear Qur'anic dimension, for it accords with the verse: "As for whoever feared standing before his Lord and restrained the self from its desires, Paradise will indeed be his refuge" (Qur'an 79:40–41).⁶ It also resonates with the Sufi teaching that struggling against the self is the true gateway to refining the heart, since the heart cannot become pure while the self remains captive to its inclinations. Comparing the self to a child is thus not merely an artistic choice; it expresses an understanding of moral education as a gradual process based on discipline rather than coercion, and continuity rather than temporary emotional resolve.

Imam al-Busiri does not merely diagnose the problem; he also outlines the remedy:

***"Turn its desire aside, and beware of giving it control;
for when desire takes control, it deafens—or brings deafness."***⁷

This verse rests on a careful contrast between reason and desire. When desire takes command of the self, insight is impaired and the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood weakens. The imperative "turn aside" stresses that self-discipline is not merely an emotional state but a deliberate decision requiring constant vigilance and self-monitoring. The expression concerning deafness suggests that desire does not simply corrupt judgement; it also disables the inward faculties of hearing and sight, leaving a person captive to impulses and unable to recognize realities.

These two verses show that al-Busiri belongs to a Sunni Sufi tradition in which the Sacred Law is the standard for conduct. Spiritual struggle does not mean torturing or depriving the self; it means guiding it toward moderation and subjecting its desires to the authority of reason and faith. The depiction of the self in the Mīmīyyah therefore differs from some Sufi conceptions characterized by extreme asceticism: the poet calls for education and correction, not annihilation or a rupture with the needs of human nature.

In the Mīmīyyah, the struggle against the self links the station of love to the station of repentance. The more a person recognizes his weakness, the more deeply he feels his need for God's mercy and realizes that perfection does not lie in claiming freedom from error but in continually returning to God. The poet accordingly shifts to an address to the self marked by hope:

***"O self, do not despair because of a grave lapse;
major sins, in the face of forgiveness, are like minor slips."***⁸

The Sufi experience reaches one of its most compelling moments here. Having called the self to self-accounting and discipline, the poet does not leave it imprisoned in guilt; instead, he opens the door of hope and emphasizes that God's mercy is greater than all sins. This balance characterizes Sunni Sufism: fear must not turn into despair, and hope must not become an excuse for negligence. The believer travels toward God between fear and hope, guided by the divine words: "Tell My servants that I am indeed the All-Forgiving, the Most Merciful, and that My punishment is the painful punishment" (Qur'an 15:49–50).⁹

This gradual construction of the Sufi experience leads to the station of repentance, which is not separate from the struggle against the self but its natural outcome. As people become more aware of their true condition, they recognize their shortcomings and feel their continuing need for divine mercy. Repentance in the Mīmīyyah thus extends from love: whoever truly loves the Prophet seeks to follow his path in purifying the heart, correcting deeds, and renewing the covenant with God. Al-Busiri does not regard repentance as a passing response to a moment of regret; he presents it as a continuous spiritual state through which faith is renewed and the self rises whenever it recognizes its weakness and incapacity.

Repentance in the Mīmīyyah therefore goes beyond regret for a sin and becomes a continuing awareness of the need to review oneself and renew one's relationship with God. It is linked to self-accounting and spiritual struggle, both foundations of the wayfarer's formation. In this context, the poet addresses the self once again:

***“O self, do not despair because of a grave lapse;
major sins, in the face of forgiveness, are like minor slips.”***¹⁰

The line is built on a subtle paradox: it combines acknowledgement of the gravity of sin with certainty in the breadth of divine mercy. It neither minimizes disobedience nor closes the door to hope. This balance reflects a deep awareness of human nature. The self needs fear to awaken it lest it persist in heedlessness, and it needs hope lest it surrender to despair. The vocative “O self” carries the implications of self-accounting and reassessment, as though the poet were conducting an inward dialogue with himself and urging himself to rise after a fall rather than yield to it.

This vision is consistent with the Qur’anic conception that places hope alongside action: “Say, ‘O My servants who have transgressed against themselves, do not despair of the mercy of God. Indeed, God forgives all sins’” (Qur’an 39:53).¹¹ It also accords with Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali’s view that sincere repentance is not merely a phrase uttered by the tongue; it is a transition from one state to another, from the domination of desire to the authority of obedience. Repentance is therefore the beginning of the wayfarer’s path, not its end.¹²

Through this gradual structure, al-Busiri establishes a delicate balance between fear and hope, one of the foundations of Sunni Sufi education. Fear protects the heart from arrogance, while hope protects it from despair. The journey toward God can proceed only when both stations are present in the believer’s heart, just as a bird needs both wings to fly; if one is missing, its flight is impaired.

Section Two: Emulation of the Prophet and the Authority of Sacred Sources (Qur'an and Sunnah)

The poet neither dwells exclusively on the terror of judgement nor overindulges in hope. Instead, he makes the two stations complementary, each performing an educational function in refining and correcting the self.

The poetic discourse becomes calmer and clearer here, following the emotional intensity of the opening. The poet seems to argue that genuine love reaches completion only when it becomes practical conduct, and that purity of heart cannot be achieved through emotional experience alone but requires persistent struggle, continual self-examination, and constant return to God. Repentance in the Mīmīyyah is thus a moment of renewed construction rather than mere collapse, restoring inner balance and enabling the individual to continue along the path of purification.

Al-Busiri does not stop at discussing the refinement of the self. He moves coherently to identify the authority that regulates all these spiritual stations: the Qur’an and the Prophetic Sunnah. The Sufism expressed in the Mīmīyyah is not an intuitive experience detached from revelation; rather, it takes the Qur’an and Sunnah as the foundation of every station and the criterion for every spiritual state. The poem therefore turns toward the Prophet’s biography, miracles, and character, presenting him as the supreme model from whom the Sufi experience derives its legitimacy and purpose.

If repentance marks the transition from self-accounting to renewal of one’s relationship with God, al-Busiri next brings the reader to the station that gives this experience its legitimacy: emulation of the Messenger (peace be upon him). In Sunni Sufi thought, love is not complete unless it is accompanied by following the beloved, for the Prophet is the human model in whom the reality of servitude to God and the virtues of moral and spiritual perfection are most fully manifested. Recalling his life in the Mīmīyyah is therefore an artistic and intellectual necessity, not merely a shift to the topic of praise.

The poet portrays the Prophet’s noble qualities by combining spiritual sublimity with artistic beauty:

“He surpassed the prophets in form and in character; none approached him in knowledge or generosity.”¹³

This verse joins the outward and inward dimensions. The poet does not praise physical beauty alone but couples it with the beauty of the Prophet’s life, presenting an integrated human model in which moral virtue and spiritual perfection converge. The contrast between physical form (*khalq*) and character (*khuluq*) is more than verbal wordplay; it emphasizes that Muhammadan perfection is not limited to one dimension but embraces the human being inwardly and outwardly. This reading is reinforced by the Qur’anic statement, “Indeed, you are of a tremendous character” (Qur’an 68:4), which the poet draws upon as a foundation for his poetic vision.¹⁴

Al-Busiri continues to emphasize this exalted status:

“Leave aside what the Christians claimed about their prophet; praise him as you will, and pronounce your judgement.”¹⁵

This is among the clearest indications of the Mīmiyyah’s doctrinal moderation. The poet opens a wide field for praising the Messenger while establishing a clear theological boundary: he rejects exaggeration that would raise the praised figure beyond the station of servitude to God to which he was chosen. Rhetorically, the verse combines prohibition and command, warning the reader while guiding him, as if the poet were drawing the limits of legitimate love recognized by Islam.

This meaning goes beyond poetic expression and confirms that the Mīmiyyah’s Sufism is disciplined Sunni Sufism. It grounds reverence for the Prophet in emulation, not in exaggeration leading to excess. The verse’s meaning resonates with the Prophetic hadith: “Do not extol me excessively as the Christians extolled the son of Mary, for I am only a servant; so say: the servant of God and His Messenger.”¹⁶ This reveals the strength of the hadith-based foundation of the poem: emotion is not allowed to overrule the religious text; rather, the text guides and disciplines emotion.

The Qur’anic foundation becomes still more apparent when the poet evokes the Night Journey and Ascension:

“You travelled by night from one sanctuary to another, as the full moon moves through the depths of darkness; until you reached a heaven that no wing can traverse, and no foot can reach.”¹⁷

These lines do more than describe the miracle of the Night Journey and Ascension; they perform a symbolic function within the Sufi experience. In Sufi imagination, ascent can signify movement from the sensory world toward purity, and from material constraint toward the horizon of knowledge. Al-Busiri, however, does not present this ascent as a purely individual experience, as occurs in some Sufi writings. He connects it to the Prophetic event established in the Qur’an and Sunnah, thereby preserving a balance between spiritual illumination and doctrinal authority.

Through this interaction between the poetic text and foundational religious sources, the Mīmiyyah becomes a space in which rhetoric and belief, beauty and guidance, embrace one another. Poetry becomes a means of reinforcing faith rather than merely producing an emotional effect. This feature has helped secure the poem’s place in Islamic culture and enabled it to outlive its historical moment, remaining present in study circles, devotional gatherings, and commentaries as a model of poetry that combines accomplished expression with a sincere message.

The artistic construction of the Mīmiyyah does not consist solely in the sequence of Sufi stations. It also relies on an integrated semantic system in which poetic imagery and Islamic authority support one another to produce an aesthetic vision with an educational dimension. The poet does not use imagery as ornament;

he makes it a means of revealing the spiritual experience and embodying its psychological transformations. Lexical fields associated with light, tears, the heart, the path, and hope recur throughout the poem, giving it an inner unity that allows the reader to move from one image to another without a break in structure or a disruption in vision.

This artistic richness is evident in the poet's treatment of the Muhammadan light. In the *Mīmiyyah*, light is not simply a sensory description; it becomes a symbol of guidance and a sign of the human transition from the darkness of heedlessness to the radiance of knowledge.

The image consequently transcends its literal meaning and takes on symbolic dimensions suited to the Sufi experience, in which light is associated with the opening of insight, the purification of the heart, and upright conduct.

By contrast, images of tears, illness, and sleeplessness recur throughout the poem, but they do not serve the purposes of elegy or complaint common in lyric poetry. Instead, they signify the sincerity of love and the depth of spiritual experience. Tears are not signs of weakness but of a living heart; sleeplessness results not merely from physical pain but from longing for Muhammadan perfection; and illness becomes a metaphor for humanity's need for guidance and continual need for the light of Prophethood. These images form an integrated symbolic network in which each image explains and leads to the others, contributing to a tightly coherent artistic structure.

From a rhetorical perspective, al-Busiri employs simile, metaphor, and metonymy in a functional way: imagery is never detached from the idea, and verbal ornament does not take precedence over meaning. When he compares the self to a child or the Messenger to the radiant full moon, he is not seeking aesthetic effect alone. He seeks to bring an abstract meaning closer to the reader and turn spiritual experience into a perceptible image. The images of the *Mīmiyyah* thus possess persuasive force because they combine expressive beauty with semantic clarity.

Poetic rhythm deepens this effect. The poem's use of the *basīṭ* metre, together with its unified rhyme, gives the text musical coherence that accompanies the progression of the Sufi experience. When emotion intensifies, rhythmic movement becomes more urgent; when the poet turns to contemplation or intimate supplication, the cadence grows calmer. The internal music seems to participate in expressing the psychological changes experienced by the poet.

The *Mīmiyyah*'s continuing presence in Arab and Islamic cultural memory may be attributed to the convergence of its aesthetic dimension and spiritual function. It has been received not merely as a poem but as an educational and emotional discourse that is recited, appreciated, reread, chanted, and transmitted across the centuries.

Intertextuality is no less important than imagery and rhythm in the poem's construction. The *Mīmiyyah* draws on a broad network of Qur'anic and hadith references, but it does not use them merely as direct quotations. It reworks them within a new poetic context so that they become part of the text's artistic fabric. References to the Night Journey, the Prophet's character, and the values of mercy and forgiveness do more than provide religious documentation; they give the poem a symbolic authority that strengthens its capacity to affect and persuade because its legitimacy derives from Islamic sources.

The *Mīmiyyah*'s distinctive character in comparison with many other Prophetic praise poems now becomes clear. Its impact rests neither on emotion alone nor on rhetorical craft alone; instead, it achieves a careful balance between art and thought, and between beauty and guidance. This balance explains its continued presence in Islamic culture over the centuries, the many commentaries devoted to it, and the interest shown in it by scholars and writers. The poem makes poetry a means of spiritual education without sacrificing its artistic qualities or aesthetic value.

The Sufi experience in al-Busiri's Mīmīyyah does not stop at defining the relationship of the individual with the self or with the Prophet. It extends to an integrated vision of the relationship between humanity and God, grounded in continual dependence on God and recognition that salvation cannot be attained without His help and mercy. The poetic discourse therefore moves naturally from praise to intimate supplication, and from the description of spiritual stations to the theme of intercession, understood as an expression of the hope that inhabits the believer's heart and enables continued progress along the path of purification.

In this context, al-Busiri writes:

“O noblest of creation, whom have I to seek refuge in when the all-encompassing calamity descends, if not you?”¹⁸

This is among the most frequently cited lines of the Mīmīyyah because it embodies the height of the poem's spiritual intensity. Its value lies not only in emotional fervour but also in its rhetorical structure, which is built on address and appeal. The vocative does more than convey information: it expresses complete dependence, arising not merely from human weakness but from the conviction that the Messenger is a door to guidance and a guide toward God's pleasure.

Semantically, the verse is not an expression of personal attachment to the Prophet as an independent source of power; rather, it expresses attachment to the means God has made a path to salvation. Its language is therefore saturated with hope, not with claims of independent efficacy. In this respect, it is presented as consistent with the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā'ah, according to which intercession is affirmed by God's permission rather than through any independent power possessed by a created being. The poet's skill lies in combining intense love with doctrinal soundness, a feature that characterizes the Mīmīyyah throughout.

The poet develops this idea in another line:

“The Messenger of God, your standing will not be too narrow for me when the Most Generous appears under the name of the Avenger.”¹⁹

The verse establishes a fine contrast between the divine names “the Most Generous” and “the Avenger,” creating a psychological balance between hope and fear. The believer hopes for God's mercy but does not forget His justice; he seeks intercession through love for the Prophet while recognizing that all affairs remain in God's hands. This duality is a central intellectual feature of the Mīmīyyah: it does not allow emotion to become detached from belief, nor does it let hope become a cause of neglecting individual responsibility.

From an artistic perspective, al-Busiri makes extensive use in this passage of performative forms such as invocation, supplication, and entreaty. These forms suit the character of intimate prayer and give the text a distinctive vitality. The reader does not encounter a static descriptive statement but a spiritual experience moving between fear and hope, acknowledgement of incapacity and trust in God's mercy.

The poet's diction also follows a deliberate logic. Words associated with generosity, mercy, bounty, and intercession are set against words such as sin, error, incapacity, and need. This contrast creates an inner movement in which the poem continually rises from the recognition of deficiency toward the aspiration for perfection. It gives the Mīmīyyah psychological unity and allows its different passages to reinforce one another in a single vision: salvation is not the product of action alone or emotion alone, but of combining love with emulation and spiritual struggle with hope.

Section Three: Artistic Construction, Aesthetic Features, and Horizons of Reception

From a critical perspective, al-Busiri can be said to have transformed Prophetic praise from a conventional poetic purpose into an integrated symbolic structure in which language interacts with doctrine and the

symbol becomes a means of rebuilding religious consciousness. The Prophet is present in the Mīmiyyah not merely as a historical figure, but as the supreme human model toward whom the entire poem moves and from whom the Sufi stations derive their meaning and function. Praise is therefore not an end in itself; it is a means of shaping the human person, awakening conscience, and linking artistic beauty with the values of faith.

For this reason, the Mīmiyyah did not remain confined to the historical context in which it was composed. It became a living text that has retained its presence in Islamic cultural memory for centuries, owing to its eloquence, depth of spiritual experience, and firm grounding in religious sources. These qualities made it a continuous subject of commentary, teaching, and recitation. The poem achieved a rare combination of rhetorical power, experiential depth, and fidelity to its religious foundations, which secured its enduring position in Arabic-Islamic culture and made it one of the foundational texts of Sunni Sufi poetry.

The Mīmiyyah's literary value is renewed not only by the richness of its spiritual themes but also by its ability to transform them into a coherent artistic structure in which language and rhythm cooperate to produce a discourse combining rational persuasion with emotional impact. Its meanings are not accumulated as separate Sufi concepts; rather, an internal movement allows each image to prepare for the next, giving the poem the appearance of an organic unity in which the experience develops from the first verse to the last. This accords with 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani's concept of *naẓm*, according to which a text's value depends on the relationships among its parts rather than on isolated elements.²⁰

One of the most striking artistic features of this coherence is the poet's use of semantic progression. The poem begins with longing and yearning, moves to self-accounting and then repentance, proceeds to emulation of the Messenger, recalls his miracles and noble qualities, and concludes with supplication and hope. This sequence is not accidental; it reflects a Sufi conception of the journey to God as a comprehensive path beginning with the awakening of the heart and culminating in complete servitude. The ordering of themes is therefore part of the poem's artistic structure, not merely a formal arrangement.

This progression reflects a deliberate compositional design in which transitions between stations are semantic rather than merely formal, generating a coherent unity of feeling and thought.

The poetic image also exceeds its aesthetic function and performs a cognitive one, helping readers grasp abstract Sufi concepts. When the poet says:

"The self is like a child: if you leave it, it grows attached to nursing; if you wean it, it will be weaned."

21

he does not merely present an eloquent simile; he establishes a comprehensive conception of human nature. In a single image he condenses what Sufi scholars have discussed at length in their treatment of spiritual struggle and discipline. The poetic image thus brings the Sufi experience within the reader's reach.

The same applies to the recurring images of light and radiance. They do not refer to physical illumination but symbolize guidance and the unveiling of truth. Here poetic symbolism meets the Qur'anic conception of light as the opposite of error, as in the verse: "God is the Protector of those who believe; He brings them out of darkness into light" (Qur'an 2:257).²² The poet does not derive the symbol from imagination alone; he draws on Qur'anic authority and reuses it in a poetic context that gives it new emotional and aesthetic dimensions.

Rhythmically, al-Busiri maintains a carefully balanced musical pattern that helps fix meanings in memory and makes the poem suitable for recitation and transmission across generations. This effect does not derive from metre alone; it also arises from the skilful distribution of sounds and the repetition of key words such as love, heart, self, tears, light, generosity, and mercy. Repetition creates interconnected lexical fields and immerses the reader in a unified spiritual atmosphere, helping to produce meaning and deepen the text's

emotional impact without creating a sense of monotony.

Qur'anic and hadith-based intertextuality is another major element in the Mīmiyyah's artistic construction. It does not always take the form of direct quotation; it may appear as allusion, semantic recall, or the reshaping of a Qur'anic image within the poetic context. The poem consequently seems to remain in dialogue with foundational religious texts, deriving authority from them while adding new aesthetic dimensions without losing its poetic individuality.

This helps explain the large number of commentaries written on the Mīmiyyah. Scholars have found in it a text open to several modes of reading: it is a poem of praise, a Sufi text, a literary document rich in images and symbols, and an educational work intended to reinforce emulation and moral refinement. These dimensions allowed it to transcend its own time and remain present in Islamic culture for many centuries, combining artistic beauty, intellectual depth, and experiential sincerity.

Taken together, these characteristics make the Mīmiyyah open to multiple interpretations. It appeals to the literary reader who seeks expressive beauty, the critic who examines the structure of discourse, and the scholar of Sufism who seeks to uncover the stations and disciplines of the spiritual path. This diversity of reception is itself evidence of the text's richness and its ability to transcend the circumstances of its composition and become one of the foundational works in the history of Prophetic praise and Sufi literature.

The literary value of al-Busiri's Mīmiyyah cannot be measured solely by the quality of its artistic construction or the depth of its spiritual content; it also lies in its ability to transcend its historical context and become a reference text within the culture of Prophetic praise. Even highly accomplished poetry may remain confined to its own age if it does not find a place in collective memory. The Mīmiyyah, by contrast, has maintained a continuing presence in scholarly and devotional life—not through the poet's fame alone, but because it contains religious and aesthetic values that invite repeated reading, recitation, and commentary across successive centuries.

The large number of commentaries is not merely evidence of popularity; it also reflects the semantic richness of the poem and its capacity to generate multiple readings, a feature of major literary works that renew themselves with each new horizon of interpretation. Scholars have not treated the Mīmiyyah as a poem alone but as a text that brings literature, doctrine, and education together. Some have explained its vocabulary and syntax, others have explored its rhetorical features, others have highlighted its Sufi meanings, and still others have examined its Qur'anic and hadith allusions. This variety reveals a rich text capable of supporting several levels of reception, as major works with open semantic structures and broad interpretive horizons often do.

The Mīmiyyah has also helped reinforce the Sunni orientation of Prophetic praise by offering a model that balances passionate love with doctrinal discipline. Praise is not treated as an end in itself but as a means of strengthening emulation and commitment to the Sunnah. Scholars and Sufis have therefore found in it a model of poetry that serves religious education without departing from the foundations of the Sacred Law. This helps explain its continuing presence in study circles, Sufi lodges, schools, and celebrations of the Prophet's birth in various parts of the Muslim world.

The poem's influence has not been confined to religion; it has also extended into literature. It became a point of reference for many later poets of Prophetic praise, whether in the overall design of the ode, the adaptation of its imagery, or the use of its spiritual vocabulary. This influence does not always take the form of direct imitation; it can also be seen in the enduring authority of a model that established new standards for praise by bringing together emotional experience, Islamic reference, and coherent artistic form.

From the perspective of reception theory, the Mīmiyyah ceased to belong exclusively to its author once it entered Islamic cultural memory; it became a text whose meanings are renewed as its readers change. The

Sufi reader finds in it the features of spiritual discipline, the rhetorician its rich imagery, the literary critic its carefully constructed unity, and the historian a document reflecting aspects of the religious culture of its time. This diversity of reception is a key sign of literary endurance because it demonstrates the capacity to generate new meanings without losing the text's original identity.²³

This may explain the *Mīmiyyah*'s continuing presence in contemporary academic research. It is not simply a heritage artefact whose study is limited to editing and commentary; it remains a literary work that raises questions about the relationship between poetry and Sufism, beauty and doctrine, and artistic function and educational message. Rereading it today is therefore not merely a return to the past; it is an attempt to reveal how major works of the literary heritage continue to generate new meanings as methods of reading change and research horizons expand.

The enduring life of al-Busiri's *Mīmiyyah* is thus not the result of a single factor but of the convergence of several elements: the sincerity of experience, the strength of its artistic construction, the depth of its Islamic foundations, the richness of its poetic imagery, and its capacity to address both intellect and feeling. It consequently occupies a prominent place in Arabic-Islamic literary history and remains a model of poetry that joins artistic creation with spiritual guidance, eloquence with elevated purpose. Taken together, these elements show that the *Mīmiyyah* is not a panegyric in the traditional sense but an integrated project in which doctrine and beauty, education and poetry, interweave; its Sufi experience is a vision of life before it is a linguistic or emotional exercise.

CONCLUSION:

The analytical reading of Imam Sharaf al-Din al-Busiri's *Mīmiyyah* shows that the poem is more than a text of Prophetic praise. It is an integrated poetic and spiritual experience through which the poet transforms personal suffering into a human discourse that moves beyond individual experience toward a broad horizon of faith and aesthetic meaning. Sincerity of feeling and the ardour of Prophetic love merge with spiritual depth and artistic form, giving the *Mīmiyyah* a central position within the corpus of Arabic Sufi poetry.

The study has shown that al-Busiri does not approach praise as a conventional genre based on enumerating virtues. Instead, he reconstructs it through a spiritual vision that makes the Prophetic station the centre of meaning and a source of guidance and hope. In the *Mīmiyyah*, the Prophet is not merely the subject of praise; he is a symbolic presence around whom the self's journey takes shape, moving from awareness of weakness and dependence toward love and reassurance.

The analysis has also shown that the poem's Sufi experience is grounded in a group of spiritual values, foremost among them love, repentance, hope, and intercession. These meanings are not presented as abstract propositions but are woven into a poetic fabric rich in symbols and suggestion. Images of light, generosity, and grace contribute to an idealized representation of the Prophetic station and enable the poem to transcend its historical period and remain open to multiple readings.

The analysis further establishes that the *Mīmiyyah*'s aesthetic value arises from the close integration of spiritual meaning and artistic construction. Al-Busiri uses language, imagery, and rhythm to serve his emotional experience. His diction is charged with feeling, while the poem's music accompanies the self's movement between fear and hope, collapse and renewal.

The enduring position of al-Busiri's *Mīmiyyah* therefore derives not from its religious subject alone but from its ability to unite a profound spiritual experience with rich poetic expression. This has made it a distinctive model of Prophetic praise and a text in which poetic aesthetics coexist with the elevated vision of Sufism.

On the basis of these findings, the main results can be summarized as follows: al-Busiri's Mīmīyyah is a poetic model in which Sufi experience intersects with the aesthetics of Prophetic discourse; praise transcends its conventional function and becomes a spiritual path through which the self expresses its need for purification and elevation; Prophetic love forms the text's deep structure; and spiritual symbols—especially light, generosity, and intercession—create a poetic world in which religious meaning interacts with aesthetic value. The study also shows that the Mīmīyyah's endurance is linked to al-Busiri's ability to balance experiential sincerity with artistic strength, making the poem open to interpretation and diverse critical readings.

Future research could extend the study by comparing the Mīmīyyah with other examples of Prophetic praise poetry, examining its place in Sufi and cultural memory, and tracing its reception across the centuries and its transformation in modern literary discourse. Such work could further clarify the continuing aesthetic and spiritual force of the poem.

Sources and References

Primary Sources

The Holy Qur'an, according to the narration of Ḥafṣ.

1. Al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Isma'il. *Sahih al-Bukhari*. Edited by Muhammad Zuhayr ibn Nasir al-Nasir. Beirut: Dar Tawq al-Najah.
2. Al-Busiri, Muhammad ibn Sa'id. *Al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah fī Madh Khayr al-Bariyyah (al-Burdah)*. Edited by Muhammad Sayyid Kilani. 1st ed. Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi wa Awladuhu, 1955.
3. Al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Isma'il. *Al-Jami' al-Sahih (Sahih al-Bukhari)*. Edited by Mustafa Dīb al-Bughā. 5th ed. Damascus: Dar Ibn Kathir.
4. Al-Jurjani, 'Abd al-Qahir. *Asrar al-Balagha*. Edited by Mahmud Muhammad Shakir. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji.
5. Al-Jurjani, 'Abd al-Qahir. *Dala'il al-I'jaz*. Edited by Mahmud Muhammad Shakir. Cairo: al-Madani Press.
6. Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad. *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*. Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa.
7. Qadi 'Iyad ibn Musa. *Al-Shifa bi-Ta'rif Huquq al-Mustafa*. Edited by Muhammad Amin al-Dannawi. Vol. 1. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
8. Hazim al-Qartajanni. *Minhaj al-Bulagha' wa-Siraj al-Udaba'*. Edited by Muhammad al-Habib ibn al-Khawja. Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami.
9. Al-Qushayri, Abu al-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim ibn Hawazin. *Al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*. Edited by 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud and Mahmud ibn al-Sharif. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif.

Secondary References

10. Eco, Umberto. *The Limits of Interpretation*. Translated by Sa'id Benkrad. Casablanca: Arab Cultural Centre.
11. Dayf, Shawqi. *Art and Its Schools in Arabic Poetry*. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif.
12. Mahmud, 'Abd al-Halim. *The Modern Shadhili School and Its Imam, Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili*. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif.
13. Fadl, Salah. *The Rhetoric of Discourse and Textual Theory*. Cairo: Egyptian International Publishing Company–Longman.
14. Miftah, Muhammad. *Analysis of Poetic Discourse: The Strategy of Intertextuality*. Arab Cultural Centre.

15. Jauss, Hans Robert. *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Reception*. Translated by 'Izz al-Din Isma'il. Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi.
16. Zaydan, Yusuf. *Sufi Orders in Egypt*. Dar Amin.

NOTES

- ¹ -Al-Busiri, Muhammad ibn Sa'id, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah fī Madh Khayr al-Bariyyah (al-Burdah), ed. Muhammad Sayyid Kilani (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi wa Awladuhu, 1955). The source manuscript does not provide page numbers for the quoted verses.
- ² -Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah), opening verse. The English rendering is a translation prepared for this article; no page number is supplied in the source manuscript.
- ³ -Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah). The source manuscript does not identify a page number for this passage.
- ⁴ -Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah). The source manuscript does not identify a page number for this passage.
- ⁵ -Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah). The English rendering is a translation prepared for this article.
- ⁶ -The Holy Qur'an, Surah al-Nazi'at (79:40–41). English rendering translated for this article.
- ⁷ Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah). The wording of the second hemistich is textually difficult and is rendered here to preserve the interpretation offered in the source article.
- ⁸ -Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah). The same verse is discussed again in the source manuscript as part of its analysis of repentance and hope.
- ⁹ -The Holy Qur'an, Surah al-Hijr (15:49–50). English rendering translated for this article.
- ¹⁰ -Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah). The verse is repeated in the original article.
- ¹¹ -The Holy Qur'an, Surah al-Zumar (39:53). English rendering translated for this article.
- ¹² -Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad, Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa). The source bibliography gives no edition, volume, or page for this idea.
- ¹³ -Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah). The article cites the verse without providing a page number.
- ¹⁴ -The Holy Qur'an, Surah al-Qalam (68:4). English rendering translated for this article.
- ¹⁵ -Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah). The English rendering is a translation prepared for this article.
- ¹⁶ -Al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Isma'il, Sahih al-Bukhari. The source article quotes the hadith but does not supply its hadith number or page reference.
- ¹⁷ -Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah). The source text refers to the Qur'anic and Prophetic basis for the Night Journey and Ascension but provides no specific page reference for the verse.
- ¹⁸ -Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah). The original article discusses this verse in relation to supplication, hope, and intercession.
- ¹⁹ -Al-Busiri, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah). The source manuscript does not provide a page number for the quoted line.

²⁰ -See 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, *Dala'il al-I'jaz*, ed. Mahmud Muhammad Shakir (Cairo: al-Madani Press). The source bibliography does not specify a page number.

²¹ -Al-Busiri, *al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah (al-Burdah)*. This line appears earlier in the article and is revisited here for its cognitive and educational function.

²² -The Holy Qur'an, Surah al-Baqarah (2:257). English rendering translated for this article.

²³ - For the theoretical context of reception and interpretation, the source bibliography lists Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Reception*, trans. 'Izz al-Din Isma'il, and Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, trans. Sa'id Benkrad. No page numbers are supplied in the source manuscript.