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“Kitāb al-Rimāḥ of ‘Umar Fūṭī Tāl: Sealing Muhammadan Sainthood in Nineteenth Century West Africa”

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Kitāb al-Rimāḥ of ‘Umar Fūṭī Tāl:
Sealing Muhammadan Sainthood in Nineteenth Century West Africa

A dissertation presented

by

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Kitāb al-Rimāḥ of ‘Umar Fūtī Tāl:

Sealing Muhammadan Sainthood in Nineteenth Century West Africa

Abstract

This dissertation offers an in-depth exploration of the key themes, sources and contributions of *Kitāb Rimāḥ ḥizb al-Raḥīm ‘alā nūḥūr ḥizb al-rajīm*; West Africa’s “most widely circulated text” written by Shaykh ‘Umar Fūtī Tāl (d.1864). Because it is often found printed on the margins of the Tijāniyya’s primary source, the *Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī*, its importance risks obscurity and its significance, literally, marginalized. Through the *Rimāḥ*, Tāl would define what a *ṭarīqa* in West Africa, as we know it today, looks like. By emphasizing the doctrine of *khatm al-wilāya al-Muḥammadiyya* (“the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood”), the Tijāniyya quickly gained considerable ground in the landscape of Islam in West Africa. This dissertation posits that Tāl’s project singlehandedly spurred a renaissance of the rhetoric of *khatmiyya* in the nineteenth century, enlisting it in the ranks of the most vividly articulated, coherent claims to the Sealing Sainthood in Islamic intellectual history. Its distinguishing features—its approach as a culmination of Sufi thought informed by a rich *dhawq*-sphere of sages past and its gnostic-driven methodology to knowledge production and *sharī‘a*—reaffirm the text’s rightful place as a sorely underappreciated masterpiece of nineteenth century Islamic textual history and as a missing centerpiece of Sufi studies.

إلى روح والدي

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At the cusp of the coronavirus pandemic in January 2020, I was lucky enough to visit the blessed city of Madina Baye in Kaolack, Senegal for field research. There, I had a memorable conversation with who is now the general *khalīfā* of the Fayḍa Tijāniyya community, Shaykh Maḥy Niasse, and asked him for general advice for the PhD. He said, “*as-ṣumūd*,” to which I replied, “I am part Palestinian, *ṣumūd* runs in my blood!” There is no direct English equivalent to *ṣumūd*, but it evokes a combination of fortitude and a graceful type of patience. Writing a PhD dissertation requires much of that, but without the support of many along the way, one’s fortitude eventually runs dry.

The pandemic has since claimed the life of my dear father, Dr. Nabil El-Sharif, whom I lovingly dedicate this dissertation to. He was my first and exemplar and role model as a human being, ethicist, academic and intellectual. I never imagined that he would not be by my side cheering me on with a celebratory *kunafa*, as I wrote the final chapters on his desk, mere months after his passing in the month of Ramadan of 2021. May this work be a *sadaqa jariya* for his soul. May this dissertation also be a balm of solace to my mother Manal, whose support and love were instrumental throughout the PhD journey.

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I thank my beautiful children Zahra and Saleh, who, since their births, have only known their mother as someone who is preoccupied with writing a great deal of words under a deadline. I hope this work inspires them to pursue knowledge endlessly and to seek *ma‘rifa*. They are the openers of my heart’s eye, and my constant source of bewilderment, love, and joy.

I am eternally grateful to my husband Abdul Mohsen, who believed in me on days when it was hard to do so for myself. He selflessly served as my sounding board, meticulous proofreader, and this dissertation’s most ardent enthusiast. I thank him and our children for their undying patience and sense of humor.

Last but certainly not least, my deepest gratitude is reserved for Shaykh Muḥammad al-Maḥy Cisse for his endless guidance and direction, and for being a true example of a living Muhammadan inheritor.

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Introduction

Al-Ḥājj ‘Umar ibn Sa‘īd Fūtī Tāl (1797-1864) was among the most prominent and erudite West African figures of the nineteenth century. Yet, his magnum opus, *Kitāb rimāḥ ḥizb al-raḥīm ‘alā nuḥūr ḥizb al-rajīm* (“The Book of the Spears of God the All-Merciful on the Necks of the League of Satan the Accursed”)—which I refer to as the *Rimāḥ* for brevity—has yet to be carefully studied or fully translated into English.¹ In 1995, Islamic Africa specialist John Hunwick lamented that the book “lies unstudied by Africanists and Islamicists like a hard lump in the stomach, massive and undigested”²—twenty six years later, this is still largely the case.³ This dissertation aims to study more closely nineteenth century West Africa’s most widely disseminated text,⁴ which stands as a vehicle for one of the most elaborate articulations of a “sealing” sainthood (*khatmiyya*) in Islamic intellectual history and as the single most cohesive, cogent and comprehensive compendium for the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiya*—and *ṭarīqa* formation generally—in 19th century West Africa.

The text is considered the second doctrinal reference of the Tijāniyya Sufi order⁵—one of the largest Sufi orders in the Muslim world, with tens of millions of followers in Africa alone. The first most important reference being ‘Alī Ḥarāzīm b. al-‘Arabī Barādah’s, *Kitāb jawāhir al-ma‘ānī wa-*

¹ The most recent effort towards translating 10 chapters from the *Rimāḥ* into a Western language was completed in 2017 by Maurice Puech in French.

² John Hunwick, “Sufism and the Study of Islam in West Africa: The Case of Al-Ḥājj ‘Umar,” *Der Islam; Zeitschrift Für Geschichte Und Kultur Des Islamischen Orients* 71 (1994): 308.

³ I say largely the case, because while there have been excellent foundational studies directly about or related to the *Rimāḥ* such as the works of Radtke (1995), Hunwick (1996), Bousbina (1996), Cisse (2010) and Puech (1967), they remain inexhaustive.

⁴ Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Power, Religion and Schooling in a Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 136.

⁵ The first most important doctrine being, ‘Alī Ḥarāzīm Ibn Al-‘Arabī Barādah, *Kitāb Jawāhir Al-Ma‘ānī Wa-Bulūgh al-Amānī Fī Fayḍ Sayyidī Abī al-‘Abbās al-Tijānī* (Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1973), the *Rimāḥ* is often printed on the margins of this text.

bulūgh al-amānī fī fayḍ sayyidī abī al-‘abbās al-Tijānī , a record of Aḥmad Tijānī’s teachings.⁶ This dissertation is *not* a commentary on the *Rimāḥ* as a doctrinal reference to the Tijānī order outlining its conditions and major litanies; rather, it is a commentary on the larger backdrop of its broader intellectual contributions and the overarching themes that get less attention when it comes to analyzing the text. This dissertation is therefore about the “deep doctrine”⁷ of this towering magnum opus: its major thematic contributions. The central topics discussed in this dissertation focus on five themes: the impetus for Tāl’s penning of the text, his arguably unique articulation of the rhetoric of “the seal” (*khatm*) relative to nineteenth century scholarly production, the text’s key most cited source, the *Rimāḥ*’s most salient legal debates and lastly, Tāl’s approach to “sober” Sufism.

Tāl’s sense of authority emanated from the fact that he saw the Tijāniyya as the “final *ṭarīqa*”, not as an expression of abrogating previous Sufi thought and practice, but as a verification of previous Sufi paths.⁸ Tāl’s magisterial work is an integral part of an important corpus of West African Islamic scholarly literature in Arabic, but its most salient status is the way it has come to serve as the blueprint for the Tijānī outlook and doctrine, and the way it has helped in the enormous spread of Islam and Sufism in West Africa in the nineteenth century. The power of the *Rīmāḥ*’s wide-ranging, persuasive rhetoric aided in this spread and empowered Tāl to spread this “sealing” Muḥammadan Path across large swaths of West Africa. The spread of this doctrine reshaped the landscape of Islam in West Africa in the nineteenth century. It is the rhetoric of *khatmiyya* (sealing)—with the central concept of

⁶ In his dissertation, “El Hadji Omar Foutiyou Tall, une Grande Figure de la Tijaniyya en Afrique Occidentale au XIX^eme siècle: Pensée Juridico-mystique à travers ‘*Rimah*,’” Cisse argues that the *Rimāḥ* was written a defense of the *Jawāhir al-Ma‘ānī* (Cisse, 13). However, while there is some evidence to suggest that this may have been his intention, I contend that this was far from a primary motivation. Rather, Tāl penned the *Rimāḥ* primarily to be a standalone culmination of Sufi thought.

⁷ To my knowledge, this term only appears in a manual of teachings by the Church of the Latter-Day Saints. See: Bruce Olmstead, *Deep Doctrines*, (Digital Legends Press, Cottonwood Heights, 2009.)

⁸ Zachary Wright, *Realizing Islam: The Tijāniyya in North Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Muslim World*, Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 7.

the Shaykh/*wālī* Allah as its vehicle—that is perhaps the most forceful and distinguishing feature that decorates Tāl’s magnum opus. Though the idea of a Muḥammadan Path is not new, Tāl’s project in the *Rimāḥ* combines a succinct formulation endowed with an articulation of the concept of the "Seal of Sainthood" (*khatmiyya*), thereby providing the Tijāniyya with a noteworthy dynamism in North and West Africa in the nineteenth century.

Since 1896⁹, only one standalone edition of the *Rimāḥ* has been published: the book is normally found printed on the margins of or as an appendix to the *Jawāhir*. Perhaps this can begin to explain why the *Rimāḥ* has—quite literally—been marginalized. The first time the *Rimāḥ* was printed on the margins of the *Jawāhir* was in 1927 in Tunis,¹⁰ and that edition set the standard as the “mother text” for all later print editions of the *Rimāḥ* (with all its typographical errors contained therein). Nonetheless, the Tunis edition sparked a widespread readership in the Maghreb, a readership that had been heretofore mostly restricted to West Africa. Today, the *Rimāḥ* is considered a veritable bedrock of the impressive corpus of Tijānī literature.¹¹ At present, at least two, if not more, processes of *taḥqīq* of the printed texts are currently underway by Muḥammad Radī Kanoun of Rabat, Morocco, and Usman Jaw of Timbuktu Editions, Cairo/Senegal.¹² Consulting both editors led me to cross check the printed editions with some of the earliest manuscripts, one being housed at the Center for Arabic

⁹ In 2019, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, published a standalone edition of the *Rimāḥ* which we have not consulted. The first standalone edition was printed in Cairo, by the historic Ḥalabī printers in 1896 but copies of this edition are extremely rare and are sold for a hefty price when found.

¹⁰ *Dhikrā murūr mā’atay sanah ‘alā mīlād al-shaykh al-Ḥājj ‘Umar al-Fūtī Tāll, 1797-1998: nadwah dawliyyah 14-19 Djanbir 1998, Dakār - al-Sīnighāl*, al-Ṭab‘ah 1., Manshūrāt Kullīyat al-Ādāb wa-al-‘Ulūm al-Insāniyyah, Jāmi‘at al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ Silsilat nadawāt wa-munāẓarāt 6 (al-Rabāṭ: Ma‘had al-Dirāsāt al-Ifriqiyyah, 2001), 386.

¹¹ For an initial list of the Tijānī literary corpus, consult: www.tijani.org. For a more expansive history of the printed editions of the *Rimāḥ*, consult the first chapter of this dissertation.

¹² Both editors were kind enough to allow me to consult some of their chapters-in-progress, not the full completed verified text, as their work is still underway. It would be prudent to base a full English translation of the *Rimāḥ* to await these verification efforts.

Manuscripts in Cairo, which was copied by one of Tāl's close disciples. I rely primarily on this manuscript for this dissertation's readings of the text but cite the printed text for ease of reference.¹³

In Tijānī communities today, it is not an uncommon trope to remark how underrated the text is, and what it stands for, or rather, ought to stand for. During my January 2020 visit to the city of Madina Baye in Kaolack, Senegal, which was founded by one of 20th century West Africa's greatest scholars, Shaykh Ibrahīm Niasse (d.1975), I asked the Imam of the grand mosque, Shaykh Tijānī Cisse (b.1955) about the reception (*rawāj*) of the *Rimāḥ*. He responded by saying: "It does not have as much *rawāj* as it should. What can one expect when the text is literally marginalized (*muhammash*)?"¹⁴ He continued that "this gives the impression to people that it is just a commentary, but it needs to be taken more seriously as a standalone text."¹⁵ If this dissertation had but one goal, it would be to do just that: to de-marginalize the *Rimāḥ* and give it its due attention.

The erudition and mobility of Tāl, no doubt propelled by the edicts of the Tijāniyya, which stress the importance of the attainment of knowledge, enhanced his scholastic rigor and his ability to memorize and transcribe a large corpus of oral and written sources.¹⁶ Backed up by an overwhelming plethora of quotes, one can say that the *Rimāḥ* offers a succinct worldview and arrayed corpus of belief and worship from the Islamic intellectual tradition as it had been received by an early nineteenth-century West African scholar. Through Tāl's critical insights and scathing adages, the *Rimāḥ* means to rouse the reader from a complacent slumber and awaken introspection. The name

¹³ In this dissertation, I cite the al-ʿAṣriyya, 2004 Beirut edition of the *Rimāḥ*, which is one of the few printed editions that have the *Rimāḥ* printed in whole as an appendix to the *Jawāhir*, not on its margins.

¹⁴ As it is normally only found printed on the margins (*hawāmish*) of the *Jawāhir al-maʿāni*.

¹⁵ Interview with Imam Tijani Cisse at his home, Madina Baye, Kaolack, Senegal, January 19, 2020.

¹⁶ For a thorough view of Tāl's own view of the Tijāniyya and its features, see Appendix III of this dissertation, which is a full translation of Chapter 43 of the *Rimāḥ*, "Why this path of ours is called *at-Ṭarīqā al-Aḥmadiyya al-Muḥammadiyya al-Ibrahīmiyya al-Ḥanīfiyya at-Tijāniyya*."

itself, the *Rimāḥ* (spears) for the text is appropriate, as it carries a critical tone throughout. Tāl uses the third person throughout the text: “informing *them* that... telling *them* that...” which signifies his aim towards corrective guidance.¹⁷

I discuss Tāl’s magisterial work is part as part of an important corpus of Tijānī as well as West African Islamic scholarly literature in Arabic. The *Rimāḥ* has two parts, is fifty-five chapters long and was no doubt meant as a “veritable compendium.”¹⁸ an all-inclusive guide for life, with topics ranging from jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to theology (*‘aqīda*), to Prophetic biography (*sīra*), and to Sufi belief and practice. According to Louis Brenner, the *Rimāḥ* is arguably “the most widely disseminated text by any nineteenth-century West African author.”¹⁹ In it he draws on a wide variety of earlier Sufi texts from North Africa, the Middle East, even citing the apparent forefather of modern Salafism Ibn Taymiyya,²⁰ (d.1328) thus showing the extent to which West African Sufism is embedded in the broader Sufi and Islamic scholastic tradition.

An inter-textual study of the *Rimāḥ*, therefore, represents a study of multiple texts, methodologies and eras, tethered by a single Sufi cosmology. Due to its clear prescriptive narrative, its copious quotes and commentary, and the erudition of its writer, the *Rimāḥ* can thus be seen as a microcosm of the corpus of the entirety of Sufi thought, with specific focus on the methodology of the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiya*, which arguably saw its apex in the eighteenth century.²¹ Scholars regarded this movement a distinct approach to Sufi experience due to the following characteristics: it placed

¹⁷ Reference to “your spears” also appears in the Qur’ān in Chapter 5 verse 94.

¹⁸ Bernd Radtke, “Studies on the Sources of Kitāb Rimāḥ Ḥizb Al-Raḥim of al-Ḥajj ‘Umar,” *Sudanica Africa* 6 (1995): 73–113.

¹⁹ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 136.

²⁰ *Rimāḥ*, 520.

²¹ See: Zachary Valentine Wright, *On the Path of the Prophet: Shaykh Ahmad Tijani (1737-1815) and the Tariqa Muḥammadiyya* (Atlanta: African-American Islamic Institute, 2005), 16.

at its center the intense connection with the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad, admonishing the imitation (*taqlīd*) of following a single legal school (*madhhab*), attaining a real connection with him through purification (*tazkiya*) and *dhikr* (remembrance) and having a *shaykh* to help one reach complete knowledge of God (*maʿrifa*). By the eighteenth century, aphorisms such as “he who does not have a *shaykh*, the devil becomes his *shaykh*” and the practice of finding a “*shaykh wāṣil*” who can help link wayfarers to God through a verified mystical chain were still normative.²²

‘Umar al-Fūṭī Tāl has been described by Radtke as a “scholar, mystic, religious combatant, founder and leader of a state, [...] considered to be one of the most remarkable and important personalities in nineteenth-century West African Islam.”²³ Born in Halwar, Futa Toro, in the border between modern day Senegal and Mauritania in 1797 to a family that emphasized the pursuit of Islamic classical scholarship from a young age, Tāl left Futa Toro sometime in his mid-twenties on a knowledge-seeking mission that took him to Futa Jallon (Guinea), Sokoto (northern Nigeria), and Masina (Mali). Like Futa Toro, these were all polities that had also undergone significant political transformations and were known as important sites of scholarship. Tāl performed the Hajj in 1827 and it was there that he met another Tijānī shaykh, Muḥammad al-Ghālī, who was a direct student of al-Tijānī. He took al-Ghālī as a guide. After three years of instruction, he appointed Tāl as a *khalīfa* of the Tijāniyya. By 1830, Tāl became an important leader in the Tijānī order and quickly gained a reputation for being one of the most erudite scholars in the Ḥijāz and West Africa and garnered a significant number of followers.²⁴ On his return trip, Tāl spent eight years in Sokoto as a guest of

²² Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijāniyya, a Ṣūfī Order in the Modern World*, Middle Eastern Monographs ; 7 (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 3.

²³ Radtke, “Studies on the Sources of Kitāb Rimāḥ Hizb Al-Raḥim of al-Hajj ‘Umar.”

²⁴ Jean Schmitz, “Autour d’al-Hājj Umar Taal. Guerre sainte et Tijāniyya en Afrique de l’Ouest,” *Cahiers d’Études africaines* 25, no. 100 (1985): 555–65, <https://doi.org/10.3406/cea.1985.1723>.

Uthman dan Fodio's son Muḥammad Bello in the Sokoto Caliphate, where it is believed he began to write his magisterial work, *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ*.

After leading jihad against the “pagan” Bambara, the perceived “corrupt” Masina Caliphate, and French colonial interests for nearly the last twelve years of his life, Tāl formed a kingdom in 1860. It is his impressive political biography which perhaps explains the Western academy's shortcomings in taking seriously the study of African Muslims as being both “bearers and interpreters of forms of Islamic knowledge” as well as “embodied practice with powerful claims to scriptural authority and Prophetic precedent.”²⁵ Furthermore, Western scholarly approaches tend to approach African and Islamic studies in separate lenses, which would explain the fascination with Tāl as a warrior and not as a serious scholar.²⁶ Seesemann describes the pitfall of figures and texts that are “too “Islamic” to be a legitimate subject of study for most anthropologists and too “African” to be of interest to Islamicists,” thereby risking African Muslim intellectuals' voices of “fall[ing] through the cracks that divide academic disciplines.”²⁷ A comprehensive study on Tāl's longest, most influential work, the *Rimāḥ*, will surely aid in upending this flawed approach.

Further, the lack of an English translation of the *Rimāḥ* constitutes a major academic blind spot in the study of modern Islamic studies, Sufi studies, West African intellectual history, as well as African studies. While my dissertation does not offer a full translation of the text, it relays the translations of key chapters, ideas and contents of the *Rimāḥ*, weaved into the analytic chapters or in full as appendices. Building on the works of past scholars who have stopped their efforts at translating

²⁵ Rudolph T. Ware, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*, Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks, (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 14.

²⁶ David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*, New Approaches to African History, (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004,) 2.

²⁷ Rüdiger Seesemann, “Embodied Knowledge and The Walking Qur'an: Lessons for the Study of Islam and Africa,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 3, no. 2 (2015): 202.

the titles of the chapters or select chapters only,²⁸ the function of translation in this dissertation is to complement the primary task of undergoing a thorough textual analysis with a focus on the sources and other scholarly works quoted in the text.

At first glance, the *Rimāḥ* does not strike one as a neatly woven, elegant text; a feature which perhaps aided in deterring scholars to study it more closely. Each chapter sets out on a single, explicit mission, usually carrying coarse titles such as “informing them that” or “warning them against.” For this reason, the *Rimāḥ* reads like a Sufi manifesto, a pairing that may seem paradoxical to readers accustomed to more temperately toned Sufi texts. It contains repeated quotes and sometimes discusses the subject matter of certain chapters in other unrelated chapters. Its sections often end abruptly, and the author’s own voice rarely and inconsistently makes its appearance with the sometimes-overwhelming barrage of quotations interwoven throughout the text. The *Rimāḥ*, therefore, is akin to a coarse quilt, rather than a velvet blanket. However, it is these features which make the *Rimāḥ* a diamond in the rough, and a serious study of it an even more rewarding pursuit.

It took Tāl eight years to pen the text, which means he was writing and adding to it over the course of his most enriching years as a pilgrim, a *khalīfa*, a scholar and leader. It was his camaraderie with Muḥammad Bello—son of the legendary leader Uthmān Dan Fodio—during his tenure in the Sokoto Caliphate that spurred the *Rimāḥ*’s writing, which he completed less than a decade later in Jegunko in modern day Mali in 1845, where he finally established his community and became its authoritative leader. This is precisely why the onlooker must not be deterred by its descriptor of being a “hard lump”: the *Rimāḥ* was not born out of comfort, but through Tāl’s almost palatable sojourning, experience, transience, and mobility. Its tone and occasional disjointedness tell the reader a great deal about this indomitable author and his enormous text: they serve to reflect Tāl’s tedious

²⁸ See Radtke, “Studies on the Sources of *Kitāb Rimāḥ Hizb Al-Raḥim* of al-Ḥajj ‘Umar” And the translation of the Chapter Headers of the *Rimah* by John Hunwick.

journeying into self and unto the world.

Describing the *Rimāḥ* as a “doctrinal reference” can mislead readers to think that it is a long manual of stringent conditions for the Tijānī path, replete with rituals and litanies. Rather, its contents include a wide scope of themes; a “deeper doctrine.” From an elaborate exposition of the “sealing sainthood” concept, to legal matters regarding following a *madhhab*, to the pitfalls many a *murīd* falls into such as the preoccupation with miracles and intermingling with princes and sultans, the *Rimāḥ*’s contents are diverse and reflect the times and locale of the author, as well as his personal and political commitments. Because of this, the *Rimāḥ* can be described as both a Tijānī text and not a Tijānī text simultaneously. It is a “Tijānī text” in the way it derives its overall ethos, methodology and approach to Sufism as being informed by gnosis via a Muḥammadan Path, and the doctrine of a “sealing” sainthood (the *khilāfa khatmiyya*) of the order’s founder, Aḥmad Tijānī (d.1815). At the same time, its approach to Sufism speaks to a rather broad range of sources, practices, beliefs and approaches, so it would be inaccurate *not* to classify it as a “Sufi text” in the general sense. As this dissertation will show, however, the category of “Sufi texts” itself must be used with a disclaimer, as the term risks the emergence of unexamined tropes regarding the work of scholars with strong commitments to Sufism. One false association tied to “Sufi” works is that they are “nonrational” and therefore un-scholastic. This perception can lead to the emergence of blind spots when it comes to the study of Sufism and Islamic mysticism.

This study is not motivated by studying so-called Islamic reform efforts based on an “illusion of teleoglogy”²⁹ or preconceived notions of what constitutes reformist thought and practice. As El-Rouyaheb rightly notes, the secondary literature on Islamic thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth

²⁹ Benjamin Soares, “The Historiography of Islam in West Africa: An Anthropologist’s View,” *Journal of African History*; Cambridge 55, no. 1 (March 2014): 30.

centuries tends to be at the mercy of a type of “Manichaean dualism inherent to the “revival and reform” narrative.”³⁰ Instead, this study is motivated by reading the politics through the text, so to speak, rather than the text through the politics. I focus on the overall project of Tāl in the *Rimāh*, which was so effectively disseminated, to the extent, I argue, that his articulation of the concept of *khilāfa khatmiyya* (sealing vicegerency) as it is articulated in the *Rimāh*, helped shape nineteenth century *ṭarīqa* formation and outlined the concept of *tarbiya*, by stressing the importance and etiquettes of the shaykh-disciple relationship.³¹ Tāl’s military campaigns and political authority stemmed from his religious authority, and not vice versa. Such a distinction is necessary to be made to avoid the trap of imposing teleological readings of Tāl’s life and work.

A study such as this cannot ignore debates, however dated, surrounding the term “neo-Sufism” in the Western academy. More recent scholarship has argued against seeing the notion of the “Muḥammadan way” as something new in the eighteenth century, but simply that “al-Tijānī’s notion of the “Muḥammadan Way” was useful in focusing Islamic learning on individual religious realization.”³² From my own readings of the Tijānī primary sources, I agree with Wright’s revisitation of his earlier hypothesis, that it is hard to claim that there was a distinct “movement” or network of *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiya* scholars as a visibly distinct phenomena from the larger Sufi tradition in West Africa before Tāl’s dissemination of the Tijāniyya. However, I work with the term *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiya* in my dissertation insofar as it appears prominently in Tāl’s text and highlights the sustained centrality of the idea of a living Prophet as a guide for scholars such as Tāl. I share Wright’s

³⁰ Khaled El-Rouayheb, “Islam without Europe: Traditions of Reform in Eighteenth-Century Islamic Thought,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 141, no. 2 (April 2021): 489.

³¹ The term “*fayḍa*” is almost exclusively associated with the reach of Ibrāhīm Nīasse (d.1975). For more on Shaykh-disciple relationship in the Tijaniyya, consult: Zachary Wright, “Spiritual Training Across the Sahara: Debating the Need for the Living Sufi Master in the Tijaniyya”, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Oxford, Forthcoming.

³² Wright, *Realizing Islam*, 6

emphasis on realization (*taḥqīq*) as a more successful paradigm to approaching and understanding the Tijānī project in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries especially in its textual forms. However, I do not see the two frameworks as mutually exclusive. The *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, as well as the notion of the “seal of the saints” and the “sealed isthmus” (*al-barzakh al-makhtūm*) are ultimately complemented by—and animated by—the process of realization (*taḥqīq*).

Tāl’s project constructs mysticism as a practice and fashions Sufism as arbiter of all forms of knowledge. In this way, the *Rimāḥ* promotes a hierarchy of knowledge structures which places Sufism at its helm; a feature which can be extended to the fifteenth century Maghrebi Zarrūqian and the Egyptian Sha‘rānīan method towards a restoration of *sharī‘a* via mysticism. It is for this that the concept of having access to “a living Prophet” rather than “the books of dead men” becomes so salient: as O’Fahey and Radtke remarked on the impasse between the Wahhābis and Ibn Idrīs was that the “fundamental difference between the two men is that for the former, revelation is closed, for the former, it is not.”³³ ³⁴This theme will be explored in further detail in Chapter II and III.

In an essay on Neo-Sufism in the *New Cambridge History of Islam*, Bruce Lawrence suggests that the single most important question that demarcates Sufi from non-Sufi Muslims is whether the Prophet Muhammad is alive or dead.³⁵ Lawrence asserts that Sufis of all generations have held this view that the Prophet is living, yet what distinguishes the nineteenth century is that it witnessed a more explicit, and more openly public, awareness of the Prophet as the crucial, “living” link between God and humankind. The figure of the Prophet, in the work of Tāl and others, possesses a timeless

³³ R. S. O’Fahey and Bernd Radtke, “Neo-Sufism Reconsidered,” *Der Islam* 70, no. 1 (1993): 52–87.

³⁴ The word “revelation” here is inaccurate, however, since those who claim to witness waking visions of the Prophet do not perceive this as “revelation,” which most Muslims believe ended with the Prophet Muhammad.

³⁵ In Ed. Michael Cook, *The New Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 355 Bruce Lawrence, “Sufism and Neo-sufism.”

omniscience. Intercession with the Prophet was certainly not a new idea; origins of which could be traced in the works of past mystics such as Ibn ‘Arabī, Suyūṭī and others. And yet, what distinguishes so-called neo-Sufism is not so much novel doctrinal shifts from mystical predecessors, but rather, the demand that Sufism responds to the multiple challenges of an emergent new political orders. In Bruce Lawrence’s view, it is colonialism, not Wahhabism, that is the impetus for the spread of politically and socially reinvigorated Sufi movements. Though the *Rimāḥ* was written before total European colonial dominance in West Africa, Tāl encountered and eventually fought against French colonial forces who were inserting themselves in internal politics in a prominent way by the 1850s. The effects of the impending threat of colonialism should not be written off in studies on mid-nineteenth century West African intellectual production.

I approach the rise of so-called *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiya* phenomenon in the context that drove certain scholars to describe eighteenth and nineteenth century North and West Africa and even as far as India as being a time and place when “neo-Sufism” took shape. I argue that the idea of a Muḥammadan Path was nothing particularly new, but rather it was, for the Tijāniyya, the clear articulation of a seal of the saints and a seal for the paths. By examining the heavy influence of fifteenth and sixteenth century scholars such as that of Sha‘rānī and Suyūṭī, I show that the notion of a *ṭarīqa* organized along the lines of the “Muḥammadan way” was already thriving two centuries prior in Cairo, so there is nothing quite “neo” about the Sufism of the Tijānīs. While scholars have helped lay this debate to rest, it is worth recalling that Trimingham noted that the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiya* phenomenon possesses the distinctive feature of “uniting with the spirit of the Prophet” as a “change which affected the whole basis of mystical life.”³⁶ John Voll contended that “North African Sufis concentrated more intensely on the Prophet” and that in the eighteenth-century the purpose of *tarīqas*

³⁶ Abun-Nasr, *The Tijāniyya , a Ṣūfī Order in the Modern World*, 3.

in North Africa was for followers to attempt a union with the Prophet than with God.³⁷ In their paper “Neo-Sufism Reconsidered”, O’Fahey and Radtke have criticized such conclusions for promoting the problematic notion of neo-Sufism without substantiating their statements.³⁸ Specifically, they decry the “neo-Sufi cliché” as being based with “the great uncertainty” on the notion of a distinct “Muḥammadan way”³⁹ and criticize these “cardboard simplifications” as having roots in the French colonial encounter in North Africa, where Sufi brotherhoods, according to O’Fahey and Radtke, were the subjects of “elaborate demonology” in French academic surveys of and missionary literature because they were the foremost resisters of colonial takeover.

This dissertation contributes to the aforementioned literature by situating the *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ* as a key text in North and West African Islamic intellectual history of the nineteenth century—which, by the eighteenth century, marked the Tijāniyya as the “last *ṭarīqa*” and Aḥmad Tijānī, the order’s founder, as the *Khatm al-awliyā’*, (Seal of Saints)—as relayed by Tāl himself in *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ*, in which he cites the renowned Qādirī scholar, Mukhtār al-Kuntī:

[...] that century being the 12th century of the *Hijra* of the Prophet—upon him be the most excellent peace and blessings—resembles the Prophet’s century, in several respects: the first being the fact that it contains the Seal of the Saints, just as his century, God bless him and give him peace, contains the Seal of the Prophets.⁴⁰

Considering the gravity of this historical moment according to Tāl’s own perception of it, I contend that Tāl’s project in the *Rimāḥ* saw itself as possessing the “final” culmination and the most definitive prescription via a clearly outlined compendium for Sufism at large and the Tijāniyya specifically. It

³⁷ John O. Voll, “Neo-sufism: Reconsidered Again,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 42, no. 2/3 (2008): 314–30, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40380170>.

³⁸ R. S. O’Fahey and Bernd Radtke, “Neo-Sufism Reconsidered”

³⁹ Ibid, 64.

⁴⁰ Umar Tal, *Hādhā kitāb Rimāḥ ḥizb al-raḥīm ‘alā nuḥūr ḥizb al-raḥīm*, 1st ed., Harvard College Library preservation digitization program (Tunis: Maṭba‘at al-Dawlah al-Tūnisīyah, 1293).

is this teaching that arguably garnered him a sense of authoritative backing and revolutionized the process of popular *ṭarīqa* formation and set the tone for what shaykh-disciple relations look like in modern Muslim West Africa.

Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries in North and West Africa, we find many debates on efforts to define the balance between *ṭarīqa* and *sharī'a* and attempts to promote a “juridical Sufism” that emphasizes the importance of jurisprudence and critiques the so-called excesses of certain Sufi practices. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *taqlīd* came to signify a pejorative notion, so Tāl’s negative position on adhering to one *madhhab* is not unique within the context of its time period, nor other Sufi scholars.⁴¹ It resembles that of his contemporary Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Fāssi (d.1837), the great mystic who was dubbed “*Muḥyī al-Sunna*” (the reviver of the *Sunna*) and underwent self-exile from his native Fes to the Arabian Peninsula in order to dwell among the exoteric community of Ibn-‘Abdul Wahhāb (d.1792), despite their staunchly diverging positions on Sufism. Both Ibn Idrīs and ‘Abdul Wahhāb converged on one key point, however; their rejection of *taqlīd* (legal conformity) by way of adhering to one of the four Sunni legal schools exclusively. The same view holds true for Tāl. Since Tāl himself and most Tijānīs adhere to the Mālikī school, what then exactly underpins the subtleties of this 19th century West African Sufi anti-*taqlīd* polemic?

This dissertation investigates how Tāl’s criticism of the *madhāhib* is not absolute, but is rather directed against those who are “misled to believe that whoever goes against the ruling of one of the four *imāms* disobeys God and that this act is enough to cast him out of the entire *madhhab*,”⁴² citing

⁴¹ *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* defines *taqlīd* as the “conformity to legal precedent, traditional behavior, and doctrines. Often juxtaposed by reformers with *ijtihād*, independent reasoning based on revelation. Traditionally, legal precedent is considered binding in Islamic law, but *taqlīd* has acquired a negative connotation among modern reformers, who use the term to refer to cultural and intellectual stagnation and unwillingness to experiment with new ideas. Reformist criticism has taken both fundamentalist and modernist directions.” I argue that Tāl’s project is neither “fundamentalist” nor modernist, but rather, one of realization.

⁴² ‘Umar al-Fūṭī. *Kitāb Rimāh Hizb al-Rahīm ‘Ala Nuhūr Hizb al-Rajīm, al-Maktaba al-‘Asriyya*, (Beirut, 2004), 69.

that ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb himself was never content with his own rulings on legal matters. The issue of critiquing forms of *taqlīd* (imitation), though not uncommon for his time, is central to understanding Tāl’s stances against competing scholars in his milieu. He criticizes trends within certain followers of *madhāhib*, who “blindly follow an *imām*’s opinion even though that ruling may be wrong in their judgment.”⁴³ Tāl advises “believing men and women to hold fast to the *sharī‘a muḥammadiyya*, strictly follow the sunna⁴⁴ and exert [themselves] in the path of knowledge and at the feet of the ‘*ulamā*’,” lest they, in his words, “drown in a sea of ignorance and darkness.”⁴⁵

Through his use of such polemics, I suggest that such criticisms underlie Tāl’s possible reproachment of the gradual corruption of the high ideals of West African scholarship by the ‘*ulamā*’ of his time, whom he saw as “abusing” Sufism for political aims or neglecting it altogether. I locate more precisely the sources of Tāl’s critique and his definition of what constitutes “corruption” in Tāl’s view regarding the intersection of scholarship and political participation in chapter I of this dissertation. I approach this question alongside the fact that he himself becomes called to formulate his own political vision to best respond to the corruption he perceived.

While Tāl is not arguing for an unbridled textual approach to knowledge—one of the key prescriptions in the *Rimāḥ*⁴⁶—it is clear that his so-called “anti-*taqlīd*” stances are not anti-scholastic prescriptions, nor are they calls for *ijtihād*. Rather, they can be read as a rhetorical weapon to undermine the exclusivity of the scholars to whom he was opposed. Further research would necessitate investigating more deeply the political differences around the scholarship he opposed

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 83.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 86.

⁴⁶ For another example of this Sufi epistemology and doctrine, see the work of Zachary Valentine Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrahim Niassé*, Islam in Africa; v. 18 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015) Here, Wright outlines the widely disseminated Tijani project of 20th century Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niāsse.

throughout his writings in the *Rimāḥ*. It is evident from cursory readings of the secondary literature that for Tāl, his project acts as a corrective one. His calls to re-center *taḥqīq* (spiritual realization) over the *taqlīd* (imitation) of earthly ‘*ulamā*’, his conceptualization of the “law” and critical approaches to the fields of knowledge possess strong mystical–and political–implications.

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters, whose themes summarize the legal, doctrinal and mystical aspects of Tāl’s project.⁴⁷ Aware of the immense effort a thorough study of the *Rimāḥ* would entail, I break down the chapters of my dissertation on a topical basis and offer a thorough translation of select, corresponding sections. This dissertation covers translations that relate to the key thematic scopes of the *Rimāḥ* underlined in this Introduction, namely:

- 1- Tāl the “Anti-Sultan”
- 2- The rhetoric of “the Seal” as the vehicle for the Tijāniyya’s spread and *ṭarīqa* formation
- 3- The “living” Prophet
- 4- The key sources of the *Rimāḥ*
- 5- Tāl’s doctrine of “sober Sufism”

In addition to the broad thematic scopes interrogated in the following chapters, the appendices offer a full translation of the text’s fifty-five-chapter headings which summarize the text’s topical contents, as well as a few select chapters I consider instrumental to the lasting intellectual contributions of the *Rimāḥ*. The translations in the appendices were aided by the unfinished work of venerable translator Mukhtar Holland’s unpublished translation of fifteen chapters of the *Rimāḥ*. Though I consulted Holland’s translations and found them to be excellent linguistically, the translations here are my own.

⁴⁷ As regards my research methodology, I deploy a classical philological approach to the text and demonstrate its major contributions, uses, sources, themes, and ideas and apply them within a larger corpus of relevant scholarship I rely on the standalone printed edition of the *Rimāḥ* which nonetheless accompanies the *Jawāhir*, (*Al-Maktaba Al’Aṣriyya*, Beirut, 2004). Due to the errors in the printed editions (which all rely on the “mother text”, the Tunis edition, of 1928) I have cross checked all translations therein one of the earliest manuscripts of the *Rimāḥ*, transcribed by one of Tāl’s closest companions in 1852, Abu Ja‘far Muḥammad bin al-Ḥājj ‘Īsā, which is housed at the Institute for Arabic Manuscripts in Cairo, Egypt. (Cairo, *Ma‘had al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya*, 110, fols.)

Sources

The literature I consult for my dissertation broadly encompass the following general scopes:

- I) West African Arabic literature with a focus on the *Rimāḥ*.
- II) Secondary sources on intellectual history in North and West Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- III) Relevant primary sources from cited scholarship, including other sources from ‘Umarian literary production.⁴⁸

While the *Rimāḥ* is arguably one of the most important scholarly works from the region in the nineteenth century, it is certainly not unique in its genre of Islamic scholarly literature in Arabic from West Africa. Arabicists, Africanists and Islamicists have gone to great lengths to document the impressive scholarly history of Islamic Africa, and especially West Africa in the past few decades.⁴⁹ Through a collection of seminal essays on the written history of Islamic scholarship in Timbuktu, *Meanings of Timbuktu*⁵⁰ debunks the notion that African history survived only through the oral tradition. Based on the pioneering 1990s journal *Sudanic Africa*, in 2010, for example, Brill launched *Islamic Africa*, a peer-reviewed journal with the purpose of publishing original scholarship on the literary tradition of Sudanic Africa and primary source material and commentary essays related to

⁴⁸ Timbuktu Editions of Cairo/Senegal is currently working on anthology of the entirety of all Shaykh ‘Umar Tāl’s written productions (*Al-A‘māl al-kāmila*) in both Arabic and French side by side, in chronological order of when they were written, starting with *Tadhkirat al-Mustarshidīn* being the earliest.

⁴⁹ The most comprehensive effort is represented by the Arabic Literature of Africa Encyclopedia which parallels in scope the *Geschichte of Arabischen Lieteratur* of Carl Brockelmann. See R. S. O’Fahey, comp., *Arabic literature of Africa: The Writings of Eastern Sudanic Africa*, Vol. 1, (Leiden: Brill, 2003); John Hunwick, comp., *Arabic Literature of Africa: The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), Vol. 2 ; R. S. O’Fahey , comp., *Arabic Literature of Africa: The Writings of the Muslim People of Northeastern Africa* Vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); John Hunwick, comp., *Arabic Literature of Africa: The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa*, Vol. 4; (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Charles Stewart, comp; *Arabic Literature of Africa: The Writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara* Vol. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 2 vols.

⁵⁰ Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *The Meanings of Timbuktu* (Cape Town: HSRC Press in association with CODESRIA, 2008).

In the book entitled, *Jihad of the Pen: the Sufi Literature of West Africa*, Zachary Wright remarked that “the near absence of their [Sufi ‘*ulamā*’ from West Africa] authorial voices leaves a void at what should be the heart of an intellectual history.”⁵² My dissertation inserts itself into part of the established effort being paid to the impressive scholarly production of the West African ‘*ulamā*’ of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Due to the breadth of the sources cited in the *Rimāḥ* and its impressive pedagogical and doctrinal reach, a thorough translation and textual analysis seeks to remedy a major blind spot in the field of modern Islamic intellectual history. It demonstrates that the West African Islamic scholarly tradition is not an isolated geographic area of scholarship.⁵³ Rather, Tāl’s central work represents an important and understudied corpus of Tijānī as well as West African Islamic scholarly literature in Arabic.⁵⁴ In fact, Arabic is so central to West African scholarly production that John Hunwick contended: “Arabic is the Latin of Africa.”⁵⁵

In a similar vein, R.S. O’Fahey noted: “the nineteenth century was Muslim Africa’s Sufi century.”⁵⁶ Sufi orders were heavily involved in the production of knowledge and Sufism is an

⁵¹ Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa, *Islamic Africa* (Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, Brill, 2010).

⁵² Rudolph T. Ware, Zachary Wright, and Amir Syed, *Jihad of the Pen: Sufi Scholars of Africa in Translation* (Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press, 2018), 1.

⁵³ الطبعة 1، *al-Thaqāfah al-‘Arabīyah al-Islāmīyah fī Gharb Afrīqiyā*, Umar Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, and عمر محمد صالح، *طبعة جديدة منقحة ومزودة* [i.e. 2.], al-Ṭab‘ah 1. [i.e. 2.], ṭab‘ah jadīdah munaqqāḥah wa-mazīdah. (Bayrūt, Lubnān: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2006).

⁵⁴ إبراهيم حامد لمين، “إسهامات قبائل كنتة و الفلان في التواصل الثقافي بين إقليمي توات و السودان الغربي خلال القرن 13 هـ”، *مجلة الدراسات التاريخية و الاجتماعية* 19 / no. 7 (2016): 17–29, <https://doi.org/10.12816/0028331>; Harith Idris Harith, “عنقاء مشرق: أطلس البحث عن أصل الفولان القديم”، *Sudanile* (blog), September 8, 2015.

⁵⁵ John O. Hunwick, “West Africa and the Arabic Language,” *Sudanica Africa* 15 (2004): 133–44.

⁵⁶ R. S. O’Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition*, Series in Islam and Society in Africa (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1990).

integral manifestation of Islam in West Africa. However, French and British colonial and missionary perceptions of Islam have colored not only scholarly perceptions of Sufism, but of Islamic thought and knowledge production in Africa in general. Some western academic approaches to Sufism in West Africa have deployed the lens of syncretism between African indigenous religion and Islamic spirituality and characterized it as a form of “local religion” or “Islam noir.” Yet it was the breadth of the political, intellectual and social force that Sufism offered that ultimately helped spread Islam over the past three centuries in the Western regions of the African continent.⁵⁷ Approaches to Sufism in West Africa must be rooted in their context-specific locale, but it is just as, if not more important to view the larger connections with Sufis and Muslims around the world as well as the rigorous intellectual production of West African Sufis.⁵⁸

Other works focus on the spread of Islam in West Africa, such as Hiskett’s *The Development of Islam in West Africa*.⁵⁹ I situate my approach along the scholarship of Last,⁶⁰ Hill,⁶¹ Wright,⁶²

⁵⁷ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Jihād in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2016).

⁵⁸ Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*.

⁵⁹ M. Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, Longman Studies in African History (London ; New York: Longman, 1984).

⁶⁰ Murray Last, “Slavery or Death in Sokoto and Borno: Tactics, Legalities and Sources,” *Landscapes, Sources and Intellectual Projects of the West African Past*, July 18, 2018, 422–42.

⁶¹ Joseph Hill, *Wrapping Authority: Women Islamic Leaders in a Sufi Movement in Dakar, Senegal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

⁶² Zachary Wright, “Secrets on the Muḥammadan Way: Transmission of the Esoteric Sciences in eighteenth Century Scholarly Networks,” *Islamic Africa* 9, no. 1 (2018): 77–105.

Kane,⁶³ Seesemann,⁶⁴ Hanretta,⁶⁵ Bevilacqua⁶⁶ and Brenner.⁶⁷ Such approaches show that the spread of Islam in Africa by Sufism cannot be understood by examining the political activism of *ṭuruq* or the “charisma” of the *shaykh* only but rather by the religious and scholarly experiential sense of growth, purpose and meaning that millions of wayfarers derive from belonging to a Sufi cosmology or order.

For biographical data on Tāl, of particular significance is a 1000-page encyclopedic biography/hagiography, *Al-Jawāhir wa al-durar fī sīrat al-Ḥājj ‘Umar* “Rare Pearls on the Life of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar”⁶⁸ by one of Tāl’s *khalīfas*, who is one of his great grandsons and a scholar of the West African Islamic scholarly tradition, Muntaga Tāl. It is a vital source that relays important biographical details and oral historical narratives on Tāl’s life not found in any other secondary source on his life or scholarship.

I base much of the first chapter on the four key secondary source works that examine Tāl’s life as both a religious scholar and a political leader, with a focus on the former lens. Ferdinand Dumont’s *L’Anti Sultan*⁶⁹ approaches Tāl as a reformer who challenged traditional political authority. In David

⁶³ Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁶⁴ Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2011).

⁶⁵ Sean Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁶⁶ Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018).

⁶⁷ Louis Brenner, *West African Sufi: The Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁶⁸ Muḥammad al-Muntaqā Aḥmad Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa-al-durar fī sīrat al-shaykh al-ḥājj ‘Umar* (Beirut: Dār al-Burāq, 2005).

⁶⁹ Fernand Dumont, *L’anti-sultan; ou, al-Hajj Omar Tal du Fouta combattant de la foi (1794-1864)* (Dakar: Nouvelles éditions africaines, 1974).

Robinson's *The Holy War of 'Umar Tal*,⁷⁰ he offers the most comprehensive take on Tāl's life and jihad campaigns through primary source chronicles, French sources, and interviews. In addition, I found JR Willis' work, *In the Path of Allah: The Passion of al-Hajj 'Umar—An Essay into the Nature of Charisma in Islam*,⁷¹ published in London in 1989, to be unique in its closer engagement with the writings of Tāl. Finally, Madina Ly-Tall's *Un Islam Militant en Afrique de l'Ouest au XIXe Siècle*,⁷² which focuses on Tāl's anticolonial resistance to French campaigns. This work is successful in the way it incorporates Tāl's intellectual project to explain his political and social actions.

More recent scholarship has begun to pay closer attention not just to the militaristic legacy of Tāl, but to his immense scholarly contributions. Amir Syed's doctoral dissertation on the history of Tāl's legacy through his written works, sheds light on his three-thousand-line poem in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad entitled, *Safīnat al-sa'āda li ahl ḍu'uf wa-l-najāda* which he translates as "The Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak."⁷³ In addition, Syed has devoted a chapter to extrapolating on two chapters of the *Rimāḥ* in the recent book, *Jihad of the Pen*. This joint book and the combined scholarship of Zachary Wright, Rudolph Ware and Amir Syed forge new pathways into the intellectual breadth and scope of the erudite West African scholarly and Sufi tradition.

Other works extrapolate on the written and scholarly tradition of Sufism writ large, and the Tijāniyya specifically,⁷⁴ but few tackle the *Rimāḥ* and its scholarly contributions. The key most

⁷⁰ David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, Oxford Studies in African Affairs (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁷¹ John Ralph Willis, *In the Path of Allah: The Passion of al-Hajj 'Umar: An Essay into the Nature of Charisma in Islam* (London, England; Savage, Md., 1989).

⁷² Madina Ly-Tall, *Un Islam militant en Afrique de l'Ouest au XIXe siècle: la Tijāniyya de Saïku Umar Futiyu contre les pouvoirs traditionnels et la puissance coloniale*, (Dakar, ACCT IFAN, 1991).

⁷³ Amir Syed, "Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written: Mastery, Mobility and Islamic Authority in nineteenth Century West Africa" (Dissertation, University of Michigan, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2017).

⁷⁴ Abun-Nasr, *The Tijāniyya , a Sufi Order in the Modern World*.

notable scholarly approaches to the study of *al-Rimāḥ* have signaled to the text's importance and repeatedly decried the lack of a comprehensive study on it. My work builds on the efforts of Maurice Puech and Mouhamadou Cisse's doctoral dissertations at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal, who both focus on the *Rimāḥ* as a vehicle for Tāl's unparalleled Islamic authority in West Africa.⁷⁵ Ten chapters of the text in French from Maurice Puech's dissertation were published in 2017 by Al-Bouraq press.⁷⁶ Further, Said Bousbina's 1996 doctoral thesis remains one of the most important expositions of the general themes of the *Rimāḥ*.⁷⁷ As previously outlined, the work of R.S. O'Fahey, Bernd Radtke and that of John Hunwick, such as his, "An Introduction to the Tijānī Path: Translations of the Chapter Headings of the *Rimāḥ*"⁷⁸ made the first "dent" in the analysis of the *Rimāḥ* in the English language. Other more antiquated works possess a curious fascination with Sufism and the Tijāniyya as representative of "black mysticism." For example, based on the dissertation of Maurice Puech, Yves Marquet's 1968 paper, *Des Ikhwan al-Safaa a al-Hag Umar (B. Said Tall) Marabout Et Conquerant Toucouler* investigates the *Rimāḥ* in relation to Ismā'īlī thought and theology.⁷⁹ Similarly, the pioneering work of Jamil Abun-Nasr on the Tijāniyya,⁸⁰ while it made

⁷⁵ Maurice Puech, "Les Rimah" (Dakar, Senegal, Cheikh Anta Diop, 1967); Mouhamadou Alpha Cisse, "El Hadji Omar Foutiyou Tall, une Grande Figure de la Tijāniyya en Afrique Occidentale au XIXeme siècle: Pensée Juridico-mystique à travers 'Rimah'" (PhD Dissertation, Dakar, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, 2011).

⁷⁶ Umar Tal, *Les Rimāḥ: un traité de sciences religieuses musulmanes*, Héritage spirituel (Beirut: Dar Albouraq, 2017).

⁷⁷ Saïd Bousbina, "Un Siecle de Savoir Islamique En Afrique de l'ouest (1820-1920) : Analyse et Commentaire de La Litterature de La Confrerie Tijāniyya a Travers Les Oeuvres d'al-Hajj Umar, Ubayda Ben Anbuja, Yirkoy Talfi et al-Hajj Malik Sy" (PhD thesis, Paris, 1996).

⁷⁸ John Hunwick, "An Introduction to the Tijani Path: Translations of the Chapter Headings of al-Rimah" Paris, France, *Islam et Sociétés Au Sud Du Sahara*, 1992nd ed., vol. 6, 1987, 17–32.

⁷⁹ Y. Marquet, "Des Ihwan al-Safa' à al-Hagg 'Umar (b. Said Tall), marabout et conquérant toucouleur," *Arabica* 15 (1968): 6.

⁸⁰ Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijāniyya , a Sufi Order in the Modern World*, Middle Eastern Monographs 7 (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

significant inroads into the study of the spiritual path, is also vitiated by antagonistic attitudes towards mysticism.

In addition to the work of Wright, Robinson, O’Fahey, Radtke, Voll and Huwnick, within the field of Islamic intellectual history, the more recent work of Ahmad Dallal⁸¹ on the Islamic intellectual history of the eighteenth century, although it does not broach the topic of Tijānī methodology in much depth, remains of particular importance, as it helps situate Tijānī scholarship within the scholarly debate regarding the so-called myth of Muslim “decline”—which has thankfully been put laid to rest in secondary scholarship—as well as within the broader scholarship on nineteenth and twentieth centuries scholarly currents. In addition, within the study of “later” Islamic intellectual history, my dissertation builds upon the insights and methodology of Khaled El-Rouyaheb, whose work on the seventeenth century as an important site of *taḥqīq* aids in laying the historical backdrop for my work on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁸² Mark Sedgwick and Bernd Radtke’s work on a parallel figure, Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs, is of paramount significance, as it extrapolates on a parallel and equally important disseminator of the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiya* paradigm in the nineteenth century.⁸³

Finally, in order to understand these new pathways in our understanding of Sufism in the nineteenth century, it is important to note that texts alone cannot give a complete picture of how their prescriptions manifest in reality. To better understand Tāl’s contribution to Islamic intellectual history and Sufi studies more fully, more studies are needed to ascertain how his written edicts “translated” in a practical way into his social milieu. Seeing as he founded a warrior state, how, if

⁸¹ Ahmad S. Dallal, *Islam without Europe: Traditions of Reform in Eighteenth-Century Islamic Thought*, Islamic Civilization & Muslim Networks (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

⁸² Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁸³ Sedgwick, *Saints and Sons*.

at all, did his writings apply to the legal institutions, courts or rulings that emerged under his rule? In what ways does the text “live on” and how is it studied and referenced today? Such questions cannot be pursued without a thorough understanding of Tāl’s overall project in the *Rimāḥ*: a site of *taḥqīq*, a manual of Gnosticism, and above all, an expression of an unyielding scholar invoking “figurative spears in the hands of a metaphorical League for the Merciful, over the necks of figurative necks of the Accursed”⁸⁴ in a turbulent and transient nineteenth century West African landscape.

⁸⁴ *Rimāḥ*, 684.

Chapter I:

Tāl as *L'Anti-Sultan*: The Conditions for the *Rimāḥ*'s Emergence

Mën nañu jange alxuraan si béne nit	One can learn the Qur'an from a single master
Kéne nit mēnu ka déf ak tarikh yi	Not the <i>tarikh</i>
Bene nit menul jange tarikh yep	A single person cannot possess the whole <i>tarikh</i>
Dafa méli né li wees	It is just like history
Nétali Umar	The story of Umar
Mun naa dóor téy	I can start narrating it today
Ba ëlëk	Continue to do so tomorrow
Di ko nétali bës bi si tope	Still perform it the day after tomorrow
Wanté	However
Du ma ko jexël	I will not be able to finish it
Li Umar déf yëp si jalóré	All the feats that Umar accomplished
Kéne mēnu ka nétali si digénté bu gate	No one person can narrate the story of El Hadj Umar in such a short period of time

⁸⁵ From the Epic of El Hadj Umar, Trans. By Samba Diop

As the above traditional Wolof epic about his life states, it would be futile to attempt to capture the full vivacity of Tāl's biography. The 'Umarian biographical narrative is a genre of writing in itself⁸⁶ and has captured the attention of many scholars over the past several decades. The reason why Tāl's life is seen as so enigmatic and mired in mystery, is due to the mixed reception of his legacy. Particularly, it is most likely attributed to the extent to which he was able to transform the religious and political landscape of nineteenth century West Africa so drastically, singlehandedly and in a relatively short period of time. "All the feats that Hadj 'Umar accomplished," as the ballad sings, are indeed difficult to encapsulate.

More so, perhaps because they are perceived to be unrealized still by his followers and

⁸⁵ Samba Diop et al., *The Epic of El Hadj Umar Taal of Fuuta* (Madison, WI: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2000).

⁸⁶ See: Wendell Hassan Marsh, "Compositions of Sainthood: The Biography of Ḥājj 'Umar Tāl by Shaykh Mūsā Kamara," PhD dissertation, 2018, 282.

descendants. The legendary nature of his demise, when he was thought to have simply disappeared in a cave in modern-day Mali in 1864, evokes Christ-like themes. According to most classical Muslim commentators on the Qur'an, Jesus did not die and will return at the end of time. In the same vein, the conditions of Tāl's death/disappearance remain are spoken of as shrouded in mystery, conjuring themes of eschatological prophecy so prevalent in his own writings. In fact, some of his more zealous supporters even consider Tāl to be "the reincarnation of 'Īsā"⁸⁷ or the awaited Imām Mahdī.

Tāl is the enigmatic saint par excellence: a *malāmatī*⁸⁸ Sufi to some, with his controversial *jihad* campaigns that defy stereotypical impressions of mystics as docile and pacifist, to others, he is the paragon of West African sainthood for his influential role in arguably laying down the groundwork for what an organized contemporary *ṭarīqa*, as we know it today, looks like. A cursory look at pre-existing Sufi figures in West Africa, namely, the Qādiriyya as it is represented by the venerable Usmān Dan Fodio, will show that there was no formal *ṭuruq* by the mid-nineteenth century West African, as Dan Fodio "did actually not set up firm organizational structures for his Sufi path" and instead of "organizing [his] followers into tight-knit Sufi communities, his descendants established the Sokoto Caliphate as their political and religious power base."⁸⁹ Though the Qādiriyya was the most wide spread early extant Sufi tradition in West Africa, explicit articulations of *ṭarīqa* affiliation, in the Qādirī communities of the founders, Mukhtār al-Kuntī (d.1811) and Dan Fodio

⁸⁷ John Ralph Willis, "Jihad Fi Sabil Allah-Its Doctrinal Basis in Islam and Some Aspects of Its Evolution in Nineteenth-Century West Africa," *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 3 (1967): 404, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/179828>.

⁸⁸ The Tijāniyya holds particular esteem for *malāmatīyya*. Not as a movement per se, but as a spiritual state. From the Arabic word *malāmah* (ملامة) "blame", the belief that piety should be a private matter and efforts must be put in place to thwart people from adoring one's piety externally, as well as the belief that being held in high regard may lead to worldly attachment.

⁸⁹ Rüdiger Seesemann, "Sufism in West Africa," *Religion Compass* 4, no. 10 (2010): 608.

(d.1815) only appeared prominently with later leaders, such as Muḥammad bin al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī (d.1826) and Shaykh Dan Tāfa (1864)—contemporaries of Tāl—who perhaps began organizing along *ṭarīqa* lines, arguably in response to the *Rimāḥ* and its vast purchase.

During a period rife with competing local polities and kingdoms and rising colonial incursion, Tāl’s unique campaign—both intellectually and politically—was in no way understated or modest, nor was it by any stretch a blip in the region’s historical radar. For some, he is seen by some as an imperialist and divisive conqueror, whereas for others, he is hailed as a proto-nationalist figure of sorts and the apex representative of Islamic authority in nineteenth West Africa.⁹⁰ Secondary literary approaches to Tāl’s biography also vary greatly. The works of Madina Ly-Tall and Emile Ducoudray, for example,⁹¹ view Tāl as a valiant Muslim defender of his homeland from European incursion whereas other works, such as those of Boubacar Barry and Amadou Hampate Ba,⁹² take a more critical stance against him as a figure who sought to spread Islam by force and driven by imperialist intentions. It can be further argued that West African authors’ writings on Tāl developed the field of modern West African history and historiography. The most glaring example of this is Musā Kamarā’s 1913 work *Ashhā l-‘ulūm wa aṭyab al-khabar fī sīrat al-Ḥājj ‘Umar* (The Most Delicious of Sciences and the Tastiest of the News in the Biography of Ḥājj ‘Umar) who was sharply critical of the military campaigns of Tāl and even of Dan Fodio’s.⁹³ He writes both critically and historically about the

⁹⁰ Soares, “The Historiography of Islam in West Africa,” 31.

⁹¹ Ly-Tall, *Un Islam militant en Afrique de l’Ouest au XIXe siècle*.

⁹² Boubacar Barry, *La Sénégal du XVe au XIXe siècle: traite négrière, Islam et conquête coloniale*, Racines du présent (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1988); Amadou Hampaté Bâ, *L’empire peul du Macina*, Monde d’outre-mer, passé et présent. 1 sér; Études, 15 (Paris: Mouton, 1962).

⁹³ Kamarā is very critical of violence among the West African religious elite and wrote a later book (1922) entitled “Most Lovers of jihad after the Prophets wanted to make names for themselves and dominion in the land and were not concerned with God’s servants who died in jihad.” Even though in it, he absolves Tāl of blame for being pulled into *jihad*, and states that he had no choice.

‘Umarian narrative in inter-war period Senegal. Writing about Kamarā’s biography of Tāl, Marsh interrogates the problem-space in this text, and the “composition of the contradictions of sainthood through the narration, archivization, and the contestation of the naturalization of saintly authority by hereditary genealogical claims.”⁹⁴

If perceptions of Tāl’s life are mixed, then it is no wonder that receptions to the *Rimāḥ* vary as well. Throughout my field research on the legacy of the text in Senegal, Cairo and Fez (2017-2021) I asked various present day Tijānī scholars and *shuyūkh* about their views on the enduring significance of Tāl’s magnum opus. This yielded a “mixed bag” of reactions. A contemporary Tijānī affiliated figure in Imbaba, Cairo, for example, attested to the text’s undeniable centrality to the formulating the early Tijānī corpus, but tended to downplay the text’s Arabic linguistic prowess due to the non-native Arabic speaking “Africanness” of the author⁹⁵ (a claim which, in my estimation, is a grossly unfair one, and is probably colored by unfamiliarity with the breadth of the Arabic literary corpus from Sub Saharan Africa and racialized views of Africa and Africans as one can hardly find even a handful of grammatical error in the text’s earliest manuscripts.) The same figure rehearsed the trope that Tāl was more of a warrior than a scholar; a charge which even a cursory glance at the body of his writings would quickly dispel.

Despite the differing approaches to Tāl’s life, one cannot argue that he did not, in fact, vastly transform the political and religious landscape of nineteenth century West Africa; the effects of his project reverberate to this day. Willis, the author of the only published English monograph on Tāl to

⁹⁴ Marsh, “Compositions of Sainthood: The Biography of Ḥājj ‘Umar Tāl by Shaykh Mūsā Kamara,” (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2018), 6.

⁹⁵ The criticism is invited, perhaps, because, in closing the *Rimāḥ*, Tāl himself says asks the readers’ forgiveness for any errors as he is not “among the people of the sciences of Arabic nor its etymology.” (*Rimāḥ*, 685) However, this is more of a gesture of humility than a reality or confession. It is more likely that Tāl wanted to signal to the reader that the marvel he composed as a non-Arab is on par with the most sophisticated works by Arabs.

date, classified him as being a “modern day *mujāhid*”, “impelled by a messianic impulse” motivated by other nineteenth century Muslim reformers’ emphasis on “Qur'an and Sunna in Muslim fundamentalism” as a means to “restore to *jihād fi sabīl Allah*” and “much of the prominence it held in the early days of Islam.”⁹⁶ This approach of boxing Tāl into a being a proponent of “Qur'an and *sunna* only” is reductionist, as chapter IIII of this dissertation on the legal thought of Tāl shows, and rehearses tropes about nineteenth century Muslim reformist thought as being both pegged by both a puritanical reading of the past and *ijtihād* only.

The topic of “fundamentalism” in West African Muslim “reformist” thought from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been explored extensively by scholars such as B.G. Martin, whose 1976 work, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth Century Africa*, explores themes of “political messianism” without going much into the actual Sufi doctrines of scholar/warriors such as Tāl, whom he dubs a “militant resister.”⁹⁷ The more recent work of Ahmad Dallal, *Islam Without Europe*, touches on the legacy of an earlier West African “resistor”, Uthmān Ibn Fūdī (who is more commonly known as Usman Dan Fodio), the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, whose legacy and writings heavily influenced Tāl’s thought and vision.⁹⁸ Surprisingly, Dallal highlights Dan Fodio’s Sufism as absent from his writings: “Ibn Fūdī was a Sufi,” writes Dallal, “yet Sufism was not part of his intellectual discourse”⁹⁹ of writing against political injustice and what he perceived to be deviant, un-Islamic practices, (an impulse which he attributed to the influence of Ibn-‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d.1792).) In a

⁹⁶ Willis, “Jihad Fi Sabil Allah-Its Doctrinal Basis in Islam and Some Aspects of Its Evolution in Nineteenth-Century West Africa,” 31.

⁹⁷ B. G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth Century Africa*, African Studies Series ; 18 (Cambridge, [Eng.] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

⁹⁸ Jamil Abun-Nasr, “Some Aspects of the Umari Branch of the Tijāniyya,” *Journal of African History* 3, no. 2 (2009): 330.

⁹⁹ Dallal, *Islam without Europe*, 44.

footnote to this statement, Dallal added only that even though Dan Fodio “does not engage in theoretical discussion of Sufism, he does quote Ibn ‘Arabī approvingly (in his work, *Ibn Fūdī, Unbelief in the Western Sudan*), in contrast to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, who considers him an unbeliever.”¹⁰⁰

It would be difficult to accept that Dan Fodio—West Africa’s most famous Qādiri and a prolific author of numerous Sufi-themed texts on *sulūk*, the Qādiri order and devotional poetry—did not write about Sufism. Even in writings on “strictly” political or social matters, such as his well-known *Ihyā’ al-sunna*, and *Bayān wujūb al-ḥijra*, there is a prevalent subtextual assumption in secondary scholarship that Dan Fodio’s or Tāl’s “radical” views have come about *despite* their Sufism. Further, if we circumscribe our definition of Sufi writing, even theoretically, to the act of citing Ibn ‘Arabī, then we risk falling into the pitfall of stereotyping Sufism and Sufi thought. Indeed, one must question why the working presupposition that citing from the Qur’an and *sunna* and pious predecessors *does not* itself classify as “Sufi writing”? As I show in later chapters in this dissertation, compartmentalizing works associated with Sufism into insular categories risks the emergence of analytic blind spots and does not take the overall project of these West African authors at hand seriously. Further, few scholars have succeeded in showing that the likes of Tāl or Dan Fodio’s political acumen and impetus against injustice came about *because* of their commitment to Sufism, not despite it. The research findings in this dissertation operate within that assumption.

In the case of Tāl, it is the singular focus on his military activity (which only began after he penned the *Rimāḥ*) and the incessant fascination with his linguistic prowess despite his “Africanness” that have distracted and derailed a serious study of the *Rimāḥ*. As the prolific Tijāniyyah scholar Rüdiger Seesemann states, this is an all-too-common pitfall when it comes to the study of Sufism

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

and Sufi thought in Africa:

One of the greatest present challenges lies in showing how African Muslims cultivated Sufism and engaged with its intellectual heritage and how they actively shaped Sufi doctrines and practices and applied them in their religious and social lives. It is time to study Sufism in its context, to write an account that brings religious leaders into dialogue with ordinary Muslims (in a way that moves beyond the common cliché of patron–client relationships) and analyzes the multiple layers of discourse and interpretation. In this sense, academic scholarship has yet to begin to systematically explore the potential of the new approach and apply it to the study of Sufism in Africa.¹⁰¹

As such, this chapter constitutes an effort to study Tāl’s intellectual life in context, primarily from the vantage point of his own scholarly contributions and his accounts, when present, of the circumstances that arose, (or indeed, those he prompted) during his various sojourns.

To paint a picture of Tāl’s life, I focus on the circumstances that led him to write his magnum opus, which took eight years or so to complete, marking it the intellectual apex of his pre-“jihad” years. Though the jihad years are the subject of most of the scholarship on Tāl, they only lasted for a decade (1852-1862) compared to his 55-year long efforts of writing treatises, doctrines and various long poems: it is so easy to forget that, “for most of his life, Tāl did not place much importance on jihad, understood as warfare,” states Hanretta, “quite to the contrary, he argued for the importance of the jihad against the *naḥs* at a time period when warfare was quite rampant in West Africa.”¹⁰²

I argue that Tāl’s motivation towards military campaigning emerged not as a strange aberration to his scholarly commitments, rather, his scholarship pulled him to militarism. It is no coincidence that Tāl began a life of military and state-building activity ever since he wrote the *Rimāḥ* and until the remainder of his life; the implications of his scholarly project were so thunderous and far-reaching, they unintentionally garnered him significant backing and allegiance, but also thrust him into the throngs of a future filled with political adversity and great enmity. This chapter

¹⁰¹ Seesemann, *The Divine Flood*, 16.

¹⁰² Sean Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 65.

examines the character traits and conditions that led him to write the *Rimāḥ* as depicted by both secondary sources written by Tijānī historians in Arabic and Western academics, as well as autobiographical narrations from *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ*.

Perhaps the most enduring and accurate descriptor of Tāl's defining trait is that of being "L'Anti Sultan" as coined by historian Fernand Dumont in his book on Tāl by the same name in 1974.¹⁰³ Responding to the word "sultan" in the title of one of the most widely read biographies of Tāl in the Arabic language, written by the famous 20th century Egyptian Tijānī scholar, Muḥammad al-Ḥafith, *al-Ḥajj 'Umar al-Fūtī: sulṭān al-dawla al-afriqiyya*, Dumond writes: "on the contrary, Hajj Omar despised sultans and kings, and only wanted to be the rectifier and propagator of the Islamic faith."¹⁰⁴ I choose to work with the framework of "anti-Sultan", therefore, as a guiding biographical theme as it captures Tāl's signature unapologetic tone and the motivations for writing his aptly and suitably named magnum opus, the "Book of the Spears of the League of God the Merciful on the Necks of the League of Satan the Accursed." For Tāl, to fight tyranny outwardly, one must first fight the tyranny of self. No other influential text in the same genre approaches Sufism as spiritual warfare in the same overt way that Tāl does. It was perhaps the milieu into which he was born that launched this exceptional scholar, gnostic, and eventually, fearless warrior and state leader.

Futa Toro in the Early Nineteenth Century

Legend has it that Tāl's was born in Ramadan and "immediately began to fast; he consumed Adama's milk only at night."¹⁰⁵ Born in 1794 in the village of Alwaar or Halwar in the region of Futa

¹⁰³ Dumont, *L'anti-sultan; ou, al-Hajj Omar Tal du Fouta combattant de la foi (1794-1864)*.

¹⁰⁴ Dumont, viii.

¹⁰⁵ Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 85. For a detailed table of Tāl's miracles, consult Robinson's detailed breakdown of his different "orthodox" and "unorthodox" miracles as relayed by griots, his talibe's (disciples), or from his own writings in the table entitled 'Miraculous Phenomena Associated with 'Umar' in Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 33.

Toro, or Futa for short; a semidesert region the middle run of the Senegal River between the border of modern-day Senegal and Mauritania. Though generally fertile close to the river, its more interior parts are dry and arid. The predominant language in Futa is Pulaar, a language of the greater Fula languages spanning West Africa from Senegal to Cameroon, but knowledge of Arabic was not uncommon, especially among scholarly families that were known to produce skilled *almamys* (imams), from a clerical class known in the region as the *Torodbe*, to which Tāl belonged. The Fulbe or Fulani people, also known as the Haalpulaar'en or Peul (French) are more commonly known as the Toucouleurs in French colonial speak (a name derived from the name of the ancient state of Tekrur). The so-called Toucouleur Empire ultimately became the name of Tāl's briefly existent kingdom in 1852. His clan, the Torodbes, had seized Futa Toro from “pagans” about a generation before Tāl's birth, making his future expanses a continuation of a family legacy and therefore not wholly unusual, though definitely wider in scope. For nearly the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Tāl lived and learned in Futa Toro, and so he was not a stranger to witnessing political corruption. Throughout his coming of age, he “came to share Toro's grievances against the exploitation of Central Futa in the guise of an Islamic state.”¹⁰⁶ Madina Ly-Tall describes how these faces of exploitation ignited Tāl's “idéal de justice et de retour à un islam orthodoxe enflamma à nouveau, un siècle plus tard l'élite musulmane du Futa.”¹⁰⁷

Tāl was hence brought up in an environment that made him a direct witness political and social disintegration. By the early 19th century, “the numbers of Muslims being sent into Atlantic and

¹⁰⁶ David Robinson, “Abdul Qadir and Shaykh Umar: A Continuing Tradition of Islamic Leadership in Futa Toro,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6, no. 2 (1973): 298.

¹⁰⁷ Ly-Tall, *Un Islam militant en Afrique de l'Ouest au XIXe siècle*, 43.

Saharan slavery in the Senegal River Valley in the century after the Tuubanaan was unprecedented,”¹⁰⁸ though there is no mention of Tāl’s stances on slavery in his writings. Though the Futa Toro revolution in the late eighteenth century yielded new Muslim-led imamates, society was weak and fragmented, and corruption was rampant. Madina Ly-Tall describes the Futa during this time as a kind of federation under the general rule of a weak Almamy (leader), with a sharp Torodbe social identity barely binding various self-interested entities together. She describes the Senegal River as the true link between various principalities and calls it a “foster mother” for its people.¹⁰⁹ Tāl was raised amidst a paradoxical backdrop of different Torodbe Muslim tribes, including his own, who seized power throughout a series of revolt campaigns from 1776 onwards, but whose reach and power was weak, disunited and limited.

Preceded by one of the earliest founders of Fulani Islamic states, Sulayman Bāl (d.1775), in the 1780s ‘Abdul Qādir Kan became Almamy of Futa Toro. Though the spread of his political authority was circumscribed, he left an incredible legacy defying slavery.¹¹⁰ A legacy which possibly inspired and emboldened Tāl. Though the primary sources remain nonexistent on Tāl’s stances on slavery, it is arguable that the Imamate of Futa Toro later became the inspiration and the institutional model for the creation of Tāl’s large state. Robinson notes that the weakening of states such as ‘Abdul Qādir Kan’s, and by extension, Tāl’s, typified how “the defense of the homeland became impossible because of the military strength of the intruding French,” adding that “the European presence helped compromise the nature of the Islamic institutions of the society and this fact, coupled with the sense

¹⁰⁸ Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*, 114.

¹⁰⁹ Ly-Tall, *Un Islam militant en Afrique de l’Ouest au XIXe siècle*, 17.

¹¹⁰ For more on Abdul Qadir Kan, see the work of Rudolph Ware in Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*, 142.

of urgency to conquer and islamize [other] states.”¹¹¹

One cannot profess to sketch a short summary of the conditions in nineteenth West Africa without mentioning the early presence of French colonial forces, before their full domination in Bilād al-Sudan by the late nineteenth century. Cisse lists the foremost elements that shaped Tāl’s world as being: “paganisme, ignorance, colonialisme, aliénation, agression culturelle, emiettemenet de l’espace politique et économique du continent.”¹¹² The French conquest of Senegal started as early as 1659 with the establishment of the French colony of Saint-Louis, followed by the capture of the island of Gorée from the Dutch in the late seventeenth century, but would only become a full-scale campaign in the second half of the nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, the effects of the rising challenge of French Colonial forces played an indomitable role in shaping Tāl’s view of the world. French presence was abhorrent to Tāl, but in addition to his anti-colonial acumen, he made diplomatic efforts to subdue and pacify colonial forces towards his favor all the same. Despite such efforts, the French eventually came to control all Futa Toro by the 1900s

¹¹¹ Robinson, “Abdul Qadir and Shaykh Umar,” 287.

¹¹² Cisse, “El Hadji Omar Foutiyou Tall, une Grande Figure de la Tijāniyya en Afrique Occidentale au XIXeme siècle: Pensée Juridico-mystique à travers ‘Rimah,’” 10.

Timeline of Shaykh ‘Umar’s “Pre-Jihad” Years

Adapted from the biography, *Al-Jawāhir wal-durār fī sīrat al-Ḥajj ‘Umar* by his 20th century successor, Muntaqā Tāl

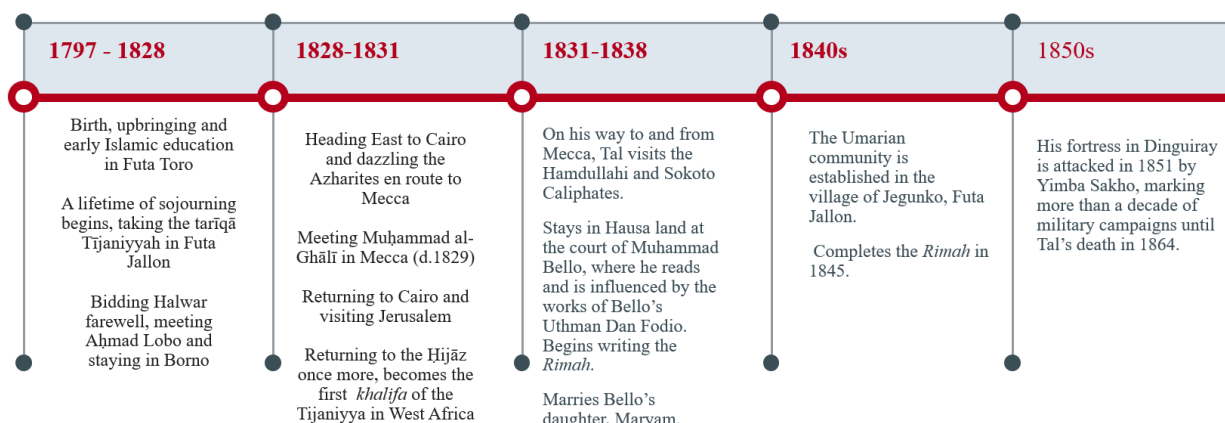


Table I

A Rising Marvel in *Bilād al-Sudan*

Tāl's pre-*jihad* years are marked by his extensive travels far and wide. Various Tāl biographies have highlighted ways that “his mobility enabled him to build an impressive network of social relationships over a wide geographic area in West Africa,”¹¹³ most notably through his sojourns in Sokoto, Masina and Futa Jallon, all three regions of whom are sites of so-called “jihad states” that were founded by sagely Muslim warriors, Shaykh ‘Uthmān dan Fodio (d.1817), founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, and Shaykh Aḥmad Lobbo (d.1845), founder of the Kingdom of Massina. The political and social conditions were ripe for a courageous, ambitious, well-traveled man of letters such as Tāl to take up his rightful place as one of West Africa's most thunderous political and spiritual revolutionaries.

¹¹³ Syed, “Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written,” 4.

Tāl received the foundation of his religious education under the tutelage of his father, Sa‘īdu Tāl. Under him, he memorized the Qur’an and the two *ṣaḥīḥs*, Bukhārī and Muslim.¹¹⁴ Of particular significance is his early tutelage under a teacher by the name of Aḥmad Ḥalīm with whom Tāl studied prosody, al-Khalīl’s *Mukhtaṣar* and more importantly, the grammatical *Alfiyya* and the poem *al-Farīda* of Imām Suyūṭī.¹¹⁵ He next left Futa Toro when he was about fifteen years of age and only returned to his home base sporadically. He travelled to continue his education at Satina, Futa Jallon, where he taught Qur’an to local children in exchange for lodging and furthering his scholarly pursuits under the ‘*ulamā*’ there. His most important instructor in Futa Jallon was Lamin Sakho, an authority on Arabic grammar.

He remained in Futa Jallon for about twelve years, during which he took the *ṭarīqa* Tijāniyya from ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Nāqil. Legend has it that in Futa Jallon, he dazzled the locals with his incredible *firāsa* (instinctual physiognomy) and his propensity for *karāmas* (miracles). The incident involved Tāl prophesizing the arrival of an army that would seek to conquer the nine water wells of the region. It is professed that Tāl used sacred numerology (*jadāwil*) to prevent the army from drawing their swords, stunting them, hence leading to their guaranteed demise.¹¹⁶ His mystical prowess was widely celebrated and his status as a uniquely disposed ‘*ālim* and *walī* had arisen, which led him to marry an honorable woman of high prestige by the name of ‘Āisha bint Karmak, who would eventually accompany Tāl to the Ḥijaz a few years later.

Tāl and the Tijāniyya: a *Quṭb* in the Making

In Tijānī West African lore, it is said that one of the reasons for the rise in his spiritual abilities

¹¹⁴ Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth Century Africa*, 69.

¹¹⁵ Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa-al-durar fī sīrat al-shaykh al-ḥājj ‘Umar*, 39.

¹¹⁶ Tāl, 42.

was due to the fact that Nāqil gave Tāl permission in certain special *awrād* (litanies) from the Tijānī path, particularly the *ḥizb al-sayfī* which Tāl was known to recite frequently and acquired close affinity to.¹¹⁷ The proximity in the warring imagery between his favored litany, “the *ḥizb* of the sword” and the *rimāḥ* (spears) of the *ḥizb* of God, as his magnum opus would ultimately be named, is uncanny. This signals to Tāl’s early unyielding trust in God as the ultimate *ghālib* (victor) and conjures the *qudsī ḥadīth* in which God says: “whosoever shows enmity to a *walī* (friend) of Mine, then I have declared war against him.”¹¹⁸ By the time Tāl was initiated into it, after taking the Khalwatī order for some time, the Tijāniyya had been existent for only a decade or so before Tāl’s birth, so the *silislā* to the founder, Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī, was markedly short.¹¹⁹ The enthusiasm and reception of the relatively new *ṭarīqa*, the Tijāniyya, was high, despite the widespread of the longer-standing Qādiri path. R.S. O’Fahey characterization of “the nineteenth century [as] Muslim Africa’s Sufi century”¹²⁰ becomes even more evident when noting the spread of the Tijāniyya by the hands of Shaykh ‘Umar. The more prevalent Qādiriyya was mostly spread by North African scholars in the Middle Niger and what today is southwestern Mauritania, but it would be perhaps inaccurate to call it a “path” compared to the way that the Tijāniyya became organized under Tāl’s tutelage, as the *ṭarīqa*, as it is known today in West Africa, was arguably introduced by Shaykh ‘Umar Tāl and the Tijāniyya.

In fact, it can be argued that the Tijāniyya, as spread by Shaykh ‘Umar Tāl, would singlehandedly change the landscape of Sufism in West Africa for its doctrinal emphasis on the

¹¹⁷ In the *Rimāḥ*, Tāl describes the *Ḥizb al-sayfī* as being “for the Prophet” and as possessing “60 *karāmas*.” *Rimāḥ*, 546.

¹¹⁸ Hadith 38, The 40 Hadiths of Imām an-Nawawī.

¹¹⁹ Some scholars claim that Tāl took the Shādhili *ṭarīqā* as well, copying Tijānī who took it prior to founding his own order.

¹²⁰ O’Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*.

sealing sainthood as the fastest facilitator of one's quest for gnosis via *tarbiya*; a feature which would help herald the arrival of the “flood” or “effusion” of the *ṭarīqa* (*fayḍa*) of Ibrāhīm Niasse (d.1975) less than a century later as Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī predicted.¹²¹ As Willis puts it, because according to his assessment, in West Africa, the “Qādirism of the first quarter of this period failed to clothe its senile form with any new attraction, excitement passed to the Tijāniyya.”¹²² Up until that point, the backdrop for Islamic institution building in the western Bilād al-Sudan was arguably not shaped by the Qādiriyya or another specific Sufi order per se, but by Almamy ‘Abdul Qādir Kan (d.1806); the first Sufi/cleric/ruler of Futa Toro, and West Africa’s most prominent Muslim abolitionist.^{123 124} Along with the backdrop of Kan’s successful legacy, Willis describes the purchase of Tāl’s spiritual authority as a perfect confluence between the diversity of the Torodbe identity and the powerful doctrine of the newfound *ṭarīqa*: “the political and religious direction of the ‘Umārian *jamā’a* was dominated by the Torodbe element which had formed the nucleus of the Shaykh's early supporters. The Torodbe were an eclectic group of Muslims drawn from diverse ethnic groups throughout the Western and Central Sudan. Wolof, Fulbe, and Mande peoples comprised the majority, but Hausa and Berber elements were also present in significant numbers.” He continues: “if Islam and blood served to bind the Torodbe to each other, the acceptance of the Tijāniyya *wird* bestowed upon this leading element its peculiar character.”¹²⁵

¹²¹ “A flood (*fayḍa*) will come upon my companions, so that people will enter into our way group upon group. This *fayḍa* will come when mankind will be in the depths of pain and despair.” (Well-known saying attributed to Aḥmad Tijānī, originally found in the *Ifāda al-Aḥmadiyya*, a collection of the shaykh’s sayings by his disciple al-Sufyānī (d.1843))

¹²² Willis, *In the Path of Allah*, xii.

¹²³ Robinson, “Abdul Qadir and Shaykh Umar,” 287.

¹²⁴ Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*, 116.

¹²⁵ Willis, *In the Path of Allah*, 24.

I argue that it was precisely the concept of *tarbiya* (spiritual training) backed by the rhetoric of *khatmiyya*¹²⁶ which Tāl articulated so well that gave the Tijāniyya its wide purchase and cohesion as the primary “organized” Sufi order of West Africa. To show this, I follow the hypothesis set forth by Rudiger Seesman, who devotes a study to an “analysis of the literary treatment of *tarbiya* by some of the major Tijānī scholars of the nineteenth century” which shows that “a major shift in the understanding and practice of spiritual training [took place], a shift that coincides with Sufism passing the threshold of modernity.”¹²⁷ Consulting the literature on neo-Sufism, as I do extensively in the following chapter, Seesemann argues that the claims of a “new” form of Sufism emerging in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were perhaps exaggerated. Still, he shares the view that one “should not jump to the conclusion that nothing has substantially changed”¹²⁸ because “that the same idea (or text) can assume a different meaning or relevance in a different context.”¹²⁹

Returning to his adoption of the nascent and exciting young Tijānī path, it was the person who first initiated him, Nāqil in Futa Jallon, who encouraged Tāl to go on *hajj*. All elements of his coming of age aside, it was his *hajj* journey that markedly changed the course of his life. There, he met Muḥammad al-Ghālī, the *khalīfa* of the Tijāniyya in the Ḥijaz, who would become his foremost mentor, bosom friend, and staunch supporter of Tāl’s spiritual aptitude and his impending lofty rank. Though the tone of his writings tends to err on the side of sensationalism, nonetheless Willis, describing Tāl’s “Eastern” sojourns, tellingly describes this transformative milestone in Mecca: “it was under Muḥammad al-Ghālī that the Torodo pilgrim reached the full tide of mysticism. He

¹²⁶ See Chapter II of this dissertation for an elaboration of the concept of the “Sealing Sainthood.”

¹²⁷ Rüdiger Seesemann, “A New Dawn for Sufism? Spiritual Training in the Mirror of Nineteenth-Century Tijānī Literature,” in *Sufism, Literary Production, and Printing in the Nineteenth Century*, Mitteilungen Zur Sozial- Und Kulturgeschichte Der Islamischen Welt ; Bd. 37 (Ergon Verlag, 2015), 279.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 281.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 280.

seemed to gather a new aura in these hallowed surroundings—it was as if the *hajj* had released some strange power within him.”¹³⁰

Within Tāl’s own framework for inheriting the *Khilāfa* of the station of Aḥmad Tijānī, it is most likely he understood himself (and ultimately, his followers) to be the *quṭb* of his time, by virtue of Ghālī’s appointment of Tāl as *khalīfa* in West Africa. In fact, despite his detailed account of al-Ghālī’s deputization of him in the *Rimāḥ*, Tāl does not boast about any sort of *ijāza muṭlaqā* or untethered permission in the dissemination of *awrād* or the ability to deputize others.¹³¹ Therefore, it is the mantle of *khilāfa* that strengthened and secured Tāl, as well as his own reputation as a *walī* and a man of miracles in West Africa. His authority, therefore, was not unrivaled due to his own unique abilities only, but rather, it emanated from Tijānī’s own authority. It was Tāl’s sense of being a verified representative of Aḥmad Tijānī—the “sealed isthmus”, “the pole of poles” and the final intermediary between the *ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* and creation, that “sealed” the fate of Tāl’s authority. After returning as *khalīfa*, Tāl’s authority in the Western Bilād al-Sudan grew expansively, and quickly. Willis writes that he amassed a large ‘Umarian community “over a remarkably short period (c. 1849-1864),” with his followers extending through much of what presently constitutes modern Guinee, Mali, and Mauritania. He continues, “never before and never again was so much territory in this region of the Western Sudan to submit to one Islamic authority.”¹³² His followers from Futa Jalon, Bundu, and Futa Toro, regions which saw their share of Islamic movements, which now became the basis for governance and gave authoritative credence to the most learned; a claim easily deserved by the dazzlingly scholastic Tāl. It was easy for them to believe in and put their trust

¹³⁰ Willis, *In the Path of Allah*, 86.

¹³¹ Neither does Muḥammad al-Ghālī himself.

¹³² *Ibid*, 1.

in Tāl, “who spoke to their Fulbe consciousness”¹³³ and someone who they could see had the power to set West Africa ablaze with his fiery doctrine and his teachings.

Tāl as the Quintessential Anti-Sultan

Most accounts regarding Tāl’s relationship with rulers can be found in the 29th chapter of *Rimāḥ*, “informing the brethren that Muḥammad al-Ghālī told me explicitly, by word of mouth, that I am one of the deputies of the Shaykh.” The incidents highlight the sources of denial and resistance to Tāl’s authority; competition, prejudice, jealousy, punctuated by Tāl’s disparaging descriptions of “worldly rulers.” Beginning the chapter, Tāl deploys the following evidence as a primary proof of the veracity of his status as a true *khalīfa* of Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī:

Praise be to God, I have never consorted with the rulers, and I do not love those who consort with them. As recorded in *Tabyīn al-Maḥārim*,¹³⁴ on the authority of Anas, may God be pleased with him, the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace said:

“The best of the rulers are those who approach the scholars, and the worst of the scholars are those who approach the rulers. The scholars are the trustees of the Messengers in charge of God’s servants, so long as they do not consort with the rulers, for if they do that, they betray the Messengers. You must therefore beware of them and stay away from them.”¹³⁵

Further in the chapter, Tāl relays numerous dreams by a variety of pious contemporary *ṣaliḥīn* (the righteous) that report seeing the Prophet Muhammad or Aḥmad Tijānī in a vision confirming his lofty rank. One such vision whose theme is oft repeated is related to visions of the Prophet guaranteeing his status as a true *khalīfa* of Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī on the condition that he avoids associating with the *ṣalaṭīn* (rulers):

I entered one of the faithful brethren in a secluded retreat (*khalwa*) and after spending several days there, he sent me a letter in which he had written: “I saw him, God bless him and give him peace, at the retreat, and he was saying to me: ‘Al-ḥajj ‘Umar is my trustee, so long as he does not consort with the rulers and meddle with this world,

¹³³ Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 16.

¹³⁴ A 17th century Hanafi Sufi text by Yusuf al-Khalwatī al-Amāsī.

¹³⁵ *Rimāḥ*, 442.

for if he consorts with them and meddles with them, he has betrayed me, so beware of them.”¹³⁶

The theme of Tāl as anti-sultan is so evident throughout his biography and autobiographical accounts, that Dumont named his 1974 study on Tāl, *L’Anti Sultan: Ou Al-Hajj Umar Du Fouta*.¹³⁷

His upbringing in an *almamy* state, his firsthand exposure to weak states, corruption, and the influence of the likes of the revolutionary leader ‘Abdul Qādir Kan, as well as the deep imprint that the works and legacy of the likes of Shaykh ‘Uthman Dan Fodio left on him, all point to the conditions that characterized Tāl’s refusal to be a bystander against what he perceived to be political and social injustice.

Tāl’s final written work, *Bayān mā waqa ‘a baynanā wa bayna amīr al-Māsina Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad* (*What Transpired between us and the ruler of Masina, Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad*), is a firsthand account of the events that took place between Tāl had with ruler of the Muslim polity of Masina, Aḥmad III in 1856. Because the scope of this chapter focuses on the “pre-jihad” years, still, reference must be made to his writings on Aḥmad III of Masina, because they provide a vivid, firsthand perspective on a divisive conflict with another Muslim ruler. On this, Amir Syed comments that “the conflict with Aḥmad III was part of a longer history of Tāl’s relationship with rulers.”¹³⁸ Commenting on another poem, *Safīnat al-sa‘āda*, in which Tāl begins by writing about a certain Almamy that felt threatened by him, Amir Syed describes the typical basis for Tāl’s recurrent run-ins with other rulers:

Writing about his confrontation with the Almamy, Tāl emphasized that ‘Umar Sori misunderstood him as a political rival. As a consequence, he attempted to harm him. Methodically narrating his own innocence in the face of a temporal ruler, whose only interest was the “*dunyā*,” Tāl highlighted that he was a simple scholar. Establishing himself as a

¹³⁶ *Rimāh*, 444.

¹³⁷ In a direct jab against the title of Tijānī biography of Shaykh ‘Umar, written by the Egyptian shaykh Muḥammad al-Ḥāfiz al-Tijānī, who named his work *Sulṭān al-dawlā at-Tijāniyya bi gharb ‘Ifriqiyyā: shay’ min jihāduḥ wa tārikh ḥayātuh* (Cairo, 1963)

¹³⁸ Syed, “Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written,” 143.

scholar apart from the temporal rulers and kings of the time, the introduction to the poem signaled a new vision of affiliation and authority.¹³⁹

In his poem, Tāl emphasizes the calling of a scholar above all else to be the pursuit of *mā'rifa*, not worldly interests, which highlights the primary way in which Tāl approached other rulers, many of whom he saw as mundane and self-interested.

In effect, his anti-sultanic stances come from his commitment to Islamic knowledge as a verified (*taḥqīq*) practice, and his reliance on his erudition and devotion as moral guides. Therefore, there is an undeniable personal factor underlying his anti-establishmentarianism; as evident from his writings, namely the spears of the *Rimāḥ*, Tāl's frame of reference and characteristic moral courage emanates from his unapologetic commitment to serving God with sincerity, devotion and excellence (*iḥsān*).¹⁴⁰ It was arguably because of his Sufism—not in spite of it—that he cultivated him his signature fearlessness. In the final chapter of the *Rimāḥ*, he imparts the reader with some final conclusive *waṣāya* (recommendations) that capture the fullness of his disposition and orientation to justice in all aspects, minute and large, for God's sake:

Whomsoever falls into the calamity of compromising the rights of his brethren, will fall into the calamity of squandering the rights of the Divine [...] should you witness someone correct a right against your self-interest, should you dislike that someone destroyed a falsehood and you would hate or hurt him for it, then that is considered *shirk* with God, for the Prophet may God grant him peace said: '*shirk* in my *umma* is more invisible than a black ant on a black rock on a dark night.' [...] I advise you, secondly, to leave all that is forbidden in matters of provision whether it be in the form of sustenance, clothing or dwelling, for the *ḥalāl* is the pole that all the spheres of observance orbit on, for whomsoever loses that loses all worship.¹⁴¹

It is one thing to consider the social, political and scholarly influences in analyzing Tāl's status as the archetypal "anti-Sultan", but not at the expense of understanding his knowledge-driven, *taḥqīqī*

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 51 of the *Rimāḥ*, "Informing them that every individual must endeavor to save their soul and must strive earnestly and energetically in the worship of his Lord, being neither diverted nor hindered from so doing by any matter", for a sampling of Tāl's assiduous trademark style and tone.

¹⁴¹ *Rimāḥ*, 669.

orientation towards justice-seeking as both inherently holy and as a pathway to God. Releasing oneself of worldly attachments, according to Tāl, should result in an uncomfortable pursuit that requires utmost sincerity (*ṣidq*) with oneself and *mujāhada* (struggling) against one's *naḥs* lower inclinations, and will likely garner many enemies along the way.

Even in the pre-jihad years, Tāl's biography is rife with tense and sometimes hostile encounters with different rulers he encountered during his travels. In the *Rimāḥ*, he writes:

We had reached the land of Peshk, and someone who had no goodness in him attempted to sow mischief between its ruler and I. All the brethren with us were afraid, and the people living there were convinced that we were doomed. One of the brethren saw a person of handsome appearance, who was saying to him: "The Shaykh [al-Tijānī] has sent me to his pupil 'Umar, and he told me to tell him that I am with him, so he need fear no harm, for his spiritual path is the path of pure safety and nothing will afflict him."¹⁴²

The oft-repeated theme of tense brush-ins with hostile rulers is ever-present in his writings. Often, Tāl does not invite the tensions himself. Rather, the magnitude of his unapologetic attitude seemed to be a magnet for trouble. Oftentimes, he relays that the conflicts in which a certain ruler feels threatened by his influence or jealous towards him. His reputation as a fearless scholar grew so large, that enmity seemed to follow him, looming over his head wherever he went. The animosity he faced is reminiscent of *sīra* narratives documenting the aggression Quraysh against Prophet Muhammad. In relaying these accounts, he also concurrently shows how he often received Divine favor and aid to abate the tension or thwart those who wished him ill harm:

On our return journey from the Two Sanctuaries, we reached a fertile country, where an intense quarrel broke out between its ruler and I. He attempted to kill me stealthily, by sending some of his boys to my house by night, under orders to assassinate me. They traveled until they came to the walled house I was in, together with my children. Then, when they reached it, God blinded their eyes, so when they looked up toward the sky, they did not see the walls, and when they looked down toward the earth, they saw no trace of the structure of the walls. They did that for four nights. Then, when this business exhausted them, they said: "It is impossible for us to do what we have been ordered to do by night," but their master told them: "Do it during the day," so they came to me while I was among my congregation. They found

¹⁴² *Rimāḥ*, 446.

some men of the Unseen surrounding us, brandishing their swords. When they saw that, they went back to their master and told him what they had seen. This also happened several times.¹⁴³

This narrative concludes with Tāl relaying that Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī appeared to his assassins three times and admonished them by saying “what do you want with Shaykh ‘Umar? Won’t you leave be this slave of God in the land of God?” and thereafter, “the *ṣultān* was forced to treated me with great respect, and they suffered four years of drought where not a drop of rain descended upon them from the sky, until they were reduced to eating cadavers, the leaves of trees, donkeys, horses and human beings. Then they repented and were showered with rain.”¹⁴⁴

Another such incident is marked during his seven-month visit to historic Palestine on his way back from *ḥajj*. There, while in Gaza, the ruler wrote to his counterpart in Jerusalem that Tāl and his entourage, which included his brother ‘Alī, will be visiting the Aqsa Mosque and the Islamic sites and asked him to host them well while in the holy city. Contemporary friend to Tāl and historian Ibn Habt al-Ghalāwī al-Shinqīṭī relays that Tāl narrated to him regarding what transpired with the “*ṣultān*” of Jerusalem at the time, who was presumably the son of Ibrahīm Pasha, the eldest son of Egyptian viceroy Muḥammad ‘Alī, who indeed hosted Tāl, but was reportedly brusque and curt to him and his entourage and gave them very little importance, seemingly for being black.¹⁴⁵ They received the same treatment by some worshippers at the Aqsa mosque, where they later stayed. Even though the people there fed and hosted them, one man at the mosque forbade his mentally ill son from eating with Tāl and his men for being “Sudanī.” The narrative relates that the son insisted to

¹⁴³ *Rimāḥ*, 445.

¹⁴⁴ *Rimāḥ*, 446.

¹⁴⁵ Tāl, *al-Jawāhīr wa-al-durar fī sīrat al-shaykh al-ḥājj ‘Umar*, 85.

join them nonetheless, and upon eating from the food that Tāl had touched, had been cured of all ailments.

Word soon got out in Jerusalem that Tāl was a man of great *wilāya* and possessed the ability to heal via *karāma*. He quickly garnered the respect and the attention of the *naqīb* (head) of the *ashrāf* (members of the Prophetic household) and the Mufti of Jerusalem, who soon enough began to treat him with high regard (Tāl implies that this came only after he reminded them about the many Qur’anic verses and *ḥadīths* regarding arrogance and racism.) While having a friendly meal with the *muftī*, the *wālī* of Jerusalem sent urgent word requesting Tāl’s immediate presence to his quarters, beseeching him to cure his “mad” daughter, who was his sole offspring. Tāl refused profusely by saying: “I shall not go to him nor will I see her.” The *muftī* pleaded and implored him to do it, if only to go for the sake of the Mufti’s great grandfather, the Prophet Muhammad. Only then did Tāl agree to go, and there he was received most warmly by the *wālī*, who apologized profusely by repeating “*tawba, tawba*” (“I repent”) for being so rude and brusque to Tāl earlier in his trip. No sooner was the sultan’s daughter “cured” of *jinn* possession, and Tāl was showered with *dirhams* and gifts, of which he gave away to his family.

The incident in Jerusalem captures Tāl’s signature suspicion and reservation towards the sultans and rulers of his time. As the narrative indicates, his impetus towards anti-sultanism was often reactionary and case specific, given what he faced from contempt, prejudice and mistrust throughout his sojourns. Particularly in Arab-majority lands such as Cairo, he often found himself being quizzed manically by the Arab ‘*ulamā*’,¹⁴⁶ having to prove his scholastic abilities, which were always under suspicion as a foreign, black scholar. His less than generous descriptions of *ṣalāṭīn* and ‘*umarā*’ of his time are more often negative than not, not due to Tāl’s inherent dislike for them.

¹⁴⁶ See chapter III of this dissertation, regarding the Azharite ‘*ulamā*’s legendary questioning of Tāl.

Rather, his stance is perhaps reflective of the forms of grandiose entitlement and abuses of power that he witnessed among the Muslim ruling elite in both Eastern and Western milieus.

As regards his relationship to steadily creeping European colonial presence, there is evidence to suggest that his relationship with the French began as a friendly one, with a series of amicable correspondences between in the 1840s, prior to the peaking of French military colonization in Senegambia in 1848. Syed suggests that Tāl's purchase of weapons from them and the sporadic friendly exchanges were not a sign of any intention on Tāl's part to partake in political alliance with the French. Rather, they stem from an effort for "Muslim scholars to safeguard their interests, and continue their vocation as teachers of the Islamic religious sciences with some semblance of protection."¹⁴⁷ This ambivalence would finally lapse, of course, when Tāl and his army fiercely resisted French troops from 1857 to 1859, marked by an openly hostile relationship with colonial governor Louis Faidherbe, who vigorously attacked Tāl's strongholds.¹⁴⁸

His earlier relationship with another leader, Muḥammad Bello, the son and *khalīfa* of 'Uthman Dan Fodio and leader of the Sokoto Caliphate, tells of a rather different—less hostile—dynamic. On his way to and from the Hijāz, Tāl would stay in Sokoto from 1831 to 1838 as a guest of Muḥammad Bello. There, he soaked in more closely the works of the venerable, legendary scholar 'Usman Dan Fodio (d.1817) and gained both support and inspiration from his bosom friend, Bello. However, historians have differed on the nature of their relationship; Nazi Boni suggests that it was not always a friendly one, and that Bello gave Tāl the cold shoulder at first due to a warning from the Qādirī shaykh Ahmed El-Bekkayy, who cautioned Bello about Tāl's rising prominence and only warmed up to him after Tāl intervened to help the people of Sokoto who were facing a threat from a

¹⁴⁷ Syed, "Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written," 158.

¹⁴⁸ For a more detailed explanation of Faidherbe's hostility towards Tal, see: Syed, 175.

certain army.¹⁴⁹ Boni also suggests that Bello took the *ṭarīqa* Tijāniyya, which is a controversial assertion and cannot be verified.¹⁵⁰

Regardless, there is no dispute that their eventual friendship was so strong, that according to Madina Ly-Tall, Bello could not bear the thought of being separated from Tāl.¹⁵¹ Another famous poem by Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn ‘an qubḥ ikhtilāf al-mu’minīni* (*Reminding the Heedless on how Ugly it is for the Believers to be Disunited*) is dedicated to Bello, who at the time was enthralled in a conflict with ruler of Bornu, Muḥammad al-Kānimī and brings to life Tāl’s abhorrence of entering into conflict with other Muslim rulers. In effect, this further enforces that Tāl was not “anti-sultan” for the sake of it. In fact, his military career shadowed the fact that he abhorred conflicts that bore disunity among Muslims and states this repeatedly in his writings; *jihād*, especially against other Muslims he saw as profoundly unjust or on the wrong side of God’s law, was an uncomfortable last straw.

Willis hypothesizes that spending time with Bello in Sokoto “reawakened the tradition of jihad” for Tāl. But the *Rimāḥ* mentions Bello’s concern for Tāl in a way that primarily verifies the close bond between them, not their mutual political interests:

The fair *imām* and the eminent saint, Muḥammad Bello *ibn al-‘arif- bi’llah* ‘Uthmān Dan Fodio informed me that he wished to ask God for good fortune, and to look after my best interests. It happened to him once that he heard a person say: "The Prophet says to you: 'You should know that the affairs of 'Umar ibn Sa‘īd are in my hand. I manage them for him and I have not neglected them."

In another narration in the *Rimāḥ*, Tāl describes Bello as “the equitable *imām*, the scholar who puts

¹⁴⁹ Nazi Boni, *Histoire synthétique de l’Afrique résistante, les réactions des peuples africains face aux influences extérieures* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1971), 103.

¹⁵⁰ For more on this point, or whether Bello took the Tijāniyya in secret, consult John N. Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 77.

¹⁵¹ Ly-Tall, *Un Islam militant en Afrique de l’Ouest au XIXe siècle*, 118.

his knowledge into practice, the Commander of the Believers.”¹⁵² His grave respect for Bello is undoubtedly marked by a sense of camaraderie, integrity in politics, and a shared commitment to knowledge in action. Rather than engaging in inter-*ṭarīqa* rivalry, Bello, a Qādirī, and Tāl, now the *khalīfa* and the face of a “new” order in West Africa, their close friendship is perhaps proof that Tāl got along better with Sufi rulers who were aligned with him on certain beliefs, practices and values. Though Tāl felt less welcome in Sokoto after Bello’s death, their alliance was one based on shared virtue and respect, not *jihad*. Even though Sokoto’s glowing history undoubtedly gave Tāl ample affirmation as an exemplary model for championing a state founded based on Islamic scholarship, their friendship was personal first, and political second.

Tāl and Saintly Female *Baraka*

While in Sokoto, Bello gave the hand of his daughter, Maryam in marriage to Tāl shortly before his death, who bore him a son, Aḥmad al-Kabīr, who would later become the ruler of Segu.¹⁵³

Tāl narrates the circumstances of her death in this story in the *Rimāḥ*:

In the month of Ramadan, in the year of our good news of the birth of a child, my wife saw that the Shaykh, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him and make him well pleased, and may He be well pleased with us for his sake, had sent her a camel, and commanded her to ride toward him on that camel. She told me about that, and she died in the month of Dhu'l-Qa‘ida that year. When she was in the throes of death, she said: "Sayyidi Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī has brought me this, so that I may travel with him." She died that night.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² *Rimāḥ*, 446.

¹⁵³ See: John Hanson and David Robinson, *After the Jihad: the Reign of Ahmad al-Kabir in the Western Sudan*. (Michigan State University Press, 1991).

¹⁵⁴ *Rimāḥ*, 446.

After she died, Tāl then married a second daughter of Bello. Accounts vary on whether she was named Ramatullāh or Hausa Bintū, but it is verified that she had with him at least two sons, Habīb and Mukhtār, who accompanied him to his visits to *hajj*.¹⁵⁵ These marriages sealed the bond between Tāl and the Dan Fodio lineage, granting him further legitimacy among the Muslims of West Africa. Moreover, Tāl held his wives in high esteem, almost as receptacles of *baraka*, and often relayed their visions as proofs of God’s favor onto him. The first saintly bearer of *baraka* was his mother Adama, whom he revered and considered to his foremost exemplar in goodness and virtue. It is narrated that while in Masina, he declared to the scholars and rulers that in Futa, he met “a great number of men whose worth equaled his father’s” but that “he never met a woman in worth equal to his mother’s” neither in Masina nor in Futa.^{156 157}

This section is motivated by— in Joseph Hill’s words—efforts to make the issue of “gender a central dimension of any study of Islamic authority,”¹⁵⁸ and not just in studies on women, a fact which often deters scholars of Islamic intellectual history to mention women in studies where the sole authorial voice is male (a characteristic of most studies in the field). Admittedly, it might seem tokenizing to add a section on women and gender especially due to the fact that “women and gender were marginal to absent in the considerable academic literature on Islam in West Africa, which focused overwhelmingly on charismatic and influential male Islamic leaders.”¹⁵⁹ This study on the *Rimāh* is unapologetically a study on the writings of a charismatic and influential male leader.

¹⁵⁵ Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 105.

¹⁵⁶ Ly-Tall, *Un Islam militant en Afrique de l’Ouest au XIXe siècle*, 77.

¹⁵⁷ “Le Fouta compte un grand nombre d’hommes de la valeur de on pere. Mais une femme comparable a ma mere, je n’en ai pas laisse dans mon pays et je vous assure qu’il n’y en a. pas non plus chez vous.”

¹⁵⁸ Britta Frede and Joseph Hill, “Introduction: En-Gendering Islamic Authority in West Africa,” *Islamic Africa* 5, no. 2 (2014): 131.

¹⁵⁹ Britta Frede and Joseph Hill, 132.

However, although by no means exhaustive, I choose to pay some attention to the women of Tāl's life simply because they have been so marginalized in 'Umarian studies. In my research trip to Senegal in January, 2020, I sat with the female members of the Cisse-Niasse family of Madina Baye. I asked them about Shaykh 'Umar's legacy, to which they mainly relayed lore about his saintly wives and daughters and their legendary piety. They also relayed how the future marriages between the Niasse family and Tāl's would bear great fruit for the Tijānī *fayḍa* (effusion).¹⁶⁰ In this way, though information about his female family members is often only found in ballads sung by *griots* or oral traditions, nonetheless, for Tijānī's in West Africa today, it is undeniable that the women of his family played an immense role in the formation of Tāl's saintly authority and had a significant if marginal role in the making of the 'Umarian legend.

We do not have much historical information about his daughters or wives in his writings, except through that which he relays in the 29th chapter of the *Rimāḥ*. In it, Tāl relays various visions by his wives or daughters. After his mother, the woman he revered the most was his daughter, Fāṭima al-Madaniyya. Ibn Habt al-Ghalāwī narrates that Tāl asked God for a child to present to the Prophet during his first visit to Madina, and Faṭima was born nine months after his arrival there in the month of Ramadan, which according to our calculations would be roughly 1829-1830. As soon as she was born, "before even suckling from her mother once," Tāl allegedly took her to the gravesite of the Prophet and placed her there, in a well-known pre-modern Madinan practice of placing newborns there to be blessed. He then told God, "if she will be a righteous believer then make her live and if not, then take her, by the *baraka* of the Prophet Muhammad."¹⁶¹ He supposedly kept her in the

¹⁶⁰ The term "*fayḍa*" is almost exclusively associated with the reach of Ibrāhīm Niasse (d.1975). See: Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2011).

¹⁶¹ Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa-al-durar fī sirat al-shaykh al-ḥājj 'Umar*, 75.

Prophet's *hujra* (chamber) for a week and returned to her to find her in perfect health, suckling her thumb. The veracity of this story is unverified, but the incident marks another *karāma* in the 'Umarian narrative; this time not just for Tāl, for Faṭīma too, giving her a saintly reputation from the onset of her life, further mirroring the Prophetic *sīra* narrative of the special, mystical bond between Prophet Muhammad and his daughter, the archetypal namesake, Faṭīma, the most revered woman in the Islamic tradition.

'Umarian devotional biographies relate that Faṭīma was known in her time for her *ma'rifa* and her high-ranking *wilāya*. She was known to recite the Tijānī litany, the *Jawhartul kamāl* ("the Jewel of Perfection") one thousand times each night, never stopping or doubting the number she would perform every night "except for the night she learned of the demise of her beloved father."¹⁶² Of particular significance is the fact that in his life Tāl only gave permission for a woman to be a *muqaddam* (representative) of the Tijāniyya to his daughter Faṭīma. Historical records show that she was not the first female *muqaddam* in West Africa, according to Kano-based scholar Abī Bakr 'Atīq bin Khidr al-Tijānī (d.1909), who documented the history of giving West African Tijānī women *taqdīm* even though he does not name the first case.¹⁶³ ¹⁶⁴ However, she was undoubtedly among the first, and arguably the most well-known early female *muqaddams* of the Tijāniyya in 19th century West Africa. More studies are needed on this, but it is likely that the figure of Fāṭīma al-Madaniyya heralded the "flood" of female *muqaddams* that Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse would initiate in West Africa a century later.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Tāl, 76.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ For a study on early 19th century Tijani female muqaddams in Mauritania, see Britta Frede-Wenger, *Die Erneuerung der Tiġāniya in Mauretānien: Popularisierung religiöser Ideen in der Kolonialzeit*, 1. Auflage., Studien (Zentrum Moderner Orient (Berlin, Germany)) 31 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2014).

¹⁶⁵ For more on female muqaddams at the time of the 20th century Niassian "flood", see: Hill, *Wrapping Authority*.

In the *Rimāḥ*, the women of Tāl's family factor into the 29th chapter—and particularly, Faṭīma—wherein he relays most historical accounts and visions. The presence of women's voices in the *Rimāḥ* is consistently tied to visions and visionary experiences. These visions stand as central forms of knowledge in the epistemology of the *Rimāḥ*, thereby allowing us to justifiably further “the goal of en-gendering the study of Islamic authority” by requiring us to take “seriously non-literate forms of knowledge.”¹⁶⁶ Tāl's relaying of the dreams of his wives or daughters—even though these dreams are mostly about him and his own saintly authority—nonetheless point to ways in which these women contribute to the “feminization of religious authority”¹⁶⁷ in West Africa and how the visions can “discursively and performatively linked to Sufism's mystical principles and thereby to authority.”¹⁶⁸ In other words, their dreams about his authority are in themselves authoritative.

The following dream about his household, namely his wives and children, signifies that his daughter, and by extension, his family, are not sidelined in visions involving the Prophet, who asks to meet them:

Faṭīma al-Madaniyya saw him God bless him and give him peace in my house, and I was with him. When he intended to take his leave, I said to him: "O Messenger of God, how can you leave now, when you have not seen the people of my household?" He replied: "I am in a great hurry, but God does not want anyone to do anything that offends your heart and makes you sad, especially me." He then commanded me to present the members of my household, so I brought all of them except two individuals.^{169 170}

¹⁶⁶ Britta Frede and Joseph Hill, “Introduction,” 154.

¹⁶⁷ Marie Nathalie LeBlanc, “Nouveaux regards sur la vie des jeunes musulmanes en Côte d’Ivoire: Dynamiques de sociabilités chez les jeunes arabisantes au tournant du XXI^e siècle,” in *Lieux de sociabilité urbaine en Afrique*, ed. Laurent Fourchard, Odile Goerg, and Muriel Gomez- Perez (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009), 435–59.

¹⁶⁸ Britta Frede and Joseph Hill, “Introduction,” 140.

¹⁶⁹ *Rimāḥ*, 444.

¹⁷⁰ It is unclear whether this was a waking vision or a vision she had in her sleep.

In another account, this time by citing a vision by “Fāṭima’s mother” (his first wife from Futa), it was she who was the receptacle for Divine grace and aid in a very perilous situation:

We were aboard a ship on the Red Sea between Jedda and Egypt. The winds were raging, and the ship was on the verge of sinking and everyone on board was convinced of disaster. The mother of al-ḥājjah¹⁷¹ Fāṭima al-Madaniyya swooned, then she recovered consciousness and said: "Be of good cheer, for I have just seen Shaykh Tijānī and Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghālī. They said to me: "Give good tidings to Shaykh 'Umar and tell him that the only reason for our coming to this ship was to let him know that we are with him, so he has nothing to fear and no harm will befall him." The wind then abated and calmed down.¹⁷²

These visions show that women had just as much access to the unseen as did Tāl or his pious companions or teachers. Furthermore, the visionary feminine narrative in the *Rimāḥ* signifies that Tāl viewed the women of his life as harbingers of Divine support and aid, who naturally possessed an authorial presence by relaying Divine signs, knowledge and warnings. Let us recall that this view was by no means strange or revolutionary. It was conventional for women in West Africa to have significant scholarly authority in Tāl’s time. The most famous examples are Nana Asma’ū (d.1864), Bello’s sister, a contemporary of Tāl’s, who was a towering poetess and prolific author and leader.¹⁷³ Another well-known example is that of Khadījah bint al-‘Āqil al-Daymāniyyah, a renowned Mālikī jurist and logic (*manṭiq*) scholar, also advised ‘Abdul Qādir Kan, who in turn inspired Tāl, as shown earlier in this chapter.¹⁷⁴ More research is needed to integrate the fullness of the story of 19th century female scholars and saintly authorities in West Africa. But there are certainly enough light posts, albeit small ones, in the ‘Umarian narrative that beg the emergence of a fuller picture.

¹⁷¹ Most printed editions of the *Rimāḥ* erroneously have this sentence as “my mother al-ḥājjah Fāṭima.” I went back to the manuscripts and found that it was “the mother of al-ḥājjah Fāṭima,” i.e., his wife.

¹⁷² *Rimāḥ*, 445.

¹⁷³ For more on the intellectual legacy of Nana Asma’ū, see: Nana Asma’ū, *Collected Works of Nana Asma’ū: Daughter of Usman ‘dan Fodiyo (1793-1864)*, African Historical Sources ; No. 9 (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997).

¹⁷⁴ Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*, 130.

The *Rimāḥ*: A Short History

We have set out to describe the political and social milieu, as well as Tāl's disposition and conviction, that made it natural for a text like the *Rimāḥ* to be written. Writing *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ* began in Sokoto, Hausaland in 1837, the year that his bosom friend Muḥammad Bello passed. After a rich period of camaraderie and intellectual vivacity, wherein he enjoyed the companionship and help of Bello, who "used his influence to secure introductions for Tāl as he traveled,"¹⁷⁵ perhaps the idea for writing the *Rimāḥ* was an idea he had discussed with Bello. What is known for sure, however, is that the germ of the idea for the *Rimāḥ* was born in the court of Uthmān Dan Fodio. Dumont views this fact with suspicion, however, and regards it as part of Tāl's greater scheme to gain legitimacy or possibly even future control of Sokoto.¹⁷⁶

Tāl would continue to write the *Rimāḥ* throughout his many sojourns across the Western Bilād al-Sudan, which would take him to the Hamdullahi Caliphate where was a guest of the Shaykh Ahmad Lobo,¹⁷⁷ passing on to Segu where he was imprisoned for several months by a non-Muslim ruler, until he finally settled in Futa Jallon where he was well received by Almami Bakar who gave him lands in the area of Jegunko. He completed the *Rimāḥ* eight years later in Jegunko in September of 1845, where by then, he established a strong Tijānī community and *zawiya*. After spending most of the 1840s in Jegunko, he left for Dinguiray, present-day Guinea, where he built a fortress, which was attacked by King Yimba Sakho in 1851, who felt threatened by Tāl and his vast success in

¹⁷⁵ Ware, Wright, and Syed, *Jihad of the Pen*, 9.

¹⁷⁶ Dumont, *L'anti-sultan; ou, al-Hajj Omar Tal du Fouta combattant de la foi (1794-1864)*, 55.

¹⁷⁷ For an exhaustive history of Ahmad Lobo and the Hamdullahi Caliphate, see: Mauro Nobili, *Sultan, Caliph, and the Renewer of the Faith: Ahmad Lobbo, the Tārīkh al-Fattāsh and the Making of an Islamic State in West Africa* (Cambridge: University Press, 2020).

converting locals to Islam and the *ṭarīqa*. Several of Tāl’s men were killed and he then felt forced to retaliate. It was this attack that sparked the beginning of his “jihad” years.

Prior to the attack in Dinguiray, Tāl would spend six years or so traveling throughout Futa Jallon where he amassed a large following of distinguished personages into the Tijāniyya. He also eventually returned to his homestead of Futa Toro after an almost two-decade long absence. Ly-Tall shows that he had his disciples carry copies of the *Rimāḥ* and they were subsequently copied and spread like wildfire, quickly becoming the most widely spread text in 19th century West Africa.¹⁷⁸ At this time, he also was thought to have initiated contact with French colonial officials. His notoriety was gradually increasing due to his religious and scholastic—not armed—prowess, and this was something the French knew held more power in West Africa than mere military might.

In a full circle homecoming of sorts, there is evidence to suggest that Tāl transmitted the *Rimāḥ* to Mawlūd Fāl; the foremost representative of the Ḥafīziyya branch of the Tijānī order¹⁷⁹, and the man who gave the *wird* to Tāl’s first initiator into the Tijāniyya, ‘Abdul Karīm al-Nāqil. Syed suggests that “is possible that through the hands of Mawlud Fal¹⁸⁰, the work reached a much broader audience across the Sahara, as well as in North Africa.”¹⁸¹ However, oral narrations I obtained during my time in Madina Baye, Senegal in 2020 point to the fact that considerable tension arose when Mawlud Fāl went to visit Tāl during one of his military campaigns, in which Tāl supposedly offended him for making him wait for a lengthy amount of time before appearing for an audience.

¹⁷⁸ Ly-Tall, *Un Islam militant en Afrique de l’Ouest au XIXe siècle*, 161.

¹⁷⁹ The Ḥafīziyya branch of the Tijāniyya is named after Muḥammad al-Ḥafīz al-Shinqīṭī, who was appointed as a deputy (*muqaddam*) by Ahmad al-Tijani, the order’s founder, in Fez around 1800 CE. Muhammad al-Hafiz belonged to the Idaw ‘Ali, a tribe in the Western Sahara known for its Islamic scholarship and its leading role in the spread of the Tijāniyya throughout West Africa. (Seesemann, “Sufism in West Africa”, 609)

¹⁸⁰ Mawlūd Fāl (d.1852) is credited to being the first shaykh to bring the Tijāniyya to West Africa.

¹⁸¹ Syed, “Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written,” 153.

Remorsefully, Tāl allegedly offered Fāl a bag of gold, which Fāl refused because he refused to believe that the young *murīd* who took the *wird* initially from him decades ago would have more *zuhd* (asceticism) than him.¹⁸² Regardless, the new and, perhaps uncomfortable dynamic of protégé turned *khalīfah* was set in stone: there was a bold new face for the Tijāniyya in West Africa and the quick spread of his magnum opus was proof enough of that.

The first printed edition of the *Rimāḥ* was published in Cairo, by the historic Ḥalabī printers in 1896, thirty-two years after Tal's death/disappearance in Bandiagra.¹⁸³ In 1927, its literal marginalization began. It was first published on the margins of the *Jawāhir al-Ma‘ānī* in Tunis, which marked the beginning of its spread in North Africa, and its reception as “the second” doctrinal reference of the Tijāniyya globally. The manuscript in the ‘Umarian Library in Paris, is one of the earliest ones, and was briefly in Mauritania then went to Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris for unknown reasons.¹⁸⁴ Today, the earliest printed editions by the Ḥalabī printers are almost as rare as manuscript editions, but not more rare than manuscripts of the *Rimāḥ*: the Tāl family *zawiya* possesses the manuscript handwritten by Tāl himself. In 2019, France returned the sword of Shaykh ‘Umar Tāl to his Senegal in a “first step” towards returning Senegalese artefacts currently in French museums, which hold at least 90,000 artefacts from sub-Saharan Africa. More importantly, there is national sentiment demanding that other items and his library is returned, which was seized in 1893 and housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France to this day: “they took everything, including his

¹⁸² From an oral interview with Shaykh Ali Abdullah Niasse, a scholar and a diplomat from the Niasse family, who is an Advisor to the Senegalese Consulate in Morocco, Jan. 20, 2020.

¹⁸³ See Image 2 on the following page.

¹⁸⁴ This historical circulation needs more research. Learned of this via an oral remark during research interview with one of the world’s most minted Tāl researchers and Founding Editor of Timbuktu Editions, Usman Jaw, Cairo, December 2020. Jaw is working on a sophisticated and thorough *taḥqīq* of the *Rimāḥ*, to be published soon.

library, in Segou, and I hope that all our books that are now in France will be returned to us,” says his descendant, Mamadou Thiam.¹⁸⁵



Figure 2: The now closed historic al-Ḥalabī printers (est. 1859), where the Rimāḥ was first published. The Ḥalabī Printers was known for publishing the “ummahāt” (mothers) of books such as the ‘Thyā’ of Imām Ghazālī and the Tafsīr of al-Ṭabarī. (Image taken by Farah El-Sharif, field trip to Cairo, December 2020)

Even though the contributions of the *Rimāḥ* are undeniable amidst the backdrop of West African Islamic intellectual history and the establishment of the foundational Tijānī doctrine, twentieth and twenty-first century manifestations of the Tijāniyya sometimes find themselves hard-pressed to recognize the full worth of his contributions for political and strategic reasons. This cannot

¹⁸⁵ “France Returns Omar Tall’s Sword to Senegal,” *BBC News*, November 18, 2019, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50458081>.

be said about the Ḥafziyya branch¹⁸⁶ or the Niassian branch of the Tijāniyya, with half of the quotes in Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niāsse’s seminal text, for example, the *Kāshif al-Ilbās* (*The Removal of Confusion*), coming from the *Rimāḥ*. With Tijānī offshoots in Ghana, Senegal, Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt, over time, the politics of inter-*ṭarīqa* rivalry muddled the more unified outlook of the path’s earlier pioneers. This may be further exacerbated because the ‘Umarian *silsila* (chain of transmission) is seen as a distinct one, with the existence of ardent loyalists who consider Tāl the ultimate *khalīfa* of Aḥmad Tijānī to this day, across Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Futa Toro and as far as Sudan, where his chain of transmission arrived with groups of West African migrants fleeing European colonial rule around the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁸⁷ It is no wonder, when Tāl’s legacy in resistance to French colonialism in the later years of his life seemed to endow “Sufism with a broader reputation for anti-colonial resistance in the region, something that no doubt contributed to its later spread.”¹⁸⁸

Today, thanks to the *Rimāḥ*, the edifice of the *ṭarīqa* Tijāniyya worldwide is generally defined under the doctrinal guidance outlined by Shaykh ‘Umar Fūtī Tāl. For example, the arguably most circulated book of Tijānī litanies in the Arab-speaking world by the Egyptian Ḥāfziyya *zawiya*, the *Aḥzāb wa awrād of Aḥmad Tijānī*, cites the *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ* as the main resource for the wordings, number of times, and specific information for different prayers and invocation. Furthermore, Tāl has become simply known as “*ṣāḥib al-Rimāḥ*” (the possessor i.e., “author” of the *Rimāḥ*), and is frequently cited in later seminal Tijānī works such as the magnum opus of Ibrāhīm Niāsse, *Kāshif al-Ilbās* (*The Removal of Confusion*), the *Kashf al-Ḥijāb* (*Removal of the Veil*) of prolific Moroccan

¹⁸⁶ See Muhammad al-Hafiz al-Tijani’s work on Shaykh Umar Tal: Muḥammad al-Ḥāfīz Tijānī, *Hadj Omar Tall, 1794-1864: sultan de l’état tidjanite de l’Afrique occidentale* (Abidjan: Nouvelles Éditions africaines, 1983).

¹⁸⁷ Christopher Wise, *Archive of the Umarian Tijāniyya* (Washington, D.C.: Sahel Nomad Books, 2017).

¹⁸⁸ Ware, Wright, and Syed, *Jihad of the Pen*, 4.

Tijānī scholar Shaykh Aḥmad Sukayrij (d.1944) and the *Durra al-Kharīda* (*The Unborn Pearls*) of al-Nazīfī (d.1936).

“I possess the *Rimāḥ*”

In his own words, Tāl describes when he completed the text and why he set out to write it, in the final and 55th chapter of the *Rimāḥ*, entitled “In mentioning some of what expiates sins”:

... completed in the morning on the blessed day of Sunday, after three days had passed since Ramaḍān began, *Lī Rimāḥ ḥizb al-raḥīm ‘alā nuḥūr ḥizb al-rajīm*, in the year of 1261 of the blessed hijra, on its bearer be blessings and peace. The occurrence of this date on this year in this way, is a matter of synchronicity, and a sign of Divine acceptance to which I had no part in, because I named this book: *Rimāḥ ḥizb al-raḥīm ‘alā nuḥūr ḥizb al-rajīm* and after I had completed it, I said in my heart, “*Lī Rimāḥ ḥizb al-raḥīm ‘alā nuḥūr ḥizb al-rajīm*” and I calculated (its numerical weight) and found that it matches the date of this year, and I thanked God for this acceptance. And I asked God to make this book in its goodness proportionate with the meaning of its name, and I pleaded Him also, to bestow on me figurative spears in the hands of a metaphorical League for the Merciful, over the necks of figurative necks of the Accursed. And when I received acceptance, by God’s grace, I attempted another date and what came to mind and my tongue was: *ṭamma*¹⁸⁹ *bushrā*, which is also 1261.

When we saw that this date yields the same number as the date before it, and matches it exactly, my aspirations for gaining incredible favor from the generous lord grew, and I was endowed with innate knowledge (*‘ilm yaqīnī*) that this is a sign of acceptance too, a bounty from the Bountiful One. I attempted another number that would be a sign for a proof of Oneness, and rejecting associating partners with the One Giver, in thanks to Him exalted, and what came my mind and tongue were the words “*lā sharīk*.”¹⁹⁰

Of significance is Tāl’s mulling over the name of the text from being “The spears of the league of the Merciful...” to “I possess spears of the Merciful...”; only by adding the word “*lī*” did the numerology amount to 1261, the year of the text’s completion.¹⁹¹

Lī – Rimāḥ - Ḥizb – ar-Raḥīm – ‘alā – Nuḥūr - Ḥizb – ar-Rajīm

40 + 249 + 17 + 289 + 101 + 264 + 17 + 284 = 1261

¹⁸⁹ *Ṭamma* طم here likely indicates the meaning for the something to overflow, signifying a “flood” of glad tidings.

¹⁹⁰ *Rimāḥ*, 684.

¹⁹¹ For more on Arabic numerology, *‘ilm al-jafar*, consult: Aḥmad Raḥā Kḥān, *Risālah fī ‘ilm al-jafar* (Lāhūr: Markazī-yi Majlis Raḥā, 1980).

But the adding of the Arabic word “I possess”, Tāl does so in a way that is much more than a strategic mathematical equation. Tāl mentions that upon completing the text, he states that he “said in his heart I possess spears.” This evokes the way in which the text’s sealing has given Tāl a sense that it has been activated as a living thing to be possessed, as a bounty from God, and as an experiential form of textual weaponry. A possible framework for this approach is to view the *Rimāḥ* as text of embodiment. That is, it is not simply a “text”, but gestures towards the Sufi edict of knowledge as to be taken primarily from the hearts of people, not from books. Tāl further corroborates this by saying he has asked God for metaphorical spears in the metaphorical league of God. It is clear that for Tāl, the *Rimāḥ*, first and foremost, stands for figurative weaponry whose spiritual importance far outweighs physical weaponry or “the lesser jihad.”

The *Rimāḥ* is an ideal canvas to interrogate the hypothesis of “embodied knowledge” as being superior to textual learning via West African ways of knowing. Ware posits that an epistemological rupture happened in the mid-twentieth century, which led to a kind of depersonalization of Islamic knowledge transmission, making it “impoverished, decontextualized, and disembodied as students seek it from texts rather than from the master.”¹⁹² As a West African Islamic text, can it be said that the *Rimāḥ* is a “text of embodiment”? It is in the sense that is informed by Tāl’s own process of “experiencing” knowledge and sitting with teachers who were motivated by, in Ware’s words, “the creation of authentic human beings who carry with them the irreplaceable core of scriptural knowledge illuminated by human example in an unbroken chain returning to the Prophet, then via the bridge of revelation to Jibril, and finally to the Almighty Himself.”¹⁹³ However, many of the sources in the *Rimāḥ* signal to the fact that Tāl was an independent, avid reader of a broad range of

¹⁹² Seesemann, “Embodied Knowledge and The Walking Qur’an,” 205.

¹⁹³ Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*, 70.

Islamic texts, and that his epistemological process was not one of embodiment alone. Therefore, in my estimation, the *Rimāḥ* is more of a text *for* embodiment (that is, by laying out prescriptions that lead to embodying good character/a verified Prophetic connection by seeking a shaykh), rather than one *of* embodiment, in of itself. The matter of embodiment is not a primary inquiry of this dissertation, however, as it has been dealt with exhaustively elsewhere.¹⁹⁴ The *Rimāḥ* can nevertheless be taken as an embodiment of Tāl himself: it is reflective of his unapologetic, masterful and authoritative character and the vast richness of his spiritual lineages and scholarly networks.

Not only does Tāl’s way of describing his text echo the proverb, “the ink of the scholar is better than the blood of the martyr,” there are glaring esoteric implications to the intention behind sealing his text in this way. By wedding the text’s symbolic relationship to the words “*lā sharīk*”, (no partners [with God]), which also amounts to the number 1261, it is as if Tāl is walking the reader through his experience of annihilation, one of *fanā’ bi al-Rimāḥ*, perhaps, not by megalomaniac aggrandizement of his own work, but by God’s generosity on him for allowing him pen it. By saying “I possess the *Rimāḥ*”, then tying it with the statement “no partners”, the reader can almost share in the experiential potential of the text as an instrument of *fanā’*; Tāl absolves himself of authorship and presents the text as a bounty, grace and an *āya* (sign) of God, one which “he” had no role to play in. The ecstatic effusion, “*lā shārīk*” is the final intention for the text’s existence.

Further, Tāl explicitly lists the reasons for setting out to write the text on the very last pages of his manuscript:

What led us to write this blessed book is three reasons:

First: Having a good opinion of my lord. Every time I felt bothered by my shortcomings and my fears, I was drawn nearer to His grace and His expansive favor. And because I am in want of a mercy that precedes wrath, and an effusion that is given without request. Even if I am not worthy of this mercy, then our generous lord is worthy of mercy.

¹⁹⁴ See: Syed, “Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written.”

Second: The love of attaining one of the qualities that are possessed in the case of when a son of Adam passes, his deeds cease except from it [*‘ilm yuntafa’ bih*]; rather I hope to attain all the types of deeds that endure, as God is the most Kind and Forbearing.

Third: Our extreme love for the people of this honorable ilk, and our attachment to these beloved ones, because they, God be pleased with them, are people of generosity. The lowly minions in their courtyard are never turned away, and their doors are never shut. [...] And even if we are not among them, then God almighty has blessed us with our sincere love for them, out of His sheer grace and favor upon us. We ask God to keep us steadfast in that and to enjoin us with them, following the saying of the Prophet, peace be upon him, “a person is with whom he loves” and “whosoever loves a people then he is with them.” Oh Lord, just as you have blessed us with knowing them, then do not deprive us of loving them and seeing them, and do not keep a distance between us and them.¹⁹⁵

Tāl’s stated reasons for penning the *Rimāh* are not in themselves an unusual way to end a Sufi treatise. However, they exude a sense of deep intimacy with Divine, and the firm, unwavering earnestness that is so characteristic of his style. More importantly, his conclusion stands as a demonstrated activation of the virtues he filled the pages of his text in hundreds of pages prior. He makes a note of this, by observing: “I mentioned 55 virtues that increase one’s faith in the introduction to this book,” and “by God’s doing this number matches the number of chapters in this blessed book unintendedly.” With matching the numbers of virtues with chapters, and the letters of the title with the year of the text’s completion, the *Rimāh*’s closing is serendipitous in tone, and relays the sense of elation Tāl felt in its sealing.

Conclusion

This chapter showed that Shaykh ‘Umar was a firebrand figure whose legacy has polarized West African scholars, historians and laypeople in the Tijānī path alike. But he was also unremarkable in the sense that his commitment to Islamic scholarship and the *sharī‘a* was unwavering; a characteristic not atypical to Muslim authoritative scholars. The *Rimāh*, like its author, also carries an aura of possessing legendary grandeur while at the same time, is met with tendencies

¹⁹⁵ *Rimāh*, 685.

to diminish its role and the downplay of its importance in Islamic and Sufi intellectual history. To find out why that is, I set out to lay out the historic backdrop for the *Rimāḥ*'s emergence. Focusing first on biographical sketches of his early life, his commitment to seeking knowledge from a young age, I show that Tāl had a vast aptitude for scholarship from a young age and received the foundations for his future erudition in his motherland of Futa Toro. Tāl's prodigious travels across the Western Bilād al-Sudan in his early youth, where he took the Tijānī path in Futa Jallon, would serve to widen his knowledge base and scholarly networks. His reputation as a man of *karāmas* and erudition would slowly grow, until he ventured Eastward to the Ḥijāz for *ḥajj*, where the course of his life would forever change upon meeting one of Aḥmad Tijānī's close disciples, Muḥammad al-Ghalī, who would become his shaykh and eventually designate him as the *khalīfa* of the Tijāniyya in West Africa.

This chapter also argued that Tāl managed to shape what a *ṭarīqa*, as we know it today, looks like in West Africa. By emphasizing *tarbiya* and the doctrine of a "sealing" sainthood, the Tijāniyya quickly gained considerable ground in the landscape of West African Sufism and solidified the concept of a Sufi order, its organization structure, doctrine and development over time. Tāl's organized, coherent teachings could easily be practiced by a large number of people, and not just in theoretical terms enabling the growth of a "sealing" Muḥammadan Path in nineteenth century West Africa.

This chapter further highlighted the theme of Tāl's trademark justice-seeking bend. I show how Tāl seemed to invite conflict with his ineffable unapologetic disposition towards justice, and his blazing commitment to reform by way of spreading Islamic knowledge. As Syed notes, "his vision of orthodoxy and moral reform brought him many enemies."¹⁹⁶ Though he was solely focused on teaching, writing and helping people along the way for most of his life, this garnered the jealousy,

¹⁹⁶ Syed, "Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written," 158.

negative attention (and oftentimes, racism) of African and Arab rulers and French colonial administrators who immediately saw his growing influence with apprehension and suspicion, which eventually thrust him into the throws of armed resistance in the last decade of his life before his eventual disappearance in a cave in modern day Mali. I stress that studying the social, political and scholarly influences in analyzing Tāl's life are important, but not at the expense of ignoring his personal, knowledge-driven orientation towards justice-seeking as both inherently holy and as a pathway to God.

Touching on the theme of female saintly baraka in the 'Umarian narrative, I highlight the visions of women Tāl relays in the *Rimāḥ* as signifying how he viewed the women in his life as harbingers of Divine support and aid, and as possessors of spiritual authority by relaying signs, knowledge and warnings. Focusing on his daughter, Fāṭima al-Madaniyya, who may have been among the Tijāniyya's earliest female *muqaddams*, it was standard for women in West Africa to gain increasing scholarly authority in Tāl's time, with the most glaring being Nana Asmā'ū (d.1864), Bello's sister and a contemporary of Tāl's. Lastly, I offer a brief history of the *Rimāḥ* as a text; its circulation, reach and contemporary status. More importantly, this chapter highlighted the significance of Tāl's magnum opus in his own words and his reasons for writing it.

Chapter II: The Living Prophet and the Rhetoric of *Khatmiyya*

Introduction: “Neo-Sufism” Laid to Rest

Ample works on so-called neo-Sufism or the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have been written, yet almost none treat ‘Umar Tāl’s delicate and elaborate conception of it. Even within the scholarship devoted to the corpus of the Tijāniyya, studies on the ideas and sayings of Aḥmad Tijānī and Ibrāhīm Niasse have increasingly been gaining more attention, but almost none go into the specifics of ‘Umar Tāl’s vision for the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* or the *khilāfa khatmiyya* (the sealing vicegerency). This chapter will elucidate on whether Tāl’s vision for the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* differed from past articulations of it, and what, if at all, make his project unique with regards to the idea of organizing his conception of *taṣawwuf* along the doctrine of the so-called “Seal of the Saints” and that of a “living Prophet.” I argue that Tāl’s rhetoric of *khilāfa khatmiyya* needs to be centered as the core vehicle behind the *Rimāḥ*’s larger aims.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, it is the centrality of the figure of “the Shaykh” in the *Rimāḥ* that undergirds Tāl’s rhetoric of the Seal of Saints, with a significant number of the chapters of the text devoted the topic of the significance of taking a shaykh/*walī* Allah, whether directly or indirectly.¹⁹⁸

It is worth considering whether Tāl’s articulation of the figure of the Shaykh in the Tijānī

¹⁹⁷ This is not withstanding the fact that contemporaneous Tijānī North and West African texts, such as the *Munyat al-murīd* of Aḥmad Bāba (d.1888), its explanation, the *Bughyat al-mustafīd* of Shaykh ‘Arabī ibn al-Sā’ih (d.1891) and to some extent, the *Ifāda Aḥmadiyya* by Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib al-Sufyānī (d.1844) also center prominently the concept of the *khatm*. However, in terms of reach and influence, the *Rimāḥ* had far more traction in popularizing the spread of the rhetoric of the *khatmiyya* in the nineteenth century onwards.

¹⁹⁸ In specific, part I of the *Rimāḥ* is significantly devoted to a thorough elaboration on the importance of believing in the ‘*awliyā*’ and warning Muslims against denying them (Chapter 1), motivating Muslims to believe in sainthood (Chapter 2), rejecting the deniers of sainthood (Chapter 6, 7 and 9), etiquettes of recognizing a true shaykh (Chapters 17,18 and 19), on the necessity of having one shaykh (Chapter 22) who attains the status of a “father” (*wālid*) (Chapter 23), that the saints see the Prophet in a waking state (Chapter 31). In part II, Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī as a *quṭb maktūm* and seal of saints (Chapter 36) the rewards of those who believe in him (Chapter 38).

doctrine as the ultimate intercessor with Prophet Muhammad are at all original in the context of his period. I argue that his claims of the *khatmiyya* are not only original in his time, rather, they represent one of the strongest articulations of all time in Islamic intellectual history, despite other scholars' attempts to square his project simply within the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, or the more dated neo-Sufism paradigm. Some have called characteristics of Tāl's Sufism as being part of "the third wave of institutional Sufism" or neo-Sufism.

While this debate has been largely laid to rest, it bears noting that it has been heavily debated by Western scholars in the 1990s, namely opponents of the term such as Rudolph Peters, Bernd Radtke, R.S. O'Fahey on one hand, and by Annemarie Schimmel, H.R. Gibb, John Voll and Nehemia Levtzion on the other hand, who did believe, at some point, that a distinct "neo" form of Sufism emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, particularly in North and West Africa and South Asia. The term itself was first coined by Fazlur Rahman and it was originally used by him mainly in reference to Ibn Taymiyya and his school of thought. Later, it simply came to connote a type of Sufism that is reformed on orthodox lines and interpreted as an activated Sufism that is organized along *ṭarīqa* lines and is politically and organizationally active. However, the term evolved and eventually came to be used to describe eighteenth and nineteenth century Sufi movements such as those of Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs of Fes and Shāh Waliyullah of the Indian subcontinent, whose ideas were the basis of the Sanūsiyya, Ghumāriyya and other so-called reformist movements and *ṭuruq* derive.

Alexander Knysh has posited that the concept of neo-Sufism was created by colonially minded Western scholars that were bewildered by a type of Sufism that stressed political activism and reform.¹⁹⁹ Recent scholarship by Mark Sedgwick has refurbished the usage of the term to simply

¹⁹⁹ Alexander Knysh, "Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm: The Issue of the Motivations of Sufi Resistant Movements in Western and Russian Scholarship," *Die Welt Des Islams* 42, no. 2 (2002): 139–73.

connote manifestations of Sufism in the modern and contemporary Western world.²⁰⁰ Bernd Radtke and John O’Kane conclusively remarked: “the debate around so-called Neo-Sufism suffered to a great extent, if not exclusively, from a lack of knowledge of relevant primary sources on the part of the participants [...] all future pronouncements on the subject will absolutely have to take into account of the publication of volume II of Fritz Meier’s *Bemerkungen zur Muḥammadverehrung*.”²⁰¹ In so far as this dissertation is concerned, I focus on the investigation of primary source literature while acknowledging the work of scholars who posit that there existed a “reformed” brand of Sufism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which allegedly possessed more exoteric features and was oriented towards political organization along *ṭarīqa* lines. I move away from the idea of neo-Sufism as having a more vivid engagement with the restructuring of the world order and political and social change, in contrast to the more “traditional” Sufism, and focus rather on the “neo” epistemic, social and political elements that may have given rise to such engagements.²⁰²

The term has almost always been used in conjunction with the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* in a way that suggests that the Prophet’s physical death did not prevent accessibility to him or attaining “union” with him and it was this idea that was the impetus for the appearance of more organized, Sufi networks. Zachary Wright has refuted this claim as “exaggeration of the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* as an intellectually coherent scholarly network.”²⁰³ Radtke and O’Fahey have also refuted the notion

²⁰⁰ Mark Sedgwick, “Neo-Sufism,” *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, August 2012, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521196505.014>.

²⁰¹ From the Introduction to Aḥmad ibn al-Mubārak al-Lamāṭi, *Pure Gold from the Words of Sayyidī ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh: Al-Dhabab al-ibrīz min kalām sayyidī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh*, *Basic Texts of Islamic Mysticism* ; v. 1 (Leiden, The Netherlands ; Boston: Brill, 2007), xxi Reference to Meier’s encyclopedic work on the history of the veneration of the Prophet is done tongue in cheek in this instance, to prove that there is nothing “neo” about the intense veneration of the Prophet across the history of Islam.

²⁰² Knysh, “Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm,” 142.

²⁰³ Zachary Wright, *Realizing Islam*, 14.

of a distinct emergence of neo-Sufi networks,²⁰⁴ however, Radtke stresses the 18th century as having “new” features: changes in regards to the attitudes towards the *madhaahib*, and an emphasis on “Muhammad oriented mysticism.”²⁰⁵ Their scholarship has rightly turned the debate’s attention not so much on the “organization” or politicization of Sufism, but with the way the methodology and doctrine of later *ṭuruq* became more clearly articulated under pressure from unprecedented new political challenges for Muslim communities from the Africa to the Balkans to South Asia. The Muḥammadan way, then, is more constructively approached not as a movement of organized Sufi paths, but rather as a more amplified revival of a pre-existing methodology central to Sufism that consisted of a set of teachings, doctrines and litanies aimed at nurturing the link between the wayfarer and Prophet Muhammad. The only thing “neo” about later Sufi *ṭuruq* such as the likes of the Tijāniyya, the Sanūsiyya, the Kittānia and the Khatmiyya therefore is the “neo” rising colonial world order under which they operated and the need to better articulate Sufi doctrines under such unprecedented, challenging conditions that carried existential implications.

Bruce Lawrence’s suggestion that the single most important question that demarcates Sufi from non-Sufi Muslims is whether the Prophet Muhammad is alive or dead²⁰⁶ is of particular significance. While Sufis of all generations have held the view that the Prophet is living, timeless and transcendent, in Lawrence’s view, what sets apart the nineteenth century is a more explicit and public realization of the Prophet as the crucial link between God and humankind. The Prophet, from the Sufi perspective, possesses a timeless omniscience. Intercession with the Prophet was certainly not a new idea, origins of this idea could be traced in the works of great past mystics such as Tirmidhī, Ibn

²⁰⁴ O’Fahey and Radtke, “Neo-sufism Reconsidered.”

²⁰⁵ Radtke. Bernd, “Sufism in the 18th Century: An Attempt at a Provisional Reappraisal,” *Welt Des Islams* 36, no. 3 (1996): 360.

²⁰⁶ Bruce Lawrence, “Sufism and Neo-sufism,” *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, November 2010.

‘Arabi, Suyūṭī and others. Evidence suggests that *ṭuruq* along the Muḥammadan Way were organized by early Egyptian Ottoman scholars such as ‘Ali al-Khawwāṣ and his student Sha‘rānī, who established *zawāyā* and *majālis salāt ‘alā al-Nabī* at al-Azhar in the sixteenth century.²⁰⁷ Approaching the topic from the vantage point of Sufi scholars themselves, the question of trying to trace the “origins” on rational lines would be futile, as the *ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* (the Muḥammadan Reality) is seen as pre-eternal, the first created being; knowledge of which is the whole goal of existence (and of Sufism) itself, as Tāl’s writings and other that of other Sufi ‘*ulamā*’ quoted therein show.

Semantics are perhaps the key contention in understanding the debate on “neo-Sufism.” One of the main opponents of an idea of “neo” Sufism as a distinct category is the scholar Bernd Radtke. In his 1994 paper, “Ijtihad and Neo-Sufism,”²⁰⁸ Radtke begins by refuting two clichés that often go uninterrogated in Western scholarly approaches to Sufism: that Sufis have historically been uninterested in *shari‘a* and that Sufism is a “softer” version of Islam that is more palatable to Western values. Radtke refutes these claims and seeks to show that Sufism has always had a powerful relationship with the law, in the same way that Islam has always taken the two supposedly opposing spheres (spirituality and the law/*sharī‘a* and *ḥaqīqa*) very seriously from the onset. He does this first by reminding readers that even as early as the ninth century, scholars like al-Tirmidhī (d.892) can be found discussing the relationship between esoteric and exoteric knowledge. Al-Tirmidhī is both an erudite adherent of the Ḥanafī school and was the first to discuss the idea of *wilāya khatmiyya* in

²⁰⁷ See Richard J. A. McGregor, Adam Abdelhamid Sabra, and Mireille Loubet, *Le développement du soufisme en Égypte à l’époque mamelouke, Taṭawwur al-Taṣawwuf fī Miṣr fī al-‘Aṣr al-Mamlūkī*, *The development of Sufism in Mamluk Egypt*, Cahier des Annales islamologiques 27 (Le Caire: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 2006).

²⁰⁸ Bernd Radtke, “Ijtihad and Neo-sufism,” *Asiatische Studien = Études Asiatiques* 48, no. 3 (1994): 909.

writing.²⁰⁹

Further, Radtke highlights that al-Tirmidhī classifies scholars into two camps, those who disseminate *‘ilm dhāhir* and *‘ilm bāṭin* or *ilm al-naḥs* and between those who are *ahl al-ra’y* (the jurists) and *ahl al-hadith* (the scholars of *ḥadīth*). Tirmidhi is an example of an early scholar who professed that, without sound knowledge of one’s soul and one’s knowledge of God (*ma’rifa*), one’s approach to understanding the *‘ilāl* (reasoning) of legal knowledge will fall short; this higher plane of reasoning is what he calls “*ilm al-ḥikma*.” By referring to Tirmidhī, Radtke rightly reminds readers that even the earliest forms of Sufism have accounted for the idea of the Prophet as a living link.

Advocates of the existence of a “neo-Sufism” have asserted that certain forms of Sufism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century are distinct from earlier forms of Sufism in some of the following ways: either they call for a discontinuation of past practice or are very critical of the mystical philosophical tradition of Ibn ‘Arabī. Yet perhaps one of the most controversial suggestions that have been made about neo-Sufism was an earlier—now retracted—one made by J.S. Trimingham and John Voll who have both made the claim in their earliest writings on the topic, that for some North African Sufis in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the purpose of Sufi devotion was to attain a union with the spirit of the Prophet as some kind of a replacement for a union with God. O’Fahey and Radtke have noted that such claims, if true, would have had a major shift in Islamic intellectual history, but the above claims were not substantiated by either author and they have backtracked somewhat from these claims in later defenses of their work, such as “Neo-Sufism Considered Again” where Voll suggests that the idea of replacing "union with God" by "union with the spirit of the

²⁰⁹ Aiyub Palmer, *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam: Al-Ḥakīm Al-Tirmidhī’s Theory of Wilāya and the Reenvisioning of the Sunnī Caliphate* (Boston: BRILL, 2019).

Prophet" needed redefinition.²¹⁰ An investigation of primary sources from so-called "neo-Sufi" figures such as Tāl would quickly refute the egregious assertion that Sufīs such as Tāl favor a union with the Prophet over God. The sections of the *Rimāḥ* discussed in this chapter will reiterate the baselessness of the outdated premise.

Regarding the issue of achieving "union with the Prophet," Valerie Hoffman's work is instrumental. She posits that the practice of annihilation in the Messenger by Sufīs in the tradition of the likes of Aḥmad ibn Idrīs represents neither an innovation nor a rejection of Ibn 'Arabī, and that the idea of a Muḥammadan Reality certainly did not originate with "modernism."²¹¹ To this, John Voll contends that experiences concerning the Prophet may not be new, but they were different from earlier forms of Sufism.²¹² He asserts that this type of Sufism is not simply a continuation of practices and beliefs from medieval times, and that themes such as "annihilation in the Prophet" was gaining increasing importance in the eighteenth and nineteenth century—at the very least, he protests, it is best not to refute the claim by simply calling it "nonsense" as did Radtke and O'Fahey. Again, in explaining this phenomenon, our authors make little mention of the shifting geopolitical realities in North and West Africa, faced by a new political incursion by European colonial powers.

Scholars like Jonathan Katz, however, suggests that these novel political challenges might explain the emphasis on the Prophet Muhammad as the ultimate symbol of the Muslim experience, and the anchor of Muslim allegiance and devotion. He describes "a global anxiety by some Muslims over the spiritual health of their community in the early nineteenth century," which made some of

²¹⁰ Voll, "Neo-Sufism."

²¹¹ Valerie J. Hoffman, "Annihilation in the Messenger of God: The Development of a Sufi Practice," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, no. 3 (1999): 351–69.

²¹² Voll, "Neo-Sufism."

them “receptive to the circulation of accounts of visionary meetings with the Prophet Muḥammad.”²¹³

The more accurate prognosis is more likely circular, however. Is it the political realities that pegged the Prophet at the center of modern Sufi experience, or is it the pre-existing centrality of the Prophet that highlighted the anxieties of a secular new world that shifted farther and farther away from the conventional belief in prophets and prophecy?

The Myth of Rejecting Ibn ‘Arabī

Regarding the claim that neo-Sufis rejected the “excesses” of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *waḥdat al-wujūd*, there seems to be a conflation of past movements here and a type of historical anachronism. It borrows features from the doctrine of Aḥmad Sirhindī and the Mujaddidi Naqshbandis in South Asia in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but there is no textual proof that North African Sufis such as Aḥmad ibn Idrīs or Aḥmad Tijānī rejected Ibn ‘Arabī. On the contrary, as far as even a preliminary reading of the sources of the *Rimāḥ* goes, Ibn ‘Arabī’s works are relied upon as support for the Tijānī doctrine and feature rather prominently.²¹⁴

Often reductively viewed as an offset to Ibn ‘Arabī, some scholars have claimed that modern Sufism came to be more articulated within the traditions of the thought of the twelfth century scholar Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazālī. Albert Hourani was one of the first contemporary scholars to suggest that during the eighteenth century there was significant attention given to Ghazālī over Ibn-‘Arabī. Hourani attributed this to the tensions between the scripturalist traditions of Ibn Taymiyya as articulated in Wahhabism, vis-à-vis the mystical traditions associated with Ibn ‘Arabī. In reference to this tension, Hourani noted the work of Murtadā al-Zabīdī, an Indian-born scholar who was a major intellectual figure in eighteenth century Cairo. Hourani suggested that al-Zabīdī wrote his

²¹³ Jonathan G. KATZ, “Shaykh Ahmad’s Dream: A nineteenth-Century Eschatological Vision,” *Studia Islamica* 79 (1994): 158.

²¹⁴ For a deeper exploration of this theme, see chapter III of this dissertation, particularly, the section, “Popularizing Ibn ‘Arabī” in the texts of Sha‘rānī and Tāl.

major work as a commentary on the works of Ghazālī, as a way of combating Wahhabi doctrine: in this way, the conflict between Wahhabism and Ghazālī would bring the rift closer than it would have it were a confrontation between Wahhabism and Ibn ‘Arabī. The "Neo-Sufi" position challenged the contemporary Wahhābi stance, argue Levtzion and Voll, in the way it enabled a type of “moderate Sufism” that still utilized the terminology of Ibn ‘Arabī but one that was at the same time reoriented to the style of thought of Ghazālī. The place of Ghazālī’s thought in neo-Sufism, did not, in other words, replace Ibn ‘Arabī, but rather, he was made less central. Breaking presuppositions about neo-Sufism once more, Tāl’s *Rimāḥ* happens to feature more quotations by Ibn ‘Arabī than from Ghazālī, proving once more that the secondary scholarship on modern Sufism is fraught with grand scale theorizations that often betray reality.

Beyond Neo-Sufism: The *Khatmiyya*

At the risk of revisiting a debate that has largely been laid to rest, it is accurate to conclude that the label "neo-Sufi" is not an entirely appropriate one to describe the Sufi orders of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is more worthwhile investigating the driving doctrinal concepts behind these so called neo-Sufi *ṭuruq*, which undoubtedly made them a significant force in North and West Africa, the Caucasus, South Asia and elsewhere in Muslim-majority communities in modernity. However reductive some of the Western scholarly on such movements may have been, the attention that they gave to the organized orders of the nineteenth century was not misplaced. Many of these orders provided the most efficient organizational bases in the defense against European colonial expansion in the nineteenth century. Perhaps the utility of the term lies in it being more of a cursory convenience rather than a particular theory or overarching label. Indeed, we would be amiss to reduce a diverse group of complex figures to static and cohesive networks. It would be more productive to see what new features may have emerged in nineteenth century Sufism, with an emphasis on a

discussion of the ideas of these vital Sufi orders. I suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the idea of *khatmiyya* (the concept of the Seal of Sainthood) and its centrality to later *ṭuruq* such as the Tijāniyya, which features especially prominently in Tāl’s magnum opus. The heavy use of quotes in Tāl’s project indicate that, in his project, he saw the “final *ṭarīqa*”, the Tijāniyya, as not one that meant to pose an abrogation of previous Sufi thought and practice, but a verification of previous Sufi paths.²¹⁵

Tāl’s magisterial work is an integral part of an important corpus of West African Islamic scholarly literature in Arabic, but its most salient status is the way it has come to serve as the blueprint for the Tijānī outlook and doctrine, and the way it has helped in the enormous spread of Islam and Sufism in West Africa in the nineteenth century. Tāl has been widely credited with introducing the Tijāniyya into large parts of West Africa.²¹⁶ I argue that the power of the *Rmāḥ*’s widespread, persuasive rhetoric aided in this spread and empowered Tāl to carry out his political and religious project across large swaths of West Africa. It is the rhetoric of *khatmiyya* (sealing)—with the central concept of the Shaykh/walī Allah as its vehicle—that is perhaps the most forceful and distinguishing feature that decorates Tāl’s magnum opus. The *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* then, which as we have seen in the preceding paragraphs is a central feature that has been a granted reality for many Sufi scholars over previous centuries.

However, one must stress the fact that, though the Tijāniyya is generally considered a later Sufi order in the sense that it was founded in the eighteenth century, it “came with nothing new” insofar as its teachings emanate from the earliest sources, the Qur’ān, sources of the sunna and

²¹⁵ Wright, “Realizing Islam”, 7.

²¹⁶ Benjamin Soares, “The Historiography of Islam in West Africa: An Anthropologist’s View,”.

classical secondary sources from the Sufi scholarly corpus.²¹⁷ Tāl’s articulation of the Tijāniyya’s “sealing” quality i.e. that no *ṭarīqa* could come after it has less to do with superiority or novelty, but rather with the clarity in which it articulated the culmination of experiential, spiritual verification or *taḥqīq* of one’s own knowledge, and for the wayfarer to achieve the ability to become ‘*amilun bī ‘ilmihī*’ (to put one’s knowledge into practice) as Zachary Wright posits.²¹⁸ This is despite the fact that, in Wright’s view, “al-Tijānī’s notion of the consummation, perfection, or “sealing” of the Muḥammadan path in the Tijāniyya both responded to regional Maghrebi intellectual and social currents, and facilitated the global spread of al-Tijānī’s *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* in a manner perhaps unrivaled by contemporary articulations.” I speculate that the *Rimāḥ*, as the symbolic vehicle for Tāl’s project in the nineteenth century, played an enormous role in making the spread of the Tijāniyya—as but one example of the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*—unrivaled. This was in no small part thanks to Tāl’s aptly articulated belief in his status as the inheritor of Aḥmad Tijānī’s station as the Seal of the Muḥammadan Sainthood, thereby making him the carrier of the *khilāfa khatmiyya*.

Wright relays that Aḥmad al-Tijānī “was not the first to claim to be the Seal of the Saints, but he may have been the last to put forth the claim with such coherency.”²¹⁹ Tāl’s *Rimāḥ* takes this effort to organize coherence to another level. It is worth noting that the rhetoric of the *khatm* is more evident in the *Rimāḥ* than it is in *Jawāhir al-ma’ānī* due to the fact that the doctrine of *khatm* was not developed enough by the time the *Jawāhir* was completed; before Aḥmad Tijānī’s attainment of his ultimate *maqam* (spiritual rank).²²⁰ This chapter will further demonstrate, through a translation

²¹⁷ Wright, *Islamic Realization and Sainthood in Eighteenth-Century North Africa: Aḥmad al-Tijānī and the Foundations of the Tijāniyya*, 5.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Wright, 169.

²²⁰ Oral remark by Zachary Wright, July 6th, 2020.

of lengthy excerpts from the relevant chapters in the *Rimāḥ*, the rhetoric, language and sources that drive Tāl's vision for the *khilāfa khatmiyya*. This idea sets the *Rimāḥ* apart from the primary doctrinal reference of the Tijāniyya, the *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī* and other relayed by Aḥmad Tijānī, even though the *Rimāḥ* is written as an affirmation of Tijānī's sayings and teachings, it crystallizes the Tijānī doctrine with the *khilāfa khatmiyya* concept as the driving framework.

Other studies on the *Rimāḥ* have come to similar conclusions: Tāl's written work is perhaps driven by the consideration that "Shaykh 'Umar wanted to establish *al-Khilafa al-Khatmiyya* and spread the Tijānī order."²²¹ It is worth noting that the author of the quoted PhD dissertation, Jah, translates the word "*khilāfa*" as a political body, to strictly mean, the "caliphate." I argue that Tāl probably did not imply the word as such, or at least, he did not intend to materialize his *khilāfa* in a particular political and military campaign from the onset. The "caliphate" or kingdom Tāl eventually did establish was but a welcome byproduct of his articulation of *khalīfat al-khatm*; the spiritual, not political rank, took precedence.

This points to the fact that the *Rimāḥ* goes well beyond the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* paradigm and is organized around the idea of Tijānī as the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood; the notion that, the *maqām* (station) of Prophet Muhammad, manifested as the *ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*, is inherited to the seal of Muḥammadan sainthood. The notion of a *ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* again, is not a new one, and has been written about at length by authors as early as Tirmidhī,²²² Ibn 'Arabī²²³ (who indirectly claimed the position in his *Futūḥāt*), Sha'rānī and others.

²²¹ Umar Jah, "Sufism and Nineteenth Century Jihad Movements", PhD Dissertation, McGill University, Montreal, 1973, 4.

²²² Consult: Muḥammad ibn 'Alī Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism: Two Works by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī ; an Annotated Translation with Introduction*, Curzon Sufi Series (Richmond, Surrey : Concord, MA: Curzon Press , 1996).

²²³ Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī*, Golden Palm Series (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

Although scholars prior to Tijānī's time have written about or claimed the title of *khātim al-wilāya al-Muḥammadiyya* (seal of Muḥammadan sainthood) or *khatm al-wilāya al-muṭlaqā* (absolute sainthood) which Ibn 'Arabī distinguishes clearly in his *Futūḥāt*, what sets the Tijānī doctrine apart, is the belief that Aḥmad Tijānī as the “seal of Muḥammadan saints,” did not negate the existence of “sealing” saints in their own time or the fact that another saint's claim would weaken the legitimacy of Tijānīs. Rather, the *ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* contains all claims to *khatmiyya* prior to the Tijāniyya because of the belief that previous *khatms* would have simply inherited the *maqām* of Aḥmad Tijānī, even before he was physically born. This further implies that Tijānī's *khalīfas*, such as Muḥammad al-Ghālī and 'Umar Fūtī Tāl after him, are the inheritors of this *maqam*, making them the *khalīfas* (vicegerents) of the *wilāya khatmiyyah*.

Tāl thought it necessary to articulate the proofs behind such notions and make them public and widespread in the *Rimāḥ*. It should be noted however, that the text does not begin with an elucidation of these proofs. Rather, chapters on the specific status of the Tijāniyya are found towards the end of part I and in the middle II in the *Rimāḥ*. It appears not to be Tāl's sole intention to write the *Rimāḥ* to champion the superiority of the Tijāniyya, but instead is aimed at all sincere wayfarers “*al-ṣādiqīn min ahl al-ṭarīq*”²²⁴ which he addresses as the intended audience in his introduction to the text and begins by elucidating the virtues of sainthood (chapter 1) and the general importance of having a shaykh *wāṣil* (chapter 12) and not a specific shaykh. It is only further into the text that Tāl goes into the more Tijānī-centric rhetoric and justifications surrounding the doctrine of the Sealing Inheritance.

Tāl states that he received divine inspiration to write the text, in chapter 29 of the text entitled, “this section is concerned with informing the brethren that Sayyidī Muḥammad al-Ghālī told me

²²⁴ *Rimāḥ*, 442.

explicitly, by word of mouth, that I am one of the vicegerents (*khulafāʾ*) of the Shaykh, may God be pleased with him and make him pleased.” In this chapter, he also relays proofs of his status, ranging from relaying verbal accounts, visions he has received, or visions others have received concerning him. The significance of the *Rimāḥ* as an inspired gift from Aḥmad Tijānī himself is tied to Tāl’s authoritative status and rank within the *ṭarīqa*:

One of the sincere brethren happened to see [in a vision] the Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, and the Shaykh carried within him an abundance beyond the comprehension of the minds, consisting of benefits, gifts, secrets, sciences and cognitions emanating from the Divine mysteries. The Shaykh was seeking someone to whom he could deliver these [bounties]. When the brother understood this, he said to the Shaykh, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him: "Hand them over to me, and I will carry them for you, oh Sayyidī!" The Shaykh did not notice him, and they both remained in this situation. The Shaykh then began to call out to me, saying: "If only you would come to me, O Shaykh ‘Umar!" He kept repeating this call, so the brother looked up and saw me. I had heard the Shaykh’s call, so I came at high speed. The brother also sped up and he and I raced each other towards the Shaykh, and we reached him together. The Shaykh, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, extended his blessed hand toward me, and delivered all those treasures to me, so the brother said: "O Sayyidī, you are delivering these things to him, although I was with you for some time before he came!" The Shaykh told him: "Say: 'There is no god but God (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*)’" And in no time since then I have composed a dazzling literary work on the subject of this *ṭarīqa*."

One would expect Tāl to boast receiving these glad tidings from Aḥmad Tijānī himself that enabled him to pen the *Rimāḥ* to be found at the forefront of the text, but he relayed this vision in the middle of the 29th chapter, which could be easily overlooked by the unassuming reader. In effect, the almost hidden-in-plain-sight placement of this important passage would suggest that Tāl is less interested in boastfulness or self-aggrandizement, and more concerned with explicating the place of the Tijāniyya as a culmination and maturation of Sufi thought. It is for this and other reasons that the *Rimāḥ* is partly entitled *Ḥizb al-Raḥīm*, (stressing “the League” of the Merciful), signifying his intention of setting up the text to appear as if it is authored by a group or band of scholars: from the onset, he is not interested in being the sole owner or author of the text, a theme which I explore at length in the third chapter of this dissertation.

To better understand his doctrine of Sealing Sainthood, it is important to center Tāl's notion of the Prophet as "living", and the way this central belief connects to the two most salient features of his doctrine; namely the admonishing the imitation (*taqlīd*) of following a single legal school (*madhhab*) and the centrality of having a *shaykh wāṣil* to aid one in attaining complete knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*).

One might argue that the widespread impetus of joining a *tarīqa Muḥammadiyya* stemmed from a desire for meaning and allegiance to Prophetic authority due to experiencing dramatic sociopolitical changes that came with impending dominance of European colonialism. This is partly true. But as I state previously in this chapter, the question is a circular one, as it could be argued that the appearance of a more pronounced and perhaps more organized "Muḥammadan way" came at a time when people were amenable to receiving a more pronounced, conclusive consensus on the future of Sufi thought and practice. In other words, there were messianic implications to the Muḥammadan way as it was more broadly received in the modern era (eighteenth-nineteenth century North and West Africa primarily). Its characteristic of finality in a temporal sense—that of bearing a definitive and conclusive culmination to Sufi methodology—signified a maturation of past doctrines, one, if fully actualized, can lead one to be able to see the Prophet and converse with him in a waking state. Though this, would warn Tāl, is not the end goal of Sufism, but rather, achieving and tasting the knowledge of God and maintaining uprightness (*istiḳāma*) in *sharī'a*.²²⁵

The Living Prophet: Nothing New

In what follows, I relay lengthy excerpts from chapter 31 of part I of the *Rimāḥ*, to shed light on Tāl's articulation of the Prophet as continuously living. The chapter is entitled:

This section is concerned with informing the brethren that the saints behold the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—in a state of wakefulness, and that he—God

²²⁵ See the final chapter of this dissertation "On Giving Less Credence to Dreams and Visions."

bless him and give him peace—is present at every meeting or place he wishes, with his body and his spirit. He moves freely and travels wherever he will, in the lands of the earth and in the *malakūt* (heavenly kingdom), and he is in the shape he was in before his death, with no part of him having altered. He is invisible, just as the angels are invisible, despite their being alive in their bodies. If God wishes to allow a servant behold him, He removes the veil from him, so he sees him in his physical shape.²²⁶

In this chapter, Tāl mainly relates quotations from Sha‘rānī’s *Lawāqih al-anwār al-qudsiyya fī al-‘uhūd al-Muḥammadiyya*, the *Ibrīz* of al-Dabbāgh and the description of the *dīwān al-awliyā’* (the council of saints), Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Ibn Fāris’ *al-Minaḥ al-‘ilāhiyya* and other mystical texts. I relay excerpts from chapter 31 to point our attention to the heart of the matter concerning the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* vision and methodology, and to show that it is regarded by Tāl as the perfected culmination of Sufi practice:

Success is achieved with the help of God, Exalted is He, for He is the Guide by His grace to the straight path. In *Lawaqih al-anwār al-qudsiya fī al-‘uhūd al-Muḥammadiya*, Sha‘rānī²²⁷ has said: "If you make a frequent practice of invoking blessing and peace upon him (God bless him and give him peace), perhaps you will attain to the station of witnessing him (God bless him and give him peace). That is the procedure of Shaykh Nūr ad-Dīn ash-Shinwānī, Shaykh Aḥmad Zawāwī, Shaikh Muhammad ibn Dawūd al-Manzalānī and all the company of the *mashāyikh* of the era. Not one of them ever ceases to invoke blessing upon God’s messenger—God bless him and give him peace—to make a frequent practice of this, and to cleanse oneself of all sins, so that he may come together with him in a state of wakefulness at any moment he wishes. If someone does not experience this coming together, he has not yet practiced the invocation of blessing upon God’s messenger—God bless him and give him peace—with the frequency required in order to attain to this station.

Shaykh Aḥmad Zawāwī told me that, when he had failed to achieve the experience of coming together with the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—he devoted himself with assiduous perseverance to the invocation of blessing upon the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—for one whole year, invoking blessing upon him fifty thousand names each and every day. In similar fashion, Shaikh Nūr ad-Dīn ash-Shinwānī informed me that he devoted himself with assiduous perseverance to the invocation of sending blessing upon the Prophet for such and such a period of time, invoking blessing upon him thirty thousand times each and every day.

²²⁶ *Rimāh*, 453.

²²⁷ I devote chapter III of this dissertation to the study of 15th and 16th century Egyptian influences on Tāl’s thought, with a special focus on the works of Imām Sha‘rānī.

[....]

As for Sayyidī Ibrāhīm al-Matbūlī, his communion with him is beyond reckoning, since he would come to together with him in all his spiritual states, and he used to say: "I have no Shaykh except God's messenger, God bless him and give him peace." Abu'l-'Abbās al-Mursī used to say: "If God's messenger—God bless him and give him peace—was veiled from me for a moment, I would not count myself among the Muslims."

He has said in another place: "The litany (*wird*) of Shaykh Aḥmad az-Zawāwī used to consist of forty thousand invocations of blessing, and he once said to me: 'Our procedure is to make frequent practice of the invocation of blessing upon God's messenger—God bless him and give him peace—to the point where he keeps us company in a state of wakefulness and we associate with him like the companions (*ṣaḥāba*). We then ask him about the affairs of our worldly life. We also ask him about those Prophetic narrations (*aḥādīth*) which the memorizer has reported to us on weak authority, and we act in accordance with what he has to say about them. When that experience does not come about for us, it must mean that we are not among those who make a frequent practice of the invocation of blessing upon him, God bless him and give him peace.'"

He has said in the foreword to the book: "The point is that the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—is the true Shaykh for us, through the intermediacy of the *shuyūkh* of the spiritual path, or without intermediacy, as in the case of someone who becomes one of the friends of God who meet with him—God bless him and give him peace—in the state of wakefulness. Praise be to God, for we have come to recognize a community of the people of this union, like Sayyidī 'Alī al-Khawwās, Shaykh Muḥammad al-'Adl, Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī and others of their kind. May God the Exalted be well pleased with them all."²²⁸

Tāl relays the above quotations from Sha'rānī in such a way that swiftly demonstrates that the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* is certainly not a new phenomenon, and that the aim of *taṣawwuf* itself, in Tāl's view, is but a path to experiencing and knowing the so-called Muḥammadan reality. The listing of numerous (mostly fifteenth and sixteenth era Egyptian) gnostics who have experienced witnessing the Prophet in a waking state since the fourteenth century or earlier centers the idea of the Prophet as the ultimate shaykh. Despite referring to the methodology of sending thousands of invocations on the Prophet that resulted in achieving communion with him, it rests that Tāl and others believed that granting this station is a form of divine grace, not something that one simply

²²⁸ *Rimāḥ*, 453.

gets or attains.

Still, there is a clear element of intense effort and devotion expected of serious wayfarers to be able to witness this station that lies at the heart of this spiritual practice, and indeed, was perceived to be the completion of one's state of gnosis. As the quote by 'Alī al-Khawwāṣ (d.1542), Sha'rānī's illiterate foremost mentor signifies, the wayfarer (*sālik*) "does not achieve perfection in the station of mystical knowledge (*'irfān*), until he experiences communion with God's Messenger." On the issue of attaining this state by grace, not by one's efforts, Tāl then relays quotes from the Ibrīz and the sayings of al-Dabbāgh which were recorded by his student, Aḥmad ibn al-Mubārak:²²⁹

Shaykh Ahmad ibn al-Mubārak, the author of al-Ibrīz, mentioned that he noticed a man who saw the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—in the state of wakefulness, and because of him the fragrant setting of al-Madina, the city of the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, was emanating from the city of Fez. He has then gone on to say: "I heard this man say: 'I went on the ḥajj, and when I visited the tomb of the Prophet God bless him and give him peace, a state (*ḥāl*) came over me and I said: "O Messenger of God, I did not think that it's conceivable that I reach your city and then return to Fez." Then I heard a voice from the noble tomb, and it was saying: "If I am confined in this tomb, then those of you who come must stay here, but if I am with my community, wherever they may be, then you must return to your homelands." I therefore went back to my homeland."

He has also mentioned that his Shaykh, the Cardinal Pole (*quṭb*) 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh—may God be well pleased with him—once said: "If one of God's saints beholds the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—in the state of wakefulness, he will not see him until he sees the whole of this world, but no one will notice." He has added: "I heard him say—may God be well pleased with him: 'Everything has a distinguishing mark. As for the servant's experience of witnessing the Prophet (God bless him and give him peace) in the state of wakefulness, its distinguishing mark is that his thinking becomes preoccupied with the noble Prophet on a constant basis, to the point where he is never absent from his mind, and no distractions or concerns divert his attention from him. You see him eating while his mind is with the Prophet, drinking while he is like that, arguing while he is like that, and sleeping while he is like that.' I said: 'Could this be achieved by cunning and artful skill?' He replied: 'If it were to result from cunning (*ḥīlā*) and skill (*kasb*) on the servant's part, heedlessness would befall him whenever a distraction or an object of concern came his way. It is

²²⁹ For a study on al-Ibriz see al-Lamāti, *Pure Gold from the Words of Sayyidī 'Abd Al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh: Al-Dhabab al-Ibrīz Min Kalām Sayyidī 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh*.

actually a form of grace from God, however, which He obliges the servant to carry out, and a task in which He puts the servant to work. The servant can exercise no personal choice in the matter, however hard he may try, and it is for this reason that concerns and distractions do not divert his attention. The servant's inner being (*bāṭin*) is with the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—and his outer being (*thāhir*) is with the people. He converses with them without deliberate purpose, eats without deliberate purpose, and treats everything he experiences in his outer life without deliberate purpose, because the crucial factor is in the heart and he is in the company of someone other than them. If the servant remains steadfast in this condition for a period of time, God will provide the servant with the experience of witnessing the noble Prophet and His glorious messenger—God bless him and give him peace—in the state of wakefulness. The period of contemplation varies in length, so for some of them it is a month, for some of them it is less, and for some of them it is more.²³⁰

He continues to cite al-Dabbāgh:

"He said, may God be well pleased with him: 'The importance of witnessing the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—is momentous and its significance is tremendous. Were it not that God strengthens the servant, he would not be capable of experiencing it. Suppose we envision a mighty, strong man, endowed with the combined strength of forty men, each one of them possessing the courage and intrepidity required to seize a lion by the ear. Then let us suppose that the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—attacked this man. His guts would surely be split asunder, his being would wither and his soul would depart, and that would be due to the might of his charge, God bless him and give him peace. In spite of [bearing the brunt of] this mighty force, for within that noble experience of witnessing contains such blissful delight that cannot be described or quantified, so much so that it is regarded by [those who receive it] as superior to entering the garden of paradise. That is because someone who enters paradise is not bestowed with all the bounties it contains, but only with a bounty specific for himself, as opposed to the experience of witnessing the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace.

For if someone experiences that witnessing, his being will enjoy every bounty of the people of the garden of paradise. He will discover the delight of every color and the sweetness of every kind, just as the people of the garden find in the garden, and that is only a little of what is due to someone whose garden has been created from his light, God bless him and give him peace, and may He ennoble, honor, extol and glorify him and his family and his companions.

No one denies the reality of seeing the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—in the state of wakefulness, except someone who has no knowledge of the stations of the gnostics (*maqāmāt al-‘arīfīn*) and has no knowledge of the council of the righteous (*dīwān al-ṣāliḥīn*).²³¹

²³⁰ *Rimāh*, 453.

²³¹ *Rimāh*, 454.

In their undertaking of a full translation of the *Ibrīz*, in which the most detailed account of the Council of Saints exists, Bernd Radtke and John O’Kane describe *the ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* as a means “of an ascent through the cosmos [that] leads the aspirant to behold and meet the Prophet in a waking state (*ru’yat al-nabī yaqadhatan*). Due to this encounter, a person endowed with illumination (*al-maftūḥ ‘alayhi*), in this case our al-Dabbāgh, comes to acquire a store on supernatural knowledge which is far superior to the knowledge of the ‘normal’ religious scholars.”²³² Tāl’s heavy use of quotations by al-Dabbāgh points to their mutual conception of attaining perfect knowledge and full illumination (*fath*) as only being possible via the assistance of Prophet Muhammad, which can only be accessed by giving allegiance to a shaykh *wāṣil*. This illumination can either be attained quickly, or gradually, as follows:

According to Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Mas’ūd ad-Dabbāgh, as reported in *al-Ibrīz*: "When the saint is endowed with illumination, he witnesses in the second station of the stations of illumination the angels, the Prophets and the saints who dwell therein. He witnesses the station of Jesus, peace be upon him, and everyone who is attached to him and of his kind; then the station of Moses, peace be upon him, and everyone who is together with him; then the station of Idris, peace be upon him, and everyone who is together with him; then the station of Joseph, peace be upon him, and everyone who is together with him; then the station of Abraham, peace be upon him, and everyone who is together with him; then the station of three of the earlier Messengers, including those who preceded Joseph and those who came after him, their names being unknown. The saint endowed with illumination does not cease to feel threatened by terrible danger and impending destruction, until he witnesses the station of our master and our patron, Muḥammad, God bless him and give him peace. Then, when he does witness it at last, he acquires the state of blissful happiness and joy becomes complete for him.

At the end of the book, he has said: "When he, i.e. the saint endowed with illumination has reached the point of witnessing the essence (*dhāt*) of the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—in the state of wakefulness, he obtains immunity from the dalliance of Satan through his communion with the mercy of God, that being our master, our Prophet and our patron, Muḥammad, God bless him and give him peace.”²³³

²³² al-Lamāṭi, *Pure Gold from the Words of Sayyidī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh: Al-Dhabab al-Ibrīz Min Kalām Sayyidī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh*, xx.

²³³ *Rimāḥ*, 456.

Tāl then proceeds to quote several passages from the opening of Suyūṭī's work on the topic of seeing the Prophet in a waking state:

In *Tanwīr al-ḥalak fī imkān ru'yat an-nabī wa al-malak* ("Shedding Light on the Murky Darkness concerning the Possibility of Seeing the Prophet and the Angels"), Shaykh Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī, may God be well pleased with him, has said:

"The question has frequently arisen concerning the sighting of the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—by the masters of spiritual states. A number of our contemporaries, among those who lack any foothold in knowledge, have gone to extreme lengths in denying that experience, and they have claimed that is utterly impossible. I have therefore compiled this set of pages devoted to that subject. We shall begin with the authentic *ḥadīth* that has been transmitted concerning that matter: as reported by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and Abu Dawūd, on the authority of Abū Huraira, God's Messenger said: "if someone sees me in the state of sleep, he will surely see me in the state of wakefulness, and Satan will not make himself look like me." A similar statement has been reported by at-Ṭabarānī, from the *ḥadīth* of Malik ibn 'Abdīllāh and the *ḥadīth* of Abu Bakarā. A similar statement has also been reported by ad-Dārimī, from the *ḥadīth* of Abu Qatāda. "According to the scholars, there has been a difference of opinion concerning his expression: '...he will surely see me in the state of wakefulness.' Some have said: 'its meaning is, "he will surely see me at the Resurrection," and it follows that there is no benefit in the specific reference to someone who sees him in the state of sleep, because all the members of his community will see him on the Day of Resurrection, both those who have seen him and those who have not seen him.' It has also been said: 'The meaning is: if someone believes in him while he is alive, but does not see him because of his being invisible at that time, the good news for him is that he will undoubtedly see him in the state of wakefulness before his death.' Some people have said: 'It is meant to be taken literally, so if someone sees him in the state of sleep, he will undoubtedly see him in the state of wakefulness, with the eye of his head.' It has also been said: '...with the eye of his heart,' and both versions have been related by al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr ibn al-Gharbī.

"According to Imām Abū Muḥammad ibn Abī Jamra, in his commentary on *ḥadīth* in which he selected from al-Bukhārī: 'This *ḥadīth* indicates that, if someone sees him, God bless him and give him peace, in the state of sleep, he will surely see him in the state of wakefulness. Does this apply to him in general, both during his life and after his death? Or will this happen in his lifetime? Will it be like that for absolutely everyone who sees him, or peculiar to someone endowed with the proper qualification or strict adherence to his Sunna, God bless him and give him peace? The wording conveys generality, and if someone claims specificity therein, without specification from him, God bless him and give him peace, he is guilty of aberration. It has happened that a certain person, lacking belief in its generality, has said on the basis of what his mind presented to him: "How can it be that someone who has died is seen by the living in the world of visual perception?" This statement by the imbecile has two serious implications: lack of belief in the truthful one, God bless him and give him peace, who does not speak from his whims, and second, ignorance and belittling of the power of the

All Powerful. Has he not heard in the Sūra of the Cow, the story of the cow, where God Exalted has said:

So, We said: "Smite him with part of it."

Thus God brings the dead to life, and shows you His signs, so that you may understand.²³⁴
(2:73)

Tāl quotes the remainder of Suyūṭī's introduction, and goes on to quote several other works from his *Tanwīr al-Ḥalāk* till the end of the chapter, such as Safī ad-Dīn ibn Abī Mansūr's (d.1283)

Risāla, 'Afīf ad-Dīn al-Yāfī's (d.1291) *Rawḍ ar-Rayāḥīn*, Sirāj al-Dīn Ibn al-Mulaqqin's *Ṭabaqāt al-'awliyā'* (d.1401), Qurtubī's *Tadkira fī ḥadīth aṣ-ṣa'qa* (d.1273) and the 10th century work al-Bayhaqī's work (d.994) *al-I'tiqād*:

After the Prophets had died, their spirits were restored to them, so they are alive in the presence of their Lord, like the martyrs (*shuhadā'*). The Prophet–God bless him and give him peace–saw a group of them on the Night of the Heavenly Ascension. He has made it known—and his information is true—that our invocation of blessing (ṣalāt) is presented to him, that our salutation (*salām*) reaches him, and that God Exalted has forbidden the earth to consume the flesh of the Prophets.²³⁵

As well as another work by al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il an-nubuwwa* in which he noted: "The prophets are alive in the presence of their Lord, like the martyrs." The chapter concludes with multiple quotations from various works that extrapolate on the aliveness, specifically of prophets, after their death. Tāl ends the section by this comment:

If you have thoroughly examined and studied everything that has gone before, from the first section to this point, it will be clearly apparent to you, with conviction and without a shadow of doubt, that the combination of the Hidden Cardinal Pole (*al-Qaṭb al-Makṭūm*) and the Sealed Isthmus (*al-Barzakh al-Makṭūm*) is our master Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad at-Tijānī. May God, Exalted is He, quench our thirst from His ocean with the greatest of vessels and sustain us with His proximity to the abode of at-Tijānī... no one will deny this, except the ignorant, foolish knowledge-seekers and the envious, recalcitrant wretches. No one is rightly guided, except those whom God, Exalted is He, has guided.²³⁶

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid, 459.

The Rhetoric of the Seal (*al-Khatm*) in *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ*

Though Tāl relies on quotations for the entirety of this chapter, he uses them as proofs for the unique status of Aḥmad Tijānī as the Cardinal Pole and the Seal of Saints. While he does not quote Tijānī in this chapter on seeing the Prophet, quoting other renowned ‘*ulamā*’ over a large period of Islamic intellectual history that have in their own works confirmed the undeniable validity of seeing the Prophet (and prophets in general) in a waking state, is meant to signify that Tijānī’s waking encounter with the Prophet in the Algerian town of Abū Samghūn. in 1782 which he gave him instruction to start a *ṭarīqa*, is proof enough of the veracity of his claims.

Tāl goes into a defense of Aḥmad Tijānī further in the section of the *Rimāḥ*, in the 36th section entitled:

Concerning the excellence of our master (may God be well pleased with him and grant him contentment, and may He be well pleased with us because of him) with the explanation that he is the Seal of the Saints, the Chieftain of the Gnostic Sages, the Imam of the Champions of the Truth, the Supporter of the Cardinal Poles and the Spiritual Helpers (*aghwāth*) and that he is the Hidden Cardinal Pole (*quṭb*) and the Sealed Isthmus (*barzakh al-maktūm*) meaning the one who is the intermediary between the Prophets and the saints, so that not one of the saints, whether his importance is great or small, can receive a bouncy from the presence of a Prophet except through his mediation, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, since that saint is not conscious of what is involved.

The chapter begins with the virtue of spreading news about the one’s lofty status as a blessing of God, not out of boastfulness of arrogance, but out of gratitude. He narrates various narrations of scholars and companions supposedly praising themselves and their lofty status, as a disclaimer, and that Tijānī’s status is not meant to supersede that of the companions of the prophet, for example. Next, he brings up the topic of those who doubt the veracity of Tijānī’s claims by relaying multiple exchanges with his teacher al-Ghālī (d.1828), who knew Tijānī intimately and became his first *khalīfa*, and relays the following account:

Sayyidī Muḥammad al-Ghālī also said: "I asked him: 'What have you to say about the saying of Sayyidī ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī: "This foot of mine is upon the neck of every saint of God?"' He replied: 'He told the truth—may God be well pleased with him—for he was referring to the people of his era. As for me, I say: "these two feet of mine are upon the neck of every saint of God from the time of Adam until the blowing on the trumpet at the final hour." Then I asked him: "O my master, what would you say, if someone after you said what you have said?" To this he replied, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him: "No one will say it after me," so I said: "O my master, you have imposed a sweeping restriction upon God. Surely God is capable of granting triumphant success to a saint, for He may give him more than He has given you, in the form of abundant favors, revelations, privileges, spiritual stations, insights, knowledge, secrets, promotions and spiritual states!" To this he replied: "Of course He is capable of that, and more than that, but He will not do it, because He has not willed it. Is He not capable of appointing someone as a Prophet, sending him as a Messenger to His creatures, and giving him more than He gave to Muḥammad, God bless him and give him peace?" I said: 'Yes indeed, but He will nor do it, because He has not willed it in sempiternity.' My master then said, may God be well pleased with him: "This is like that. He has not willed it in sempiternity, and His knowledge, Exalted is He, has not anticipated it.'"

Together with our master Muḥammad al-Ghālī—may God the exalted be well pleased with him—I went out one day from Medina the Illumined, upon its Resident be the most excellent blessing and the purest peace, in order to visit the martyrs of Uḥud, may God the Exalted be well pleased with them. Then, when we had completed the visitation and were on our way back to the city, I said to him: "O my master, let me present you with some objections against our Shaykh, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, on the hypothetical assumption that I am critical of him—I take refuge from that with God Exalted!—and you be a respondent in his defense!" He said: "Say whatever occurs to you," so I proceeded to raise allegations and objections, while he rebutted those allegations and objections and resolved the ambiguities.²³⁷

The tone of certainty is interlaced throughout the *Rimāḥ*. Tāl’s narrations stress the unsurpassed authority of Aḥmad Tijānī, not as a position of superiority over others, but as a manifestation of God’s ordained hierarchy of prophets and their inheritors; the *awliyā’*. That is, it stresses the following idea in the Tijānī doctrine is the following framework: just as Muhammad is the seal of prophets, Tijānī is the seal of the saints. He goes on to demonstrate that the Tijāniyya is not in conflict with other *’awliyā’* who have claimed this mantle in the past, or even those who might claim it in the future, because according to Tijānī, God did not will that.²³⁸ The question of doubt and derision towards the claim of

²³⁷ Ibid, 496.

²³⁸ Ibid.

khatmiyya looms heavily in the *Rimāḥ*, though Tāl does not name a single detractor per se. The *Rimāḥ*'s forceful rhetoric against "deniers" and "naysayers" is indicative of resistance to the Tijānī doctrine, but for brevity, we will not discuss them here and simply highlight Tāl's reaction to such critiques:

Then, when we came close to entering Medina the Illuminated, upon its Resident be the most excellent blessing and the most perfect peace, I said to him: "O my master, I never cease to be astonished at a person who recognizes the excellence of this Shaykh, the excellence of his Spiritual Path, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, and the excellence of its people, who studies *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī*, who has with him someone authorized to reach its remembrances and place the seeker in the chain of its followers, but who hesitates for an instant, and does not join the company of its people!"

He stared at me, then he told me: "I find it most astonishing and very strange, that someone like you should be amazed at such a person." When I asked him why, he said to me: "Of the communities, the books and the prophets, which are best and most excellent?" I said: "Islam, the Qur'an and Muḥammad." He then said: "when God sent Muḥammad, God bless him and give him peace, as His Messenger, and revealed the Qur'an to him, and commanded him to summon his fellow creatures to the affirmation of Divine Oneness how did they react to him, God bless him and give him peace?" I said: "they were divided into two groups: as for the fortunate ones, they believed in him, helped him and fought on his side, so they gained the honor of this world and the glory of the Hereafter. As for the miserable wretches, they disbelieved him and fought against him, so they forfeited this world and rejected a means of access to bliss in the Hereafter."

He then said to me, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him: "if someone knows this, how can he be amazed at what you have found so amazing? You know that our master Aḥmad, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, was nothing other than a deputy (*khalīfa*) of this Prophet, God bless him and give him peace. You know that everything contained within this path-the lights, the secrets, the gifts, the presents, the knowledge, the intuitions, the allotted shares, the bounties, the litanies, the incantations, the supplications, the orientations, the goals, the solitary retreats, the discoveries and the manifestations, including both that which is disclosed and that which is not disclosed--consists of allotted provisions, so if something from them is destined for someone, God will enable him to obtain it, but otherwise not. For every morsel there is an eater to whom it has been allotted, so no one but he will eat it..."

There is no doubt that they [the unbelievers] were ignorant of the status of Islam, which is the noblest of the religious communities, the most excellent of them, the most exalted of them, and the most splendid of them in the sight of God. They were also ignorant of what true belief (*imān*) encompasses: the ranks, the spiritual stations, the degrees, the spiritual states, the moral virtues, the proper modes of conduct, the lights and the secrets. They shunned it and mocked it, and they said derisively to the believers:

"You are in nothing but a great error!" (67:9) [...]

This is typical of deficient ones, ignoramuses, and fools. As for those who express their rotten opinions about the spiritual state of the prophets and the champions of the truth, if they recognized a single atom of their spiritual state, they would die of grief, because of their ardent yearning for it. Sempiternal misery has been predestined for them, however, so it screens them from the beauty of their spiritual states and the lights of their secrets. They are stuck with their contradictory ideas and their false analogies concerning the outward appearances and physical structures, and they are prevented from beholding the spirits and their soaring flight in the Realm of Sovereignty (*‘ālam al-Malakūt*) and the Realm of Dominion (*al-Jabarūt*). They regard God's saints with haughty disdain, because they have very little knowledge and understanding of themselves.²³⁹

It is strong rhetoric such as the above which recurrently captures the essence of why the *Rimāḥ* is called “the Book of Spears”; Tāl’s recurrent derision of “ignoramuses” and “fools” is not only set out to refute claims. It also signifies that there was perhaps quite a bit of resistance to the Tijāniyya and its high claims during his time. As a second-generation bearer of the mantle of *khalīfa* of Aḥmad Tijānī, it is clear that Tāl sought to carry out the hefty task of deftly responding to detractors with heavy spiritual and intellectual artillery. The *Rimāḥ* is also the first comprehensive Tijānī text to have been written shortly after Ahmad Tijānī’s passing and therefore right at the cusp of the spread of the Tijāniyya and the renown of his claimed status as the “seal” of saints. More than simply writings in the genre of polemics, such claims contain pointed teachings from the Tijānī worldview and methodology. It is no surprise then, that the *Rimāḥ* is titled as a fiercely respondent, argumentative text, just as much as it is a doctrinal reference.

Commenting on Tāl’s approach to the doctrine of the “seal of the saints”, Saïd Bousbina writes that it has a primarily utilitarian function:

The closure of sainthood, as the prophet had closed the prophecy, aims at ensuring the domination of his *ṭarīqa*; to ensure a lack of an adversary. This is why Al-Hajj Umar had tried, by all means, to make al-Tijānī this "seal of the saints." He recalls that it was the Prophet himself who revealed to the founder of the *ṭarīqa*, in a waking state, that he was the “seal of the saints”; this is another way to reflect on the character of al-Tijānī a halo of

²³⁹ Ibid, 503-504.

holiness likely to attract the greatest number of disciples.²⁴⁰

While the doctrine of “the seal of the saints” undoubtedly possesses obvious political implications, Bousbina’s framework echoes the well-rehearsed “charisma” argument prevalent in secondary literature on modern Sufi leadership in Africa.^{241 242} In his chapter on Tāl, John Hanson attributes Tāl’s success in amassing followers in Futa Toro to his charisma. Hanson acknowledges that “many scholars use charisma to refer to any leader who appears to forge strong emotional ties to his followers.”²⁴³ Syed rightly warns that approaching Tāl’s leadership squarely within this lens risks approaching “charisma as only a political tool at the expense of understanding the broader social and intellectual roles of Sufi shaykhs.”²⁴⁴ Beyond the Weberian approach to religious leadership in Africa as being pegged by *baraka*, charisma or political interests alone, Soares has noted that it is in fact esoteric knowledge that amasses following; an approach which goes beyond political utilitarianism and gives credence to knowledge as a mobilizing force.²⁴⁵ When it comes to the doctrine of *khatmiyya*, Soares’ approach can be successfully applied as a lens to explain the power and purchase of Tāl’s approach.

²⁴⁰ Saïd Bousbina, “Un Siecle de Savoir Islamique En Afrique de l’Ouest (1820-1920) : Analyse et Commentaire de La Litterature de La Confrerie Tijāniyya a Travers Les Oeuvres d’al-Hajj Umar, Ubayda Ben Anbuja, Yirkoy Talfi et al-Hajj Malik Sy” (PhD thesis, Paris, 1996). 5.

²⁴¹ For a critical take on the lens of “charisma” in his approach to Tāl’s life see the response of John Hunwick to the work of John Ralph Willis in: John Hunwick, rev. “*In the Path of Allah: The Passion of al-Hajj Umar. An Essay into the Nature of Charisma in Islam* by John Ralph Willis” in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Nov., 1991), pp. 672-676.

²⁴² Syed, “Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written,” 7.

²⁴³ John H. Hanson, *Migration, Jihad, and Muslim Authority in West Africa: The Futanke Colonies in Karta* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 3.

²⁴⁴ Syed, “Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written,” 7.

²⁴⁵ Benjamin F. Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town*, *International African Library* 32 (Edinburgh: University Press, 2005).

The “charisma argument”, for example ignores the way in which Tāl masterfully weaves the temporal narrative thread of the Tijāniyya aware of itself as a “final”, culminative path:

My master Muḥammad al-Ghālī informed me that the Shaykh, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, died in a year for which to be thankful, the year 1230 of the *hijra* of the Prophet, upon him be the most excellent blessing and the most perfect peace. We are now in the year 1261 of the *hijra* of the Prophet, upon him be the most excellent blessing and purest peace, more than eleven years later. To every believer who has definitely entered into Aḥmadī Tijānī intercession (*shafā‘ā*) during those years, let us say: "welcome, welcome to this Muḥammadan Community!" But let us say: "woe and alas!" to those who have been deprived of this tremendous benefit, which is obtained without work, without inconvenience and without trouble, because of their disapproval, criticism and abuse of the people of his path. May God let us live and die in accordance with his love, and may He resurrect us in his company, for the sake of his honor in the sight of God, and the honor of his ancestor, the best of humankind, and the secret of the deputy of the All-Knowing sovereign lord.

The Shaykh said, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him: “All the paths are included in the path of ash-Shādhilī, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, except this Muḥammadan Ibrahīmī Ḥanīfī path of ours, for it is self-sufficient.” We must therefore treat it as unique, because he gave it to us, directly from him to us. He also said: “Nothing will reach you except with my help.” He is the one who trained us and led us, to the point where we came in contact with the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace. Praise and thanks be to God. He also said, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him: “all the paths will be incorporated into ours, so they will be rendered obsolete. Our stamp will be imprinted on every stamp, and our stamp will carry no other.”

[...] He also said, may God the exalted be well pleased with him: "All the saints will enter our company, receive our litanies (*awrād*), and adhere to our *ṭarīqa*, from the beginning of existence until the Day of Resurrection. Even the rightly guided *imām* (al-Mahdī) will receive from us, when the end of time arrives. They will enter our company after our death and our transfer to the Abode of Perpetuity.²⁴⁶

Tāl’s rhetoric of the *khatm* in the *Rimāḥ* is undoubtedly influenced by that of Muḥyiddīn ibn ‘Arabī, who, like al-Tirmidhī before him, laid an elaborate groundwork for a doctrine of sainthood in Sufi literature, and too sought to define the nature and function of sainthood, while specifying the criteria for a hierarchy of saints based on the notion of prophetic inheritance.²⁴⁷ Tāl is of course keenly aware

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 506.

²⁴⁷ For more on Ibn Arabī’s conception of the “seal of the saints”, consult: Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*.

that previous claims to the title of the *khatm* have been made, and addresses this matter as a rhetorical question in the 36th chapter entitled “Concerning the excellence of our master.” Though he does not cite Ibn ‘Arabī in the following quote, it is implied that he would be among the earlier claimants to the station:

Suppose you raise the question: “how can the latter saint be more excellent than the great saints of earlier times, whose excellence has been disseminated and come to be widely known, and whose fame has spread in the east and west, such as Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Shaykh Abu’l-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī and others of their kind, may God be pleased with them all? My answer to this will be: due to the fact that the latter-day Prophet Muḥammad, God bless him and give him peace, is more excellent than Ibrāhīm, the bosom friend of God, Mūsā the interlocutor of God and ‘Īsā, the spirit of God and others among the prophets and the messengers, upon our prophet and upon them be the most excellent blessings and peace.

In his *Futūḥāt al-Makkiya*, Ibn ‘Arabī famously stated, “I am without doubt, the Seal of Sainthood.”²⁴⁸ Another passage in the *Futūḥāt* contains a casual reference to the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood as an Arab man whom he met in Fez, and referred to him as “one of the noblest in lineage and power.”²⁴⁹ Ibn ‘Arabī continued that this man will receive bear the brunt of criticism from people, and that his status was hidden to them, but his reality was revealed to him in Fez. The chronological order of when he wrote each account is hard to locate. Giving little significance to this visionary encounter, Chodkiewicz favors Ibn ‘Arabī’s claim to be the Seal based on the refutation of the encounter in Fez as being written down before Ibn ‘Arabī received his status as the Seal. Zachary Wright notes that “Chodkiewicz’s assertion that Ibn ‘Arabī’s meeting with the Seal in Fez came before his own claim to the position is impossible to prove, as both narrations appear in the same text (*Futūḥāt*).”²⁵⁰ He adds that “Tijānī scholars were not alone in believing, despite their profound respect for the “Greatest Shaykh,” [*al-Shaykh al-Akbar*] that Ibn ‘Arabī’s

²⁴⁸ Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, Part 2, page 49, cited in Chodkiewicz, 129.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Wright, *Islamic Realization*, 174.

claim to be the Seal of Saints was relative to his time, or that the unique Seal of Saints was other than him.”²⁵¹

Tāl addresses this matter directly. He cites the *Futūḥāt* in which Ibn ‘Arabī describes a vision he saw of a wall made of gold and silver. The wall is complete except for two spaces for two bricks of gold and silver each, onto which Ibn ‘Arabī imprints (*inṭabā‘a*) himself in, as a proof of his *khatmiyya*. Ibn ‘Arabī basis his claim to *khatmiyya* on this vision and rejoices: “with us God has sealed sainthood and it has been given to us; there will be no seal after me.” In response, Tāl cites that ‘Alī al-Khawwāṣ has refuted this vision as insufficient proof to Ibn ‘Arabī’s claim of the Seal. After uttering this effusion, Khawwāṣ narrates that Ibn ‘Arabī heard a voice saying “it is not what you imagine and wish, rather, it is for a saint at the end of times.” To which Ibn ‘Arabī allegedly responds: “I submit all my affairs to their creator and maker.” Tāl then writes:

I say, this speech from al-Hātimī makes it obvious that he abandoned his claims to [being] the greatest seal, and that it was not for any of the masters that preceded his (Ibn ‘Arabī’s) time, rather it is for a saint at the end of times and what supports this is that the gnostic Shaykh al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī,²⁵² God be pleased with him, said in the book *Al-ṭarā‘iq*, ‘the twelfth century since the Muḥammadan hijra on him be the best prayers and peace, resembles the century of [Tijānī] may God be pleased with him.’²⁵³

The *Khatm* and the Prophet

Tāl undergirds the claim of the *khatm* to the Tijānī due to its status as given by the Prophet directly as a sealing, culminative path for modern Sufism. Mentioning other ‘*awliyā*’ such as al-Jilānī and ash-Shādhilī as bearers of sealhood in their own time therefore does not seek to discredit previous saints or *ṭuruq*, but rather is an effort to bring together past Sufi traditions under the umbrella of the

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² A towering eighteenth century ‘ālim of the Qadiriyya order in the Western Sudan, who taught Uthman dan Fodio and supported the founding of the Sokoto Caliphate.

²⁵³ *Rimāḥ*, 494.

so-called “Muḥammadan Ibrahīmī Ḥanīfī” path. For Tāl then, the goal encompasses much more than the championing of the Tijāniyya per se, but rather full actualization, *tahqīq* of the domain of Sufism itself. The issue of temporality is a central one, since, according to Tāl, no one could have received this path before the *hijrī* year of 1238, the time of Aḥmad Tijānī. The rhetoric of *khatmiyya* in the *Rimāḥ* is a far more salient lens to understanding the spread of the Tijāniyya in nineteenth century West Africa than that of the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, because his understanding of the *khat*

miyya stems from the Muḥammadan reality, an original Tijānī concept referred to as “the sealed isthmus” (*al-barzakh al-makhtūm*.) In the same chapter, chapter 36 he posits another rhetorical question:

Suppose you ask: "What is the form of the Isthmus-like nature [*barzakhīyya*] of the Hidden Cardinal Pole [*al-qutb al-makhtūm*] who is considered-by the gnostics, the champions of the truth, the special friends and the jewels of the Cardinal Poles to be the Jewel of all jewels, the Isthmus of all isthmuses, and the Grandest of the grand?

The answer will be, success is achieved with the help of God exalted is He, for He is the guide by His grace to the straight path. May God enable me and you to achieve what He loves and finds pleasing. You should know that the presences (*ḥaḍarāt*) are seven in number:

1. The presence [*ḥadra*] of the Ahmadi Reality [*al-ḥaqīqa al-Aḥmadiyya*]. As we are told in *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī*, this is one of the mysteries of God Exalted, so no one has become aware of what it contains in the form of intuitions, knowledge, secrets, bountiful favors, manifestations, exalted states and lofty virtues, and no one has had any experience of it, not even any of the other Messengers and Prophets. Its station is peculiar to him alone, the Prophet Muhammad who is also named Aḥmad, God bless him and grant him peace, because of the perfection of its glory and the extreme degree of its sublimity.
2. The presence of the Muḥammadan [*ḥadrat al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*]. As we are told in *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī*: "It is the source of all the attainments of the prophets and the envoys, all of the angels and those drawn near, all of the Cardinal Poles and the champions of the truth, and all of the saints and the gnostic sages.... From the bountiful source of the Muḥammadan Reality comes everything attained by all existing beings in the form of knowledge, intuitions, favors, manifestations, promotions, states and stations, and virtuous characteristics.
3. The presence which contains the presences of our masters the prophets, in accordance

with the diversity of their experiences and degrees. The people of this presence are those who receive every bounty that flows and emerges from the presence of the Muḥammadan Reality. When referring to the people of this presence, our Shaykh said, may God be well pleased with him: “The bounties that flow from the nature of the Chieftain of Existence, God bless him and give him peace, are received by the natures of the prophets.” He also said: “His spirit, God bless him and give him peace, supports the Messengers and the Prophets, yet the Seal of the Saints has a disposition [*mashrab*], received from the Prophet of which the prophets, blessing and peace be upon them, are quite unaware.”

4. The presence of the Seal of the Saints [*khatm al-ʿawliyāʾ*] through which every bounty that flows from the natures (*dhawāt*) of the Prophets, because he, may God be well pleased with him, is the Isthmus of all isthmuses [*Barzakh al-barāzikh*]. When referring to this presence, our Shaykh said, may God be well pleased with him: “The bounties that flow from the Chieftain of Existence [Prophet Muḥammad], may the prayers and peace of God be upon him, are received by the natures of the Prophets. Everything that flows and emerges from the Presence of the natures of the Prophets is received by my nature, and from me it is distributed to all creatures, from the origin of the universe until the blowing on the trumpet [at the Final Hour].” I was favored with knowledge between us without an intermediary, in an oral conversation of which only God glory be to Him and Exalted is He knows.

He also said, may God be well pleased with him: “When God exalted assembles His creatures at the place of standing [*al-mawqif*], a herald will proclaim at the top of his voice, so that everyone at the place can hear him: ‘O people of the Resurrection, this is your Imam, from whom came your support!’”

He also said, may God be pleased with him, while pointing with his two fingers, the index finger and the middle finger. “His spirit (God bless him and give him peace) supports the Messengers and the Prophets (blessing and peace be upon them, and my spirit supports the Cardinal Poles, the gnostic sages and the saints, from pre-eternity to eternity.”

He also said, may God be well pleased with him: “The Hidden Cardinal Pole [*al-Qub al-Maktūm*] is the intermediary between the Prophets and the saints. There is no one saint of God exalted, whether his importance be great or small, who receives abundant grace from a Prophet except through his mediation, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, without being aware of it. It is only from the Chieftain of Existence, peace and blessings be upon him, that the Hidden Cardinal Pole receives his support, and not one of the Prophets blessings and peace be upon them, is aware of the bounty that is particular to him, because he shares a [*mashrab*] with them, God bless him and give him peace.”



Figure 1: Shaykh 'Umar Tāl depicts the seven ḥadrās in this illustration, the central being that of the Seal of Saints.

The remaining *ḥadrās* he mentions include the "presence peculiar to the people of this path", the "presences of our masters the saints" and finally, "the presence which contains the presences of their disciples." John Hunwick has aptly noted the importance of stressing the relationship between the 'Reality' of the Prophet and that of Aḥmad Tijānī as stemming from the reason the Tijānī doctrine is often referred to Aḥmadī in the *Rimāḥ*, that being that "it was vouchsafed to Aḥmad al-Tijānī who was the first of the Friends of God and the first to praise him before all others."²⁵⁴ He adds, "just as the *khatm*'s *ḥaqīqa* existed before his earthly body," so did the reality of the Prophet, the first created 'thing'. It is therefore instrumental to view Tāl's doctrine of the sealing sainthood within the purview of the *ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*. An effective approach to understanding his approach to "the Seal" is viewing it as a concentric whole, rather than a dismembered, standalone concept.

The implications of the rhetoric of the *khatm* as the mediator or the "sealed isthmus" (*barzakh al-maktūm*) between the Muḥammadan reality and other saints and creation, is especially stark in the

²⁵⁴ John Hunwick, John, "An Introduction to the Tijani Path: Being an Annotated Translation of the Chapter Headings of the Kitab al-Rimah of al-Hajj Umar," *Islam et Societes Au Sud Du Sahara* 6 (1996): 30.

Rimāḥ. The relationship between the station of *khatm* as the closest possible one to the Muḥammadan reality, as the supreme benefactor and arbiter, therefore, represents the crux of Aḥmad Tijānī's claim to being the Seal of Saints. As Zachary Wright describes it: "al-Tijānī's spiritual station is nothing but a further manifestation of the Prophet's perfection. The Prophet assures al-Tijānī that he is never absent from him, that their souls were joined from the beginning of creation, that he is the secret of the saintly seal as a divine reality. The Prophet's own saintly perfection is the hidden essence of al-Tijānī's own being."²⁵⁵ In effect, there is no duality, in Tāl's vision, between the *quṭb al-maktūm*/the *khatm* and the Prophet. Both are intricately linked in a tightly bound sphere manifested as the Muḥammadan Reality; a reality that can only be known by experience of "taste" (*dhawq*) by the aid of a true *khalīfa* of the *khatm*.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed that the Muḥammadan path meant different things to different sages across different ages, but there exists a clear, overarching, granted reality centering the Prophet at the heart of the Sufi experience across different eras and milieus. I argued for the need to move beyond the neo-Sufism/Muḥammadan path debate surrounding 19th century Sufi movements such as that of Tāl and focus instead on the modern articulation of the Seal of Sainthood as it is features prominently in the *Rimāḥ*. I posit that the rhetoric of the *khatm* in the *Rimāḥ* offers the most vivid articulation of the concept in modern Sufi thought, so much so, that it can be argued that Tāl's project singlehandedly spurred a renaissance of the *khatmiyya* in modern West Africa, making it one of the most vividly articulated, coherent claims to the Sealing Sainthood in Islamic intellectual history.

The claim to Tijānī's station as the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood and the *quṭb maktūm* as described by Tāl lies at the heart of the *Rimāḥ*'s ethos and purpose, and helped shape the text's

²⁵⁵ Zachary Valentine Wright, *Realizing Islam: The Tijāniyya in North Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Muslim World*, Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 160.

forceful tone, prescriptions and doctrines. It is for this reason that the concept of the having a Shaykh, and believing in the importance of one, taken collectively, occupies more than half of the topics of the *Rimāḥ*, making it the text's guiding, central vehicle. The *Rimāḥ*, therefore, can easily be read as an elaborate argument for the belief in sainthood—and saintly hierarchies—as being as central to the Islamic belief in prophethood. Although the relationship between sainthood and prophethood has been heavily interrogated elsewhere in Sufi thought and practice, and is in no way itself novel, it is Tāl's articulation of Tijānī's claim to being the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood that activates the text's full potential and agency.

Amir Syed writes that “claiming the Prophet's heritage through the Muḥammadan Path has important doctrinal consequences: it confers a superior knowledge of the law and of religion, since it emanates from the Prophet, of whom the Sufi can ask direct questions.”²⁵⁶ It is for this reason that this chapter has been devoted to a better understanding the concept of the “sealing” Muḥammadan path and its relationship to the Prophet Muhammad's final rank in *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ*. Tāl's bold new claims clearly carried incredible doctrinal weight; ultimately, the sheer weight of Tāl's claims was commensurate with his electrifying and controversial legacy in West African Islamic intellectual and political history, as well as modern Islamic thought as a whole.

²⁵⁶ Syed, “Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written,” 216.

Chapter III:
**Interauthors in the *Dhawq*-Sphere: The Prominence of Fifteenth and Sixteenth Egyptian
Scholarship in *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ***

"The best Sufi authors draw near to each other"

– Michael Frishkopf
Authorship in Sufi Poetry

In his pioneering study surveying the cited sources of the *Rimāḥ*, Radtke identifies that more than half of the almost 650 direct quotations (50%) in the text come from sixteenth-century Egyptian mystic and scholar, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī (d.1565). Yet, Radtke does not expound on possible reasons why Sha‘rānī features so prominently in Tāl’s magnum opus, as the scope of his study does not claim to do so and simply sets out to name and list the cited sources in the text and proposes avenues for further research (he calls his paper an “inventory” and not a source-critical analysis).²⁵⁷ In the last section of his article on the underrated originality of Sha‘rānī’s theory of legal pluralism, Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim writes that Sha‘rānī’s legacy is evident through Leila Hudson’s study which shows that Sha‘rānī was the single most popular author in nineteenth century Damascus. He also cites Rashid Riḍa’s views on Sha‘rānī’s *Mizān*.²⁵⁸ Other than those references, no other scholarly work exists that precisely points to Sha‘rānī’s legacy or influence outside of modern era Arab-majority societies. This chapter hopes to begin a conversation on the influence of Sha‘rānī on West African Islamic intellectual history.

It bears mentioning that Tāl does not cite West African Muslim authors in his magnum opus,

²⁵⁷ Radtke, “Studies on the Sources of Kitāb Rimāḥ Ḥizb Al-Raḥīm of al-Ḥajj ‘Umar.” It must be noted, however, that Radtke takes on a more detailed study of two sources in the *Rimāḥ* in his paper, “Von Iran nach Westafrika Zwei Quellen für al-Ḥāgg ‘Umar’s Kitāb Rimāḥ Ḥizb ar-raḥīm” but instead of discussing some of the more prominently featuring sources, he instead turns out attention to two lesser known sources Tāl cites, those of Zaynuddīn al-Ḥwāfi and Šamsaddīn al-Madyanī, 14th and 15th century Sufi scholars respectively.

²⁵⁸ Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, “Al-Sha‘rānī’s Response to Legal Purism: A Theory of Legal Pluralism,” *Islamic Law and Society* 20, no. 1/2 (2013): 138.

arguably for strategic reasons: to seal the legacy of the Tijāniyya as the paragon of knowledge production in nineteenth century West Africa. Rather than focusing on lesser-known cited sources in the *Rimāḥ* as Radtke had done, (though this is undoubtedly an important endeavor that adds to our understanding of the more obscure, finer intellectual currents in the text) in this chapter I turn our attention to the most cited source, that of Sha‘rānī, and show which elements of his project that Tāl finds compelling. Though he has been criticized for espousing “Orientalist tropes of Islamic mysticism,”²⁵⁹ nonetheless, John Ralph Willis has been among the few scholars to study the written texts of Tāl concurrently with a historical reading of his life and legacy, and through this, he was able to highlight the extent of Sha‘rānī’s undeniable influence on Tāl, so much so that he has concluded that:

Contrary to what one might have reasonably expected, the Shaykh [Tāl] does not appear to have found the germ of much of his thought in the teachings of Aḥmad al-Tijānī, but rather in the writings of Sūfī mystic, canonist, theologian and biographer, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī. Indeed, it now seems certain that a careful study of the Egyptian’s writings is of the utmost importance for any understanding of the intellectual currents of Sudanese Islam. A Shāfi‘ī and member of the Shādhiliyya ṭarīqa, Sha‘rānī’s works were widely circulated in the Sudan and the Maghrib, where his influence went undiminished.²⁶⁰

This chapter focuses on why it is significant that half of the copious quotes of the *Rimāḥ* come from him. Particularly, I pay close attention to Sha‘rānī and Tāl’s shared emphasis on the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, their gnosis-guided approach to *sharī‘a*, their mutual “anti-sultan” political orientation and the messianic, end-times backdrop for their doctrines as the key themes that bind their respective projects. I argue that Tāl’s methodology of copious quotation is a way of reinvigorating and refurbishing Sha‘rānī’s and other Sufī scholars’ overall project in a manner which breathes new life into their works as co-authors of the Tijānī doctrine. Copious quotation is not based

²⁵⁹ Syed, “Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written,” 18.

²⁶⁰ John Ralph Willis, “The Writings of Al-Hajj ‘Umar al-Futi and Shaykh Mukhtar b. Wadi at Allah” (Cass, 1979), 191.

on Tāl’s motivation to override or change previous Sufi scholars’ contributions, rather, it stems from a desire to preserve and build on the ideas and projects of bygone Sufi giants and weave them into a specific *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* doctrine based on the *wilāya khatmiyya* (sealing sainthood). I call this sense of affinity building: interauthors in the *dhawq*-sphere, a concept which I explain more fully later in this chapter. By borrowing copiously from numerous authorities, Tāl’s *Rimāḥ* undoubtedly stands on shoulders of many giants; but perhaps the most towering giant of all in the text is Sha‘rānī, who, with the sheer volume of his works and citations quotes, stands tallest.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Books</i>	<i>Quotations</i>
al-Sha‘rānī	15	98
Barrāda	1	84
al-Lamaṭī	1	66
Baqlī	1	45
al-Shirbīnī	1	31
al-Zarrūq	3	29
Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh	3	23
al-Madyanī	1	22
Ibn Khāzin	1	18
Total: 9 authors	27	416

Table 1: From Radtke’s “Sources of the *Rimāḥ* of Ḥajj ‘Umar”, 111.

Radtke classifies Sha‘rānī’s quotes as belonging to the category of Sufism-themed quotes in the *Rimāḥ*, however, as I show in this chapter, Sha‘rānī’s influence on Tāl cannot be easily circumscribed to the realm of *taṣawwuf* or mysticism “proper”, rather, his dynamic—and arguably rather bold and unique—intellectual project intersects with and perhaps inspires, Tāl’s own approach to Islamic law, eschatology, theology, poetry and politics and how these fields ultimately answer to the authority of Sufism as the supreme arbiter of knowledge; an approach shared by Tāl as illustrated in the following chapter of this dissertation. Along with Imām Ṣuyūṭī who also features heavily in Tāl’s text, Sha‘rānī’s recurrent voice in the *Rimāḥ* points to an undoubtable influence of fifteenth and sixteenth century Egyptian scholars’ approaches to Sufism to Tāl’s overall intellectual project in

nineteenth century Bilād al-Sudan. Though this chapter focuses on the influence of fifteenth and sixteenth century Egyptian scholars, it by no means seeks to present this intellectual current at the expense of others, such as the *Ibrīz* of al-Lamaṭī or the *Jawāhir* of Barrāda, the prominence of which in the *Rimāḥ* should be not understated. However, in comparing the breadth of citations in the *Rimāḥ* to that of the work of Al-Dabbāgh for example, Marsh notes that “‘Umar’s citations in the *Rimāḥ* demonstrate a familiarity with both classical fiqh works and more recent works by Azhari authors that do not appear in the comparable al-Ibrīz.”²⁶¹ In this sense, Tāl’s work is far more comprehensive and broader in their citational scope than the texts he cites themselves.

Authorship and the Dynamics of Citation in the *Rimāḥ*

Given that the *Rimāḥ*’s one of most distinguishing features is its heavy use of quotations, what can be said about the status of Tāl as the author of the *Rimāḥ*? Is he the sole author or can it be said that he employs a methodology of so-called “inter-authorship,”²⁶² as Firshkopf puts it? Recent scholarship has interrogated the concept of authorship in the genre of Islamic scholarly literature. Ample studies have been written about what makes an author an author in the European scholarly context, yet, “so far little research has been done on the concept of authorship and its development in Arabic or Islamic literature.”²⁶³ In the normative sense, the definition of what it means to be an author implies “an individual who is solely responsible—and therefore exclusively deserving of credit – for the production of a unique work,” as Martha Woodmansee posits.²⁶⁴ In a similar vein, author of

²⁶¹ Marsh, “Compositions of Sainthood: The Biography of Ḥājj ‘Umar Tāl by Shaykh Mūsā Kamara,” 80.

²⁶² Michael Frishkopf, “Authorship in Sufi Poetry,” *Alif (Cairo, Egypt)* 23, no. 23 (2003): 78-, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1350077>.

²⁶³ Andreas Gorke, “Authorship in the Sīra Literature,” *Concepts of Authorship in Pre-Modern Arabic Texts*, Bamberger Orientstudien, 7 (2015): 64.

²⁶⁴ Martha Woodmansee, “The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the ‘Author,’” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 17, no. 4 (1984): 426, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2738129>.

The Author, Andrew Bennett writes: “This common-sense notion of the author involves the idea of an individual (singular) who is responsible for or who originates, who writes or composes a (literary) text and who is thereby considered an inventor or founder and who [...] is thought to have certain ownership rights over the text as well as a certain authority over its interpretation.”²⁶⁵ Both definitions stress the idea of individuality as a necessary component of “original” authorship.²⁶⁶

The authorship of the *Rimāḥ* by Tāl is recognized to this day in later Tijānī texts such as the *Kāshif al-Ilbās* of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse as he is frequently referred to simply as *ṣāḥib al-Rimāḥ*; “the possessor of the *Rimāḥ*”, so the question at hand is not whether Tāl’s authorship of the text is a matter of debate as such. It is not. But I would like to interrogate the question of the text’s authorship further considering its copious quotes, even though such a feature is itself not uncommon in Islamic scholarly literature. Fittingly, even when it comes to studies on the writings of Sha‘rānī, Tāl’s most quoted scholar, he himself took on the practice of citing other authors in high volumes in his written texts, a feature which has not gone unnoticed by scholars of his works. Remarking on Sha‘rānī’s heavy citation of his illiterate teacher, ‘Alī al-Khawwās (d.1532), Adam Sabra notes: “Sha‘rānī quotes ‘Alī al-Khawwās so frequently that one wonders which man is the mouthpiece and which the authorial voice.”²⁶⁷ The very same remark could be made about Sha‘rānī’s voice in the *Rimāḥ*. However, the usage of the term “mouthpiece” is misleading, and is not an accurate descriptor of the dynamics of citation at hand between these Sufi authors.

²⁶⁵ Andrew Bennett, *The Author*, New Critical Idiom (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 7.

²⁶⁶ For more on the notion of books and authorship more broadly in the Western canon, see Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books* (SUP, 1994). Guglielmo Cavallo; Roger Chartier; Lydia G. Cochrane (eds.), *History of Reading in the West*, (UMass Press, 2003).

²⁶⁷ ‘Abd al-Wahhab Ahmad Al-Sha‘rani, *Advice for Callow Jurists and Gullible Mendicants on Befriending Emirs*, World Thought in Translation (New Haven, [Connecticut] ; London, [England]: Yale University Press, 2017), 7.

Being a “mouthpiece” suggests a certain passivity when juxtaposed with the more proactive label of “authorial voice.” On this arguably faulty dichotomy, Sabra backtracks: “the fact that Sha‘rānī places so many of his opinions in the mouths of teachers might suggest a lack of confidence in his own authority, were it not for his clear sense of self-importance.” Rather, he posits, “it is more likely that he references these authority figures because he wants to be seen as the heir to their spiritual mantle and because he genuinely regards them as mentors to be emulated. Sufi shaykhs not only possess knowledge, they embody it through their conduct.”²⁶⁸

When it comes to Sha‘rānī’s citation of Khawwās, or Tāl’s citation of Sha‘rānī, I argue that the citational dynamics have very little to do with one being a “mouthpiece” for the other, rather, as Sabra suspects, more to do with being “heirs in the *dhawq*-sphere”, as I call it, to one another. Tāl uses quotes from bygone ‘*awliyā*’ not to legitimate or endorse his individual project but does so foremost in a nod of reverence and respect towards the intellectual production of past Muslim sagely scholars across time and geography. Tāl’s *Rimāḥ* boasts the combined strength of the works and utterances of spiritual ancestors and finds powerful resonances among other scholars. It is inconceivable to consider, that someone with Tāl’s sheer erudition and mastery of religious sciences and the Arabic language, that he could not do away with the use of quotations and be the “sole author” of the *Rimāḥ*; the intention behind writing it therefore is not to call attention to himself, but to the culmination of the Sufi corpus. Just like Tāl, Sabra notes how even though “Sha‘rānī is not shy about expressing his own opinions in his writings, he often quotes the opinions of men he regards as authoritative teachers.”²⁶⁹ When it comes to the *Rimāḥ*, it would be more productive to move away

²⁶⁸ Adam Sabra, *Advice to Callow Jurists*, 8.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 7.

from authorship within the framework of an individualized creative source, and rather view it as a culminative corpus of “interauthorship”, which will be explained in greater detail in what follows.

Western scholars such as Foucault and Barthes have discussed the problématique of authorship within the contours of copyright and giving credit to a singular, creative genius. Following the Foucauldian line of interrogation by asking, “what is a [Sufi] author”, in his article entitled “Authorship in Sufi Poetry”, Michael Firshkopf combs through the issue of copyright and authorship in Sufi writings, poetry in particular, and argues for an approach to reading Sufi poetry as coming from a social network of “interauthors”; “the best Sufi authors draw near to each other,”²⁷⁰ he posits. Firshkopf proposes a compelling “theory of authorship for sacred literatures”²⁷¹ by interrogating the “emic” (insider) view vs. the “etic” (outsider) theories of Western scholars. He ultimately champions the “emic” view and concludes that it is not productive to try to impose “postmodern” assumptions to literary attributions when it comes to the study of Sufism. Instead, he suggests that: “Every poetic [or literary] practice of Sufism is collaborative, involving some portion of a densely connected interauthor, a spiritual-social network itself reinforced by poetic practices.”²⁷²

In approaching the *Rimāḥ*, Firshkopf’s definition of interauthor and intertext fit rather neatly. In defining the interauthor, he writes: “the Sufi author is not dead, but rather revealed as an inextricable component within a broader non-linear network of crisscrossing social relations.”²⁷³ Likewise, he defines the “intertext” in a similar vein, writing: “the text is not dead, but rather revealed as an inextricable component within a broader non-linear network of crisscrossing symbolic

²⁷⁰ Firshkopf, “Authorship in Sufi Poetry,” 97.

²⁷¹ Firshkopf, 84.

²⁷² Firshkopf, 103.

²⁷³ Ibid.

relations.”²⁷⁴ ²⁷⁵ The observation that “the Sufi author is not dead” is especially clairvoyant as the *Rimāh* itself is rife with narrations of visions and visionary experiences of dead saints and devotes a chapter to the possibility of seeing the Prophet after his death. In a sense then, just as the cited texts of bygone scholars and sages that Tāl uses are not dead, the interauthorship and intertextuality of the *Rimāh* renders Tāl’s voice and text very much alive as part of a vivid “broader non-linear network of symbolic relations” that transcend both space and time. I call this the “*dhawq*-sphere”; a metaphysical space of a shared gnostical “taste” that can only be known by direct experience—and not merely rationalized or thought of—in recognized affinity by these Sufi authors.

One of Firshkopf’s definition of interauthorship is his further commentary on the theory of a Sufi doctrine and how, at its root, it is based on the Sufi virtue of humility. On this, he writes: “generally, Sufi doctrines render the individual more open to networked interactions, inhibiting (in particular) an autonomous author position [...] the true Sufi remains anonymous, attributes his work to others, posits inspiration from others, or (at least) denies his [...] production indexes autonomous greatness. For Sufis, spiritual greatness can only mean connection.”²⁷⁶ Firshkopf takes the etic view in his emic analysis: he centers the interauthor theory on the Sufi virtue of humility. One might argue against this claim by stating that there is nothing humble about Tāl writing about himself a section entitled: “informing the brethren that Sayyidī Muḥammad al-Ghālī told me explicitly, by word of

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ For more on Intertextuality, see Charles Briggs and Richard Bautnan, “Genre, Intertextuality and Social Power,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 2, 2, 1992, 131-72 who argued that “the relation between a text and a genre, or “generic intertextuality,” is always a constructed one, and that in the process of linking a text to a genre, producers of discourse necessarily create an intertextual gap and use various ideologically motivated strategies to either minimize or maximize the gap.

²⁷⁶ Frishkopf, “Authorship in Sufi Poetry,” 100.

mouth, that I am one of the deputies of the Shaykh” (chapter 29, *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ*) or in citing Aḥmad Tijānī’s saying “this foot of mine is on the neck of every *walī*” (chapter 36, the *Rimāḥ*).

Generally, the Tijāniyya’s renown for possessing an air of “superiority” over other *ṭuruq* and saints has not gone unnoticed by scholars on the topic. On this, Abun-Nasr writes in his characteristically critical tone about Tāl in specific and the Tijāniyya in specific: “accepting as he did the belief of the Tijānīs in their pre-eminence, Hajj Umar could not deal with other Muslims on terms of equality”²⁷⁷ or his [Tāl’s] “warlike career was based on Tijānī superciliousness.”²⁷⁸ In light of such critiques, does Firshkop’s theory of “posture of deference to earlier Sufis”²⁷⁹ and minimizing the authorial ego hold when it comes to Tāl’s inclination towards for interauthorship?

Arguably, Abun-Nasr’s view on Tijānī “superciliousness” represents a superficial reading of Tijānī texts such as the *Rimāḥ* and imposes “a modernist concept of individualized authorship”²⁸⁰—in Firshkop’s words—on the interauthorial text, especially when Tāl himself acknowledges the potentiality of accusations of boastfulness or conceitedness when it comes to his claims on the lofty rank of the Tijāniyya, Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī, or indeed, himself as a professed *khalīfa* of the shaykh. He tackles the issue of humility and boastfulness at length in chapter 36, “concerning the excellence of our master”:

In *al-Adhkar*, an-Nawawī had the following to say on the topic of a person’s praising himself and mentioning his virtues: “You should know that someone who mentions his virtues is two separate individuals, one blameworthy and one praiseworthy. What is blameworthy is that he mentions something for the purpose of boasting, displaying superiority and such. What is praiseworthy is that it contains some religious benefit, because he is commanding what is right and fair, or forbidding what is wrong and unfair, or giving good advice, or pointing to some benefit, or reaching, or educating, or admonishing, or reminding, or reconciling two people, or protecting himself, or something like that. When mentioning his virtues, he

²⁷⁷ Abun-Nasr, “Some Aspects of the Umari Branch of the Tijāniyya,” 329.

²⁷⁸ Abun-Nasr, 331.

²⁷⁹ Firshkopf, “Authorship in Sufi Poetry,” 100.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

intends by this to make his speech more likely to be accepted and received with trust. He is implying the message: 'You will not find what I am saying in the company of anyone else, so take it to heart.'

Tāl further cites the sayings of Prophets and companions that, taken at face value, sound like boastful statements, but are in fact reflective of thankfulness to God for his bounty on select people, and are intended to guide and correct:

Many of the religious texts convey a message similar to this, like the saying of the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace:

I am the Prophet, that is no lie. I am the master of the children of Adam, and that is no boast. I am the first of those from whom the earth will split, and who will enter the Garden of Paradise. I am the one of you who knows God best, and the one of you who is most truly devout. I dwell in the presence of my Lord...There are many traditions like this. Joseph, blessings and peace be upon him, said: "Put me in charge of the treasures of the earth. I am an erudite custodian." Shu'ayb said: "You will find me, if God wills, among the righteous." As reported in the *Sahīh* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, 'Uthmān, may God be well pleased with him, said when he was besieged: "You must surely know that God's Messenger once said: 'If someone digs the well of Rome, he is entitled to the Garden of Paradise.' I have dug it.' They believed him to be telling the truth.

Therefore, Frishkop's theory appears to hold in this case, that the Sufi writer—in this case being Tāl—is unlikely to be motivated by achieving “autonomous greatness.” The sheer volumes of the *Rimāḥ*'s interauthorial web and the breadth of the scholarly network therein signify that indeed, for Tāl, “spiritual greatness can only mean connection.” The question over the dichotomy of “mouthpiece” vs. “authorial voice” due to his citation of various authors is “thus revealed as illusory artifacts” and reminds the reader, that “from a philosophical perspective, literary creation is perhaps always interauthorial, always intertextual.”²⁸¹

²⁸¹ Frishkopf, “Authorship in Sufi Poetry,” 103.

Tāl's erudition in carefully placing aptly located quotations and the manner in which they are placed, along with his organization of chapter headings point to Tāl's methodology for the content design of his text; each quotation and chapter topic is intentional. His characteristic use of copious quotes has to do with forming synthesis, affinity, approximation, and unification of the corpus of Sufi thought. This motivation is clear from the very beginning of his text, in which his first chapter is partially titled: "Informing them that it is incumbent upon every scholar to speak in support of the People of God and to defend them against those who discredit them." By citing scholars like Ibn 'Arabī, Tirmidhī, al-Dabbāgh or Sha'rānī, Tāl is not only seeking approximation and affinity to them, but also seeks to present their works as pointing to the Tijānī doctrine as a natural, logical culmination of previous projects. This point—that of a *tahqīq* of the doctrine of Sufism—is perhaps the biggest motivator of all behind Tāl's heavily woven interauthorial and intertextual methodology.

Instead of viewing the *Rimāḥ* as a "massive lump" of quotes,²⁸² I argue that the primary use of quotations needs to be taken seriously as its own mode of knowledge transmission and corpus design. First and most importantly, the *Rimāḥ* is not unique in having a copious number of quotes. This is a common feature of Islamic texts in general. There is a need to examine more closely the content and method of curation behind these quotations, which this chapter sets out to do. I approach quotations from fifteenth and sixteenth-century Egyptian 'ulamā' as tools for both knowledge retransmission and the transmission of an original project. Tāl's careful selection of sources can tell us a great deal about the construction of the Tijānī doctrine in relation to the intellectual vibrancy of fifteenth and sixteenth-century Egypt.

The following characteristics bind Sha'rānī's and Tāl's doctrines: the striking centrality of the Muḥammadan path with its intensified devotion to the Prophet as the ultimate guide and shaykh,

²⁸² Hunwick, John, "An Introduction to the Tijani Path: Being an Annotated Translation of the Chapter Headings of the Kitāb al-Rimāḥ of al-Hajj Umar," 308.

writing treatises against those who deny the possibility of witnessing the Prophet in a waking state, reviving understandings of the *sharī‘a* that are not bogged down by so-called exotericism and egoism, and challenging the authority of sultans and princes who are perceived to be oppressive and unjust. Since 50% of the quotes in the *Rimāḥ* come from Sha‘rānī, whose seminal work *Al-Mizān al-kubrā* (“The Supreme Scale”), in which he compares the rulings of all four Sunni schools of *shari‘a* as if they were a single school, is heavily quoted in the *Rimāḥ*, Sha‘rānī can easily be regarded as the intellectual and spiritual “twin” of ‘Umar Fūtī Tāl, whose ideas become synthesized in bold new ways in the *Rimāḥ*.

Transmission and Epistemology

Before examining more closely the themes that Tāl synthesized from his mystical predecessors to formulate a distinctly Tijānī doctrine, it is worth tracing the significance of the scholarly networks Tāl would build and sustain on his physical journey to Egypt and other places in the Muslim world to and from his pilgrimage journey to the Arabian Peninsula. Particularly, it is documented that Tāl took to the habit of copying countless manuscripts by hand during his many sojourns, signifying a specific (though not exactly unique) methodology in which this nineteenth century West African scholar exemplified both an inheritance and a transmission of knowledge from other bygone or contemporary Muslim scholars from different regions. Commenting on this, Amir Syed uses the example of Tāl’s copying of the advanced grammar work by Suyūṭī *Al-Farīda* and conceptualized this practice in what he dubs an “artifact of epistemology.”

In highlighting Tāl’s practice of copying manuscripts, Syed “highlights the wider connections between West Africa and other parts of the Muslim world and demonstrates that West Africans were

deeply engaged with the broader Islamic scholarly tradition.”²⁸³ Further, an “artifact of epistemology” implies that:

... though texts mattered, their production was tied to the relationship between mobility and embodied forms of Islamic learning. Therefore, it is important to understand nineteenth century manuscripts of the basic texts of the Islamic religious sciences within the broader constellation of meanings forged between masters and disciples. By focusing on how *al-Farīda* came into the hands of Tāl more than three centuries after it was produced, I comment on the larger interconnections between West Africa and other Muslim learning centers. The work gives us critical insight into Tāl’s intellectual genealogy, and also highlights that Muslims in Futa Toro were engaging with sophisticated works on Arabic grammar in the nineteenth century.²⁸⁴

The implications of the concept of an “artifact of epistemology” can therefore be extended to Tāl’s broader appreciation of fifteenth and sixteenth century Egyptian scholarly works such as those of Suyūṭī, ‘Alī Khawwāṣ and Sha‘rānī, and the works of others who feature heavily in the *Rimāḥ*. Based on this, it is therefore not improbable to argue that Tāl’s methodology of immaculate and elaborate citation from said works likely came from manuscripts he had copied in his own writing or even from memory. He also resorted to poetry to gain proximity to his foremost interauthor: on his final return from hajj during his stay in Hausa, he composed a poem that carried the names of all the saints mentioned in the *Ṭabaqāt* of Sha‘rānī.²⁸⁵ Tāl’s methods of authorial approximation certainly point to his vast erudition and his impressive appetite for the broader Islamic scholarly intellectual tradition and the impressive reservoir of manuscripts in his possession. We know that Tāl’s personal library contains hundreds of personally copied manuscripts, many of them by Egyptian scholars. Seized in 1890 by Louis Archinard during his conquest of Segu in 1890, it is today called the Bibliothèque ‘Umarienne de Ségou as housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

²⁸³ Syed, “Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written,” 216.

²⁸⁴ Syed, 39.

²⁸⁵ Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa-al-durar fī sīrat al-shaykh al-ḥājj ‘Umar*, 150.

Even a superficial reading of Tāl's frequenting of Cairo en route to hajj indicates a well-established longstanding scholarly network between North African and West African 'ulamā' by the nineteenth century. There, he arguably obtained a large volume of works by Egyptian scholars as well as took part in transmitting knowledge, as is documented in secondary biographical literature, even though he most likely already read Sha'rānī in West Africa, before his sojourns outside his homeland even began. It is said that he "dazzled" the scholars of Al-Azhar with his vast erudition. In a biographical piece by a contemporary descendent of Tāl's, Hadja Tall relays a well-known encounter in 'Umar Tāl lore involving the rector of Al-Azhar (*shaykh al-Azhar*) at the time²⁸⁶, who "decided to challenge his knowledge because they felt that a black man could not know more about Islam than an Arab." She adds that "according to Malian folklores, not only did Umar Tall fully recite the Koran (sic), but he even stated exactly how many times each word appeared in it; he also did the same for the *Jawāhir al-Ma'ānī*, the sacred book of the Tijāniyya."²⁸⁷ As is the case with many biographical accounts of Tāl, the veracity of exact historical details is debatable. However, when discussing his sojourn in Cairo, biographers are unanimous in stating that this much is true: the impression he made on Azharite scholars was notable. A poem describes the Cairene 'ulamā's reaction to Tāl's erudition:

إذ جمعوا من علماء القاهرة لشيخنا أهل العلوم الباهرة
 عن متشابه القرآن سائل و آخر إلى حديث مائل
 [...] يسأله عنها و غير ذلك و لم يسأله سائل هنالك
 إلا أجابه بأحسن جواب من غير أن ينظر شيئاً في كتاب

They gathered for him the scholars of Cairo, those of the brilliant sciences
 One asked about the similar verses of the Qur'an, the other about *ḥadīth*
 He was asked about this and that, and not a question was asked

²⁸⁶ Who was likely to have been Shaykh al Azhar Ibrāhīm al-Bajūrī, who died in the same year as Tāl, 1864.

²⁸⁷ Tall, Hadja, "Al Hajj Umar Tall: The Biography of a Controversial Leader," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, UCLA, 32 (1-2) (2006): 75.

Except that he answered it in the best of ways without consulting any books.²⁸⁸

Commenting on Tāl's sojourns and habituation to copying manuscripts as "artifacts of epistemology", Amir Syed highlights a handwritten note by Tāl in a manuscript copying the grammatical poem *al-Farīda* by Suyūṭī. Tāl inscribed: "I have completed the *qasīda*, known as *al-Farīda*, and its commentary *al-Minah al-ḥamīda*, written by the author, the shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, may God continuously have mercy on him."²⁸⁹ Such artifacts of epistemology symbolize the enduring link between the North and West African scholarly milieu from the fifteenth century onwards and the extent to which West African scholars were strongly embedded in the broader Islamic intellectual tradition.

After all, Mamluk era Egyptian scholars like Suyūṭī enjoyed a well-documented relationship with West African scholars and rulers. He was known to have advised "Askia the Great"²⁹⁰, one of the most influential leaders of the Songhai Empire, for example, and hosted fifteenth century West African seekers of knowledge who, like Tāl, stopped in Cairo en route *ḥajj*.²⁹¹ Such exchanges helped solidify the impressive scholarly status of places like Timbuktu as centers of learning, and deeply entrenched the West African scholarly tradition within the larger narrative of the Islamic intellectual history of early medieval times to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Zachary Wright argues that:

The Tijāniyya was largely welcomed in West Africa because the region's scholarship, from Timbuktu and beyond, had already anticipated many of the central ideas at the heart of the

²⁸⁸ Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa-al-durar fī sīrat al-shaykh al-ḥājj 'Umar*, 67.

²⁸⁹ BnF Fonds Arabe 5719 fol. 97b. as found in Syed, "Al-Hājj Umar Tāl and the Realm of the Written," 52.

²⁹⁰ On this see: Omar AbdulRaziq El-Nagar, *West Africa and the Muslim Pilgrimage: An Historical Study with Special Reference to the Nineteenth Century*, PhD Dissertation (School of Oriental and African Studies, 1969) who posits that "al-Siuti [sic] can be seen responsible for the confirmation of the Askia's rule."

²⁹¹ See E. M. SARTAIN, "Jalal Ad-Din as-Suyuti's Relations with the People of Takrur," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 16 (1971): 193-.

Tijāniyya, and indeed had long been part of the intellectual exchange that gave rise to eighteenth-century scholarly vibrancy. From the vision of the Prophet, paradigmatic sainthood, *ijtihād* outside and within the Mālikī legal school, the notion of a Muḥammadan Path as the essence of Sufism, to the exploration and verification of the esoteric sciences: all were ideas that readily circulated among West African scholars by the eighteenth century.

It is important to note that Tāl's vast training and exposure to works from the broader Islamic scholarly corpus was well-established earlier in his life before he left West Africa for studying abroad. That is, he received the bulk of his scholarly training in West Africa and not during his later sojourns. He dazzled the Arabo-centric '*ulamā*' of al-Azhar, perhaps, more so because they did not expect someone to have such erudition having trained in West Africa, and not from their own scholars.²⁹² It is most likely that Tāl read Sha'rānī in West Africa due to the widespread—and now documented—popularity of his works in the nineteenth century.

More recent scholarship has successfully traced the reaching influence of Sha'rānī beyond his native Egypt in the sixteenth century. Writing about the notable popularity of Sha'rānī's books in nineteenth-century Damascus, Leila Hudson notes that even "according to Sha'rānī himself, his writings were widely read and influential within his own lifetime, and we know that they continued to be read long after his death."²⁹³ Not only does her work comment on the appeal of printed literature and the political milieu of early Ottoman Damascus as a backdrop for the popularity of Sha'rānī's books, Hudson goes further to sketch the appeal and influence of his works in the modern period across the Muslim world, even among European Orientalists:

Goldziher used Sha'rānī as source material for his philological work. Von Kramer used *Durar al-ghawwāṣ*, *al-Anwār al-quḍsiyya*, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, and three other manuscripts by

²⁹² Wright, *Realizing Islam*, 2020, 212.

²⁹³ Leila Hudson, "Reading Al-Sha'rānī: The Sufi Genealogy of Islamic Modernism in Late Ottoman Damascus," *Journal of Islamic Studies (Oxford, England)* 15, no. 1 (2004): 49, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/15.1.39>.

Sha‘rānī as the major sources for his history of the main ideas of Islam. A Frenchman translated and hoped to make Sha‘rānī’s *Mizān* the basis of French legal policy in Algeria.²⁹⁴

Clearly, Sha‘rānī made an impression on nineteenth century Western and Muslim scholars alike. Hudson goes on to describe the political and social milieu of nineteenth century Ottoman Damascus, and how the precarious conditions explain more fully the purchase of Sha‘rānī works centuries after his passing. She notes that just as it is important to study the life and times of Sha‘rānī in medieval Egypt, “it is even more rewarding to try to piece together a picture of how and why Sha‘rānī’s works were prominent in another society undergoing traumatic change nearly four hundred years after [he] lived.”²⁹⁵ Taking into account the context of the traumatic changes of nineteenth century West Africa in which ‘Umar Tāl lived, it is all the more rewarding of an undertaking to take into account the enduring influence of a sixteenth-century Egyptian ‘ālim on a nineteenth century revolutionary Tijānī Sufi.

It is clear then, that there was a readiness to inherit and spread the Muḥammadan path approach of fifteenth and sixteenth century Egyptian scholars and that this approach strongly reverberated in the Tijānī scholarly tradition in West and North Africa in later centuries. Further commentary on this is amply elaborated in Zachary Wright’s *Realizing Islam: the Tijāniyya in North Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Muslim World*. Based on historical writings and the work of chronicles such as that of Egyptian historian Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, Wright shows that there existed a mutually beneficial network of knowledge transmission between West and North African scholars in the eighteenth century—and indeed, Arab scholars in general—and describes Aḥmad Tijānī’s earlier *ṭarīqa* affiliations in the Egyptian Khalwatiyya of Muṣṭafa al-Bakrī (d.1749). In tracing the link between North and West African scholars in the eighteenth century, Wright

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 52

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 53

highlights the central role played by Egyptian sage Muḥammad al-Bakrī (d. 1585), the first transmitter of what would become the seminal Tijānī litany, *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*, who also acted as a “spiritual mentor for the scholars of Timbuktu” and how, “his influence on the Tijāniyya suggest[s] a degree of intellectual continuity between the Islamic scholarship of Western Africa and later reception of the Tijāniyya.”²⁹⁶ It is unsurprising then, that Tāl’s most cited figure, Sha‘rānī would refer to his contemporary Muḥammad al-Bakrī as a reviver (*mujaddid*) of the *sharī‘a*²⁹⁷ and it is not improbable that Sha‘rānī was aware of al-Bakrī’s close relationship with the scholars of Timbuktu, such as Aḥmad Baba (d.1627). More research is required to ascertain whether Sha‘rānī, Tāl’s most ardently cited scholar, had any substantial links with West African scholars during his lifetime. Sha‘rānī mentions West Africa in his autobiography stating that his teacher, Nūr al-Dīn al-Shūnī, who established the custom of organizing sessions to send invocations on the Prophet (the sessions were called *al-maḥyā*, since they were spent “enlivening” [*iḥyā*]’ the night in prayer) the which from then on spread from Egypt, “to the Ḥijāz, Syria, North and West Africa.”²⁹⁸ But this much is true: the intellectual exchanges between West African scholars and Egyptian and Maghrebi scholars were a two way street; West African scholars were not only on the receiving end of new ideas from the north and east, they offered new avenues and insights in various domains of Islamic scholarly production.

Sha‘rānī: A Brief Biography

At the risk of overstating a link between Sha‘rānī and Tāl’s respective intellectual and religious projects, the obvious must first be stated that the two figures have lived under rather different times, locations, and circumstances. In addition, it is not at all on its own astonishing that

²⁹⁶ Wright, *Realizing Islam*, 2020, 27.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of ‘Abd Al-Wahhab Al-Sha‘Rani* (Taylor and Francis, 04), 38.

Sha‘rānī would factor in so heavily in a modern Sufi text as the significance of his scholarly and spiritual influence has been widely documented by various scholars.²⁹⁹ His influence on later Sufi scholars is wide, and has been described as “the last great, (or at any rate, original) thinker and writer before the final cultural decadence of the Arabic-speaking world in the later Middle Ages”³⁰⁰ and the popularizer of Ibn ‘Arabī.³⁰¹

Though Winter concludes that Sha‘rānī did not depart too drastically from positions taken before his time, his study on him nonetheless approached his life and prolific writings with ambivalent awe. While Tāl heavily cites Sha‘rānī, we would be remiss to attribute too strong a correlation between the two scholars’ projects. Rather, it is the selection of quotes, their placement in the text—in addition to their abundance—that point to the fact that Sha‘rānī’s work, at the very least, has been brought to the fore in the *Rimāḥ* and at most, has been revived to activate a new project.

Before expounding further on the influence of Sha‘rānī on later Bilād al-Sudan and Maghrebi scholars, and more closely the themes of intersectionality between Sha‘rānī’s and Tāl’s respective projects, let us first attempt to better understand who the figure of Sha‘rānī was, the times he produced his scholarly works in, and his intellectual legacy in the context of sixteenth-century Islamic thought.

‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Sha‘rānī was born in 1493 in the Nile Delta Valley village of Qalashqanda. He is dubbed “Sha‘rānī” because forty days after his birth, he was taken to

²⁹⁹ For more studies on Imam Sha‘rānī, consult the works of A. Sabra, M. Winter, G. Flügel, Perron, I. Goldziher, M. Horten, L. Hudson, A.E. Schmidt and S. Pagani. His life has also been documented in Arabic by Egyptian scholars and historians such as Tawfīq al-Ṭawīl, Zakī Mubārak and Zakī Mubārak and Tāha Surūr.

³⁰⁰ Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt*, 1.

³⁰¹ Though the “decadence” argument has been firmly laid to rest by scholars including, among many others, Khaled El-Rouayheb in *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 2015 and Muhsin J. Musawi’s *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2015.

his parents' village in the Manufiyya province, dubbed Sāqiyat Abū Sha'ra, He studied Qur'ān from a young age at the hands of his brother, 'Abd al-Qādir, who helped him memorize it in full by the time he was 8 years old. Sha'rānī then moved to Cairo at twelve years of age where he settled for seventeen years in the Bāb al-Sha'riyya quarter. There, he met his first teacher Nūr ad-Dīn ash-Shūnī, the founder of the first *maḥyā* circle for sending invocations on the Prophet at Al-Azhar and became one of his favored students, which garnered the jealousy of the students of knowledge there and was forced to move to the *madrassa* of Umm Khond and return a few years later to Cairo to establish his *zawiya*. It was also around this time that the Ottoman Empire took control of Egypt after wresting Cairo away from Mamlūk rule in 1517, at a time when Sha'rānī was in his mid-twenties and enjoying a rising renown as a vastly knowledgeable and pious, ascetic Sufi scholar.

It is clear that his father and brother were heavily involved in juristic circles, which may have influenced Sha'rānī's frequenting of scholarly circles at al-Azhar, where he studied until the age of thirty. Shortly thereafter, an important turn occurred in his life: "he shifted his identity from the '*ulamā*' to the Sufis,"³⁰² no doubt due to his critical stances towards jurists that are heavily prominent in his writings. Most of what we know about his life is present in his own writings, mainly his "auto-hagiography" *Laṭā'if al-minan* as the most informative biographical text. In his *Laṭā'if al-minan*, Sha'rānī cites Jalāl ad-Dīn Suyūṭī as the most important scholar belonging to the prior generation. Winter notes that "Suyūṭī strongly influenced Sha'rānī's religious attitudes."³⁰³

So much so, that hagiography narrates that Suyūṭī, aware of Sha'rānī's future brilliance and acumen for his works, sent a note to his father when Sha'rānī was ten years of age authorizing him to teach all of his works. Winter notes that "Majīlī regards this as a *karāma* on part of the of Suyūṭī

³⁰² Leila Hudson, "Reading Al-Sha'rānī," 46.

³⁰³ Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt*, 32.

for realizing Sha‘rānī’s potentialities” before he even reached the age of ten.³⁰⁴ Sha‘rānī relates that when he first went to Cairo at the age of twelve in 1505, he met Suyūṭī and read with him a few hadiths and was adorned with his *khirqā* (habit). A month later, Suyūṭī died. Winter writes that Suyūṭī’s influence on Sha‘rānī “cannot be overemphasized” and that his views were especially important to “molding Sha‘rānī’s approach to various religious questions, mainly those connected with *fiqh* and the defense of Ibn ‘Arabī.”³⁰⁵ A recurrent secondary literary descriptor of Sha‘rānī’s project is the popularization of Ibn ‘Arabī, which will be elaborated on in the following section of this chapter.

While he was officially an adherent of the Shādhiliyya, he took multiple litanies from many orders of his time. Winter suggests that Sha‘rānī’s affiliation with the Shādhiliyya as stemming from his devotion to Suyūṭī’s literary works, and that he was in practice more suitably an adherent to the Aḥmadiyya order, a popular order in early Ottoman Egypt, which emphasized a strict adherence to the *sharī‘a* and the singular devotion to one’s shaykh, among other things.³⁰⁶ He criticized heavily the practices of “misguided” jurists and Sufis he saw as unorthodox, and “developed rivalries with and grudges against both the establishment of the ‘*ulamā*’ of al-Azhar—whose scholasticism, he felt, cut them off from the people and from religion—and against popular Sufi shaykhs, whose teachings strayed from orthodoxy.”³⁰⁷ Despite this, Sha‘rānī retained amicable political relations with the rulers of the time which benefited the upkeep of his well-maintained *zawiya* in Cairo.

All the forementioned features begin to explain why Tāl saw so much affinity in Sha‘rānī’s

³⁰⁴ Michael Winter, 45.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt*, 55, 88–117, 132.

³⁰⁷ Leila Hudson, “Reading Al-Sha‘rānī,” 47.

life, writings and practice. Yet not all scholars studying Sha‘rānī saw his contributions as unique. He is described by Joseph Shacht as having an “intellectual importance which must not however be over-estimated.” Shacht attributes Sha‘rānī’s popularity to his “extremely prolific pen”³⁰⁸ but notes that there is “hardly any originality in them; in mysticism especially he simply repeats the ideas of Ibn ‘Arabī.”³⁰⁹ On the subject of his views on legal pluralism and *madhahib* affiliation, Pagani concludes that Sha‘rānī’s work is not entirely original as it “did not depart from the legal tradition and that his attitude was ultimately conservative.”³¹⁰ Winter dubs his *karamāt* descriptions as “miracle mongering”³¹¹ and his general tone “apologetic” repeatedly in his major study on him, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī*. It is no surprise that Tāl’s life and writings would receive similarly uncharitable reactions from Western scholars. Both Tāl and Sha‘rānī’s works were by no means subdued or passive. They made broad stroke prescriptions and criticized other scholars, particularly jurists, as well as rulers they deemed corrupt or abusive of their powers. They did not shy away from pointing out what they saw as “hypocrisy” and “moral decay” within Islamic religious thought currents or groups. Yet at the same time, they remained firmly in within the bounds of so-called “orthodox Sufism” and the Sunni tradition.

Both Tāl and Sha‘rānī’s projects had far-reaching consequences and carried influential implications. In other words, they were not trying to acquiesce to the status quo or play the role of the classical docile ‘*ālim*: squarely bookish, passively apolitical and unyieldingly reverent to past

³⁰⁸ Joseph Shacht’s entry on Sha‘rānī in *E.J. Brill’s First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-1936* / (Leiden ;, 1987), volume 7, 319., <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951d00622297e>.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Samuela Pagani, “The Meaning of The Ikhtilāf Al-Madhāhib In ‘Abd Al-Wahhāb Al-Sha‘rānī’s Al-Mīzān Al-Kubrā,” *Islamic Law and Society* 11, no. 2 (2004): 194, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851904323178746>.

³¹¹ Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt*, 23.

opinions. Tāl and Sha‘rānī’s hardnosed personas and bold doctrines had massive political purchase with “laymen” and possessed a certain popular edge which sometimes compromised their more cautious, scholastic tendencies. In Leila Hudson’s words, “he [Sha‘rānī] is remembered by Orientalists as pompous and mediocre, but that is perhaps because he was a populizer.”³¹²

Though her work on Sha‘rānī’s popularity in nineteenth century Damascus makes no mention of Tāl’s reception of his work in West Africa, in almost clairvoyant fashion, Hudson concludes that there is powerful potential purchase of Sha‘rānī’s works, if it falls in the right hands. In our case, this is certainly true for his presence in the Tijānī text, the *Rimāḥ*: “in the hands of an influential shaykh or scholar, this kind of orthodox but cosmopolitan Sufism was a powerful vehicle for broadening the scope and possibilities of Islamic discourse without necessarily engaging in *ijtihād*, or legal interpretation, a practice severely restricted by the Sunnī Islamic tradition.”³¹³ Though the statement regarding *ijtihād* in this remark needs further clarification, still, Hudson’s observation points to the purchase of a doctrine guided by Sufism as the arbiter of knowledge; one of the *Rimāḥ*’s most enduring features. Based on this guiding hypothesis, let us now turn our attention into the specific ways in which Tāl’s deployment of interauthorship with Sha‘rānī in the *Rimāḥ* gave rise to a new project that would enable a type of “broadening [of] the scope of Islamic discourse”³¹⁴ in nineteenth century West Africa.

Specifically, I focus on the following intersecting themes that bind these sagely authors’ projects:

³¹² Leila Hudson, “Reading Al-Sha‘rānī,” 49.

³¹³ Leila Hudson, 48.

³¹⁴ Leila Hudson, 48.

- a) The centrality of Muhammad-oriented mysticism³¹⁵ and its methodology.
- b) The messianic backdrop for their projects.
- c) Criticism of jurists and madhhab-related discussions.
- d) Criticism of immoral rulers and “anti-sultanic” political views.
- e) Calls for “sober” Sufism and criticism of “excesses” among popular Sufis.

It is important to restate that some or all such features were prevalent across a range of other scholars’ projects cite in the *Rimāḥ*, such as ‘Ali Ḥarāzem Barrada’s *Jawāhir* of Aḥmad Tijānī, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh in al-Lamaṭī’s *Ibriz* or the letters of Aḥmad ibn Idrīs (d.1837), and are not exclusively shared between Tāl and Sha‘rānī only. However, this chapter is more concerned with investigating the status of interauthorship in the *Rimāḥ* as it relates to the works of Sha‘rānī in order to signify how Tāl sought to highlight a specific ethos, methodology, tone and approach that very closely echoes and borrows from fifteenth and sixteenth century Egyptian interlocutors. Due to the overwhelming volume of quotes from Sha‘rānī and their specific placement in the *Rimāḥ*, this interauthorial relationship makes it stronger and more pronounced than Tāl’s interauthorship with other projects and visions. Let us now explore ways in which Tāl handpicked the choice jewels of earlier Sufi traditions by reinvesting it in his own saintly authority and that of Aḥmad Tijānī.

The Centrality of the Muḥammadan Way

Perhaps the most salient feature of the intersectionality of Sha‘rānī’s project with that of Tāl’s, is the way he articulated his adherence to the notion of *ṭaqrīqā Muḥammadiyya*. Winter writes, “the desire to imitate the Prophet and to express loyalty and love for him was one of the outstanding features of orthodox Sufis,”³¹⁶ words he described the Sha‘rānian approach to Sufism as being. It is important to restate, however, that the Tijāniyya’s articulation of the Muḥammadan way was not a

³¹⁵ Radtke. Bernd, “Sufism in the 18th Century: An Attempt at a Provisional Reappraisal,” 360.

³¹⁶ Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt*, 24.

mirror image of the sixteenth century approach to Muḥammadan way in early Ottoman Egypt. Though “the Tijāniyya came with nothing new in relation to earlier Islamic and Sufi ideas: adherents conceived their affiliation to the “way of Muḥammad” as the fullest actualization of a very old and basic concept,”³¹⁷ posts Wright, however, by the sixteenth century, the dominant approach to Sufism became synonymous with the Muḥammadan way and sending invocations on the Prophet as the central practice. In West Africa, as stated earlier in this chapter, the pre-existing intellectual landscape was ripe for the spread of the “Muḥammadan way” as this idea was being heavily discussed in the scholarly circles of Timbuktu and beyond by the sixteenth century.

Thanks to maturing earlier articulations of it in from South Asia to the Hijaz and North Africa and even in West Africa itself, it is quite likely that “Muḥammadan Sufism” became synonymous with Islamic religious identity in West Africa by Tāl’s time in the nineteenth century. The two approaches were interchangeable. By highlighting an analysis of important descriptors in the Timbuktu Chronicles, Zachary Wright reminds us that “West African scholars [...] clearly saw themselves as equal participants in the global scholarly exchanges of the eighteenth century, particularly when it came to the idea of the *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*.”³¹⁸ In the Chronicles, which document scholarly life in Mali and neighboring regions in the fifteenth century, Wright reveals that Mālikī scholars listen therein are described as having characteristics being endowed with (*maʿrifa*), sainthood (*wilāya*), and having visionary encounters with the Prophet Muhammad. Even though there is no mention of the existence of organized Sufi orders in the chronicles, the fifteenth-century Timbuktu scholar Yahyā al- Tadillis is described as “the jurist and scholar, the *quṭb*, the Friend of

³¹⁷ Wright, *Realizing Islam*, 2020, 2.

³¹⁸ Wright, 26.

God Most High” who saw the Prophet in dreams regularly.³¹⁹ Such descriptors indicate that Gnosticism and seeing the Prophet in visions was a regularly recognized feature of pious ‘*ulamā*’ in West Africa, so what makes Tāl’s articulation of the Muḥammadan way unique and in what ways has Sha‘rānī helped reinvent, so to speak, the Tijānī doctrine?

As previously stated, Sha‘rānī’s illiterate teacher and master, ‘Alī al-Khawwās (d.1542) had a profound influence on his intellectual project and his chain of transmission in the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*. The second chapter of this dissertation dealt at length with the central idea of seeing the Prophet in a waking state and that the Prophets are “alive” in the rhetoric of the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*. Sha‘rānī’s most cited work in the *Rimāḥ*, *Lawaqīḥ al-anwār*, deals directly with the Muḥammadan way based on the narrations of his teacher al-Khawwās, and in particular, the distinctive methodology of sending copious invocations on the Prophet until one meets him in a waking state:

I heard my master ‘Alī al-Khawwās say: ‘A servant does not achieve perfection in the station of mystical knowledge [*irfān*], until he experiences communion with God’s Messenger in a state of wakefulness and oral conversation. The following are included among those righteous predecessors who have seen him in a state of wakefulness: Shaykh Abu Madyan al-Maghribī³²⁰, the shaykh of the Sufi community (*al-sāda al-ṣufiyya*), Shaykh ‘Abd ar-Raḥīm al-Qināwī, Shaykh Musa az-Zawāwī, Shaykh Abu'l Hasan ash-Shādhilī, Shaykh Abu al-‘Abbās al-Mursī, Shaykh Abu al-Sa‘ūd ibn Abi'l-Mashā‘ir, Sīdī Ibrāhīm al-Matūlī and Shaykh Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī. He also used to say: “I have seen the Prophet and I have come together with him in a state of wakefulness no fewer than seventy times.” As for Sīdī Ibrāhīm al-Matbūlī, his communion with him is beyond reckoning, since he would come to together with him in all his spiritual states, and he used to say: “I have no Shaykh except God’s Messenger, God bless him and give him peace.” Abu'l-‘Abbās al-Mursī used to say: “If God’s Messenger, God bless him and give him peace, was veiled from me for a moment, I would not count myself among the Muslims.”³²¹

The chapter then goes on to list length excerpts from the Dabbāgh’s words in the Ibrīz and his vivid

³¹⁹ Wright, 27.

³²⁰ More popularly known as Abu-Madyn al-Ghawth (d.1198), 12th century Qādiri Andalusian mystic.

³²¹ *Rimāḥ*, 453.

descriptions of *diwān al-awliyā'* (the so-called “Council of Saints”, both dead and live, who convene in the cave of Ḥirā' with past prophets, companions and sagely figures like al-Khiḍr). Tāl then cites *ḥadīth* and its commentaries, ibn 'Arabī's *Futūḥāt*, Suyūṭī's *Tanwīr al-ḥalak*, al-Bārīzī's *Tawthīq 'urwat al-imān* and Ibn 'Atā-'illah's *Laṭā'if al-minan* and others to show that visionary experience with Prophet has always been central in the writings and experiences of pious Muslims across history. At first glance, there is nothing remarkable about Tāl's choice of citations from Sha'rānī's particular chain of teachers. Indeed, in his 1912 paper on the topic, Goldziher affirms that: “it is no uncommon thing in Islamic literature to find both theological doubts and questions of practical controversy solved by the decision of the Prophet, who appears in a dream.”³²² And yet, Wright writes that even though visions of the Prophet were always a significant event in Islamic history, “at a certain point, perhaps from the sixteenth century, it seems the emphasis on its occurrence increased.”³²³

The sixteenth century puts us at the precise milieu of Suyūṭī,³²⁴ Khawwāṣ, Sha'rānī, who emphasized not only visionary experience with the Prophet, but the idea of experiencing union (*fanā'*) in him by seeing him in a waking state at all times, so much so that, to some sages, if the Prophet were to be absent for them for one moment, as Sha'rānī cites thirteenth century Egyptian Sufi Abu-al-'Abbās al-Mursī as saying, they “would not count myself among the Muslims,” perhaps for dramatic effect. Yet the motivation behind broadcasting and describing the prevalence of this possibility with such vivacity for these sagely authorities is clear: when one is not exerting him or herself in the constant invocation on the Prophet, what implications does this have on a Muslim's claim to faith? According to these sagely authors, there is an obvious existential implication on the

³²² Ignaz Goldziher, “The Appearance of the Prophet in Dreams,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1912, 503.

³²³ Wright, *On the Path of the Prophet*, 81.

³²⁴ Though he lived a century prior, he taught and markedly influenced al-Sha'rānī.

spiritual health of one's faith if they do not have a strong, living connection to the Prophet. Seemingly, the stakes for attaining this connection get only higher by the nineteenth century West Africa. As Tāl saw it, a need arose for a clearer articulation of what Muḥammadan Sufism (or rather more simply, what to him is simply Sufism) entails for the believe to undertake and believe. This curation of quotes and accounts from sages past meeting with the Prophet was not written for the spiritual elite and is not meant to be shrouded in a garb of secrecy: this was an invitation for the masses to make the Muḥammadan Path not only palatable, but central to religious wayfaring.

The difference between the cited works in the *Rimāḥ* then, is that most often, their *ṭarīqa* affiliation was vague or not all that necessary to pronounce in their respective periods. Tāl's project comes in and confirms the doctrine of Aḥmad Tijānī and takes these kernels from past saintly interauthors to articulate a culminative Sufi path in the literal sense, a *ṭarīqa*, one replete with a doctrine, hierarchy, etiquette and sources of verification that any layman can read and understand. Chapter 42 of *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ* entitled, "Why this path of ours is called..." does a thorough exposition of what the *ṭarīqa* is and introduced it as a definitive way, according to Tāl, and why it is not principally called the Tijāniyya, but rather, "*al-ṭarīqa al-Aḥmadiyya al-Muḥammadiyya al-Ibrāhimiyya al-Ḥanafīyya at-Tijāniyya*," giving the Tijāniyya an heir of primordial significance. The idea that just as Islam is the last religion, the idea of the Tijāniyya as the last *ṭarīqa*, makes it all the more conducive for Tāl to adopt a license to reinvest past Muḥammadan Sufi doctrines:

All the paths will be incorporated into his path, so they will be rendered obsolete. Its stamp will be imprinted on every stamp, and its stamp will carry no other, as previously explained, just as the *sharī'a* of God's messenger has replaced all other religious laws.³²⁵

This rhetoric of culminative exclusivity confirms the idea that Tāl's citation of past sages' articulations of the Muḥammadan path does *not* mean that these figures are authoritative in the

³²⁵ *Rimāḥ*, 588.

Tijāniyya, per se. Tāl's continues to reaffirm and perhaps popularize (the arguably controversial) Tijānī condition that Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī relays: "no creature among the *shuyūkh* of the *ṭuruq* has any benefit to bestow upon you, for I am your intermediary and supporter in actuality."³²⁶ Tāl continues to warn that Tijānī also commanded *murīds* not to visit any saint for *baraka* lest they lose the favor and blessings of both Tijānī and the visited saint.

Popularizing Ibn 'Arabī

There is a near unanimous consensus in the secondary literature describing Sha'rānī's project as playing a large role in popularizing the ideas of Ibn 'Arabī; a line of inquiry that is heavy with multifaceted implications.³²⁷ On his essay on the diffusion of the thought of Ibn 'Arabī, Michel Chodkiewicz highlights how Sha'rānī's works spread "in all directions of the Moslem world" as corroborated by the "wide dispersion of catalogued manuscripts."³²⁸ Further, he credits Sha'rānī for spreading and summarizing Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūḥāt* in his popular work the *Yawāqīt*. Appropriately correspondent to the topic of this chapter, one of the links he makes in relation to the popularization of Ibn 'Arabī's thought is 'Umar Tāl's heavy reliance on Sha'rānī: "Al-Hājj Umar," he writes, "certainly often relies on Sha'rānī, but no doubt he also had a direct knowledge of the *Futūḥāt*."³²⁹ The Western secondary tendency to measure later Sufi ideas against the yardstick of Ibn 'Arabī tends to carry differing implications. This trend tends to single out the influence of Ibn 'Arabī—who is

³²⁶ *Rimāh*, 151

³²⁷ See: Michael Winter, "Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt; Studies in the Writings of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, Studies in Islamic Culture and History, The Shiloah Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies (New Brunswick, N.J.; Transaction Books, 1982). Pp. 355., " *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, no. 04 (1985): 556–557, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800029603>; Michel Chodkiewicz, "The Diffusion of Ibn 'Arabī's Doctrine," *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 9 (1991); Adam Sabra, "Illiterate Sufis and Learned Artisans: The Circle of 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rānī," ed. Richard McGregor and Adam Sabra, *Le Développement Du Soufisme En Égypte à l'époque Mamlouke.*, Institut Français D'archéologie Orientale, 2006, 153–68.

³²⁸ Chodkiewicz, "The Diffusion of Ibn 'Arabī's Doctrine," 33.

³²⁹ Chodkiewicz, 33.

undoubtedly the doyen of Islamic mysticism—but when done singularly, it risks the inability to analyze the projects of other influential authors in their own light. Ibn ‘Arabī’s own legacy hazards to become a fixed caricature, when it is much more fluid, dynamic and is itself a product of interauthorship with a rich plethora of earlier (and even future) Islamic figures, mystics and scholars.

Risks of reductionism aside, it is safe to conclude however, that the influence of Ibn ‘Arabī is certainly popularized in both the Sha‘rānian project, as well as in Tāl’s *Rimāh*, defying faulty perceptions that “neo-Sufism” and its precursors were marked by a rejection of Akbarian thought. This is so true of the Tijānī tradition in general, that Patrick J. Ryan credits the order for simplifying “much of this esoteric thought of Ibn ‘Arabī, making it available to ordinary Muslims in concrete devotional practices.”³³⁰ Similarly, Rachida Chih makes a distinct connection between the ideas of Ibn ‘Arabī and the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*:

The famous Muḥammadan Path, the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, was not a consequence of neo-Sufism since, far from representing a rejection of Ibn ‘Arabī, it emanated in fact from the milieus of Sufis that were deeply impregnated with his ideas.³³¹

Thanks to studies by Levtzion and Voll, Azra, Knysh, Wright, Nafi, Coptý, El-Rouayheb, and Pagani,³³² we can better understand the dynamic nature of the intellectual life of seventeenth century

³³⁰ Patrick J. Ryan, “The Mystical Theology of Tijānī Sufism and Its Social Significance in West Africa,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 30, no. 2 (2000): 209, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1581801>.

³³¹ Rachida Chih, “Discussing the Sufism of the Early Modern Period: A New Historiographical Outlook on the Tariqa Muḥammadiyya,” *Sufism East and West*, March 19, 2019, 120, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004393929_006.

³³² Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll, eds., *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987); Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern ‘Ulamā’ in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Crow’s Nest, Australia and Honolulu, HI: Allen and Unwin, and University of Hawaii Press, 2004); Alexander Knysh, “Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1101/1690), an Apologist for waḥdat al-wujūd,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 5, no. 1 (1995); Basheer M. Nafi, “Taṣawwuf and Reform in Pre-Modern Islamic Culture: In Search of Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī,” *Die Welt des Islams* 42, no. 3 (2002); Atallah S. Coptý, “The Naqshbandiyya and Its Offshoot: the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ḥaramayn in the 11th/17th Century,” *Die Welt des Islams* 43, no. 3 (2003); Khaled El-Rouayheb, “Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Florescence of the 17th Century,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 2 (May 2006); idem, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Pagani, *Il Rinascimento*.

Madina and beyond, which showed clearly see that the elements of Akbarian thought reverberate through early Ottoman scholars such Aḥmad al-Qushāshi (d. 1661), Sha‘rānī and others whose works inspired later Sufis such as the founders of Khalwatiyya, the Sanūssiya and the Tijāniyya.

Citing *tajdīd* (renewal) not *ṭaqlīd* as the central lynchpin for modern Muḥammadan Sufi orders, Chih observes that a Sufi *mujaddid* can only claim that mantle in relation to axial or sealing sainthood, which is directly tied to Prophetic inheritance:

If this theme, of *tajdīd*, returned in force in the modern age, it was because the Prophet became the initiator of numerous Sufis: among the founders or re-founders of Sufi paths between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries Sirhindi, Shah Wali Allah, Mustafa al-Bakri, Tijānī, and Samman all laid claim to a status equivalent, in terms of sainthood, to that of the Prophet and his community. It was in this sense that they presented themselves as renovators (*mujaddid*) of his religion, with all the social and political functions implied by this role.³³³

As stated in the chapter of the rhetoric of the *khatmiyya*, previous claims to possessing the mantle of the seal of the saints by Tirmidhī and Ibn ‘Arabī or others does not weaken Tāl’s articulation of the concept. Rather, he reaffirms that past sages wrote about the *khatm* by quoting them, even when some considered themselves as claimants to that station in their own time. He cites Sha‘rānī on this by saying: “my master (presumably al-Ghālī) said about the elite, just as Sha‘rānī said in *Durar al-ghawwās*: ‘this community has two comprehensive Seals, and every degree and station has an inheritor.’”³³⁴ The same logic of confirmation can be applied to Tāl’s citation of past sages that have influenced Sha‘rānī such as ‘Abd ar-Raḥīm al-Qināwī, Shaykh Musa az-Zawāwī, Abu’l Hasan ash-Shādhilī, Abu al-‘Abbās al-Mursī, Ibrāhīm al-Matbūlī and Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī. Obvious anachronism aside, though they were not Tijānī, the experiences of these sages are meant to act as a form of verification and proof of the viability of the Tijānī doctrine as a culminative path in the

³³³ Chih, “Discussing the Sufism of the Early Modern Period,” 168.

³³⁴ *Rimāḥ*, 136.

eighteenth century. The temporal aspect, that of Tāl being aware of his time as “late” relative to earlier Sufis, is an outlook shared by Sha‘rānī, who also projected his writings to be insightful for the community of end-time Muslims.

The Unity of the *Madhāhib* as a Messianic Doctrine

One of the most salient features of Sha‘rānī’s intellectual legacy is his criticism of the jurists and their so-called flawed inter-madhhab conjecture. This critical theme towards the conventional *fiqh* approach is not just found in his hugely influential *Mizān al-kubrā*, but also in other works, namely, *Kashf al-ghumma ‘an jamī’ al-umma* (“The Removal of the Fog from the Whole Community”) was written as a response to the moral and intellectual corruption he witnessed from the *fuqahā’* per the request of certain complainants who were presumably aggrieved and confused laymen. In the Introduction to this text, he sets out to explain his intention in penning it, which was to become one of this most popular works after *al-Mizān al-kubrā* and *al-Yawāqīt wal jawāhīr* well into the nineteenth century:

Groups of workers and simple people came to me to complain, and to express their chagrin and confusion. Whenever they performed one of the religions ordinances or concluded a contract according to one madhhab, the *fuqahā* of an opposing madhhab declared them null and void. When I advised them to sit with the *fuqahā* and listen to the discussions so that they would be able to tell right from wrong, they answered that they had often done so, but only seldom had they heard the *fuqahā* mention a hadith; the *fuqahā* had, for the most part, been concentration on understanding one another’s words. The *fuqahā* then based their fatwas on those arguments, as if they were legal proofs. Besides, the simple people were confused as to which *madhhab* they should follow and what were actually the opinions of the *madhhab*. Realizing that these learned discussions would not help the people out of their confusion, I suggested that they give up their work and devote themselves to ‘ilm, whereupon the workers replied that they could not afford to do so, since they had to work in order to support their families and pay the oppressive taxes and debts. They added that they were not content to sit in a *madrassa* or a mosque and eat the people’s ‘dirt’, that is alms, as the *fuqahā’* did. If they did so, they would have to give up their trades. They had tried to eat from the waqf money and discovered that it lay heavily on their hearts. They asked me, therefore, to collect in one

book the principles of religion according to the four *madhhabs*.^{335 336}

In the *Kashf* and the *Mizān*, both of which are cited heavily in Tāl’s *Rimāh*, Sha‘rānī’s rhetoric decries how lay people allegedly became “victims” of the *fuqahā*’s “endless argumentation” based on each others’ opinions and not based on the primary sources of the law, the Qur’an and the *sunna*. Sha‘rānī wrote that most people cannot perfect their understandings of the opinions of the four legal Sunni schools, nor the reasoning behind most Islamic legal opinions, since this is a grace reserved for “the greatest saints who have abandoned the path of conjecture for the light of revelation and divine instruction.”³³⁷

To remedy this, Sha‘rānī proposes that jurists and laymen alike must approach the four *madhhabs* as emanating from the same source, a methodology which he sets out to explain in his written works. Some scholars have noted the heavy influence of Andalusian scholar Ibn Ḥazm on Sha‘rānī, who argued that one must forgo the legal schools and consult the opinions of the Qur’an and sunna only.³³⁸ However, Sha‘rānī does not call for the abandonment of the legal schools, rather, that the schools must be approached with a unifying effort in mind. In the *Kashf al-ghumma*, which he presents as a remedy for the corruption of the juridical class and a compendium of all the major *ḥadīth* sources, he attempts to summarize the varying basis for the opinions and proofs of different legal schools to prove the ultimate unity of the *madhhabs*, not to invalidate them. Citing parallel ideas found in the *Rimāh*, Willis comments: “the writings of al-Ḥajj ‘Umar echo the opinions of

³³⁵ From Sha‘rānī’s *Kashf al-Ghumma*, as trans. by Leila Hudson, “Reading Al-Sha‘rānī,” 49.

³³⁶ Of course, we must distinguish what is rhetoric from reality, and whether this truly happened or has been exaggerated for the text’s purposes.

³³⁷ From Sha‘rānī’s *Kashf al-ghumma* trans. by Adam Sabra, “Illiterate Sufis and Learned Artisans: The Circle of ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha‘rānī,” 162.

³³⁸ Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, “Al-Sha‘rānī’s Response to Legal Purism,” 122.

Sha‘rānī that ‘all the madhhabs of the *mujtahidīn* of this *umma* are the way of the believers’ [and that] ‘each man may follow freely the view which appeals to him, [which] Allah has appointed it for him.’”³³⁹

The backdrop for writing such a conclusive work had evident messianic undertones, which perhaps contributed to the bold approach adopted by Sha‘rānī. Citing *Kashf al-ghumma*, Adam Sabra makes a valuable observation in his work, *Illiterate Sufis and Learned Artisans: The Circle of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī*:

Sha‘rānī was convinced that he was writing a book that would last until the end of time, for “the voice, may peace be upon him, gave me the good news that this book will last until the advent of the Mahdi, may peace be upon him, so that his supporters will benefit from it, so that they will have no need to consult him about religious matters. For when he appears, may peace be upon him, he will remove disagreement and opinion from the earth and only pure faith will remain in his reign.”³⁴⁰

Similarly, Ḥajj ‘Umar Tāl believed he was living at a time nearing the end of the world, and a small group of his followers even presumed him to be the awaited Mahdi.³⁴¹ This makes it all the more conceivable, that Tāl’s adoption of Sha‘rānī’s doctrine—which was explicitly written to be a prescription for end-of-time confusion—was something Tāl did intentionally in the *Rimāḥ* as a messianic text.

Some scholars have debated whether Sha‘rānī’s views on the *madhāhib* are at all original, concluding that they are merely a “as a conservative restatement of a well-established doctrine of legal pluralism.”³⁴² Such a question, naturally, will have bearing on the originality (or lack thereof)

³³⁹ Willis, “The Writings of Al-Hajj Umar al-Futi and Shaykh Mukhtar b. Wadi at Allah,” 185. For a more thorough investigation of Tāl’s *fiqh*, consult the following chapter of this dissertation.

³⁴⁰ Adam Sabra, *Illiterate Sufis*, 161.

³⁴¹ Willis, *In the Path of Allah*, 205.

³⁴² Scholars such as Pagani and Shacht. See: Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, “Al-Sha‘rānī’s Response to Legal Purism” For a summary of their views. .

of Tāl's project, since it relies so heavily on Sha'rānī's legal edicts to formulate one of its central doctrines. In his paper on this precise topic, Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim argues that Sha'rānī's legal theory departs significantly from his predecessors and merits a closer look by Islamic legal scholars and scholars of Sufism alike. Referring to this methodology as "pragmatic eclecticism", which Fekry Ibrahim recognizes analogous features of among scholars such as Ibn 'Arabī and Suyūṭī, Sha'rānī's lack of "orthodox" legal training, he posits, does not appear to prevent him from providing an important and valid interjection in the milieu of his time.

Particularly, the feature of consulting local authorities—that is, his favoring of "the local, Mamluk approach to law against Ottoman Ḥanafization, in the same way that he gave preference to local saints over their Anatolian counterparts"³⁴³—seems to have motivated Sha'rānī to formulate his legal doctrine of pragmatic eclecticism in the way he has.³⁴⁴ Fekry Ibrahim shows how early Ottoman authorities tried to circumscribe people's transactions to the authority of one legal school, the Ḥanafī one, a practice which Sha'rānī found to be problematic. The interplay of anti-authoritarian views characteristic of both Sha'rānī and Tāl's approach to mysticism points to a type of reinvigoration for *shar'īa*. This approach ultimately points to the unique way in which an:

... emphasis on the Prophetic tradition and aversion to scholasticism, in some ways, united the Sufis and purists against the "traditional" *'ulamā'*, although, to be sure, the lines demarcating those categories were often blurred. Indeed, Sha'rānī himself was both a Sufi and a respected member of the *'ulamā'*. We can see in the opposition to scholasticism and focus on *ḥadīth* what is to become an important emphasis of eighteenth-century revivalism. Sha'rānī's legal work shows that the tensions between juristic scholasticism and strict textualism were a topic of intense debate throughout the Ottoman period.³⁴⁵

³⁴³ Adam Sabra, "Illiterate Sufis and Learned Artisans: The Circle of 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani," 167.

³⁴⁴ Fekry Ibrahim deals with Sha'rānī's legal doctrine in great detail, including the precise views of his predecessors, a detailing of who he writes against, as well as his views against the idea of the unity of truth. Specifically, he traces Sha'rānī's unique views on the sources of the law as being deliberately created by God to appeal to people's varying levels of piety and strength. In every situation, there are two correct juristic views: one is lenient, the other strict. For more, consult A.F. Ibrahim / *Islamic Law and Society* 20 (2013) 110-140

³⁴⁵ Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, "Al-Sha'rānī's Response to Legal Purism," 131.

In this dissertation, I am hesitant to place Sha‘rānī squarely within the category of anti-scholastic *ḥadīth* proponents typical of eighteenth-century so-called revivalist movements described in the secondary literature on the Islamic intellectual history of the modern period. While Fekry Ibrahim presents a satisfying explication on why Sha‘rānī’s work is unique, he does so squarely against the backdrop of his past predecessors, not his contemporaries or future interlocutors, such as Tāl in our case. Fekry Ibrahim himself identifies that Sha‘rānī blurs the lines of traditional jurists in the way he gives laypeople agency for their quest for truth, while at the same time, recognizing that Sufi ‘*ālims*’ offer a unique perspective to key debates on Islamic law. Therefore, the impulse to categorize Sha‘rānī as an anti-scholastic “*ḥadīth* champion” is simplistic and does not quite capture the full vivacity and overall implications of his project.

Still, it remains worthwhile to investigate the question of how early Ottoman anti-orthodox Sufi ‘*ulamā*’ like Sha‘rānī helped shape the Islamic “reform” discourse among different groups and individuals in the subsequent periods. Citing Rashid Riḍa’s answer to an anonymous Azharite inquiring about Riḍa’s views Sha‘rānī’s *Kashf al-ghumma* in al-Manar newspaper. Fekry Ibrahim cites that Riḍa responded by saying: it “was one of Sha‘rānī’s best books, and it contains very little misinformation (*khaṭṭ*), but he (Riḍa) cautioned that some of the *aḥādīth* used by Sha‘rānī are not reliable.”³⁴⁶

Fekry Ibrahim states that the repercussions of Sha‘rānī’s views cannot be overstated: “a cursory look at the modern codification of Islamic law in a country like Egypt or at the efforts of contemporary scholars such as Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, or lay intellectuals such as Jamāl al-Bannā or Rāshid al-Ghannūshī shows the influence of Sha‘rānī’s views on legal diversity.”³⁴⁷ Though such a

³⁴⁶ Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, 138.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

claim would require further research, it nonetheless proves that more studies are needed on Sha‘rānī’s legacy as it pertains to subsequent intellectual currents. Suffice it to say that attempts to appropriate Sha‘rānī’s project by later anti-Sufi scholars—a category he wrote against—would be an interesting course of research.

This much, however, is true: the power and purchase of Sha‘rānī’s project, whether in the nineteenth century Levant or West Africa been instrumentalized differently by different people. Pagani highlights the wide interpretative possibilities when reading Sha‘rānī’s work and their implications on *fiqh* approaches: “the *Mīzān* is open to a wide range of interpretations. In the nineteenth century, conservative ‘*ulamā*’ with a Sufi background used the text to oppose *ijtihād*, while Sufi and Salafi reformers used it to support *ijtihād*.³⁴⁸ Herein lies the liminal positionality of both Sha‘rānī and Tāl’s respective projects. Far from being stringent dogmatists, they were both able to criticize different manifestations of corrupt features in their respective societies, even, or perhaps more so, their very own communities of ‘*ulamā*’ and adherents to Sufi *ṭuruq*. Though features of their projects appear to be more championed by anti-Sufis in the modern period, this perhaps indicates that their visions were ultimately never fully fulfilled. Neither author lived to see the implementation of a society that is guided by the Muḥammadan Sufi way, an anti-tyrannical ethos and one that is legally pluralistic in which the ‘*ulamā*’ were trained in gnosticism via a widely recognized shaykh *wāṣil*,³⁴⁹ though Shaykh ‘Umar Tāl certainly came close to realizing this vision during the briefly existent state he founded.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed why it is significant that half of the copious quotes of the *Rimāḥ* come

³⁴⁸ Pagani, “The Meaning of The Ikhtilāf Al-Madhāhib In ‘Abd Al-Wahhāb Al-Sha‘rānī’s Al-Mīzān Al-Kubrā,” 2.

³⁴⁹ An exception could made, however, for the Sanūsiyya Sufi order established in 1837 by Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī as-Sanūsī, who was a student and follower of Aḥmad ibn Idrīs.

from ‘Abdul Wahhab al-Sha‘rānī. In undergoing a serious excavation of the intellectual sources of the *Rimāḥ*, few studies have barely scratched the surface of Tāl’s inspiration and influences. The number of direct quotations in the text and the breadth of citations from hundreds of sources, from Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to Ibn ‘Arabī, to al-Dabbāgh and others are so numerous in the *Rimāḥ* that Bernd Radtke devoted an entire paper solely towards a study that outlines the sources of the text. Along Hunwick, Radtke is among the first scholars to undergo a documentation of the sources of the *Rimāḥ*. In his study, he has shown that the *Rimāḥ*: “contains between 640 and 650 direct quotations from 125 different sources. Of these, one-third stem from nine authors and 27 sources, of these again, more than one half comes from ‘Abd al-Wahāb al-Sha‘rānī.”³⁵⁰ Hunwick describes the need to read the text “within the context of its time and place, but it must also be read as a major exposition of Tijānī doctrines, and, indeed of Sufi thought in general [...] which go back to the 10th century or earlier.”³⁵¹ Though Sha‘rānī is perhaps the most quoted author in the text, Tāl’s heavy citation of other authors, such as Ibn ‘Arabī and Dabbāgh emphasize the *Rimāḥ*’s interauthorial character which gives the impression that the text is set out to be a culmination and maturation of past Sufi doctrines.

Explaining the theoretical concept of interauthorship in Sufi writings, I argued that Tāl’s methodology of copious quotation is a way of reinvigorating and refurbishing Sha‘rānī’s and other Sufi scholars’ overall project in a manner which attempts to breathe new life into their works as co-authors of the Tijānī doctrine, which saw itself as a final *ṭarīqa*, just as the Prophet was the final messenger. Notwithstanding that heavy quotation is a feature that most Islamic texts share,³⁵² what

³⁵⁰ Radtke, “Studies on the Sources of Kitāb Rimāḥ Ḥizb Al-Raḥim of al-Ḥajj ‘Umar.”

³⁵¹ Hunwick, “An Introduction to the Tijani Path: Translations of the Chapter Headings of al-Rimah” Paris, France, *Islam et Sociétés Au Sud Du Sahara*, 1992nd ed., vol. 6, 1987, 21.

³⁵² From email exchange with Professor Sarah Savant, Director of the Kitaab Project, which uses digital technology to exact citational volume and sources in Islamic texts. <https://kitab-corpus-metadata.azurewebsites.net/>

distinguishes Sha‘rānī’s and Tāl’s interauthorial relationship is its strikingly similar approaches to their respective projects that are guided by Gnosticism. I dub their similar approaches to mystical experience and the way it maps on their respective intellectual discourses as stemming from the same “*dhawq*-sphere”; implying that the ideas they write about do not stem from a rational/intellectual discourse only, but one that emanates from a shared experiential “taste” of Gnosticism that touches on all facets of Islamic knowledge spheres (legal, creedal or otherwise). Though the two sagely authors lived two hundred years apart, the two-way intellectual exchange between fifteenth and sixteenth century Egyptian ‘*ulamā*’ with that of West African scholars of those periods and later periods has been increasingly well documented and sets up the backdrop for this vibrant cross-regional link.

I showed that the heavy prominence of Sha‘rānī’s interauthorship in the *Rimāḥ* urges us to turn our attention to the following distinctive features: Sha‘rānī and Tāl’s shared emphasis on the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, their gnosis-guided approach to *sharī‘a*, their mutual “anti-sultan” political orientation and the messianic, end-times backdrop for their doctrines as the key themes that bind their respective projects. Sha‘rānī’s legal work has been proven novel and original, and his reach and influence wider than previously thought in the modern Muslim world. The heavy borrowing from his work in the *Rimāḥ* has important implications for the legacy of Sha‘rānī beyond Arab Muslim communities. This chapter points to the fact that Sha‘rānī’s works inspired one of the most important Sufi reform movements in modern West Africa. There are many ways in which the two authors were kindred “twins” in the *dhawq*-sphere, so to speak: so much so, that if one were to replace the name of Sha‘rānī with that of ‘Umar Tāl in the following description, it would still hold true:

Sha‘rānī criticized the ‘*ulamā*’ for their legal rigidity, neglect of duties, mock learning, and inability to come to terms with the social problems of Egyptian society. He believed that the distinctions between the schools of Islamic law were socially divisive and advocated instead a unified approach to the law, using the best elements of each school. He castigated many of

the Sufi orders as being corrupt and believed that their practices were contrary to the *sharī‘a*—the body of Islamic legal doctrines that regulated society.³⁵³

Sha‘rānī left ample guiding prescriptions in his literary corpus for Tāl to activate as Tijānī doctrine, two centuries later. Tāl spent much of his life in the liminal space between a staunch commitment to Sufism and Gnosticism while at the same time occupying a space of criticism against those he regarded as abusers of Sufism and anti-Sufis alike. Like Sha‘rānī before him, Tāl addressed scholars and laymen who may have perhaps disputed the validity of having a shaykh or criticized so-called excesses by certain Sufis in that time; both of which were not uncommon charges by nineteenth century *fuqahā’* and intellectuals. Two centuries prior, Sha‘rānī had almost identical challenges and concerns in the milieu of early Ottoman Egypt, signifying both the timelessness of their edicts, as well as their suitability for messianic prescriptions.

³⁵³ “Ash-Sha‘rānī -- Britannica Academic,” accessed September 22, 2020, <https://academic-eb-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/levels/collegiate/article/ash-Sha%CA%BFr%C4%81n%C4%AB/67148>.

Chapter IV: “If all the Legal Schools Were to Disappear:” Gnosis and Jurisprudence in the *Rimāh*

Introduction

Focusing on the intersection of the Sufism and Islamic law in the *Kitāb al-Rimāh*, this chapter focuses on Tāl’s contributions to modern Islamic intellectual history. Most studies on Islamic thought in the eighteenth century usually begin with Wahhabi movement as the beginning of a “fundamentalist mode of Islam.”³⁵⁴ Ahmad Dallal critiques conventional approaches to studies of Islamic modernism³⁵⁵ as one that tends to create an “intellectual cohesion” among thinkers of the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as members of the same “intellectual family tree.”³⁵⁶ Among the normative associations that are usually made when describing Islamic reformers, in Dallal’s view often resemble these descriptors:

The need to return to the Qur’ān and *Sunna*, return to origins, revival of *ijtihād* (scholarly interpretation of the Law) and *ḥadīth* studies, rejection of innovation and imitation (*taqlīd*) in matters of law, and rejection of the excesses of Sufism.³⁵⁷

This chapter is motivated by a rejection of the above cohesive consensus on Islamic reform and seeks to move away from making blanket claims about associations usually made with Sufism and Islamic law in the nineteenth century; one of which being that debates over *taqlīd* are tied to legal matters outside the purview of the “non-rational” realm of mysticism. Rather than “quoting isolated ideas

³⁵⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, 24.

³⁵⁵ The term “modernism” itself is a contested one, but I use it here to simply connote what the Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam describes as a thought movement that advocates a “flexible, continuous reinterpretation of Islam.”

³⁵⁶ H.A.R Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam*, Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1947, 27-28.

³⁵⁷ Ahmad Dallal, “The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought (1750-1850)”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol 113, No.3 (July-Sept 1993) p.341-359. p.341

out of their general ideological context,”³⁵⁸ as previously stated, compartmentalizing works associated with Sufism into insular categories due to their “mystical” (i.e., “non-rational”) representation risks the emergence of blind spots in understanding the mystic’s overarching spiritual, legal and intellectual project. Islamic intellectual historians of the nineteenth century would be amiss not to place Tāl within the ranks of its prominent thinkers.

The Features of Tāl’s Liminal Anti-Madhhabism

From the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries in North and West Africa, from Aḥmad Zarrūq to Aḥmad ibn Idrīs, the debates on efforts to define the balance between *ṭarīqa* and *sharī‘a* are rife. Attempts to promote a “juridical Sufism” that emphasizes the importance of jurisprudence and critiques the excesses of certain Sufi practices become a common trope among the ‘*ulamā*’ for at least four centuries prior to Tāl. Under pressure from varying contenders from competing colonial and intra-Muslim forces, Tāl articulates an intervention to this debate in a pronounced and forceful way, indicating that the stakes for this debate have become heightened. Of course, there is a strong indication that these criticisms were leveled by Tāl to direct deeper political and scholarly dissatisfaction with the ‘*ulamā*’ of his time, whom he perhaps saw as embroiled in caste hierarchies, corruption, and a what he perceived to be an “abuse” of religious authority.

Of primary significance is his opinion on the issue of adhering to the authority of a single *madhhab*. Chapter 8 of the *Rimāḥ*, entitled “informing them that God did not oblige one to follow a specific school from the schools of the *mujtahidīn*”³⁵⁹ is the focal topic of this chapter. The chapter is directed against “those who are misled to believe that whoever goes against the ruling of one of

³⁵⁸ Ibid, 358.

³⁵⁹ ‘Umar Tāl. *Kitāb Rimāḥ Hizb al-Rahīm ‘Ala Nuḥūr Hizb al-Rajīm*, 69.

the four *imāms* disobey God and that this act is enough to cast him out of the entire *madhhab*.”³⁶⁰

Tāl’s criticism of the *madhāhib* is therefore not absolute, rather, indicates that it is directed against a trend of a class of ‘*ulamā*’ who upheld the view that one must follow a single *madhhab* and stick to it unquestioningly, lest they incur God’s wrath. Tāl decries this claim as erroneous. The issue of *taqlīd* is central to understanding his grievance against following a *madhhab*. Tāl criticizes trends within certain followers of legal schools, who follow an *imām*’s opinion even though “that ruling may be wrong in their own judgment.”³⁶¹ He does not cast blame on the *imāms* of the four legal schools, but rather on their followers who “take their word as infallible and akin to the word of God.”³⁶² Instead, Tāl advises believing men and women to hold fast to the “*sharī‘a Muḥammadiyyah*”, strictly follow and know the Qur’rān and *sunna* to the best of their abilities³⁶³ and exert themselves in the path of knowledge and at the feet of living ‘*ulamā*’ who embody the Muḥammadan reality, rather than “the books of dead men,” lest they “drown in a sea of ignorance and darkness.”³⁶⁴ “There is no one more ignorant than those who claim that soundness is circumscribed in the understanding of a singly one imam,”³⁶⁵ he adds.

According to Bernd Radtke, “the real reason behind Sufī criticism of the activities of the *madhāhib* has to do with attitudes and practices which can be designated under the general heading of *ṭarīqa muḥammadiyya*.”³⁶⁶ Tāl makes a clear link between the authority of the Prophet

³⁶⁰ Ibid, 69.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid, 77.

³⁶³ Ibid, 83.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, 86.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Radtke. Bernd, “Sufism in the 18th Century: An Attempt at a Provisional Reappraisal,” 339.

Muḥammad and the field of jurisprudence to reject the singular emphasis on the authority of legal schools:

Know that the *sharīʿa* that Prophet Muḥammad brought was without division among people [...] how can the *imāms* cause disunity among Muslims knowing that judgment belongs to God alone and that there is no path to finding his judgment except through the Book which he sent down and the *sunna* of the Prophet? ³⁶⁷

In the tenth chapter of the text entitled (see Appendix II) “The Saint for whom the door for of Truth has been opened is not tied to any particular doctrine among the legal doctrines of the independent jurists”, Tāl quotes Shaʿrānī (d.1565) in a parable comparing the gnostic and *muqallid* (the conformist), where the gnostic enters a house in broad day light and is able to see its contents, while the *muqallid* stands outside the house and listens to a group of people who merely relay to him the description of the interior of the house. Next, he remarks that if two gnostics enter the same house and debated its contents, they will definitely come to agreement on what they both see, whereas if two *muqallids* debate the contents of the house, they would not be able to do so with certainty, adding: “this is why two gnostics have never disagreed about their knowledge of God Exalted is He.”³⁶⁸

This position is not unique within the context of its period, nor is it surprising in mystical approaches to Islamic law. It is reminiscent of that of his contemporary Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Fāssi (d.1837), the great mystic who was dubbed “*Muḥyi al-Sunna*” (the reviver of the *Sunna*) and underwent self-exile from his native Fes to the Arabian Peninsula, bringing him in close contact to the exoteric community of Ibn-ʿAbdul Wahhāb (d.1792), despite their staunchly diverging positions on Sufism. Both Ibn Idris and Ibn-ʿAbdul Wahhāb converged on one key point, however, which was

³⁶⁷ Ibid, 67-68.

³⁶⁸ Ibid, 97.

the impetus for Ibn Idrīs to immigrate:³⁶⁹ their rejection of the *taqlīd* of one imam of the four Sunni legal schools and following a single school exclusively. But the length of Tāl’s argument, backed up by quotes from luminaries such as Imām Mālik (d.795), al-Qarāfī (d. 1285), Ibn ‘Arafa (d.1401), Ibn Juzayy (d.1357), al-Dasūqī (d.1296), al-Damīrī (d.1405) and many others, points to the lengthy effort to discredit so-called “exoteric” scholars and cast them into the camp of those “who break with the consensus approach” of past scholars in the Islamic intellectual tradition on this particular matter.

In the Chapter 8 of the *Rimāḥ*, Tāl names three types of students of knowledge: those who pursue the opinions and narrations of the *fuqahā’* without knowing the Qur’ān and the sunna, secondly, those who do focus on the Qur’ān and the sunna without consulting the ‘*ulamā’* and their opinions and opt for a return to consulting “rulings during the time of the Prophet only”³⁷⁰ (an obvious nod to Wahhabism), and lastly, those who he dubs people of “light and *ṭahqīq*, who, with the guidance of Gnostics, no door can ever be shut for them.”³⁷¹ It is through this framework that Ibn Idrīs’ and Ḥajj ‘Umar’s anti-*madhhabism* poses criticism towards the anti-*taqlīd* of ‘Abdul Wahāb, one of Salafism’s doyens.³⁷² Secondly and most importantly, in the case of Tāl, his stance against what he perceives to be the purely “exoteric” *taqlīd* of the *imāms* translates into a call to be more diligent about striving to attain *ma’rifā* (gnosis) through the aid of a living shaykh. For adherents of the Wahhabi movement, this cannot be possible because of their vehement stance against most forms of Sufism. *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ*, therefore, offers a differing understanding of Islamic thought in which

³⁶⁹ Consult Aḥmad ibn Idrīs, *The Letters of Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs* (London: Hurst & Company, 1993).

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Even though, contrary to conventional assumptions as circulated in secondary sources on Salafism, ‘Abdul Wahāb barely devotes any of his writings to an elaborate rejection of *taqlīd* in favor of *ijtihād* (scholarly interpretation of the Law).

legal and mystical epistemology are not mutually exclusive spheres. For Tāl, the goal of *taḥqīq*³⁷³ (verification) supersedes the exoteric *taqlīd* conformity of earthly ‘*ulamā*’: knowing God is the all-encompassing goal, which *de facto* subsumes the obtainment of superior legal knowledge via one’s living *shuyukh*, the embodiments of the *ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiya* (the Muḥammadan reality). In this sense, Tāl’s rhetoric gestures to the point that all Muslims must naturally adhere or conform to the authority of God and the Prophet, in effect making his project one of *taqlīd*, but a *taqlīd* of the Muḥammadan reality. After all, the linguistic meaning of the term *taqlīd*, of wearing, being clad with or putting on, closely describes the way in which Gnostics come to know this *ḥaqīqa* in Tāl’s overarching project. His exoteric “anti-*taqlīd*” project, therefore, can be seen in fact as a project of *taqlīd* of the Muḥammadan reality.

As previously mentioned, regarding Sufism as the arbiter of all knowledge is not a wholly new approach by the illustrious mystics of the past. One of Islam’s greatest Sufis, Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī, whom Tāl quotes heavily, echoes similarly skeptical of what he called “books of opinions,” meaning the works of *fiqh*. James Morris relates the following translation from the *Futuhāt*:

Most people’s intellects are veiled by their thoughts and fall short of perceiving this (reality), because of their lack of spiritual purification (*tajrīd*) [...] so whoever God grants its understanding will recognize it and distinguish it from the rest. For that is the True Knowledge.³⁷⁴

In the Introduction to *The Exoteric Ahmad Ibn Idrīs*, Radtke, O’Fahey and O’Kane cite al-Lamaṭī’s relation of the words of al-Dabbāgh in *al-Ibrīz*, which is also cited in the opening of Tāl’s tenth chapter, makes a similar point:

If all the legal schools were to disappear—because of direct contact with the Prophet—the

³⁷³ Khaled El-Rouyaheb suggests that the features of emphasis on *taḥqīq* doctrinally can be traced back to the 17th century. See Khaled El-Rouyaheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 235-256.

³⁷⁴ James Morris, Ibn ‘Arabī’s “Esotericism”: The Problem of Spiritual Authority, *Studia Islamica*, No. 71 (1990), pp.37-64, 41.

gnostic would be able to restore the whole of *sharīʿa* ... knowledge of this kind is far superior to that of an ordinary theologian and jurist. From the vantage point of the fanatic factionalism of the schools of jurisprudence, this obviously appears absurd, since the activity of the schools is based on fallible human understanding.³⁷⁵

For great Gnostics like Tāl and Ibn ʿArabī, knowledge, whether mystical or legal, can only be obtained directly from the perpetual, experiential knowledge of God and the Prophet rather than from the “books of dead men.” In the Tijānī methodology which Tāl expounds on this point in his chapter on the *fiqh* of the *tarīqa*, the complete *shaykh* who—by virtue of his lofty *maqām* (station) and closeness to the “living Prophet”—enables the *murīd* (Sufi follower) to follow acts governed by *sharīʿa* in a confirmed, assured way. The sphere of *fiqh* thus becomes a means to an end (*maʿrifa*), rather than an end in and of itself. In the *Rimāh*, it is evident that *fiqh* as a discipline and field of knowledge remains central but is subsumed under the holistic, superior authority of the Gnostics by virtue of their Prophetic inheritance.

While the aims of *sharīʿa* remain central to this pursuit, Tāl warns that the field of *fiqh*, when studied alone, can present a veil to the seeker of knowledge. In Chapter 4 of the *Rimāh*, partially entitled “regarding some of the veils which prevent people from recognizing the friends of God,” he names “contemporaneousness”³⁷⁶ as one of the veils and remarks: “no one is more inflicted with this veil than the *fuqahāʾ* (jurists) that remain stuck on the sciences of *furūʿ* (branches), which categorically is called “*fiqh*.” He also calls jurists *ahl ʿilm al-dhāhir* (the people of exoteric knowledge) and *ahl al-inkār* (the deniers) in multiple instances.

Prophetic “Open Source”

As previously quoted, in his essay on Neo-Sufism in the *New Cambridge History of Islam*,

³⁷⁵ Radtke, Bernd. *The Exoteric Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs: A Sufi's Critique of the Madhāhib and the Wāḥḥābīs : Four Arabic Texts with Translation and Commentary*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000, 18.

³⁷⁶ Denying a saint based on the fact that he/she could not possibly live in the same time as the denier.

Bruce Lawrence suggests that the single most important question that demarcates Sufi from non-Sufi Muslims is whether the Prophet Muhammad is alive or dead.³⁷⁷ Lawrence asserts that Sufis of all generations have held this view that the Prophet is living, yet, perhaps what distinguishes the nineteenth century is that it is time that witnessed a more explicit, and more openly public, awareness of the Prophet as the crucial, “living” link among Sufi-oriented intellectuals. This more public awareness naturally incited increased criticism from reform-minded anti-Sufi detractors. Yet the figure of the Prophet, in the work of Tāl and others, possesses a timeless omniscience. Intercession with the Prophet is certainly not a new idea, with origins of documenting this experience can be traced in the works of past mystics such as Ibn ‘Arabī, Suyūfī and others. Jonathan Brown briefly treats the question of *kashf* (unveiling) via visions as a means of attaining religious knowledge in his seminal work on *ḥadīth*.³⁷⁸

Tāl’s text is undergirded by the doctrinal belief that, the Prophet’s physical death in 632 C.E did not—at least for some of eighteenth-century mystics like Tījani—signify the end of a direct juridical access to legal knowledge, as the preceding chapter has sought to show. Zachary Wright describes the Tijānī epistemology and the centrality of the Prophet Muhammad’s accessibility as a continuous source of knowledge:

By the late eighteenth century Sufi *shaykhs* began to be seen, increasingly, as the living personification of the Prophet Muḥammad’s spiritual reality (*ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*), itself symbolizing true knowledge of God. The highest Sufi authorities maintained direct contact with the Prophet Muḥammad’s enduring bodily presence (*dhāt*), receiving both religious and worldly guidance.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ In Ed. Michael Cook, *The New Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 355
Bruce Lawrence, “Sufism and Neo-sufism.”

³⁷⁸ Jonathan Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, One World Publications, Oxford, 2009, 110.

³⁷⁹ Zachary Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: the Sufi Community of Ibrahim Niassé*. Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2015, 58.

It is due to figures like Tāl and Uthmān b. Fūdi (d. 1817) and others, that the feature of seeing the Prophet “*yaqadhatan lā manāma*”³⁸⁰ (in a waking state) became normative in eighteenth and early nineteenth century West African and Moroccan Sufism. After all, Prophetic access is the basis on which the Tijāniyyah was founded, and continues to be a source of ongoing, legal and mystical guidance beginning with its founder, Ahmad Tijānī, (d.1815) and subsequent leaders and followers of the *ṭarīqa* to this very day. Allegorically speaking, the *sunna*, for Tāl can therefore be seen as a perpetual “open source”; for some, open, in the sense that it is a perpetually open door to accessing prophetic knowledge.

Such claims have been met with controversy and are naturally an inflammatory point of contention among critics of Sufism and *ṭuruq*. Questions of accessibility, heresy, elitism and the theme of secrecy come to the fore when discussing the mystical experience of seeing the Prophet in a waking state, but the *Jawāhir*—the Tijāniyya’s seminal text—glosses over this experience matter-of-factly. Similar illuminations appear in the work of great mystics such as Dabbāgh and Ibn Idrīs. The *ṭarīqa* Tijāniyya is especially unique in the issue of Prophetic accessibility because it derives its exclusivity and central doctrine from the fact that Ahmad Tijānī is claimed to have received direct sanction to start the *ṭarīqa* from the Prophet himself.³⁸¹ Through that, Tijānī claimed the ranks of *qutb-al-aqtāb* (the pole of poles) and *khatm al-wilāya al-Muḥammadiyya* (the seal of Muḥammadan inheritance) which implies that no one would achieve the same rank after him. The centrality of the Prophet’s accessibility as central to Tāl’s construction of a doctrine in the *Rimāḥ* cannot be understated (see Chapter II of this dissertation).

Tāl cites Ahmad Zarrūq (d.1493) in his *Qawā'id*: “do not follow except the *ma'sūm* (the

³⁸⁰ *Jawāhir al-Ma'ani fī Fayd Sayyidi Ahmad Tijānī*, 96.

³⁸¹ *The Exoteric Ahmad Ibn Idrīs*, 66.

immaculate one) i.e., the Prophet.” Tāl devotes an entire section³⁸² on the issue of seeing the Prophet in a waking state. As previously argued in the former chapter, he heavily cites the works of sixteenth-century Egyptian scholars ‘Abdul Wahāb ash-Sha‘rānī and Jalāluddīn al-Suyūṭī’s (d.1505) who both emphasized the centrality of the Muḥammadan Path with its intensified devotion to the Prophet as the ultimate guide and shaykh, wrote against those who deny the possibility of witnessing the Prophet in a waking state, sought to revive understandings of the *sharī‘a* that were not bogged down by exotericism and egoism, and also wrote treatises challenging the authority of sultans and princes who are perceived to be oppressive and unjust.³⁸³

By emphasizing connection to the living Prophet, Tāl reconstitutes the hierarchy of authority in the disclosure of knowledge. While doing this, he does not insinuate a sense of secrecy to preserve these mystical disclosures, quite the contrary; he constructs a doctrine derived from them. He does so at a time when aphorisms such as “he who does not have a *shaykh*, the devil becomes his *shaykh*” and the practice of finding a *shaykh wāsil*; one who can help link wayfarers to God through a verified mystical chain, was being challenged, but still held traces of normativity. Tāl goes on to blame a person’s defunct free will and shortcomings as the primary hindrance for not being able to comprehend or believe such a claim throughout his text. The effects of the *Rimāḥ* on its readership, therefore, has a more tangible impact than the words of Dabbāgh or Ibn Idrīs; his text does not mince its words as an open invitation to take the *ṭarīqa* as a means of salvation and obtaining closeness to the Prophet. For mystics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and in the major Sufi texts

³⁸² The full title of Chapter 31 of the *Rimāḥ* is: “informing them that the friends of God see the Prophet may God bless him and grant him peace in a waking state, and that he may God bless him and grant him peace attends any assembly or place he wishes in body and soul and acts as he wishes and travels wherever he desires In all regions of the earth and in the Divine realm (*malakūt*) in the form in which he was before his death, without any change, but hidden from sight just as the angels are, despite their being alive corporeally; and [informing them that] if God wills that a servant should see [the Prophet] He lifts the veil from His servant and he sees the Prophet in his actual form.”³⁸²

³⁸³ For more on this theme, see previous chapter of this dissertation on the prominent presence of fifteenth and sixteenth century Egyptian scholars in the *Rimāḥ*.

mentioned in this chapter, none of the authors prescribes a *ṭarīqa* as a clearly outlined methodology as does the *Rimāh*.

Superior Knowledge

In a poem, Tāl cites the risks associated with the path of knowledge: vanity, or hesitance in acquiring knowledge, procreating, talking too much and loving the world.³⁸⁴ He warns of those who claim to spread *fiqh* but are not truly *fuqahā'* (knowledgeable),³⁸⁵ signaling towards an important insight into Tāl's methodology: the mystic, in the eyes of Tāl, possesses superior power over the exotericist in his or her ability to access the Prophet as a living guide and as a source of knowledge "regarding all questions to do with delivering legal judgments."³⁸⁶ I propose that in the mystic's view, the concept of *sunna* is not simply tied to normative practice and the dominant methodology of deriving laws from *ḥadīth*, but can instead be approached as an esoterically oriented epistemology.³⁸⁷ For Tijāni and his followers then, *sunna* signifies a rather different thing than it does for the likes of Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328) or Abdul Wahāb.³⁸⁸ This is epitomized by the consideration that, for the mystics, their approach to *sunna* possesses the power to verify and confirm ambiguous legal questions directly from "the source" himself, which transcends the limits of the physical world, and even has the ability to introduce new ones. This claim to a higher authority, however, did not escape

³⁸⁴ *Kitāb al-Rimāh*, 92

³⁸⁵ Ibid, 90.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Mouhamadou Cisse dubs this approach "juridico-mystique" in his PhD dissertation. See: Mouhamadou Alpha Cisse, "El Hadji Omar Foutiyou Tall, une Grande Figure de la Tijāniyya en Afrique Occidentale au XIXeme siècle: Pensée Juridico-mystique à travers 'Rimah'" (PhD Dissertation, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, 2011).

³⁸⁸ The consensus on the definition of "Sunna" emerged in the era of Imām Shāfi'i, who created the association between the Prophet's actions and speech with the science of Hadith as a source of the law. For more on the origins of Sunna, see the Introduction to Brown, Daniel W. *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

the criticism of various Muslim scholars throughout history. For example, the al-Azhar educated Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭār (d.1835) reproached Ibn Idrīs for claiming to maintain direct verbal contact with the Prophet.³⁸⁹ In addition, in his *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muhamadiyya wa-al sīra al-Aḥmadiyya*, the sixteenth-century Ottoman theologian al-Birkāwī (d.1573) explicitly criticized how certain Sufis in his time claimed direct contact with the Prophet.

Tāl, aware that the trope of direct contact with the Prophet is met with ambivalence among laity and scholars alike, attributes this to limitations in cognitive and spiritual willingness, accessibility and the “fallibility of human understanding.”³⁹⁰ He does not directly indicate that not all Muslims are able to acquire this state, let alone are required by law believe in its possibility. In their conclusive article “Neo-Sufism Reconsidered”, Radtke and O’Fahey elucidate this very point as a key source of conflict between jurists and mystics that arose in early Islam.³⁹¹ Juxtaposing Ibn Idrīs and Ibn Taymiyya, it is conferred that both would agree that knowledge is valid insofar as this knowledge comes from God; but “the fundamental difference between the two men is that for the latter, revelation is closed, for the former, it is not.”³⁹²

The Tijāniyya and the Mālikī School

Concerning the accessibility of the Prophet and asking him questions on legal matters and verifying the weak *ḥadīths*, there is no indication in the *Rimāḥ* that Tāl regarded this as a replacement for the historical evidence of traditional *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* sciences. Throughout the *Rimāḥ*, Tāl cites *ḥadīth* with their proper historical chains, and when he references the Prophet in a waking state, he

³⁸⁹ *The Exoteric Ahmad Ibn Idris*, 19.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

³⁹¹ O’Fahey, R. S., and Radtke, Bernd. "Neo-sufism Reconsidered." *Der Islam*: 52-87, 61.

³⁹² *Ibid*, 61.

only cites the visions of Ahmad Tijānī who in the *Jawāhir* in numerous places simply says “*qāla lī rasūl Allāh*” (“the Prophet of God told me...”). Today, one would be hard pressed to find the position of Tāl on the authority of *madhāhib* widespread among neo-traditionalist and Sufi practitioners, and most adherents of the Tijāniyya order and Muslims in West and North Africa follow the Mālikī school of law. It is possible to consider, however, that the Mālikī school may possess unique flexible features in that, as Zachary Wright notes, “it laid particular emphasis on learning in the presence of teachers rather than texts.”³⁹³ Sufism in West Africa, Wright asserts, “drew on the legacy of bodily mimesis and the scholarly-ascetic ideal in the Mālikī *fiqh* tradition, [it] also challenged the juristic tradition”³⁹⁴ Such a flexibility in interpreting the legal canon, I argue, stems from the Tijāniyya’s emphasis on undergoing experiential *ma‘rifa* before all else. Similar stances can be found in more contemporary manifestations of Tijānī practice, even among its professedly Maliki adherents.³⁹⁵

The renowned Ibrahim Niasse (d.1975), who is considered one of the most important Tijānī figures of the 20th century was known to have said: “we are Mālikīs but we are not *mamālīk* (slaves) of Imām Mālik.”³⁹⁶ According to Wright, Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse’s position on the *madhāhib* is that the strict following one of the four *imāms* blindly can shield someone from benefitting from a living *shaykh*, since most people cannot master all four legal schools and their rulings (a view shared by Tāl and Sha‘rānī).³⁹⁷

³⁹³ *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*, 34.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 39.

³⁹⁵ Though Ahmad al-Tijani himself was Mālikī, he also went against certain Mālikī practices in preference of a those perceived to be closer to the Sunna.

³⁹⁶ Well-known oral tradition of Shaykh Ibrāhim Niasse.

³⁹⁷ *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*, 224.

The issue of *qabd* (folding one's arms to the chest in prayer) is one such vital example. Zachary Wright relates the fascinating timeline of how Ibrāhīm Niāsse broke the custom of praying as most Mālikīs do, in *sadl* (with ones hands folded against the sides) due to seeing a vision in which the Prophet instructed him to pray in *qabd* instead of *sadl*.³⁹⁸ It bears to mention that *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ* of 'Umar Tāl is one of the three most referenced sources in Ibrāhīm Niāsse's own magnum opus, *Kāshif al-Ilbās*, which was written in 1931.³⁹⁹ Albrecht Hofheinz observed that "the Niyāsiyya's adoption of *qabd*" was instated to "mark themselves from the parent Tijāniyya and Nigerian Qādirīs."⁴⁰⁰ Even a cursory reading of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niāsse's belief system and practice will prove this claim baseless: his move to performing *qabd* in his prayer and among his followers had nothing to do with strategic aims, rather, it is one of modernity's starkest examples of a communal affirmation of *ṭahqīq* over *ṭaqlīd*. Such an emphasis on verification above all is not unique among West African scholars, and may be traced back to Aḥmad Bābā, who, according to Wright "criticized the Moroccan scholars' fanatical attachment to the Mālikī school."⁴⁰¹

Conclusion

In the *Principles of Sufism* of Aḥmad Zarruq, he writes: "he who maintains that 'a Sufi has no legal school' is wrong, except in the sense that the Sufi chooses from each school what is best as a proof, a goal, a precaution, or something else, which will lead him to a spiritual state; otherwise, Junayd was a Thawrī, al-Shiblī a Mālikī, al-Jurayrī a Ḥanafī and Muḥāsibī a Shāfi'ī, and these men

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Zachary Wright, "The Kāshif al-Ilbās of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse: Analysis of the Text." *Islamic Africa* 1, no. 1 (2010): 109-23, 115.

⁴⁰⁰ Albrecht Hofheinz, "Transcending the Madhhab-in Practice: The Case of the Sudanese Shaykh Muḥammad Majdhūb (1795/6-1831)," *Islamic Law and Society* 10, no. 2 (2003): 240, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3399253>.

⁴⁰¹ Wright, *Realizing Islam*, 2020, 89.

are leaders and pillars of the path.”⁴⁰² Tāl’s views on *fiqh* in the *Rimāḥ* align with this statement. “Forgoing all the legal schools is what is forbidden. But leaving the opinions of some of them is alright [...] for all the schools of the *ummah* are valid paths for the believers and not only one of them.”⁴⁰³ A later Tijāni text, *Bughyāt al-mustafīd lī sharḥ munyāt al-murīd* by Muḥammad al-‘Arabī b. al-Sā’ih (d.1892) corroborates this point, citing an oral narration by Ghazālī (d.1111) who, “after tasting *taṣawwuf* said: “we wasted our life in falsehood,” i.e. in the study among *ahl al-jadal* (the people of disputation) [...] but the truth is, Ghazālī said this during a state of gnostic drunkenness because the study of *fiqh* is not falsehood, rather, it is the principal of the way, and it is incumbent upon the people of the way for all their actions and stillness to be based on the Qur’ān and the *sunna*, and that cannot be known except by sailing in the sciences of *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* [...] so the goal of the Sufi, then, is to have his actions backed up by his or her own knowledge (*‘ālimun bī ‘ilmihī*), no more, no less.”⁴⁰⁴

Clearly, Tāl’s scathing critique of the *fuqahā’* is motivated by political criticism of scholars in his time, but his reproachment is guided by his understanding of what he perceived to be singularly “exoteric” knowledge-seeking prevalent in his time. The *Rimāḥ*’s forceful disparagement of exoteric *taqlīd* takes previous debates on Sufism and Islamic law to another level of analysis, previously ignored in studies on Islamic modernism and reform emerging from nineteenth century West Africa. It is a critique of exoteric *taqlīd*, but its ultimate aim is experiencing *ṭahqīq* within the Muḥammadan reality. Though the critique of the authority of the legal schools has today been normatively paired with Salafi ideology, Tāl’s text and the many sagely interlocutors he cites therein complicates this

⁴⁰² Ahmad Zarruq, *Qawā'id at-Taṣawwuf, Principles of Sufism: an Annotated Translation with Introduction*, trans. Zaineb Istrabadi, PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1987, 84.

⁴⁰³ *Kitab al-Rimāḥ*, 74.

⁴⁰⁴ Muḥammad al-‘Arabī b. al-Sā’ih, *Bughyāt al-Mustafīd li Sharḥ Munyāt al-Murīd*, al-Ma’arif al-Jadida, Rabat, 2017, 61.

narrative: Sufi ‘*ulamā*’ also questioned the prevalence of *taqlīd*, but to them, “a return to the Qur’ān and sunna only” meant something rather different to them from the likes Abdul Wahāb and his adherents. For Sufis like Tāl, “Qur’ān and *Sunna*” is rather an invitation for re-centering the authority of Gnosticism, and the experiential *dhawq* (taste) of knowing God as the highest goal for knowledge-seeking. It regards the attainment of knowledge not as a path of prestige or worldly gain, but a tenacious path of sincerity, humility and acting upon what one knows to be true through experience, not via intellectualism alone.

Given Tāl’s commitment to Mālikism, however, his reproach of *taqlīd* ultimately served theoretical, not practical, aims. His approach to *tahqīq* undergirds the general edict, that for the Tijāniyya, the centrality of the Prophet is not simply a methodology but a complete *weltanschauung*. With the experiential knowledge of God at its epicenter, the *Rimāḥ* points to a mystically invigorated epistemology for approaching *sharī‘a*. For Tāl, the *sharī‘a* is known through following a living shaykh in possession of direct access to the Prophet; who for Tijānīs is believed to be the ongoing, living embodiment of the sunna itself.

Perhaps the views of Ibn Idrīs and Tāl on the link between Sufism and jurisprudence offer a potential point of dialogue with adherents of the Salafī movement today. Proponents of “traditional Islam” today, who vehemently champion the validity of Sufism and *taqlīd* as their signifying marker can no longer fully reject those they deem as “bad” Salafis due to their rejection of the *madhāhib*, (many of whom practice manifestations of esotericism, or Sufism with a small “s”, and many of whom are in actuality proponents of *taqlīd* of the school of Imām ibn Ḥanbal.)⁴⁰⁵ At the very least, the *Rimāḥ* invites purveyors of intellectual history to complicate the narrative of modern Islamic

⁴⁰⁵ See the work of late contemporary Syrian scholar who was known for his polemical writings against those who reject the following of a *madhab*: Al-Būti, Mohammad Sa‘id Ramadān. *Al-Lā Madhabiyya: Akhṭar Bida‘a Tuhaddid Al-Shari‘ah Al-Islāmiyya*, Dār Al-Farābi, Damascus, Syria. 1969.

reform, and challenges us not accept the reductive classifiers and wholesale descriptors in the contentions between Sufism and Salafism. At most, the *Rimāḥ* invites readers to re-center this text into its rightful place as an important contribution to nineteenth century Islamic intellectual and legal history.

Chapter V: Tāl's Doctrine of Sober Mysticism: On Giving Less Credence to Dreams and Visions

You and all the beloveds do not need to see me. The ones that need
to see me are those who are not among the beloveds.⁴⁰⁶
Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī in *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ*

Introduction

Any student of early Sufism invariably come to learn about the “*fanā*” vs. “*baqā*” typology or the 'sober' school of Baghdād vs. the 'intoxicated' school of Khurāsān. Describing this pedagogical exercise, Jawid Mojaddedi writes: “virtually every introductory work on Sufism refers to drunkenness and sobriety as a major typology, representing distinct approaches or ways of being a Sufi.”⁴⁰⁷ Specifically with al-Bisṭāmī (d.874) representing the “drunken” school and al-Junayd (d.910) as the doyen of “sober” mysticism.⁴⁰⁸ The Ḥallājīan turn gave rise to a more concerted effort to condemn ecstatic utterances in favor of a “efforts to defend the orthodoxy of Sufi practice” between the 9th and 11th centuries.⁴⁰⁹

With the advent of Ghazālī, one of the key figures in “orthodox” Sufism,⁴¹⁰ and in studies on later Sufi movements, this categorization wanes in favor of studies on scholarly or organized Sufism,

⁴⁰⁶ *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ*, “On the Merits of Attaching Oneself to the Shaykh”, 516.

⁴⁰⁷ Jawid A. Mojaddedi, “Getting Drunk with Abū Yazīd or Staying Sober with Junayd: The Creation of a Popular Typology of Sufism,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 66, no. 1 (2003): 1, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4145692>.

⁴⁰⁸ These categories have not been formulated in later Western scholarly studies, rather, they exist in the writings of early Sufis themselves such as Sarrāj’s *Kashf al-luma’ fī al-tasawwuf*, who uses words such as “*sukūn*” and “*ḥudūr*” vs “*ghaybā*” or “*ghashyā*” to describe so-called states of sobriety or drunkenness.

⁴⁰⁹ Joseph Hill, “Sufism Between Past and Modernity,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, ed. Mark Woodward and Ronald Lukens-Bull (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 8, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73653-2_9-1.

⁴¹⁰ See: Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination*, Islamic Civilization & Muslim Networks (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

i.e., *ṭuruq*. “Drunkenness” becomes a relic of a bygone past of harsh wool-wearing renunciants, or, at most, is relegated to the study of Sufi poetry, as “sobriety” quickly takes form as the normative approach, coated in various categorizations like “orthodoxy” as they respond to [Western] modernity or coloniality. On the other hand, charges of Sufism as “*bid‘a*” (innovation) and “unorthodox” become increasingly associated with both Muslim and non-Muslim Orientalists’ commentaries on modernity and Sufism; it was all too common to describe “popular practices associated with Sufism” to be “lumped together under the rubric of tradition,” and thus be “made responsible for ‘the decline of Islam’ and treated as an impediment to its progress.”⁴¹¹

As it relates to studies on the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, the closest alternative to the sober-drunken typology would be the orthodox-syncretic typology, a debate which is particularly prominent in South Asian Sufi studies,⁴¹² or the “juridical-Sufi” classification in North Africa, particularly as it is led by Aḥmad Zarrūq (d.1493).⁴¹³ Zarrūq is credited with being a key interlocutor in the debate towards the balance between *tarīqa* and *sharī‘a*. Due to his *Qawā‘id*, which is frequently cited in the *Rimāḥ*, Zarrūq arguably takes on the mantle of a so-called juridical Sufism, one that emphasizes the central importance of *fiqh* to one’s religious experience and critiques the “excesses” of certain Sufi practices. From the 18th century onwards, we begin to witness networks of ‘*ulamā*’ from Mecca to Bali and from Morocco to India that would continue to debate central issues regarding law and mysticism, particularly as a response to so-called “unorthodox excesses”

⁴¹¹ Itzhak Weismann, “Genealogies of Fundamentalism: Salafi Discourse in Nineteenth-Century Baghdad,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 2 (August 2009): 276, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530190903007301>.

⁴¹² See: A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam*, South Asia across the Disciplines (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁴¹³ See: Scott Alan Kugle, *Rebel between Spirit and Law: Ahmad Zarruq, Sainthood, and Authority in Islam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

by Sufīs, such as seeking blessings and intercession at shrine visitations⁴¹⁴ or staying in a state of ecstatic *fanā*’ without the help of a shaykh to guide one back to a state of *baqā*’.

The *Rimāḥ* is rife with such critiques, which are indeed often undergird by primarily legal concerns. I suggest, however, that *Kitāb al-Rimāḥ* brings back the debate on sobriety to the fore in the nineteenth century, signifying that “drunkenness” or “excess” never ceased to be perceived as a phenomenon of concern by Muslim scholars. This is evident by the texts he cites to back up and wave together his claims in his chapters that centralize the theme of sobriety; from the works of Ibn Aṭā’illah, to Sha‘rānī to al-Dabbāgh. The *Rimāḥ* is less interested in combatting popular mysticism or negative “innovations” in Sufism and is rather more concerned about penning a complete compendium for mysticism in the nineteenth century. It represents an anti-typological approach in Sufī studies: one that holds the tension between “sobriety” and “drunkenness,” “mysticism” and “orthodoxy” in a liminal space of non-duality.

I show this by exploring the themes of anti-drunkenness in the *Rimāḥ*, and suggest that Tāl does not operate within a strict dichotomy of Sufism vs. orthodoxy, or even a “juridico-mystique” approach.⁴¹⁵ Rather, Tāl’s critiques stem from a holistic approach to Islamic knowledge: one that operates from the assumption that the process of “knowing” *shar‘iā* is an inherently mystical, experiential exercise based on a living link with a Prophetic inheritor. He warns of dreams, visions and miracles, with their many different enticing symbols and meanings, as possibly harmful distractions for wayfarers along their journey, which according to Tāl, must be set upon one destination alone: God.

Due to secular subjectivity in Western and modern Muslim academic discourse, the category

⁴¹⁴ Acts which Tāl would not object to, but they are listed here as common charges against Sufīs.

⁴¹⁵ Cisse, “El Hadji Omar Foutiyou Tall, une Grande Figure de la Tijaniyya en Afrique Occidentale au XIXeme siècle: Pensée Juridico-mystique à travers ‘Rimah.’”

of “mysticism” became loaded with subjective assumptions. As a methodology, it is not normally paired with efforts of “serious” knowledge-attainment or as a viable path to ascertaining legal questions. Through my reading of his text, however, Tāl’s at once mystical and “sober” approach does not negate scholastic rigor, nor does it discourage erudition in studying *uṣūl*, *muṭūn*, or *fiqh* manuals. Rather, his work reiterates that without the ability to verify one’s knowledge base via *taḥqīq*, then the endeavoring will invariably fall short or be rendered incomplete. The problem lies then, according to Tāl, in unintentionally making a “god” or an idol out of mystical wayfaring or the discipline of *fiqh*; human sciences which are in themselves only constructs or methodologies and are therefore not God.

Loosely relying on Hunwick’s translations for the headings of the *Rimāḥ*,⁴¹⁶ I base this dissertation’s final chapter on an analytical study of four chapters in the *Rimāḥ* as they relate to critiques of “excess” and calls for “sobriety.” I name the chapters for brevity as I continue to refer to them:

- 1) Chapter 4 “On veils”: An explanation of some of the veils which prevent people from recognizing God’s Friends (the *awliyā*) so that the wise one may be aware of them and hence pierce them [the veils] all attain to knowledge of the Friends of God and through knowledge of them commute with them, and through communion with them, attain to God, for He is the ultimate goal.
- 2) Chapter 5 “On asceticism”: Informing them that the asceticism of the Perfected Ones (*al-kummāl*) does not consist of being detached from the world but rather of detaching the heart. And the perfection of this state is only achieved by them through their lack of attachment to what they possess and have under their control with nothing coming between them and it. And informing them that opting for asceticism combined with rejection of worldly goods may be due merely to loss [of worldly goods] or to weakness or inability to obtain them, and that one of the stipulations for him who calls [people] to God Most High is that he be not completely cut off from the [goods of] this world; and informing them that he who has no means of support and who is supported by other people is to be classified with women and is devoid of manliness.

⁴¹⁶ Hunwick, John, “An Introduction to the Tijani Path: Being an Annotated Translation of the Chapter Headings of the Kitab al-Rimah of al-Hajj Umar.” I take license in changing some word choices in the translation.

- 3) Chapter 20 “on preoccupation with *kushūfāt*”: Warning them against striving for materialized unveilings (*kushūfāt kawniyya*) and visible miracles (*karamāt ‘iyāniyya*) and informing them that this path of ours is a path of thankfulness and love and its followers do not occupy themselves with longing for anything that distracts them from God and they do not concern themselves with materialist disclosures. Because they are beloved ones, only rarely do such things befall them. Indeed, to the beloved among them such things do not occur lest they become dependent upon them and the devil find a way to mislead them and send them astray by showing them such falsehoods that would be a means of enticing them, as happens to many who have recourse to them, so they go astray and lead others astray and they perish and cause others to perish – may God preserve us from perdition! Then, when God wishes out of His bounty to give them illumination (*fath*)⁴¹⁷, He opens for a particular person without his [or her] knowing it, by which he [or she] attains success in both abodes. May God make us among them by His grace. Amīn.
- 4) Chapter 21 “on preoccupation with visions”: Warning them against being preoccupied with visionary phenomena (*al-waqā’i*) and being addicted to them and longing for their occurrence and informing them that the aspirant who neither sees nor is seen in a visionary state is no less in rank than the one who sees. Rather, he [or she] is superior.

Although themes of “sober Sufism” are interlaced throughout the *Rimāḥ*, I focus on these four chapters that most typify Tāl’s approach to responsible wayfaring. At initial glance, these chapter headings might seem contradictory in a text whose central theme and basis of its doctrine is the viability of seeing and conversing with the Prophet Muhammad in a waking state. The theme of giving less credence to dreams may also seem at odds with the mystical visions mentioned throughout this dissertation, wherein Tāl lists the various dreams he has had or those of prophets, sages from bygone eras, his companions or family members.

Indeed, even a cursory reading of the *Rimāḥ* will show that it is filled with “tall tales” about sages who possess the ability to hear the language of planets and stars, chatting with angels, stones that talk, trees that weep, animals doing *dhikr*, and the like.⁴¹⁸ It is a text that discusses centrally the *diwān al-awliyā’*, where it is described that prophets, companions, saints and sages—both dead and

⁴¹⁷ Hunwick translates this as “enlighten” which I find not to be an accurate translation of the word “*fath*.”

⁴¹⁸ See particularly Chapter 24 of the *Rimāḥ*, “*fi bayan fadl al-dhikr muṭlaqān*” that focuses on ecological themes of nature being in perpetual *dhikr*.

alive—gather to meet in the cave of Ḥirā’. This is further exacerbated by the glaring fact that there is nothing quite so “sober” about the numerous *karāmas* attributed to Tāl, of changing destinies with a litany or defeating an enemy with a stare. So how can we square Tāl’s calls for sobriety when his text and life are unapologetically so otherworldly, full of ineffable experiences, backed by visions as “proofs” and waking meetings with dead people as the “norm”?

I suggest that Tāl’s methodology is one of liminality: one that comfortably “sees” the unseen but cautions against making a “god” of it. Further, his approach stresses that it is incumbent upon a *sālik*, especially a novice one, not to get too caught up in “desiring mystical unveilings and visible miracles” as the truthful aspirant must “seek al-Ḥaqq alone” lest this quest becomes blemished by “mixing it with passions of the lower self (the *nafs*).” Therefore, there is no apparent contradiction between Tāl’s numerous references to dreams and visions as veritable proofs for worldly affairs, while at the same time, he cautions *murīds* against relying on visions or miracles as being absolute truths, especially if they are not yet firmly rooted in *ma’rifā*.

“On the Veils that Prevent People from Recognizing God’s Friends”

In Chapter 4 of the *Rimāḥ*, “An explanation of some of the veils which prevent people from recognizing God’s Friends (the *awliyā*)”, Tāl lists six types of *ḥujub* (veils) that can prevent one from knowing a person’s true standing before God. Here, the reader is provided with Tāl’s rhetoric of saintly stereotyping: an anti-bias approach to imagining sainthood and the *awliyā*. Referring constantly to the preconceived “*ṣūra*” (image) of a *walī*, Tāl’s sophisticated approach invites readers and wayfarers to look beneath the external surface and interrogate their base assumptions about people around them. For him, a *walī* is not necessarily going to be an impoverished, disheveled man with a big beard fasting in silence atop a solitary mountain,⁴¹⁹ but rather, it could be anyone at all; a

⁴¹⁹ The fifth veil Tāl cites is that of assuming that a *walī* will be in a solitary desert or arid plain.

view that requires one to be assiduous in the filtration of external predisposition and questioning one's immediate prejudices. Tāl's criterion for recognizing saints is intimately tied with his concept of *zuhd* (asceticism) as bearing no relevance to one's possession of material wealth, status or worldly markers of success. This will be further explored following this section at more length.

The first veil that Tāl mentions is the veil of likeness, "*al-mumāthala*", which he cites as the "most severe veil that prevents the recognition of *awliyā*"⁴²⁰ as it is the same veil that prevented people from recognizing the prophets. Citing the Qur'anic verses, "you are only mortals like us. You wish to bar us from that which our fathers worshipped. Give us some clear proof"⁴²¹ and "how is it that this Messenger eats food and walks about the markets? Why has no angel been sent down with him to warn us?"⁴²² Tāl states that only Divine favor can lift these veils for someone to recognize a true *walī* if He chooses to "eclipse for you his humanity and make you witness his essence (*khuṣūṣiyya*)."⁴²³

Second, he cites the veil of contemporaneousness (*al-mu'āṣara*), because "most of those who are contemporary to a *walī* will deny the *awliyā*' of their time due to two deficiencies: the hatred that one in their time should outrank them in stature or preference" or "containing the grace of God to a specific time or place or thing."⁴²⁴ Citing Sha'rānī's *Tabaqāt*, he highlights how the group most infected with this malady are "the *fuqahā*' who have remained frozen in the study of *furū*' or what is technically called *fiqh*."⁴²⁵ On this, he cites ibn 'Aṭā'illah's *Laṭa'if al-minan*, in which he shares the

⁴²⁰ *Rimāh*, 326.

⁴²¹ Qur'ān, 14:10.

⁴²² Qur'ān, 25:7

⁴²³ *Rimāh*, 326.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

view that is it the jurists that have been afflicted most with being left behind on recognizing the ‘*awliyā*’, in fact they, “the people of ‘*ilm al-dhāhir*’” would say “yes, *awliyā*’ do exist, but where are they?” and whenever any name is mentioned to them they would object, “bereft of the light of conviction.” “So beware of these people” he warns, and “flee from them just as you would flee from a lion.”⁴²⁶

Further, Tāl cites Zarrūq who is of the opinion that evaluating people squarely relative to their time periods and places is a *jāhili* exercise. Instead, he cautions, one must see the grace of God a being expansive instead of being tied to a single place or time. Citing the primary text of the Tijāniyya, the *Jawāhir al-ma’ānī*, he continues: “whomsoever turns his back on the people of his time, relying only on the words of predeceasing *awliyā*’ and the dead, is sealed with seal of deprivation”⁴²⁷ just as those who denied the prophets of their time in favor of bygone prophets. Of particular interest is Tāl’s own wording on the quandary of possessing a preconceived image of a *walī* in the reader’s imagination: “if they read a book about the *karāmas* of the friends of God, he imagines the *walī* to be a certain way according to the descriptions in the book. Comparing this image to the *awliyā*’ of his time, he will cast doubt on all of them.”⁴²⁸ Therein lies insights into Tāl’s advanced conception of *taṣwīr* (representation) or stereotyping, which he describes to be a limit of human perception, almost two-hundred years before the term gains steam in Western academic critical theory.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ *Rimāḥ*, 327.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

Relatedly, the third veil Tāl cites is that of having the expectation of God-like infallibility from a *walī*: “*thannahum an al-walī mawṣūf bī waṣf min awṣaf al-rubūbiyya*.”⁴²⁹ On this, Tāl describes how some people think that a *walī* possesses a *carte blanche* to do anything he wishes, who has no inability, and has the characteristic of ‘*iṣma* just as prophets do. He writes, “if they see a *walī* who asked God for something but did not receive it, or if they see that he has an impious son, or that his wife lacks *taqwā*, they will say: ‘surely he is not a *walī*’, for if he were one, then God would have answered his prayers and fixed the affairs of his household.”⁴³⁰ On the veil of expecting infallibility, Tāl cites the *Ibrīz* in which al-Lamaṭī relays his teacher al-Dabbāgh saying: “those who wrote books about the *karāmāt al-awliyā*’—though they have benefited people by informing them more about the *awliyā*’—they also caused a great harm [upon them] because by mentioning miracles only, the reader will be misled to think [...] that the *walī* can do no wrong [...] then a major ignorance will befall him, for ascribing to the *walī* Divine characteristics.”⁴³¹ Tāl ends this section by saying that one need to look no further than the dynamic life of the Prophet Muhammad to be able to identify a *walī*, for it was filled with sorrow and tragedy, and ordinariness in which the Prophet ate, slept and drank like everybody else. Tāl elaborates how people failed him and how he did not always come out victorious in many worldly affairs, such as his crushing defeats at battles like al-Rajī’ or what happened in Hudaybiyya, despite what Prophet Muhammad knew in terms of “Divine secrets.” Tāl writes that the *sīra* should suffice in curbing one’s exaggerated expectations of the friends of God, and not to place value judgments on their exoteric appearances, for their apparent shortcomings are all part of the fleeting human condition.

⁴²⁹ *Rimāh*, 328

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

The fourth veil that Tāl cites is that of poverty or its opposite, having material wealth and worldly might; the sixth veil listed in the chapter. Tāl describes how some people fault a *walī* for not having enough money to give an abundance of alms and therefore assume he is a miser, thereby rendering it impossible for him or her to be a *walī*. In the same vein, some people assume that if someone has plenty of material wealth, then they could not possibly be a *walī*, for a *walī* is someone who shuns worldly gains and must not be rich. Both approaches are invalid according to Tāl, as they are still based on seeing the friends of God through material, external signifiers. He cites a story of a man in Algeria who travels to Fes after hearing a *walī* endowed with a great many miracles there. When he arrives, he inquires about him and is shown to a man of great wealth and might, which leaves him in disbelief that a *walī* should possess such extravagance. Thinking that he is being mocked or ridiculed, he takes his leave disappointed not to find the *walī* he was seeking live up to the image in his mind.⁴³²

The fifth veil, according to Tāl is the assumption that the friends of God are “only to be found in deserts and abandoned plains” and that they “do not mix with people.”⁴³³ He further observes the veil of how some people recognize that there can be *awliyā’* in their midst but think that those who live in caves or arid desert terrains are “better.” On this, he cites Sha‘rānī in his *Laṭā’if al-minan* who decries the paradox of humans favoring a man if he dwells in a cave or an arid plain, and rejecting someone who is of similar dress and dwelling, even though such a person is more likely to know their problems and carry their grievances. He likens the former to a zebra (*waḥsh*) who dazzles people with his stripes and the latter to the donkey, who carries the weight of their problems

⁴³² *Rimāḥ*, 331.

⁴³³ *Rimāḥ*, 329.

unassumingly.⁴³⁴ To capture the extent of this veil, he relays a long narrative about a castaway man on an island relayed to al-Lamaṭī by al-Dabbāgh in the Ibrīz, in which he narrates:

We went to an island off the coast of Salā, and the island was about a mile long with two sources of drinking water. We found a man there who worshipped God alone for 40 years, and houses carved from stone. [...] We asked him for how long he was lived there, he said 40 years. We told him he looked about that age, and when he arrived there, he said he arrived at 5 years of age with his father, whom he buried there when he died when he was 25 years of age. [...] He spoke Arabic but his tongue was heavy for seldom speaking to any humans. We asked him about faith, and he said he believed in God. [...] We asked him about the Messenger God, and he said he knew him. We asked him about Abū Bakr, and he knew him as he knew about Fāṭimā bint Muḥammad. We asked him about her son, Ḥusayn, but he did not know of him. We asked him about the month of Ramaḍān, but he did not know about it. He mentioned that he prayed 30 days a year, but they were scattered throughout the year. So we informed him about the obligation of fasting the month of Ramaḍān and when we asked him what he memorized from the Qur’ān and he only knew “*al-ḥamdu lillah rab al-‘ālamīn*” and “*al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*” and “*mālik yawm ad-dīn*” [...] we stayed with him for several hours and taught him what we could from the religion of Islam, then we said our goodbyes, and when he saw us walk on water with our feet without sinking, he sought refuge in God from us and thought that we were devils.⁴³⁵

The veracity of such a tale is unverified, as it could be relayed for rhetorical effect to drive a view that Tāl and al-Dabbāgh share: just because someone lives in extreme asceticism or in solitude does not mean they are a *walī* or have a firm grasp on even the basics of *sharī‘a*. Further, the casual turn in narrative regarding al-Dabbāgh and his companions walking away on water is meant to convey a certain ease and nonchalance in their lived practice of mysticism. I attribute this to the liminal space of non-duality in Tāl’s approach to mysticism: rather than rejecting *karāmas* in a wholesale fashion, it relegates them to a place of less central importance.

Tāl continues by citing al-Lamaṭī that the above story highlights three important lessons, the most important of which being: “the blessing of being able to mix with the believers,” for it is through

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ *Rimāh*, 330.

this that people can learn the basics of their religion and the story of the Prophet's life.⁴³⁶ Lamaṭī relays that he told his teacher al-Dabbāgh that his father had done this man a great disservice by cutting him off from the Muslim community, who, even if they were sinners ('*uṣā*'), even their cursory knowledge of the *dīn* cannot be underestimated; citing 'Abdul Qādir al-Jīlānī who says, "even looking at a believer's face increases one in *imān*."⁴³⁷ Second, Tāl continues that the castaway story shows how God's blessings, from clothing, drink, food and sleep are bounties which this ascetic was not endowed with. If he dwelled with Muslims, then they would have shared such bounties with him too, says Tāl. Thirdly, Tāl states that, "most people are misled in their impressions of these castaways in their deserts and *khalwās* (solitary retreats), thinking they possess perfection, and that the rank they achieve can never be achieved by the friends of God who are involved in the lives of people"; an idea that is sorely contrasted with—and triumphed by—the image of the urban dwelling *awliyā'* who casually walk away from the island on the surface of the sea.

On Asceticism and Manhood

Chapter 5 of the *Rimāḥ*, is briefly entitled: "Informing them that the asceticism of the Perfected Ones (*al-kummal*) does not consist of being detached from the world but rather of detaching the heart."⁴³⁸ In this chapter, we get a clearly articulated idea of Tāl's approach to accruing material wealth and worldly might, possession of which are seemingly at odds with the lifestyle of a mystic. Tāl's emphasis here is one of "lack of attachment" and that what matters is the ability to control the significance (or lack thereof) of wealth in one's heart, not the absence of wealth altogether. In fact, he faults mystics for *not* having a trade or a means to generate an income, and "informs them that

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ *Rimāḥ*, 333.

opting for asceticism combined with rejection of worldly goods may be due merely to loss [of worldly goods] or to weakness or inability to obtain them,” and that it is not necessarily a mark of honor to be poor.⁴³⁹ He reminds “them,” in fact, “that one of the stipulations for him who calls [people] to God,” should not be “completely cut off from the [goods of] this world.”⁴⁴⁰

Of particular interest is the gendered language in which Tāl shames those who have no means of financial support: “who is supported by other people is to be classified with women and is devoid of manliness” he charges, “even if he has a big beard, and a *subḥa* (prayer beads), [sits on] a prayer rug on a platform in tattered clothes and enjoys the good graces of rulers.” Further deploying rhetoric of image and imagery, Tāl’s conception of manliness is tied to being have gainful sustenance, which, he stipulates, is a responsibility that does not fall on the shoulders of women. Using the “*qawāma*” verse in the Qur’ān (An-Nisā’: 34) to state his case, Tāl’s lesson on asceticism is clearly directed at men, and particularly the category of people whom he calls, “the worshippers and the students of knowledge” (*al-muta‘abiddīn wā ṭalabat al-‘ilm*).⁴⁴¹

Does this imply that Tāl considers the charge of womanhood to be an insult, or does not think of women as worthy mystics? It is more probable, that relative to his social setting and cultural references, he has seen more men than women in visible positions of claiming shaykhdom by “abusing” the edict of asceticism. Women are not necessarily meant to be denigrated in this charge, because they are simply not seen as implicated in the accusation of misusing the trappings of asceticism to gain notoriety as authoritative saintly figures. It is more likely that Tāl saw women as

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ *Rimāh*, 335.

too preoccupied with their own (more private) wayfaring, knowledge-seeking and domestic duties, that the affair of their hearts' attachments were not of primary concern for him.

Due to the social and cultural backdrop in which Tāl existed, it is likely that he witnessed what he perceived to be “abuses” of asceticism by certain male Sufis; a grievance shared by the *Rimāh*'s most cited sage, Sha'rānī, who also vigorously opposed unemployment for Sufis, as he himself was a gainfully employed artisan.⁴⁴² He advises the *fuqahā*' also to learn a trade so that they do not have to work hard and at the end of the day, eat from the petty alms that people give them and states that this is something he instilled in his own children. By way of crafts, Tāl recommends “even lowly ones” such as performing *hijāma* (cupping) for a fee would free the scholar from having to beg from people.⁴⁴³ It is unclear whether Tāl himself had a specific craft in which he made a living from, other than his teaching.

Tāl's denigration of material asceticism is motivated by criticizing those who shame the poor for working hard (*takassub*) in trade or farming, citing the saying of the companion Ḥudhayfā ibn al-Yamān (d.656) who said: “the best among you are those who do not turn away from their *dunyā* for their *ākhirā*, nor turn away from their *ākhirā* for their *dunyā*.”⁴⁴⁴ Tāl describes the world as a “beast of burden” (*maṭiyya*) which one must ride to the next destination (the *ākhirā*), for through it “one achieves the good, and avoids evil,” recalling the famous *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet favors the one who feeds his family and his livestock as being better than the pious worshipper to the one who spends all his days and nights in solitude.⁴⁴⁵ Tāl cites many other parables from the life of the Prophet

⁴⁴² Adam Sabra, “Illiterate Sufis and Learned Artisans: The Circle of `Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha`rani,” 156.

⁴⁴³ *Rimāh*, 335.

⁴⁴⁴ *Rimāh*, 333.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

‘Īsa and others, such as one from the *zawiya* of the Egyptian saint Ibrāhim al-Matbūli (d. 1472), who was known to have only taken the Prophet Muhammad as his shaykh and was himself a chickpea merchant throughout his life and was known to be a great *walī*. He cites a parable which states that a man entered upon an ascetic at a *zawiya* and asked him why he does not have a craft or earns money. In response, he says that he often sees a blind owl in the *zawiya* that an eagle comes to each day with a piece of meat, and that he wanted to be like the owl, not caring about his sustenance. The man in turn asks him why he should want to be like the owl and not like the eagle, in providing for others. The ascetic then repented and went out to find gainful work.⁴⁴⁶ He ends the section with a quote from Zarrūq, who says: “asceticism towards a thing is its coolness (distance) from the heart.”⁴⁴⁷

The “four sources of *fitnā*”, in the world, according to Tāl are: “women, power, money and offspring” but “the perfected one must not run away from these but must love all of them just as God made them beloved to his heart.”⁴⁴⁸ He likens money to a snake, who carries in it both the lethal poison and a beneficial cure, and that most people are ignorant of the ways of performing “*ruqyā* on the snake of money,” which means, taking the good aspects of it and casting aside the bad.⁴⁴⁹ Further, he describes power (*jāh*) as an ocean and an alligator, those of which, if one does not handle with utmost care, then they will expose themselves to mortal danger by drowning or by getting bit.

Tāl ends the chapter on asceticism with words from Aḥmad Tijānī, who is quoted in the *Jawāhir al-ma’ānī* to have said: “Satan, God curse him, holds significant sway over *ṣāhib al-māl* (the wealthy person). If he sees him pious and observant of God’s commands [...] the cursed one

⁴⁴⁶ *Rimāḥ* 336

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ *Rimāḥ*, 335.

⁴⁴⁹ *Rimāḥ*, 337.

comes to him and draws people to him to ask him for money and makes him feel fear in his heart if he turns them away.”⁴⁵⁰ Satan continues to cast whispers in his heart about the danger of saying no to people until he squanders away all his money, leaving him in a state of “*shatāt*” (disarray) which might risk even his faith in God, says Tijānī. He continues to cite Tijānī, “God favors some of his creation, and gives them the whole world in their hands, and whoever preserves that along with preserving the command of God without squandering it, then God will preserve him in His palm, and keeps it for him, and makes it a means of *baraka* for him. And whomsoever squanders it, gets squandered by God.”⁴⁵¹ Tāl ends by saying: “let us end this chapter with the words of the Sealed Isthmus and the Hidden Pole, for his words suffice in *baraka* and meaning, verifying the words of all the master saints and scholars [that I cited].”⁴⁵²

On Preoccupation with Unveilings: The Devil’s Playground

In the chapter, “warning them against striving for materialized unveilings (*kushūfāt kawniyya*) and visible miracles (*karamāt ‘iyaniyya*),” Tāl devotes a lengthy study into the malady of a wayfarer coveting miracles and unveilings. The chapter has been translated and relayed in full by Amir Syed in *Jihad of the Pen*.⁴⁵³ So as not to be repetitive with offering the full translation,⁴⁵⁴ I relay only the most important sections from this central chapter in the *Rimāh*, which captures the full vivacity of what I call Tāl’s casual mysticism or anti-typological Sufism. This chapter is comprised mainly of sayings by 9th century Indo-Persian mystics, signifying that Tāl shares significant

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ *Rimāh*, 338.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ware, Wright, and Syed, *Jihad of the Pen*, 89.

authoritative interauthorial links with a specific scholarly network on the issue of seeking miracles, especially as it relates to entering solitary retreats. This chapter also holds important insights on Tāl's gendered conceptualization of sainthood, which will be explored at length in the section that follows.

He begins by saying:

I reaffirm that by God alone is success, for He is the guide to the Straight Path.

It is stated in *al-Waṣāya al-quḍsiyya*⁴⁵⁵ that it is necessary for the aspirant who engages in the remembrance of God (*dhikr*) to be sincere and [strive to be] free in his aspirations from attachments to creation. [The aspirant should also avoid] inclining towards objects of desire and taste. Such inclinations are longings, which belong to the false objects of worship. From among [these objects of worship] are desiring mystical unveilings and visible miracles, since they are useless [in one's quest] and contain no benefit. [The truthful aspirant] seeks the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*) alone and keeps his quest unblemished from mixing with the passions of his lower self (*nafs*).

[...] inclinations towards mystical unveilings and visible miracles stem from the passions and desires of the self. Thus when a person intentionally seeks them, and focuses his remembrance on only [acquiring] them, then such a person is explicitly counted among the deluded. Yet even if a person is drawn to [mystical unveilings and visible miracles] without intent, then there still remains the danger that this person will become enticed by them. The great Shaykhs (*al-Kibār*) have said: "Suppose the wayfarer enters a garden, and the birds in the trees of that garden say in their language 'Peace be upon you, O saint of God!' If he does not realize that this is a ruse, he will become deluded by it."⁴⁵⁶

The word for ruse or trickery that Tāl uses, is "*makr*," signifying that prodigious phenomena can be tied to Satanic manifestations, rather than Divine favors. Citing a report to Abū Yazīd [al-Bisṭāmī] in which someone told him a person who walked to Mecca in one night, to which he replied, "Satan travels in an hour from the east to the west with the curse of God on him."⁴⁵⁷ Tāl relays another report in which he is told about a person who walked on water, to which he retorted: "birds fly in the air

⁴⁵⁵ By Herati 9th century Sufi scholar, Zainuddīn al-Khawāfi (d.838)

⁴⁵⁶ *Rimāh*, 403.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

and fish swim in the water.”⁴⁵⁸ Tāl’s prognosis for the malady of seeking miracles is a deficient *nafs* that is susceptible to devilish ruses.

The devil’s trickery is a central theme to this chapter:

Further, Zayn al-Dīn al-Khawāfi (d.838) said in his *al-Waṣāyā*⁴⁵⁹: “do not enter spiritual retreat (*khalwā*) seeking mystical unveilings or visible miracles. Whoever enters spiritual retreat with this hope and does not observe the condition of sincerity (*al-ikhlāṣ*), Satan will pounce on him, toy with him, make fun of him, and cause him to see false things in the form of truth.”

He also said: one of our companions from Khurāsān entered spiritual retreat without permission, and without observing the conditions of maintaining a specific time. So Satan came to him in the form of al-Khidr and said to him, “Do you want to attain the knowledge of divine sciences (*al-‘ulum al-laduniya*)?” He responded, “Yes,” since he was inclined to speak freely about matters related to gnosis (*al-ma‘arif*). So he said, “Open your mouth.” He opened his mouth, and Satan spat into his mouth (*bizaqa fi fayhi*). After that, he wrote a book containing chapters on gnosis. When he left [his spiritual retreat] in order to meet me, he presented what he had written, and also narrated this story. I responded, “O miserable one (*miskīn*), that was Satan who came to you in the form of al-Khidr. He played with you, keeping you occupied from worshipping God and remembering Him. Go and wash [away the ink from] the book and repent to God for what you have done.”⁴⁶⁰

Tāl warns the wayfarer that the devil can come in various forms, including those of the righteous, but not of the Prophet Muhammad: “Satan often comes in the form of tyrannical jurists (*al-jabbārīn al-mutaḥḥiqqihā*) who claim knowledge of jurisprudence, heretical innovators (*al-mubtadi‘īn*), ugly beardless youth (*al-amrad al-kariha*), the wearers of top hats (*as-ḥāb al-qalanūs*).”⁴⁶¹ Describing the devil’s ruse as a web, “*shabakat al-shayṭān*”, where even the most assiduous and pious can fall prey, Tāl warns of the blameworthy consequences of entering solitary retreats without the permission of one’s shaykh, lest “he without a shaykh, the devil becomes his shaykh.”⁴⁶² Tāl warns that he once

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ *Al-Waṣāyā al-quḍusiyya*.

⁴⁶⁰ *Rimāh*, 403.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² *Rimāh*, 404.

“saw Satan once obstruct the path of a person who had claimed to call to guidance, to the point that he became [one of] his closest agents,” and eventually became a mouthpiece for “misguidance and corruption in the mask of guidance.”⁴⁶³

The Mensuration of Men

The question of gendered rhetoric surfaces in his writings surfaces again, when Tāl describes the involuntary nature of miracles for the elite wayfarer as *ḥayḍ* (mensuration):

Further, all the guides detest the fact that their disciples incline to acquire mystical unveilings and visible miracles, and categorically state that “they are the menstruation of men (*ḥayḍ al-rijāl*).”

Using Joseph Hill’s framework of Islamic authority, and particularly Sufi authority, as “largely imagined through gendered imagery,”⁴⁶⁴ I suggest that the metaphor of men menstruating is largely functional in Tāl’s rhetoric of sainthood. When it comes to gendered imagery in Sufi writings, Jamal Elias poses that women in classical Sufism fall under one of two categories: the ideal “feminine” or the lower “female.” The “divine feminine” is represented by the likes of Mary and Fāṭima, and the mythical beloved who represents the longing for God “while actual women are more often depicted as “female,” denoting a being whose animal attributes “prevail over her spiritual nature.”^{465 466}

In this case of the men who menstruate analogy, it is more likely that Tāl is not invoking the “divine feminine,” but rather, the biological “female,” as menstruation here is meant to signify the

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Hill, *Wrapping Authority*, 148.

⁴⁶⁵ Jamal J Elias, “Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism,” *The Muslim World* 78, no. 3–4 (July 1988): 220, <http://ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0000812807&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁶⁶ Hill, *Wrapping Authority*, 149.

lower, bodily, animalistic “impurity” of women just as miracles are meant to signify something that is base, lowly and “impure” for the seeker of miracles. For the male authorial Sufi voice, Hill presents us with the quandary that “reproductive metaphors, then, seem to have been most useful to men, who risked no association with the impurities of female reproduction.”⁴⁶⁷

In his studies on the contemporary female *muqaddams* of the Fayḍa Tijāniyya Sufi movement in Senegal, Hill states that “gendered metaphors of begetting, birth, milk nursing, maternal nurturing, virility, filial piety, patrilineage, and marital relationships have been central to Sufi imaginations of religious knowledge and authority for over a millennium”⁴⁶⁸ and that these metaphors continue to be used, particularly through metaphors of fatherhood for male leaders and motherhood for female leaders, with varying masculine and feminine metaphors used to describe either men or women. “At the same time,” he reminds us, “these [Tijānī sufi] women deconstruct gender distinctions using mystical discourses, sometimes presenting all sincere and accomplished Sufi wayfarers as “men” and sometimes insisting that gender has no reality.”⁴⁶⁹

In his work, *Wrapping Authority: Women Islamic Leaders in a Sufi Movement in Dakar, Senegal* for example, Hill translates a saying by Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse as follows: “secrets are in the hearts of the distinguished folk (*rijāl*), not in the bellies of books,”⁴⁷⁰ signifying that the word *rijāl* must not be understood to mean “men”, particularly in the Tijānī Sufi framework. In another work entitled, “Women Who are Men: Shaykha Maryam Niasse and the Qur’an in Dakar,” Hill writes on the modern and contemporary Tijānī authorial female leaders as seeing themselves as “*rijāl*.” In

⁴⁶⁷ Hill, 151.

⁴⁶⁸ Joseph Hill, “Picturing Islamic Authority: Gender Metaphors and Sufi Leadership in Senegal,” *Islamic Africa* 5, no. 2 (2014): 275, <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/562290>.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Hill, *Wrapping Authority*, 118.

interviews with female *muqaddams* in Dakar, they reported to him: “that a person who knows and follows God is [a] man, whether female or male” and many of them shared the sentiment that “all of Baay’s [Niasse’s] disciples are men.”⁴⁷¹

In the case of Tāl’s usage of the term “*rijāl*” as it relates to miracles as mensuration, I suggest that Tāl’s analogy is deployed as a rhetorical device. That is, it is utilized to invoke the obvious paradoxical meaning—that biologically, men do not menstruate and that their “menstrual release” comes too without beckoning, in the form of miracles. The *ḥayḍ* analogy applied in this case through the male authorial voice enjoys relaying the rhetorical device without the risk of “association with the impurities of female reproduction,” as stated prior. However, it is less likely that through this rhetorical paradox, Tāl is implying that women are less endowed to receive miracles, since as previously stated, in the Tijānī cosmology, *rijāl* simply connotes “the distinguished ones” and not men, per se, as he could have used the word “*dhukūr*” to mean biological males, which he did not. In the case of the “mensurating men analogy”, Tāl’s rhetorical borrowing of the female bodily function is simply meant to connote the involuntariness of miracles, and their function as mere byproducts for a wayfarer. Wayfarers, according to Tāl—be they men or women—must waste no time seeking miracles and instead, see them as favors based on God’s grace and timing, not their own.

Istiḳāma as the Highest Karāma

When the aspirant is preoccupied with seeking miracles, Tāl cautions they can fall prey to devilish ruses and squander the only worthy goal: achieving nearness to God and attaining Gnosis. Tāl cites Sahl al-Tustārī (d.896) in the saying: “the noblest miracle (*karamāt*) is that you rectify a blameworthy trait from among your characteristics.”⁴⁷² The recommendation that “in contrast [to

⁴⁷¹ Joseph Hill, “Women Who Are Men Shaykha Maryam Niasse and the Qur’an,” in *Approaches to the Qur’an in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Zulfikar Hirji (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 374.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

seeing things], [the noble characteristics are] truth, sincerity, and being content with performing virtues, and constant vigilance of the evils of the lower self”⁴⁷³ are the actual miracles one should be seeking, evoking the well-known Sufi saying: “*istiqāma* (uprightness) as the highest *karāma*.” The ability to “acknowledge shortcomings and one’s distance from the ranks of the perfected ones, as well as having a good opinion of God, including not having haste in arriving to the goal, to calm the lower self [...] tempering expectations, and remembering that death can arrive at any moment” are the characteristics “that tame Satan [...] and prevent him from obstructing the path of the wayfarer from ascending to the peak of divine knowledge (*dhurwat al-‘irfān*).”⁴⁷⁴

Tāl addresses the wayfarer by stating that the “Aḥmadiyya, Muḥammadiyya, Ibrahīmiyya, Ḥanīfiyya, Tijāniyya way”⁴⁷⁵ is one of gratitude (*shukr*) and love (*maḥabba*) and nothing else. In addition to stressing the pitfall of wanting miracles, he discusses the futility of coveting the greater illumination (*al-faṭḥ al-akbar*), which is also a matter of grace, and not an aspiration to be sought, according to Tāl:

When one among those on the spiritual path was seeking the station of repentance and forgiveness from his sins, he suddenly acquired a clear illumination (*al-faṭḥ al-mubīn*). This is because such wayfarers attain illumination quite suddenly, without their expectation for it. As a consequence, such an illumination arrives from divine (*rabbāniya*) bestowal. None attains it except the steadfastly convinced, the beloved knower, who is not captivated by mystical unveilings and visible miracles. [The latter point is important because] if in the case his thought wanders to mystical unveilings and visible miracles, and he thinks he has attained them through his own skill, his foot will descend into the depths of destruction, and he will be completely unaware of that. He will go astray, and then lead others astray, in the manner that has happened to many of the misguided misguiders. Those who travel on the path and practice spiritual retreat without an authorized teacher, or at the hands of an unqualified teacher, who does not even have basic authorization for spiritual guidance, fail to understand the goal of spiritual training (*tarbiya*).⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³ *Rimāh*, 404.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷⁵ See Appendix III for a full translation of Chapter 43 of the *Rimāh*, “Why this path of ours is called *at-Ṭarīqā al-Aḥmadiyya al-Muḥammadiyya al-Ibrahīmiyya al-Ḥanīfiyya at-Tijāniyya* .”

⁴⁷⁶ *Rimāh*, 404.

Tarbiya is repeatedly invoked as a viable methodology for the aspirations of the wayfarer, according to Tāl's doctrine. Of particular note is the way he views *tarbiya* as something which must be rigorously earned and strived towards for later Muslims, when it came more intrinsically to earlier Muslims:

This was the state of the first three generations [of Islam], which are also the best. The people in each of these generations were linked to Truth [wherever they found it]. If they slept, they slept with it, and when they awoke, they woke up with it. When they moved, they moved with it. So that if God were to open someone's sight and he looked intently at their inner states he would find their intellects, with few exceptions, linked to God and His Messenger, searching for a way to arrive at their contentment. For that reason, benefit accrued in them, and their essences captured the light of Truth. Knowledge also became firmly established with them, and this became apparent since they arrived at the rank of independent judgement (*ijtihād*). Spiritual disciplining (*tarbiya*) in this era was not required, since a teacher simply transmitted his secret to his disciple, the possessor of his secret. That disciple then simply inherited his teacher's light. He spoke in his ear and then the disciple gained enlightenment (*fath*). This was the result of the cleanliness of their essences (*al-dhawāt*) and the purity of their intellects (*al-'uqūl*).⁴⁷⁷

Tāl's relation to temporality and his own time is oft referred to in the *Rimāḥ*. At times, he refers to the century of Aḥmad Tijānī as auspicious, just as the century in which the Prophet Muhammad lived was auspicious. However, at other times, he refers to later times, and particularly his century, as times when Muslims need to work assiduously in *tarbiya* with a verified shaykh, lest they remain entangled in the "webs of Satan and their egos."⁴⁷⁸

In summary, writes Tāl, "spiritual disciplining is meant to attach the heart to God, and to establish constancy in that, even if outwardly a person is not adorned with great acts of worship."⁴⁷⁹ He describes how the path towards God is meant to be one of balance, in that for example, "the practitioners of this path will fast, but also break their [voluntary] fasts, spend the night in prayer,

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ *Rimāḥ*, 405.

but also sometimes sleep.”⁴⁸⁰ He continues: “they also spend time with their spouses, have intimate relations with them, and do other things in accordance with the Sacred Law, that the path of disciplining the bodies shuns.”⁴⁸¹ In an elaborate explanation on the difference between the *ṭarīqa* being a path of *shukr* (gratitude) vs. that of *mujāhada* (exertion), Tāl shows how the path of gratitude is better than the path of exertion, because “the journey of the first is that of the hearts, whereas the latter is that of the bodies. The intention in the first is pure, whereas in the latter the intention is flawed.”⁴⁸² Because when the heart is grateful and repentant, Tāl finds that “it [illumination] happens suddenly without the servant having any desire for it, since it emerges from the Divine,” in contrast to illumination in the way of bodily exertion, “meticulous planning and reliance on other means,” which “Christian monks and Jewish rabbis” have easily achieved.⁴⁸³ Tāl sees merit in combining the two paths, as “it is possible that a person who [inwardly] attaches his heart to God in all his moments and states,” to be “at the same time outwardly in a state of strenuous effort and constant disciplining.”⁴⁸⁴

Tāl ends the 20th chapter by relaying a waking vision of one of the disciples of Aḥmad Tijānī with the Prophet Muhammad:

The summary of what has preceded is indicated by some of what the Master over existence and the Knower of witnessing, our leader and master, Muhammad, dictated to a companion of the Shaykh, who was in a state of wakefulness and not asleep, so that he could deliver the message to the Shaykh. He said:

The Prophet said: “tell him,” meaning the Shaykh, “here the sincere devotion (*tajarrūd*) in worship, is divided into four parts. The first part is to withdraw from the world and to devote oneself to God, in all one’s actions with complete sincerity to God. [Second], what he/she intends or desires with devotion is to magnify, glorify Him, and praise and sanctify Him, in the manner

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

that is best befitting to Him. [Third] that he/she does not intend to gain anything from his worship, [fourth] while at the same time he/she also considers his worship as inadequate.”

[...]

“Tell my beloved al-Tijānī that the meaning of all of this is in the magnificent Qur’an.” Tell him: “that this Book will make it clear to you in what I have commanded you to do.” Tell him: “Not to aspire for anything else, and struggle greedily for things.”

Tell him: “This postpones illumination. The aspirations that people intend to attain through their efforts delays illumination. Strive to perfect your worship while also opposing your lower self.” Tell him also: “It delays illumination,” and he repeated this three times.

It is most likely that Tāl learned of this vision through a rare manuscript by ‘Alī Ḥarāzīm entitled the *Mashāhid* (“spiritual encounters”), detailing Ḥarāzīm’s visionary encounters and experiences at the direction of Tijānī.⁴⁸⁵ Tāl’s choice of placement for the Prophetic vision at the very end of the chapter is intentional: the words, “it delays illumination”, repeated three times, is designed to be the ominous last word on the topic. Ever true to Tāl’s liminal methodology to mysticism, it might seem ironic that he should end his chapter on preoccupation with miracles and visions, with a narrative of a waking vision. For Tāl, however, there is no contradiction or tension in doing so because the vision itself is about not wanting illumination for illumination’s sake, but rather for God’s alone.

On Preoccupation with Dreams: “Those who do not See [Visions] are Better”

In chapter 21 of the *Rimāḥ*, “Warning from Becoming Preoccupied with Extraordinary Occurrences (*bi-l-waqāi’*)”, which he states is a branch of the previous chapter, Tāl delves deeper still into potential misdirected aspirations by the wayfarer. He begins by positing that in fact, “the wayfarer who does not see anything [from unveilings] or does not witness extraordinary occurrences (*wa lā yarā fī al-waqā’i*)” is not less [in rank] than the person who does. In fact, the former is actually superior to the latter.”⁴⁸⁶ He writes: “our only purpose in pursuing [this topic further] is to dispel the

⁴⁸⁵ Wright, *Realizing Islam*, 2020, 14.

⁴⁸⁶ *Rimāḥ*, 407.

delusion of the ignorant and negligent from the seekers by providing explicit proof of the lowliness of the one who sees and contemplates extraordinary occurrences from the one who does not see them.”⁴⁸⁷ Tāl adds that it is his intention “to establish the superiority of those who do not see and experience extraordinary occurrences, by the very fact that the falseness of such claims can cause a proponent of them to die as a nonbeliever unless he repents. The person who relies on what he experiences and becomes captivated [by it], and stands with it, becomes severed from attaining the goal in essence (*al-maqṣūd bi-l-dhāt*).”⁴⁸⁸

The adage, that ‘one who does not see is not better than the one who sees, in fact he/she is better,’ is perhaps the lynchpin of Tāl’s doctrine of “sober” Sufism. Tāl borrows from an abundance of warnings against misdirected attachments to sober retreats and miracles, but no other author cited in the *Rimāḥ* quite shares Tāl’s view that the wayfarer who does not see dreams is in actuality better than the one who sees. The main reason Tāl highlights this can be squared back to a saying by shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī, who relays that those who truly love the shaykh (or the prophet) and are beloved to him do not need to see them [in dreams] much,⁴⁸⁹ and it is those who lack love that need more visions and dreams. In effect, it is love, or the lack thereof, that is the primary reason that “those who see are not better than those who do not see, in fact they are better.”

Further, in this adage is a warning to the budding *sālik* about disclosing unveilings and visions to other than the shaykh: “the person who cannot contain himself from concealing extraordinary occurrences, will not be able to conceal spiritual miracles.”⁴⁹⁰ He cites the famous saying, “the

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ *Rimāḥ*, 516.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

liberated chest is the grave of secrets (*ṣudūr al-aḥrār qubūr al-asrār*).⁴⁹¹ Next, Tāl relays a narrative in which “one of the Sufis” saw the Prophet Muhammad either during an unveiling or in a dream. He asked him about Sufism (*al-tasawwuf*) and the Prophet responded to: “Sufism is disavowing claims and concealing subtle meanings (*al-ma‘anī*).”⁴⁹²

Tāl continues to condemn the disclosure of secrets or visions, especially when the person doing so is a shaykh who relays the visions of his disciple, as this might inflict the disciple with the “veil of vanities” and “because the majority of such spiritual happenings are from fantasies, which the neophytes on the path are pacified with.”⁴⁹³ Next, Tāl directly tackles the meaning intended by his earlier statement on the preference towards those who do not “see”:

It is not as though the person who does not see or contemplates about extraordinary occurrences is less[er] in rank to the one who sees and contemplates them. In fact, the former is actually better than the latter. Those who are weak in certainty, when they experience [such occurrences], their certainty increases. As for someone who is already strong and perfected, he does not become distracted by such occurrences. Such a person already has certainty about the afterlife, as God and His messenger have explained it; especially in how Paradise and its blessings, and the Fire with its raging inferno, are described, and the Reckoning for some, and the absence of it for some, and the weighing and counting of deeds, and the rest of the remaining events and terrors [that human beings will undergo]. Even if those matters were not disclosed, they would be witnessed on the Day of Resurrection. If he is inspired with something which is in contradiction to what is described [by God and the Prophet] because of the seduction of Satan, the light of faith will fade away from him. For where lies the benefit in this inspiration and where lies the harm? A person should only wish to climb the summit of Gnosis and arrive to witness the beauty of the Owner and Beneficent.⁴⁹⁴

With the above considered, it is clear how such a view does not contradict with the fact that the founding of the Tijāniyya is based on a waking vision with the Prophet. I asked Shaykh Mahy Cisse—a prominent *khalīfa* of Aḥmad Tijānī in West Africa in Madina Baye, Senegal—a question regarding

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

this quandary over a phone interview. Commenting on the question of “those who do not see” being “better”, Shaykh Mahy said that Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī himself was not known to have had many visions earlier in his spiritual journey. He added that this warning by Tāl is not meant to be absolute, but is rather directed to the *sālik*, the *murīd* (i.e. “those who are weak in certainty”) who still have not achieved *kamāl* (perfection) in gnosis and that this hierarchy no longer applies to *shuyūkh* or *kummal* (perfected ones) who witness waking visions all the time. The difference between the two is that the former is still afflicted with the veil of seeking visions and miracles, while for the latter, they are indifferent as these are but a welcome byproduct of a perfected state.⁴⁹⁵

Tāl’s approach to dreams and visions in the *Rimāḥ* is dynamic; when it comes to relaying narrations about waking visions with prophets, angels or verifying his legitimacy as *khalīfa*, dreams and visions are seen as a sound proof. However, when it comes to advising the wayfarer, according to Tāl, dreams and visions can be a harmful ruse and even a destructive distraction from achieving knowledge of God. It is *tarbiya* that Tāl recommends as a viable methodology to remedy the desire for other-than-God distractions. The greatest trap for the *murīd*, as Tāl sees it, is desiring *fath* before one is ready to receive it. In the Tijānī doctrine, a *murīd* attains a smaller *fath* by experiencing the annihilation in God, and “tasting” that none exists except Him. Whereas the greater *fath* is something that is more elusive and cannot be obtained except through Divine grace. Though the goal of his chapter is not to raise the *murīd*’s desire for it, Tāl describes the attainment of *fath* in an enticing way from a quote from the *Ibrīz* based on the difference between “the people of truth” (*ahl al-ḥaq*) and “the people of darkness” (*ahl al-bāṭil*), who can also experience mystical openings:

As for the people of truth they obtain an opening (*fath*)—in both the first instance, as well as the second instance—with everything that has already been mentioned about the people of darkness about their knowledge of this world, the sky and the earth. A person who experiences the first instance of the opening witnesses the seven earths and all that they

⁴⁹⁵ Phone interview with Shaykh Mahy Cisse, prominent contemporary Shaykh and *Khalīfa* of Aḥmad Tijānī and his grandfather, Ibrahim Niasse and spokesperson for the Fayḍa Tijāniya. May 23rd, 2020.

contain, as well as the seven heavens and all that they contain. He also witnesses the actions and deeds of the servants in their homes and palaces. He does not, however, witness this with his eyesight, but instead by his insight, which is neither veiled by an obstruction, nor is blocked by a barrier. They also witness all future events that will occur in a specific month and a specific year. With respect to this type of opening, the people of darkness can be on an equal footing.

Consequently, unveiling (*al-kashf*) is considered the lowest rank of sainthood, since it can be found among the people of truth, but also among the people of falsehood. The person endowed with this type of opening has no guarantee that he will not distance himself from the people of truth, and attach himself to the people of falsehood, thereby abandoning his station and overstepping his bounds.

As for the opening in the second instance, it amounts to witnessing the secrets of the Truth, which are veiled from the people of darkness. He witnesses the saints, who have intimate knowledge of God speaking with each other across distances in the same manner that people sitting face to face speak. He also witnesses the souls of the believers around their graves, the noble scribes, the angels, the intermediary realm and the souls of the dead within it. He witnesses the grave of the Prophet and the column of light that extends from it to the dome of the intermediary realm. If he obtains the witnessing of the essence of the Prophet, while in a waking state, he also obtains safety from the ruse of Satan, because of his connection to the mercy of God, which is indeed our Master and our Prophet, Muhammad. By virtue of this connection with the noble essence (*al-dhāt al-sharifa*), he also comes to acquire intimate knowledge of the Truth and the witnessing of His primordial essence (*dhātuhū al-azaliyā*). This is because he finds the noble essence disappearing into the Truth, enraptured by love in witnessing Him. The saint continues [journeying] to the Truth because of the blessing of the noble essence, and thereby slowly mounts the stations of intimate knowledge, until he stays witnessing (*taqa' lahū al-mushāhadāt*), and acquires the secrets of intimate knowledge, and the lights of love.

The rhetoric of “good” illumination, as cited by Tāl, is therefore meant to increase the *murīd*’s resolve not to be in want of attaining it, lest the *murīd* falls into the trap of getting illumination as a “person of darkness”, not of truth.

To differentiate further between “good” illumination and “faulty” illumination, Tāl refers to the *Ibrīz* on the question of how the likes of pious Jews and Christians, as well as Ancient Greek philosophers such as “Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, and Galenus and from others among the wise men and nonbelieving philosophers” were able to reach celestial truths. He likens those who are able to obtain the “origin of the sciences of the philosophers and their judgements on the celestial sphere

and similar matters” to being like a man who was contemporaneous with the Prophet Abraham and attained illumination through his teachings, but never followed his religion because “he remained stationary, only witnessing the wonders of the world, until he severed his connection from the Truth [...] he was elated by what he witnessed in the celestial sphere and began discussing the location of stars and assigning rules for them. He ultimately turned away from the religion of Abraham, and only those that God has willed His disappointment on began to follow him, until this knowledge reached the blameworthy philosophers.”⁴⁹⁶ Tāl describes “false” illumination in the words of al-Dabbāgh:

This second degree of opening clarifies the differences between the people of truth and the people of falsehood. As for the first type of opening, they [the people of truth] treat it as though it is only attainable by the people of darkness, since they acquire the ability to witness transitory events and have the ability to change them. Consequently, you will see a person of falsehood (*al-mubṭal*) walking over water, flying through the air, or acquiring sustenance from the unseen (*al-ghayb*), even though he does not believe in God. The reason is that God created light, and from it He created angels and made them helpers of the people of truth, by means of good fortune (*al-tawfīq*), right direction, and supernatural accomplishments (*kharq al-‘awā'id*). Likewise, He created darkness and from it devils and appointed them helpers of the people of falsehood, by means of persuasion, an increase in loss, and the ability to have control over supernatural accomplishments.⁴⁹⁷

According to Tāl, the people of truth and the people of darkness can both perform miracles, like walking on water or flying, but “their intentions are different.”⁴⁹⁸ The intention of the people of darkness “turns them away from His door and creates a barrier from His way, since His anger is upon them” and God “envelops them with existential phenomena as a tribulation and a persuasion so that they think they have attained something”⁴⁹⁹ while the intention of the people of light is the pleasure of God.

⁴⁹⁶ *Rimāh*, 409.

⁴⁹⁸ *Rimāh*, 410.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid*.

Borrowing further from the words of al-Dabbāgh, Tāl states that the above also applies to “frivolities” such as asking about the future and events yet to transpire, which he sees as equally harmful as the want of the greater illumination (*al-faṭḥ al-akbar*):

When the perfected ones (*al-kāmilīn*) from the people of truth are asked about matters pertaining to the future, they say very little about them. This is because such matters are from the first instance of witnessing, and they have already moved onto witnessing truth after it. They recognize the falsehood in it, and subsequently detest it. Therefore, they also detest talking about matters pertaining to this. This is ultimately because the ephemeral world and the events that happen within it are hated by God, and so they also hate whatever the Truth hates. They also cannot speak of these matters without descending from their station, in the same manner that someone would descend from Pleiades (*al-thurayyā*) to the earth. Each degree of such events [is] akin to a degree of illumination of the people of darkness.

[...]

In summary, it is not possible to compare the knowledge of the servant with that of his Lord. Alluding to this [point], our master al-Khiḍr said to our master Moses: ‘My knowledge and your knowledge are not comparable to the knowledge of God, except that they are like the comparison of the sparrow in its nest with the ocean.’”

He [al-Dabbāgh] also said:

The saint may sometimes speak about something pertaining to an event that will take place in the future, for he can experience them by descending below from his rank. This is not considered a sin. It does, however, represent a lowering of aspiration (*qusūr himma*) and coming down from a higher station. It is a proper mode of conduct so long as it aligns with the intentions and goals of the Prophet. This must also be done with the acknowledgement that the case of the Prophet was not like this, nor was it with most of the perfected ones among the saints. They only rarely speak about such phenomena in accordance with the decree of destiny and the control exerted over them, in whichever manner He pleases, since they witness the manifestations of the Truth.

Tāl’s interauthorial “*dhawq*-sphere” as regards to warnings about false attachments on the spiritual path is evident through lengthy quotes from the *Ibrīz*. He finds particular affinity with al-Mubārak al-Lamaṭī, who relays in it the words of his master, ‘Abdul ‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh (d.1719). The *Ibrīz* is another Sufi magnum opus from only a century prior that follows a similar structure of sober–yet mystically invigorated–gnosticism. It has been described by its translators, John O’Kane and Bernd Radtke as an “encyclopedia of Sufism” whose authorial voice, al-Dabbāgh, achieved “illumination and access to the Prophet, as well as his teachings about the Council of the godly that regulates the

world, (*diwān al-awliyā*’)⁵⁰⁰ yet holds stringent views on the proper relations between master and disciple, and the so-called base desires and hypocrisies of people who claim to be on a spiritual path.

Tāl summarizes the chapter with a quote from al-Lamāṭī who warns of “the potential harm that comes from knowing the saints and mixing with them” as through knowing them, “some people fail to discern between illumination of the people of darkness in comparison to illumination of the people of truth.”⁵⁰¹ They are deluded to think that “if anyone demonstrates supernatural abilities, they consider that this confirms the title of sainthood.”⁵⁰² Another group, according to al-Lamāṭī, is attracted to more apparent manifestations of piety, and thinks “that sainthood is based on uprightness outwardly, and the constant practice of fasting and prayer, even though the inward state of that person is empty of the Truth and inclines towards others besides Him.”⁵⁰³ The only saving grace from being tricked by the above illusions, he states, is if “the servant is blessed by God to be in the company of a perfected saint,” the one who “warns him about what severs this relationship—the ephemeral world and inclining to its ornaments.”⁵⁰⁴ Al-Dabbāgh says one can recognize a perfected *walī* if you find him to be akin to “a potter [...] who does not have a craft nor any occupation except intimate knowledge of the Truth and what leads to Him” and does not like it when people come to his pottery shop to speak about anything else: “whoever realizes this point will accrue profit in this world and the next, and the person who understands something different than this will ultimately gain the opposite,” warns al-Dabbāgh.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁰ From the preface to: al-Lamāṭī, *Pure Gold from the Words of Sayyidī ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh: Al-Dhabab al-Ibrīz Min Kalām Sayyidī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh*.

⁵⁰¹ *Rimāḥ*, 410.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

Tāl ends the chapter with poetry verses regarding miracles:

Some of the elite see the existence of miracles
As true evidence of the obtainment of spiritual stations
[...]
Miracles are nothing but a hindrance, (accidentally) encountered
Among true (Sufi) people of (divine) action and (pure) intention
Such extraordinary occurrences should not be sought
So be warned of (God's) test in being enfolded by miracles.
[...]
Guard the knowledge for which you are responsible
Do not substitute anything else for God
Hiding miracles is obligatory on the actualized saints
So do not be led astray
Their appearance among the Messengers was obligatory
For thus did divine inspiration descend.

Tāl makes a key point which comes at the end of the chapter, themes on which were not cited prior from the *Ibrīz*, in which he says: “the saint calls to God the Exalted with a true, confirmed law, laid out before him by the Prophets” whereas “a Prophet calls to God the Exalted by a law that is strange [to his audience]: what he comes with has not been presented before to the people of his time.” Miracles, according to Tāl, should not be sought out at all anymore as the Sacred Law has already been revealed and sealed. It was normal for people to demand manifestation of miracles (*mu'jizāt*) as evidence of a prophet's truthfulness, but *murīds* of later times are not excused in their coveting of *karamāt*. On this point, Tāl lastly directs the reader to consult the treatise, *The Lifting of Inundation* (*Kashf al-rān*), Sha'rānī's manual in which he answers miscellaneous questions, mostly regarding human *sulūk* and gnosis from pious *jinn* folk who came to him in the form of a yellow dog.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁶ Initially one would think that *Kashf al-rān* the text/poem authored by Ibn 'Arabī with the same name on sacred numerology. However, Tāl is referring to the text, *Kashf al-ḥijāb wal-rān* by Sha'rānī, which is a treatise in which he answers questions from the *jinn* regarding human's experience of gnosis. Particularly, question 45 is regarding whom is better, the saint who perform miracles or the saint who does not. In his answer, Sha'rānī describes how Prophets were given miracles because they were necessary, but the *wālī* is not excused in calling people to him through *karāmāt* but rather he must do so via *shar'īa* only. It is curious why Tāl did not cite the proper name for the text or quote from the text directly. It is likely that he did not retain the material in question either in memory or as a manuscript in his possession. See: 'Abdul Wahhāb ash-Sha'rānī, *Kashf al-ḥijāb wā al-rān 'an wajh as'ilāt aljān*, Ḥijāzī Printers, Cairo, 1937, 80.

Conclusion

Commenting on the paradox between Tāl's transmission of esoteric knowledge in the *Rimāḥ*—while at the same time—warning against the malady of preoccupation with it, Rudolph Ware cites Sha'rānī as he is quoted by Tāl in Chapter 29, which reflects the general disposition towards dreams and visions in the Islamic tradition:

No one makes light of what he sees in the state of sleep, except the ignorant, because everything the believer sees consists of God's revelation on the tongue of the angel of inspiration. Since he is incapable of bearing the burdens of revelation in the state of wakefulness, and of hearing it directly from the angel, it comes to him in the state of sleep, which is the common ground, because the general rule is that it relates to spirituality not the physical body. It is a known fact that the spirits are akin to the angels, and the angel is capable of hearing the speech of the Lord of Truth without any intermediary.⁵⁰⁷

“But such spiritual visions, he [Tāl] warns us, are not ends in themselves,” writes Ware, and “when taken out of proportion, they become distractions on the spiritual path: inclining to unveilings and miracles stems from the passions and desires of the *naḥs*.” Ware summarizes Tāl's approach to wayfaring: “if spiritual experiences take precedence over God, then God has been forgotten instead of remembered—and the basic purpose of humanity is *dhikr* (remembrance of God).”⁵⁰⁸ It is this warning that drives Tāl to warn against the reliance on spiritual experiences, which can derail one's wayfaring to God.

In this chapter, we relied on four chapters in the *Rimāḥ* that elucidate Tāl's ideation of “sober” Sufism. By examining the veils that Tāl lists as preventing people from recognizing *awlīyā'*, his conceptualization of asceticism as having little to do with material wealth at all and the pitfall of preoccupation with miracles and dreams, this chapter has shown Tāl's holistic approach to mystical

⁵⁰⁷ *Rimāḥ*, 442.

⁵⁰⁸ Ware, Wright, and Syed, *Jihad of the Pen*, 240.

wayfaring. This chapter also considered Tāl's usage of the gendered rhetorical device, "the mensuration of men", to capture the reader's attention on miracles and sainthood.

It is the *sālik* he warns and addresses, first and foremost, but his words also serve as a reminder to *shuyūkh*, who sometimes neglect to keep their (or their disciples') dreams or miracles a secret or fail to encourage their disciples not to give overt credence to visions which could easily be a "devilish ruse." Tāl relies heavily on his interauthorial "*dhawq*-sphere" in centering themes of "sober" mysticism, from the works of 12th century Persian mystics when it comes to the etiquettes of solitary retreats (*khalwā*) to the 18th century mystical manual, the *Ibrīz*. Unlike anti-Sufi polemical tropes regarding manifestations of "excess" among Sufis, Tāl's criticism, rather, comes from his vantage point as a shaykh of *tarbiya* and as someone who sees common pitfalls and mistakes that befall the average disciple.

Tāl proposes that the base human inclination towards supernatural manifestations and the desire for attaining the greater *fath* can only be remedied under the supervision of a perfected shaykh, one who does not entice the disciple with these distractions, and instead focuses the object of their wayfaring on God alone, further solidifying this dissertation's central argument that Tāl meticulously laid the groundwork for shaykh-disciple relations and formal *ṭarīqa* formation in West Africa. By showing that even "people of darkness" can fly or walk on water, Tāl and his interauthors warn that miracle-seeking is a perilous—even a pointless—pursuit. In this way, Tāl sets the tone for the Tijānī path as a path of sober, responsible wayfaring, yet one where one is encouraged to be completely drunk with the love of God and his Prophet. If this love is sincere, posits Tāl, then God will aid them to attain the true *karāmā* of *istiqāma* (uprightness), where "getting rid of a single blameworthy trait" is more worthy a miracle than getting provision from the unseen or leaping through time, for example. For sages like Tāl and al-Dabbāgh, the only reason they can "see" the unseen, is because

they have smashed it as an idol. According to Tāl, only when one's *nafs* is sufficiently polished of blemishes and “worldly attachments” can it possibly then reach perfection and illumination. And even if that never happens, then for Tāl, it should suffice as a goal to reach God alone.

Conclusion

Eight years after setting out to pen it at the court of Usmān Dan Fodio at the Sokoto Caliphate, Shaykh ‘Umar Tāl seals his nearly 600-page long magnum opus with a sense of euphoric elation:

We have deposited in this blessed book that which attains the wayfarers light, and thrusts in their hearts joy and delight, and that which the eyes are cooled and uplifts those who are sad. Its contents are a pleasure for those who hears them, and it is an aid for the *nāsikūn* (disciples) and *sālikūn*. It suffices in baraka and light and is a pleasure for the righteous. May God benefit us from it on the day when no money or offspring will benefit us, and may we gain mercy from it on days to come [that will be] filled with tumult and chaos. May we be forgiven from what we have been deprived of due to the limits of our *naḥs*, and unleash us from the chackles of [attachment] to others, by the blessings of the possessor of divine lights, the one who takes our hand to the bride of the *ḥadra qudusiyya*, Muḥammad the harbinger of secrets from the divine presence, and may we be wayfarers among that league, guided on its path.⁵⁰⁹

This dissertation sought to offer an in-depth exploration of the key themes, sources and contributions of *Kitāb Rimāḥ ḥizb al-Raḥīm ‘alā nūḥūr ḥizb al-rajīm*; a commentary on the “deep doctrine” of nineteenth century West Africa’s “most widely circulated text.” Because it is often found printed on the margins of the Tijāniyya’s primary source, the *Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī*, its importance risks obscurity and its significance, literally, marginalized. Today, the *Rimāḥ* stands as the looming doctrinal backdrop for the practice of millions of Tijānī disciples worldwide. His work is one of the major references for the twentieth century *ḥayda* (flood) *Ibrāhīmiyyah* of Ibhrāhīm Niasse (d.1975) which spread like wildfire in Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Niger, and Mauritania, and has a growing presence in the United States and Europe. Today in villages such as Medina-Gounass, Senegal, Tāl is still centered as the ultimate *khalīfa* of Aḥmad Tijānī, and there and in places like northern Mali, the *Rimāḥ* continues to stand as a cherished—if symbolic—living source of meaning and connection among contemporary disciples.

⁵⁰⁹ *Rimāḥ*, 685.

Due to a lack of a complete English translation, the *Rimāḥ*'s rightful presence has been sorely lacking in studies on the nineteenth century Islamic intellectual history in the Western academy. Because of its literal print marginalization along the *Jawāhir al-Ma'āni*, it is rarely studied in knowledge centers like Fes or Senegal among contemporary wayfarers, but it quietly and stalwartly continues to inform much of the foundations of the teachings of the Tijānī path—particularly among the “elite” of the *ṭarīqa*. Larger theoretical edicts aside, the *Rimāḥ* is full of “secret” and practical knowledge as it relates to *tazkiya* and *sulūk*, and exhaustive details about the process of *tarbiya*, *khalwā*, and seeking God's Greatest Name (*al-ism al-a'dham*), making it a fundamental resource for *shuyūkh* of the *ṭarīqa* from Senegal to Fes to Cairo to this day.

This dissertation does not profess to cover the study of all the facets of the *Rimāḥ* in its entirety: it has been described by specialists as a “hard lump—massive and undigested” for good reason. However, this dissertation sought to “digest” its key sources and most important, broad themes. Still, in addition to a full English translation, there remain important avenues for further research on the *Rimāḥ*, namely, the way Tāl formulates the conditions, practices and litanies of the Tijānī path and their evolution and reception among disciplines and Tāl's methodology of *tarbiya*.⁵¹⁰ Further studies could tackle the evolution of such practices and their transmission cross-regionally over different Tijānī groups over time. Other areas ripe for more research on the *Rimāḥ* might include a focus on the figure of the Shaykh broadly speaking and Tāl's conceptualization of *mashyakha* in general: how one should have only one murshid (chapter 22) for example, and the ill fate of those who seek the position of *mashyakha* before their *bashariyya* (human inclinations) have been

⁵¹⁰ A recently published volume entitled: Mathias Eichhorn, *Les Conditions et Les Oraisons de La Tijaniya: Et Leur Appui Dans Le Coran et La Sunna Prophetique* (Mathias Eichhorn, 2021) accomplishes this in chapter 4, entitled “Les conditions de la Tijaniya évoquées dans le Rimah.”

⁵¹¹ Another dissertation in the French language, focuses on the *Rimāḥ* as a doctrinal reference and highlights the conditions of the Tijani path as emanating from the text: Cisse, “El Hadji Omar Foutiyou Tall, une Grande Figure de la Tijāniyya en Afrique Occidentale au XIXeme siècle: Pensée Juridico-mystique à travers ‘Rimah.’”

extinguished (*khumūd*) (chapter 15). Other studies could explore more deeply other cited sources of the *Rimāḥ* within the inter-authorial framework I have set out to propose in this dissertation.

Chapter One has shown how Shaykh ‘Umar Tāl’s contentious legacy is reflected in the reception to the *Rimāḥ*: like its author, it is a text that is also met with ambivalence due to its charging, unapologetic tone and the military campaigns that ensued after (or arguably because of) the text’s wide circulation and successful reception. The chapter dealt in brief with the historic backdrop for the *Rimāḥ*’s emergence. Biographical snippets of his early life, namely his assiduous appetite for knowledge-seeking, would herald his reputation as a scholar with unparalleled erudition in his motherland of Futa Toro and in places like Cairo and Jerusalem, where he left his mark on the dumbfounded Arab ‘*ulamā*’ and leaders, who doubted this African scholar could exceed them in Divine favors, knowledge, and erudition. His growing reputation as a gifted *walī* with a propensity for miracles grew, but it was not until he met one of Aḥmad Tijānī’s close disciples, Muḥammad al-Ghālī in the Ḥijāz that would alter the course of his life. After becoming his most trusted disciple under his tutelage for three years, al-Ghālī designated him as the *khalīfa* of the Tijāniyya in West Africa: this title gave Tāl an unrivaled sense of authority, arguably because of his understanding that vicegerent of the Aḥmad Tijānī possesses the status of being the supreme pole (*quṭb al-aqṭāb*) at a given time.

The first chapter also argued that Tāl defined what a *ṭarīqa* in West Africa, (and arguably beyond) as we know it today, looks like. By emphasizing *tarbiya* via a shaykh who an inheritor of is “the seal” (the *khatm al-wilāya al-Muḥammadiyya*), the Tijāniyya quickly gained considerable ground in the landscape of West African Sufism and solidified the concept of a Sufi order, its organization structure, doctrine and development over time. The *Rimāḥ* played a major role in this: by offering the doctrinal references to this growing, “sealing”, Muḥammadan Path, Tāl’s organized,

coherent teachings could easily be practiced by a large number of people, and not just in theoretical terms, among its followers. This is proven by, among other factors, the fact that the Qādiriyya—the preexisting Sufi tradition in the region—had loose to no formal organizational structure before Tāl appeared on the West African Sufi landscape.

Using Tāl’s characteristic justice-seeking, “anti-sultanic” impetus as a lens for the biographical introductory chapter revealed that Tāl seemed to invite the negative attention of African and Arab rulers and French colonial administrators who saw his growing influence with apprehension and suspicion. Even his close friendship with Muḥammad Bello, son of Usmān Dan Fodio, has been met with skepticism, with some observers accusing Tāl of having ulterior motives of a stealth takeover of the Sokoto Caliphate. I emphasized that just as it is valuable to examine the social, political and scholarly influences in analyzing Tāl’s biography, so is the focus on his personal, knowledge-driven orientation towards justice-seeking as both inherently holy and as a pathway to God. Touching briefly on the theme of female saintly *baraka* in the ‘Umarian narrative, the role of women in the *Rimāḥ*, while a small one, brings to the fore their status as visionary harbingers of Divine support and aid, and as possessors of spiritual authority through their dreams and warnings. Lastly, I offered a brief history of the *Rimāḥ* as a text; its circulation, reach and print history.

Chapter Two explored that the concept of a “Muḥammadan path” and how it manifested in different ways across varying eras and geographies. By revisiting the (now arguably extinct) academic debate on neo-Sufism, my research found that there always existed a centering of the Prophet Muhammad at the heart of the Sufi experience across different eras and milieus, but the rise of “neo” political realities in much of nineteenth century North and West Africa yielded a more pronounced centering of the Prophet as “living.” In studying a nineteenth century text like the *Rimāḥ*, I advocated for the need to move away from the neo-Sufi paradigm and focus more on Tāl’s elaborate

articulation of the Seal of Sainthood as a central vehicle for the success of the *Rimāḥ*. The rhetoric of the *khatm* in the *Rimāḥ*, I argued, offers the most vivid articulation of the concept in later Sufi thought, so much so, that it can be said that Tāl's project singlehandedly spurred a renaissance of the *khatmiyya* in the nineteenth century, enlisting it in the ranks of the most vividly articulated, coherent claims to the Sealing Sainthood in Islamic intellectual history.

The claim to Tijānī's status as the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood and the *qutb makhtūm* (the sealed isthmus) as described by Tāl lies at the heart of the *Rimāḥ*'s project and aided in shaping the text's potent tone, doctrines and its influential agency in shaping Tāl's authority (as a representative of said *khatmiyya*). This explains why the concept of having a Shaykh, and believing in the importance of one, taken collectively, occupies close to half of themes of the *Rimāḥ*. The *Rimāḥ*, therefore, can be taken as one elaborate argument for the belief in sainthood as being as central to the belief in prophethood.

Though the "sealing" rhetoric of the Tijāniyya often gave it an air of exclusivity, chapter III shows that the *Rimāḥ*'s feature of heavy intertextuality actually shows that the order's intellectual roots are deeply embedded in earlier scholarly networks and currents. The chapter discussed why it is significant that half of the quotes of the *Rimāḥ* come from 'Abdul Wahhab al-Sha'rānī (d.1565). The *Rimāḥ*'s interauthorial character signifies the text's role as a culmination and maturation of past Sufi doctrines. Tāl's methodology of copious quotation is a methodology of reinvigorating and refurbishing Sha'rānī and other Sufi scholars' overall project in a manner which breathes new life into their works as co-authors of the "sealing" Tijānī doctrine, which saw itself as a final *ṭarīqa*, just as the Prophet was the final messenger.

Notwithstanding that heavy quotation is a feature that many Islamic texts share, what distinguishes Sha'rānī's and Tāl's interauthorial relationship is its strikingly similar approaches to

their respective projects that are guided by Gnosticism as the arbiter of knowledge. I dub their similar approaches to mystical experience and the way it maps on their respective intellectual discourses as stemming from the same “dhawq-sphere”; implying that the ideas they write about do not stem from a rational/intellectual discourse only, but one that emanates from a shared experiential “taste.” I showed that Sha‘rānī’s interauthorship in the *Rimāḥ* rested on a set of distinctive similarities in the projects of the two figures: their shared emphasis on the *ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, their gnosis-guided approach to *sharī‘a*, their mutual “anti-sultanic” justice-seeking orientation and lastly, the messianic, end-times backdrop for their doctrines. Though the two sagely authors lived two hundred years apart, the two-way intellectual exchange between fifteenth and sixteenth century Egyptian ‘*ulamā*’ with that of West African scholars of that time period tell of a vibrant cross-regional link and point to the Tijāniyya’s deeper roots within the context of the larger Islamic Sufi intellectual tradition.

Chapter IV focused on Tāl’s critique of the *fuqahā’* (jurists) as motivated by what he perceived to be the emphasis on “exoteric” knowledge-seeking prevalent in his time. *Al-Rimāḥ*’s forceful disparagement of *taqlīd* takes previous debates on Sufism and Islamic law to another level of analysis, previously ignored in studies on so-called Islamic reform, emerging from nineteenth century West Africa. It is a critique of the assumption that following one *madhhab* is obligatory for a Muslim. The alternative, according to Tāl, is neither *taqlīd* nor *ijtihād*, but *taḥqīq* (verification). The polemics therein were mostly theoretical and not practical, however, since Tāl was not known for following other than the Mālikī *madhhab*.

Though the critique of the singular authority of the legal schools has today been normatively paired with Salafi ideology, Tāl’s text and the many sagely interlocutors he cites therein complicates this narrative: Sufi ‘*ulamā*’ also questioned the prevalence of *taqlīd*, but to them, “a return to the Qur’ān and *sunna* only” meant something rather different to them from the likes Abdul Wahhāb and

his adherents. For Sufis like Tāl, “Qur’ān and sunna” is rather an invitation for re-centering the authority of gnosticism, and the experiential *dhawq* (taste) of knowing God as the highest goal for knowledge-seeking. It regards the attainment of knowledge not as a path of prestige or worldly gain, but a tenacious path of humility and wayfaring, a process of which can be known through experience, not via intellectualism alone. For Tāl, the *sharī‘a* can be known through following a living *shaykh* in possession of direct access to the Prophet, who for Tijānīs and most other Muslims is the embodiment of the *sunna* itself. In this way, the *Rimāḥ* invites purveyors of intellectual history to complicate the narrative of so-called Islamic reform and challenges the reductive classifiers and wholesale descriptors in the contentions between Sufism and Salafism.

The dissertation’s final chapter dealt with the topic of “sober” Sufism in the *Rimāḥ*. Tāl recurrently warns wayfarers against the reliance on miracles, dreams and spiritual experiences as markers for one’s success or failure on their quest to know God. By examining the exterior veils that Tāl lists as preventing people from recognizing *awliyā’*, his conceptualization of asceticism not as being stripped of material wealth, but that wealth should not possess ownership over one’s heart, and the pitfall of fixation on miracles and dreams, this chapter highlighted Tāl’s approach to responsible wayfaring and argues that the “sober-drunken” typology never dissipated fully among later Sufi scholars. Unlike anti-Sufi polemics against “excess” among Sufis, Tāl’s criticism, rather, comes from his vantage point as a shaykh of *tarbiya* and as someone who sees common pitfalls and mistakes that befall the *nafs* (lower self) of the average disciple.

The final chapter also considered Tāl’s usage of the stark gendered rhetorical device, “the mensuration of men”, to denigrate the status of miracles. By citing a vision of the Prophet, Tāl disparages the lowly inclination towards seeking supernatural manifestations as being a singular cause for delaying one’s attainment of true *fath* (illumination). By making the rhetorical point that

even “people of darkness” can fly or walk on water, Tāl puts forth that miracle-seeking is a dangerous—even a pointless—pursuit. Tāl sets the tone for the Tijānī path as being both a path of sober wayfaring, yet, one where one is encouraged to be drunk with the love of God and his Prophet. If this love is sincere, posits Tāl, then God will aid them to attain the true *karāma* of *istiqāma* (uprightness). For Tāl there is no harm in “seeing” the unseen, but it must not be an idol or an end in itself.

The *Rimāḥ* has been described by Islamicists and Africanists as a “hard lump,”⁵¹² a “veritable compendium,”⁵¹³ “nineteenth century West Africa’s most widely disseminated text,”⁵¹⁴ a second doctrinal reference, yet perhaps what distinguishes the *Rimāḥ* most of all, is the literal and figurative marginalization of its deeper doctrinal contributions that extend from the writings of the most venerable sages in Islamic history. The *Rimāḥ*—with the breadth of its themes, sources and scholarly contributions—can no longer afford to remain “on the margins.” This dissertation sought to shed light on but some of the larger implications of this text’s agency in shaping the religious and political landscape of nineteenth century West Africa and reiterates the calling for a fuller appreciation for Umar Tāl’s magnum opus. Debunking the assumption that it is simply a commentary to the *Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī*, or merely a doctrinal reference outlining the litanies and conditions for the *ṭarīqa Tijāniyya*, the *Rimāḥ*’s horizons are more expansive than meets the eye.

Its distinguishing features—the elaborate rhetoric of “the Seal”, its approach as a culmination of Sufi thought informed by a rich *dhawq*-sphere of sages past and its gnostic-driven methodology to knowledge—reaffirm the text’s rightful place as a sorely underappreciated masterpiece of nineteenth century Islamic textual history and as a missing centerpiece of Sufi studies. Above all, an

⁵¹² Hunwick, “Sufism and the Study of Islam in West Africa,” 308.

⁵¹³ Radtke, “Studies on the Sources of Kitāb Rimāḥ Ḥizb Al-Raḥim of al-Ḥajj ‘Umar.”

⁵¹⁴ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 136.

in depth-study of the *Rimāḥ* debunks the Western academic fascination with Tāl as a militant deployer of literal spears and centers a status he saw as more important: that of him as a warrior of the pen and of the spirit, and a devoted wielder of “figurative spears in the hands of a metaphorical League for the Merciful, over the necks of figurative necks of the Accursed.”

Appendix I: A Translation of the Fifty-Five Chapter Headings of the *Rimāḥ*

(Based on the translation of John Hunwick's "An Introduction to the Tijānī Path: Being an Annotated Translation of the Chapter Headings of the Kitab al-Rimah of al-Ḥājj Umar")⁵¹⁵

The Introduction: Consisting of some of the matters that increase one in faith.

Chapter 1: Informing them that it is incumbent upon every scholar who keeps the religion to speak in support of the People of God and to defend them and aid them against those who discredit them and seek bring them into disrepute by denouncing them and those who associate with them, and that in so doing they gain a great reward; and informing them that no one repudiates [the People of God] save him whose light God wishes to extinguish and the benefit of whose scholarship and writings-if he be a writer-He wishes to negate on account of his wicked conduct.

Chapter 2: On stirring desire in the brethren for association with the Friends of God and holding fast to love for them and serving them, and similar actions.

Chapter 3: Informing them that belief in the People of God and affirmation of the truth of the acquired and the intuitive knowledge which show forth from them, and giving oneself over to them and loving them, constitute intimacy with the Divine (*wilāya*).

Chapter 4: An explanation of some of the veils which prevent people from recognizing God's Friends (the *awliyā'*) so that the wise one may be aware of them and hence pierce them [the veils] all attain to knowledge of the Friends of God and through knowledge of them commute with them, and through communion with them, attain to God, for He is the ultimate goal.

Chapter 5: Informing them that the asceticism of the Perfected Ones (*al-kummal*) does not consist of being detached from the world but rather of detaching the heart. And the perfection of this state is only achieved by them through their lack of attachment to what they possess and have under their control with nothing coming between them and it. And informing them that opting for asceticism combined with rejection of worldly goods may be due merely to loss [of worldly goods] or to weakness or inability to obtain them, and that one of the stipulations for him who calls [people] to God Most High is that he be not completely cut off from the [goods of] this world; and informing them that he who has no means of support and who is supported by other people is to be classified with women and is devoid of manliness.

Chapter 6: Warning them against and deterring them from denouncing and showing enmity towards any of our masters the Friends of God and informing them that this is the essence of perdition in this world and the next.

Chapter 7: Warning them against denouncing people by branding their actions *ḥarām* when this concerns matters whose legal categorization the scholars disagree over.

⁵¹⁵ With my own literary license in changing some word choices, see: Hunwick, John, "An Introduction to the Tijani Path: Being an Annotated Translation of the Chapter Headings of the Kitab al-Rimah of al-Hajj Umar."

Chapter 8: Informing them that God Most High did not make it obligatory for anyone to adhere exclusively to a specific *madhhab* of the *mujtahidīn* and [informing them] that every *imām* of this community—may God Most High be pleased with them all—has renounced any claim that one must necessarily follow him exclusively in every religious matter since [the imams] know that unqualified fidelity is due only to him who is guarded from error (*al-ma‘ṣūm*).

Chapter 9: Informing them that denunciation of the People of *Ḥaqīqa* is permissible to none save him who has comprehensive knowledge of the *shari‘a*; and the point of informing them about this is so that they will be wary of outright condemnation and to confine themselves to matters which are explicitly [deemed] obligatory or forbidden by the Book, the sunna and the consensus of the community.

Chapter 10: Informing them that the Friend of God who has received illumination (*al-walī al-maftūḥ ‘alayh*) is not bound by any *madhhab* of the *mujtahidīn*, but indeed, pursues the truth through God where of leads.⁵¹⁶

Chapter 11: Informing them that the *‘ulamā’* are unanimous encouraging [people] to eschew disputation and avoiding situations in which it occurs.

Chapter 12: Informing them that it is incumbent upon every mature person (*‘āqil*) who is desirous of freeing his soul of foul vices of its own and the devil's making, both now and in the future, to seek out a shaykh who is a guide and counsellor, one well-versed in the Islamic sciences and cognizant of [moral] defects and sicknesses. He should submit to his direction and follow his commands and should not go against him in any matter whatsoever.

Chapter 13: Informing them that no ascetic aspirant attains to the presence of God and the planes of His Attributes and Names except through the agency of those specially authorized (*aṣḥāb al-idhn al-khāṣṣ*), no matter if he amasses all the knowledge of the former [scholars] and associates with all groups of people and performs worship equivalent to that of men and jinn combined (*‘ibādat al-thaqlayn*).

Chapter 14: Informing them that if anyone has students and disciples seeking spiritual tutelage (*tarbiya*) and guidance and the acquisition of knowledge and is favored by God with the presence of one more knowledgeable and more perfect (*akmal*) than him, then it is incumbent upon him to divest himself of [those students and disciples] and to follow together with them that person who is more knowledgeable and advanced.

Chapter 15: Informing them that if a disciple embarks upon shaykh-hood and wants to have his own disciple before extinguishing his human inclinations (*bashariyya*) and being weaned at the hand of a shaykh, then he is blind and is one who merely loves authority. Nothing [good] shall come from him.

Chapter 16: Informing them that the first step which a disciple should take on this path is [the attainment of] complete truthfulness (*al-ṣidq*).

⁵¹⁶ See full translation of this chapter in Appendix II.

Chapter 17: Informing them that the Friend of God is known, befriended, loved and served for nothing other than the sake of God, and that [a disciple] will benefit from such a person in matters of this world and the next, even though it may take a period of time. Whomsoever does not [do so for the sake of God] will not be so, even if [the disciple] were to follow a lesser Friend of God for years and even if this Friend of God were a *quṭb*. Indeed, [the disciple's] perdition is closer to him than his own sandal.

Chapter 18: Informing them that the shaykh (who is the Perfected Friend of God) is, in relation to his followers, like the Prophet in relation to his *umma*, and that pledging allegiance to him is like pledging allegiance to the Prophet—may God bless him and grant him peace—since he is a deputy of the Prophet—may God bless him and grant him peace.

Chapter 19: Warning them not to oppose the shaykh either secretly or openly by failing to do his bidding, whether he be present or absent or by opposing him secretly or openly.

Chapter 20: Warning them against striving for materialized unveilings (*kushūfāt kawniyya*) and visible miracles (*karamāt 'iyāniyya*) and informing them that this path of ours is a path of thankfulness and love and its followers do not occupy themselves with longing for anything that distracts them from God and they do not concern themselves with materialist disclosures. Because they are beloved ones, only rarely do such things befall them. Indeed, to the beloved among them such things do not occur lest they become dependent upon them, and the devil find a way to mislead them and send them astray by showing them such falsehoods that would be a means of enticing them, as happens to many who have recourse to them, so they go astray and lead others astray and they perish and cause others to perish – may God preserve us from perdition! Then, when God wishes out of His bounty to give them illumination (*fath*)⁵¹⁷, He opens for a particular person without his [or her] knowing it, by which he [or she] attains success in both abodes. May God make us among them by His grace. Amin.

Chapter 21: Warning them against being preoccupied with visionary phenomena (*al-waqā'ī*) and being addicted to them and longing for their occurrence and informing them that the aspirant who neither sees nor is seen in a visionary state is no less in rank than the one who sees. Rather, he [or she] is superior.

Chapter 22: Informing them that every sincere aspirant must confine himself to a single exemplar (*quḍwa*) and should have recourse to none other, nor should he frequent any other Friend of God either living or dead.

Chapter 23: Informing them that the spiritual father, who is the shaykh, has a more elevated status and is more deserving of filial piety and veneration (*al-birr wa-l tawqīr*), is more entitled to watch over [the disciple], is firmer in knowledge, more sensitively attuned to and more tightly bonded than one's biological father.

Chapter 24: Being an exposition of the general merit of *dhikr* and its benefits, and on encouraging [performance of] it and stirring up a desire for it, [initially] without performing it in company or doing it publicly, and other matters.

⁵¹⁷ Hunwick translates this as “enlighten.”

Chapter 25: On stirring up a desire to perform *dhikr* in company and in public, and encouraging people to do so, and announcing that it is something in which one should persevere because of its merit; and a rebuttal of him who, on account of his ignorance of the Book and the Sunna and the consensus of the umma, denounces those who perform *dhikr* in groups.

Chapter 26: Mentioning the origin of imparting orally (*talqīn*) various formulae of *dhikr* (and the making of covenants and taking an oath of allegiance and the handshaking (*al-muṣāfaḥa*) and *mushābaka*).

Chapter 27: Informing them that in the eyes of the People of God the esteemed *dhikr*, through which is gained illumination and attainment to God, is the one which is acquired through permission and through being imparted orally by a shaykh *wārith wāṣil murshid* who has a direct teaching relationship (*ṣuḥba*) with the Prophet and whose path is [directly] connected to the Prophetic Plane and not one which a person acquires independently.

Chapter 28: Mentioning our chain of authority in this Aḥmadiyya, Muḥammadiyya Ibrāhīmiyya, Ḥanafiyya Tijāniyya path.

Chapter 29: Informing them that our master Muḥammad al-Ghālī told me explicitly that I am one of the *khalīfas* of the shaykh—may God most high be pleased with him and cause him to be pleased.

Chapter 30: Informing them that God Most High bestowed upon me knowledge of His Greatest and Most Exalted Name in order that I boast about the bounties of my Lord.

Chapter 31: Informing them that the Friends of God see the Prophet—may God bless him and grant him peace—in a waking state (*yaqdhātān lā manāma*) and that he—may God bless him and grant him peace—attends any assembly or place he wishes in body and soul and acts as he wishes and travels wherever he desires in all regions of the earth and in the divine realm (*al-malakūt*) in the form in which he was before his death without change, but hidden from sight just as the angels are, despite their being alive corporeally; and [informing them that] if God wills that a servant should see [the Prophet] He lifts the veil from His servant and he sees the Prophet in his actual form.

Chapter 32: Mentioning the conditions stipulations (*sharāʾiʿ*) of the Ḥanafiyya Tijāniyya Path and a reply to him who rejects any of them.

Chapter 33: An enumeration of the obligatory *dhikr* formulae of our Aḥmadiyya Muḥammadiyya Ibrāhīmiyya Tijānī Path.

Chapter 34: Mentioning some of the non-obligatory *dhikr* formulae of the Path, some of which are given by permission and instruction to the elect among the People of the Path to the exclusion of its ordinary initiates, and some of which are only permitted to the elect of the elect.

Chapter 35: Mentioning the rules of etiquette for *dhikr* and what is meant by it.

Chapter 36: Mentioning the merit of our Shaykh—may God Most High be pleased with him—and mentioning that he is the Seal of the Friends of God (*khātim al-awliyāʾ*) and the lord of the Gnostics and the imam of the righteous and the support of the poles and the Nurturers (*mumidd al-aqtāb wa l-aghwāth*) and that he is the Hidden Pole (*al-quṭb al-maktūm*) and the Sealed Isthmus who is the intermediary between the Prophet and the Friends of God such that none of the Friends, either of greater or lesser rank, finds an effusion [of grace] from the plane (*ḥaḍra*) of a prophet except through his mediation—may God Most High be pleased with him—[which comes] to him whence that Friend of God knows not.

Chapter 37: Announcing the possibility that God Most High will pardon all the past sins that His servant has committed and the future sins that he/she will commit; [announcing further] that the Friend of God may or may not be aware that he/she is a *walī* and that he may [or may not] know that his future state is secure.

Chapter 38: Concerning the merit of those who are devotees in whatever way [of al-Tijānī]—may God Most High be pleased with him and cause him to be pleased and watch over him- and what God has prepared for them; and the merit of the obligatory dhikr formulae of the Path and what, in general terms, God has prepared for those who recite them.

Chapter 39: Concerning the merit of the obligatory dhikr formulae in detail.

Chapter 40: Concerning the merits of the non-obligatory dhikr formulae which are special to the elect and the elect of the elect among the People of the Path.

Chapter 41: An elaboration of the meanings of the obligatory dhikr formulae of the Path, since presence of the heart during dhikr is required of one who performs it and [awareness of the divine] presence is not [attainable] except through knowledge of the meaning of the dhikr [formulae]. Awareness of the divine presence (*al-ḥudūr*) is the core of action and the need for the one who performs dhikr to understand the meaning of what he utters is an essential matter from which there is no escape.

Chapter 42: Concerning some of the objectives upon which are founded the dhikr formulae which are obligatory for this Path alone.

Chapter 43: An explanation of the reason for calling this Path of ours the Aḥmadiyya, Muḥammadiyya, Ibrāhīmiyya, Ḥanīfiyya, Tijāniyya Path.

Chapter 44: Concerning the proof for [the practice of] spiritual retreat (*khalwā*) and its rules according to the Sufis.

Chapter 45: Concerning some of the [types of] spiritual retreat of this Path.

Chapter 46: Being a reply on his [al-Tijānī's] authority—may God Most High be pleased with him—received orally from the Prophet—may God Most High bless him and his family and grant them every one of which contains [spiritual] benefits and secrets which could be comprehended by none save his Lord, the Generous, the Giver, and [al-Tijānī's] most meritorious forebear, upon whom be from

God Most High the finest blessing and purest peace. These are questions which those who have no sound knowledge may dispute with him.

Chapter 47: Informing them that it is incumbent upon them to be obedient to the *muqaddams* (deputies) over the matter of giving out the *wird* and that it is forbidden to disobey them.

Chapter 48: Informing *muqaddams* who have received valid permission to give out the *wird* from one who has valid permission on the authority of his shaykh who was given it verbally and through guidance, especially those of them who have attained the rank of *khalīfa*, having been so appointed by another *khalīfa*, that it is necessary for everyone who summons [people] to God, and is true in so doing, to be patient over the denigration of his brothers, just as [those who] formerly summoned to God were patient when they were vilified.

Chapter 49: Enjoining the brethren who belong to the Paths of the People of God to bear the vilification of those who reject and oppose them and their masters, the Friends of God, following the example of the prophets of God Most High and His messengers, and to find consolation through them.

Chapter 50: Informing them of a quality that facilitates friendship with all manner of people.⁵¹⁸

Chapter 51: Informing them that every individual must endeavor to save their soul and must strive earnestly and energetically in the worship of his Lord, being neither diverted nor hindered from so doing by any matter, due to [the distractions of] a parent or child or homeland or friend or dwelling or kinsman or wealth or any other thing that may hinder one from approaching God and turning one's back on whatever is other than Him even if that leads one to the abandonment of their homelands—nay even [if it must lead to] to taking life (*ḍarb al-a 'nāq*) through *hijra* or *jihad*.

Chapter 52: Mentioning matters which necessarily result in the servant being cut off from his Lord—Exalted and Glorious is He—and which catch the members of this Muḥammadan community off their guard without most of them being aware of it.

Chapter 53: Informing them that it is incumbent upon every adult believer who wishes to save himself from the wrath and anger of God Most High and to win His good pleasure to hasten to sincere repentance.

Chapter 54: Mentioning some of the things that expiate sins.

Chapter 55: Mentioning some of [al-Tijānī's] sayings and advice—may God Most High be pleased with him and cause him to be pleased and watch over him.

Conclusion: We ask God Most High that it should be felicitous: An exposition of the superiority of *dhikr* over all other acts of obedience, since it does not cease with the end of the world—nay, it

⁵¹⁸ This chapter is delightful exposition that compares human temperaments and qualities to those of animals, wherein Tāl compares people to monkeys, donkeys and lions. This chapter, along with the chapter 24, “*fi bayan fadl al-dhikr muṭlaqān*” focuses on ecological themes of nature and animals in the *Rimāḥ*. A worthwhile area for further research.

continues for the believers; and an account of the Garden and some of its features, and descriptions of [what] its people [are doing] therein, and [an exposition of the fact] that they are continuously performing *dhikr*.

Appendix II: Chapter 10 of the *Rimāh*

The saint for whom the door of the truth has been opened is not tied to any particular doctrine among the legal doctrines of the independent jurists. Whatever course he takes, he proceeds with the truth in the presence of God.

Success is achieved with the help of God, Exalted is He, for He is the Guide by His grace to the straight path.

According to Shaykh Aḥmad ibn al-Mubārak in al-Ibrīz: “regarding the saint for whom the door has been opened, you should know that he is fully aware of the truth and of that which is right and sound, and he is not tied to the doctrine of any particular legal school (*madhhab*). Even if all the schools of jurisprudence were to disappear and become irrelevant, he would be capable of reviving the sacred law (*sharī‘a*). How could it not be so, since he is the one from whom the Prophet–God bless him and give him peace–is never absent for the twinkling of an eye, and who does not depart for an instant from witnessing the lord of truth, magnificent is his majesty? He is therefore the one who is aware of the intention of the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, and the intention of lord of truth, magnificent is his majesty, with respect to his decrees and judgements. Since this is the case, he is an over-riding authority (*ḥujja*), and no one else is an authority prevailing over him, because he is closer to the truth than someone for whom the door has not been opened. How can it be permissible, therefore, to be led to subject such a person to denial (*inkār*), and to say that he has contradicted the legal doctrine of so-and-so concerning such-and-such...

"If you hear this, only one of two things can explain why someone wishes to deny the saint for whom the door has been opened:

1. He is ignorant of the sacred law, as is usually the case where people of denial (*ahl al-inkār*) are concerned. This person is not befitted to practice criticism, for the blind man is never found criticizing that who can see, so it is more appropriate for him to preoccupy himself with the removal of his ignorance.

2. Or else, he may be well-versed in the doctrine of one of the legal schools, but ignorant of another. The expression of denial by this person will not be admissible, unless he has become convinced that the truth about everything rests in his *madhhab* and does not disregard it in favor of another. This conviction has not been arrived at by anyone, however, neither among those who are accurate in their judgment, nor among those who are mistaken. As for those who are accurate, they believe that the truth is in every *madhhab*, for all the schools are correct in their opinion. According to them, God's judgment is diverse, in accordance with the rulings of the *mujtahidīn*, so if one of them thinks that unlawfulness applies to a particular case, that is God's ruling as far as he is concerned, and if one of them thinks that lawfulness applies to it specifically, that is the verdict of God as far as he is concerned. As for those who are mistaken, God's judgment is but one in their opinion, not diverse, and there is only one application for it. They do not confine it to a particular *madhhab*, however, but consider the truth in a certain case to be the ruling of an imam, and in another case the ruling of another. It is therefore more appropriate for this denier to preoccupy himself with the removal of this false belief.

As for someone who is well-versed in the four school, then denial by such a person

is also unbefitting, unless he has become convinced of the exclusion of the truth from other legal doctrines of scholars, like those of al-Thawrī, al-Awza‘ī, ‘Atā’, ‘Ikrima, Mujāhid, Mu‘ammar, ‘Abd ar-Razzāq, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Juraij, Ibn Khuzayma, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ṭāwūs, an-Nakha‘ī and Qatāda and others, including the successors (*al-tābi‘īn*) and their followers, all the way back to the companions, may God be pleased with them. This conviction is corrupt, so his preoccupation with its remedy is more appropriate than his preoccupation with denial against God's saints for whom the door of the truth has been opened.

Now that you have reached this point, you will know that denial is not permissible except for someone who fully comprehends *sharī‘a*, and no one fully comprehends it except the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—and his inheritors, like the helpers (*al-aghwāth*) in every period of time. As for all others, their silence is better for them, if only they knew. The subject of our discourse is the denial directed to the people of the truth from the people of illumination (*fath*). As for the people of darkness and error, their states are not concealed from those who have contended with them.”

In addition, he (al-Mubārak) has gone on to say:

"I was once in the presence of a certain person, endowed with sagacity (*fiṭna*) and perspicacity (*ḥathāfa*), while he was listening to an enquirer who was asking an illumined saint the following question about the *sūra* recited after the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb* i.e. al-Fātiḥa): 'If the worshipper forgets to recite it, and he omits the prompt prostration that is incumbent upon him as a consequence, then does not perform it until he has pronounced the concluding salutation—and if the condition is prolonged—is the ritual prayer annulled by the omission of the prompt prostration, based on the belief that there are three traditional customs (*sunan*) relating to the *sūra*, or not, based on the belief that there are not three traditional customs relating to it? In the opinion of Shaykh al-Ḥaṭṭāb and others, the former belief is correct, while the second is maintained in *Sirāj ar-Risāla*.' The inquirer requested this illumined saint to identify for him the truth according to God, exalted is He, so the saint quickly replied to him: 'The truth according to God, exalted is He, is that forgetting to recite the *sūra* does not necessitate any act of prostration whatsoever, and if someone prostrates himself because of it, his ritual prayer is annulled.'

The illumined saint happened to be an illiterate commoner, and the inquirer had been acquainted with him and had recognized the degree of his illumination, so when he heard him answer, he knew it to be the truth in which there is no doubt. As for the person endowed with sagacity and perspicacity, doubt and suspicion took over of him, so he said to the inquirer, after they had left the saint's presence: "This man—meaning the saint is an ignoramus who does not know anything at all." Notice how he was ignorant of God's judgment concerning this clear question, for he said: "If someone omits the *sūra*, no prostration is incumbent upon him," although Ibn Rushd has included it (the recitation of the *sūra*) among the established traditional customs, just as he has included both audible and inaudible recitation among them." The inquirer responded by telling him: "the illumined saint is not tied to any school of jurisprudence. Whatever course he takes, rather, he goes where the truth goes." The person endowed with sagacity and perspicacity then said, and so did everyone among the seekers of knowledge: "We do not disregard the sayings of our Imām Mālik," so the inquirer replied: "what the illumined saint has said has been related by Ashhab⁵¹⁹ on the authority of Mālik, as reported in *at-Tawḍīḥ*, for he has related this statement of the imam: "the [recitation of the] *sūra* is highly recommended, but it is not a traditional

⁵¹⁹ Egyptian Mālikī scholar named Miskīn bin ‘Abd al-Azīz (d.820).

custom (*sunna*)” This is also the *madhhab* of Shāfi‘ī, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, for according to him the *sūra* is among the embellishing Qur'anic verses (*al-āyāt al-taḥṣīniyya*) not among the traditional customs (*sunan*), and if someone prostrates himself because of it [to compensate for its omission], his ritual prayer is annulled.”

The inquirer then asked us: “for the saint, it was simply a matter of identifying the truth without qualification, and his statement was made without specific reference to the well-known doctrine of Mālik. He identified what we asked him about, and that identification was consistent with a report from Mālik, as well as the *madhhab* of Shāfi‘ī, may God be well pleased with them both, so what further responsibility was incumbent on the saint in his reply?” When the inquirer uttered these words, and the person endowed with perspicacity heard him, that person was rendered speechless, for he did not understand what he was saying.”

According to ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī in *ar-Risālat al-mubāraka*: in the debate between the conventional follower of authority (the *muqallid*) and the gnostic (‘*ārif*), the judgement between the two is akin to the judgement of these two individuals: one of them entered a house in broad daylight and saw everything contained within it. The other did not enter it, but a group of people informed him that such-and-such was inside this house, and he believed them to be telling the truth. The first, the one who entered, is analogous to the conventional follower of authority. As for the one who entered the house in daytime, and saw everything contained within it, he will not be shaken from his knowledge by that which is maintained by the one who did not enter, on the strength of the evidence of the informants, not one of whom has entered the house, even if they reached the extreme limit of repetition. That is because no one will disbelieve his own perception (*lā yukathib ḥissahu*).

As for the debate between the *muqallid* and the *muqallid*, the judgement therein is also the judgement of these two: both of them entered the house in broad daylight with clear presence of mind, and saw everything contained within it, so they are unanimous with no disagreement between them, that is why two Gnostics have never disagreed about their knowledge of God, exalted is he. So, understand, for among them all the matters at the disposal of the independent jurists, which they have understood from the Book and the *sunna*, there is no part of what is available to the gnostic, as proven by what we have previously set forth from all the sciences of the Gnostics, may God the exalted be well pleased with them all.”

[End of Sha‘rānī’s quote]

I [Tāl] say: included among the total number of those sciences are the seventy-one thousand sciences—each one of them beyond the grasp of intellect—which he [Sha‘rānī] has listed in his book, *Tanbīh al-aghbiyā’ ‘alā qaṭra min baḥr ‘ulūm al-awliyā’* (“Informing the Fools of a Drop from the Ocean of the Sciences of the Saints.”) He also mentioned approximately three thousand of them in another book of his entitled *ad-Durr an-nāzīm fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān al-‘Adhīm* (“The String of Pearls concerning the Sciences of the Glorious Qur’ān.”) He said that his incentive to compile it was preservation of respect for the people of God, when he heard someone—a person who had no acquaintanceship with them [the people of God]—subjecting them to derision and characterizing them as ignorant commoners.

He also compiled a list of two-hundred thousand sciences, a list of forty-seven thousand sciences, and a list of nine hundred and ninety-nine sciences. He said that his Shaykh ‘Alī al-

Khawwās informed him that Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Matbūlī derived the latter from the opening sūrā of the Qur'an alone. They include four hundred and eleven sciences that are reserved for the Gnostics and the names of which are unknown to any of the scholars, let alone their profound significance. He said that he was led to list them due to a feeling of profound sympathy for the critics...

According to Shaykh Muḥyīd-Dīn al-‘Arabī al-Ḥātimī, may God the exalted be pleased with him: “God has deputies (*khulafā’*) among his creatures apart from the Envoy. From the mine of messenger Muḥammad and the other messengers, they take what the messengers took. They recognize the merit of that which has been there since long ago, but [it is possible for] the messenger to accept the addition—in other words, adding to the rules—whereas this deputy (the *khalīfa*) cannot accept the addition which, had he been the messenger, he would have accepted, so he does not give the ruling and the knowledge of what is legally prescribed, except the law of the messenger [Muḥammad] in particular, as opposed to other messengers.

Do you not see that the condition of Jesus, peace be upon him, when the Jews underestimated him that he did not amount to more than Moses, resembles what he have said about the *khilāfa* today, in relation the messenger? The Jews believed in Moses and acknowledged him, so when Jesus, because of his status as a messenger, added a rule or abrogated a rule that Moses had established, they did not tolerate that. The Jews were ignorant of the reality of things and ordered him [Jesus] killed. In his story is what God has related to us and about them in His magnificent book. Since he was a messenger, he accepted addition by some means, either by diminution of an established rule, or the augmentation of a rule, on condition that the diminution resulted in the addition of a rule, without any doubt.

The [station of] *khilāfa* today does not possess this status. It merely diminishes and adds to the law (*shar’*) established by independent legal reasoning (*ijtihād*); that is to say, to the independent legal rulings of which there is really no support. Whether they do or do not include the textual proof (*naṣṣ*), they are not in accordance with the law that was ennobled by Muḥammad, God bless him and give him peace. The ruling that emerges from the *khalīfa* may sometimes be at variance with a *ḥadīth*, so it may be assumed that it is based on independent juristic reasoning (*ijtihād*). It is not so, however, but rather that, in the opinion of this imam, that report from the Prophet has not been confirmed from the standpoint of intuitive cognition (*kashf*), and if it had been confirmed he would have ruled in accordance with it. Even if his ruling is reached by equitable means, he is not immune from doubt, which is the source of negligence and forgetfulness, nor from inaccurate reporting, which is the source of alterations and distortions.

The like of this occurs in the case of the *khalīfa* today, and it happened likewise in the case of Jesus. When it occurs, it removes a great deal from the established law of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*), and by its removal clarifies the form of the legal truth that was observed by the Prophet, peace be upon him, especially when the rulings of the imams are contradictory in one and the same case. We know for certain, therefore, that if revelation (*wahy*) came down, it would come down in various aspects, for that is the divine judgement, and anything else is not. If the Lord of truth has established it in the form of the jurists, He has prescribed its establishment for the purpose of removing narrow constraint from this community and broadening legislation on it.

Appendix III: Chapter 20 of the *Rimāh*

This section is concerned with warning the brethren against the pursuit of existential phenomena and conspicuous charismatic talents. It also informs them that this path of ours is a path of thankfulness and love. Its people are not preoccupied with eager desire for everything that distracts attention from God, and they take no interest in existential phenomena. Because of their being loved ones, they let nothing of that kind impress them, in case they come to rely on it, for Satan would then find a means of deluding them and leading them astray. He would show them vanities that would serve to entice them, as happens to many of those who rely on that, for he has gone astray and led astray, perished and caused to perish. We take refuge with God from perdition. If God wishes to open the way for them by His gracious favor, He may provide an individual, unbeknown to them, with an opening that will admit them to bliss in the two abodes. May God include us among them, by His gracious favor. Amīn.

Success is achieved with the help of God Exalted, for He is the guide by His grace to the straight path. As we are told in *al-Waṣāya al-quḍsiyya* [The Sacred Counsels]: "It is necessary for him, meaning the seeker who performs the remembrance, to be sincere in his aspiration to be free from attachments to created beings, and from the propensity for the objects of longing and desire, which are the false objects of worship, including the propensity for existential phenomena and conspicuous charismatic talents [*karamāt*], for they are of no avail.

He must seek the Truth alone and keep his quest pure and free from mixing with the desire of the lower self, for the propensity for existential phenomena and charismatic talents is part of the desire of the lower self and its passion. If someone is interested in them, and that is his goal and the focus of his attention in his remembrance, he is incorporated among those who are deluded. Even if it comes about without a quest, he is in danger of enticement.

"The great Shaykhs have said: 'If the spiritual traveler enters a garden, and the birds on the trees of that garden say with their tongues: "Peace be upon you, oh saint of God," then, if he does not realize that he is being deluded by it, he will be deluded unawares.' All the spiritual guides have warned the seekers against the propensity for conspicuous charismatic talents, and they have said: 'they are nothing but the menstruation of men.'

Abū Yazīd was told: 'So-and-so walks to Mecca in one night,' so he said: 'Satan walks in one hour from the East to the West, under the curse of Allah!' He was also told: 'So-and-so walks on the water,' so he said: 'The birds fly in the air and the fish swim on the water.'" According to Sahl ibn 'Abdullah: "The noblest of charismatic talents is that you alter a blameworthy characteristic among your characteristics."

Zain ad-Dīn al-Khawwāfi has said in *al-Waṣāya*: "The seeker should not enter the retreat [*khalwā*] for the purpose of discovering my being, or acquiring conspicuous charismatic talents, for if someone enters the spiritual retreat on the strength of these wishes, and he does not observe the prerequisite of sincere devotion, Satan will manipulate him, play with him, make fun of him, and show him false things in the forms of the truth."

He has also said: "One of the companions in Khurāsān entered the spiritual retreat without permission and without a set time, so Satan came to him in the form of al-Khiḍr, and said to him: 'Do you wish to acquire the divine sciences [*al-ʿulūm al-laduniyya*]?' He said: 'Yes, for he was

inclined to speak loquaciously about the gnostic sciences, so Satan told him: 'Open your mouth!' He promptly opened his mouth, and Satan spat into it. Then, after that, he compiled a book containing chapters from the gnostic sciences. When he left the retreat and came to meet me, he presented what he had compiled and related how it had occurred, so I said to him: 'O miserable wretch, that was Satan! He came to you in the form of al-Khidr, played with you, and distracted you from obedience to God and His remembrance. You must go and wash the book and repent to God of your own accord.'

"Satan often comes in the form of the righteous, but he is incapable of imitating the form of God's Messenger, for He said, God bless him and give him peace: 'if someone has seen me in the state of sleep, he has really seen me, for Satan cannot imitate me.' Nor can he imitate the form of the shaykh, since the shaykh is a successor of the Prophet, authorized to provide guidance by his shaykh, who was authorized by his shaykh and so on, back to the venerable Messenger of God, bless him and give him peace.

He also comes often in the form of the tyrannical jurists (*al-jabbarīn al-muttafaqiha*); in the form of the heretical innovators; in the form of the ugly beardless youths, the wearers of top hats between the age of six or seven and thirteen or fifteen; and in the form of the cunning impostors. He also comes in the form of the dog, the lion and the wolf; in a form consisting of light that is both dingy red and white in color, and also between redness and whiteness, but the whiteness of its color is not pure, so it comes quickly into view and disappears. He also comes in other forms apart from these, familiar to the cautious seekers of refuge with God, those who are sincerely devoted to God and are truthful in their dealings with God. Those forms are made known to them by the Lord of Truth by means of their Shaykh, who acquaints them with Satan, the nature of his methods, and the occasions of his misguidance and his deception, in presence or absence, after the connection has been established.

"I once saw him come toward me in the form ascribed to al-Khidr in the report of Nurābādh, in Khurāsān during the retreat. After some conversation with him, I said: 'I wish to hear from you a saying that you have heard directly from God's Messenger, just as *rukn al-millā wa ad-dīn* 'Alā' ad-Dawla⁵²⁰, sanctified by his innermost being, has heard directly from you.' He changed at this point, and then, when I began to utter the Prophetic saying, and I said: 'God's Messenger said:

If you see the man confounded, taking vain pride in his opinion, his loss has become complete.' He then stood up and fled away, with the Khidr-like form having changed into the form of a sly thief. I tried to capture him, but I could not catch up with him.

"The purpose of this long-windedness is to provide cautionary advice and warning, so that the occurrence of supernatural events will not cause the spiritual traveler, who is devoutly pious and intent on investigating things, to fall into Satan's net, and so that he will by no means enter the retreat without the Shaykh's permission. One of the Shaykhs has said: 'If someone does not have a Shaykh, their Shaykh is Satan.' In the case of one of those who lay claim to spiritual guidance, I noticed that Satan cut off his path, and he became one of his most important agents in misguidance and corruption in the provision of spiritual guidance.

"Truthfulness, sincere devotion, refraining from vain pride in any of the indubitable virtues, suspecting the lower self of evil at all times, recognizing shortcoming and exclusion from the company of the perfect, thinking well of God, being wary of haste in attaining arrival at the goal, training oneself to be tolerant of isolation from the common folk and the villains, refraining from contempt for anyone who believes God and His Messenger, curtailing expectation and contemplating the sudden advent of the hour of death-these are some of the qualities that tame Satan, prevent him

⁵²⁰ Persian medieval Sufi scholar of the Kubrāwī order, Alā' ad-Dawlā al-Simnānī (d.1336).

from causing damage to the benefits of faith, and drive him away from that which obstructs the *sālik* on the ascent to the summit of true knowledge. We beseech God for the height of aspiration."

If you have understood this well, you must know that this Aḥmadī-Muḥammadī-Ibrāhīmī-Ḥanīfī-Tijānī path is the path of thankfulness and love. The exercise practiced therein consists of the attachment of the hearts to the Lord of Truth. Its strict requirement is adherence to His door; taking refuge with God Exalted in the states of movement and the states of rest; keeping one's distance from the negligent lapses that intervene between the moments of present awareness; worshipping Him in accordance with the true devotion of servitude and complete detachment from all favors, together with acknowledgment of weakness, shortcoming and the failure to accord divinity (*ar-Rubūbiyyā*) its rightful due; and the constancy of all that in the heart through the passage of the hours and the times.

While one of them was at the stage of repentance and seeking forgiveness for sins, lo and behold, clear opening [*fath*] came to them! Illumination is not bestowed upon any one of them, except as a surprise that the never expected, and since this is the case, it can only be a Divine bestowal, which no one receives except the truly convinced, the beloved gnostic who is not enticed by existential phenomena, nor by conspicuous charismatic talents, lest they take it for granted, believing it to have been ordained by a skillful adept, so their foot will slip into the chasms of perdition, while they are unaware. They will go stray, then lead others astray and perish, just as it happens to many of the misguided misguiders, who have followed the Path and entered retreats for wrong purposes, without any Shaykh at all, or at the hand of a decrepit Shaykh never authorized to provide guidance. They have not understood that the goal of spiritual training is the cleansing of the essence, and its purification from its frivolities, until it becomes capable of bearing the secret, for that depends on the removal of darkness from the essence, and the severance of the attachments of falsehood from its disposition. The severance of falsehood from it will sometimes relate to its attributes of its innate character, in which case God will purify it without any intermediary.

Such was the condition of the three distinguished centuries, the best of all the centuries, for the people in those centuries were devoutly committed to the truth, exploring it thoroughly. When they slept, they slept in accordance with it; when they awoke, they awoke in accordance with it; and when they moved, they moved within it. Someone whose insight by God has been opened by God, and who studies their inner being, will discover that their minds, in all but a few rare cases, were devoutly committed to God and His Messenger, seeking the attainment of their good pleasure. Because of this, goodness was abundant among them, and the light of the Lord of Truth shone brightly in their natures. As for the extent of knowledge and their achievement of the degree of independent judgment (*ijtihād*), it is impossible to describe or define what became apparent in them.

Spiritual training (*tarbiya*) was therefore unnecessary in these centuries. The shaykh would simply inspire his disciple, the owner of his secret and the inheritor of his light, by whispering in his ear, so the disciple would receive illumination by means of that alone, because of the purity of the essences and the clarity of the minds, and their longing for the path of right conduct.

In the time since the distinguished centuries, the severance of darkness from the essences has come to depend on the work of the shaykh, because intentions have been corrupted, natures have stagnated, and minds have become attached to the lower world, seeking the satisfaction of lustful desires and the enjoyment of pleasures. The shaykh endowed with insight must therefore instruct his disciple and his inheritor, so he gets to know him, studies him, and discovers that his mind is devoutly attached to falsehood and the satisfaction of lustful desires. He also discovers that his essence follows the mind in that attachment, for it dallies with the frivolous, frolics with the playful, and prattles with the idle gossips. The limbs of the body move in a disreputable manner because the mind, which is

their master, is tied to falsehood, not to the truth. When the shaykh finds him in that condition, he commands him to practice retreat (*khalwa*), remembrance (*dhikr*) and reducing food intake (*taqlīl al- 'akl*), for by retreat he is separated from the idle gossips, who are counted among the dead; by the remembrance his tongue is rid of the utterance of falsehood, frivolity and nonsense; and by reducing the intake of food, the steam in the brain is weakened, so the lustful appetite is diminished. The mind then returns to devout attachment to God and His Messenger. When the disciple has attained this purity and clarity, his essence is capable of bearing the secret, and this is the goal of the shaykhs, pursued by means of spiritual training and *khalwā*.

The business has continued in this manner for a period of time, until the truth has been mingled with falsehood and light with darkness, for the people of falsehood have started training those who come to them for guidance by introducing the spiritual retreat and reaching the Names with a corrupt intention and a purpose contrary to the truth. They sometimes add incantations and required performances which turn this into a flight from God and amount to temptations. (See *al-Ibrīz* by Shaykh Aḥmad ibn al-Mubārak.)

Suppose you were to say: "It has now become quite clear to us that the pursuit of existential phenomena and conspicuous charismatic talents is blameworthy, misleading and destructive, and that the path of your shaykh is a path of thankfulness, for that is the gracious favor bestowed upon its people by God, which keeps you safe from the falsehoods by which Satan leads astray. Nevertheless, we would like you to provide us with additional information about that, and also to explain to us the difference between the path of thankfulness, which is your path, and the path of strenuous exertion (*mujāhada*). The scope of the former is centered entirely on thankfulness and delight in the Benefactor, without hardship and trouble, while the scope of the latter is centered on exercise, fatigue, hardship, sleeplessness, hunger and so on.

Which of the two is more appropriate? Are they both in agreement on the need for spiritual exercise! Does your shaykh command you to practice thankfulness only after drawing near to the goal or having reached it, or does he enjoin thankfulness and delight in God from the very first moment and at the time of initiation? Is it possible for one man to follow both paths, or is it impossible for him to benefit by one of them unless he runs away from the other?

My response to this would be: "God is the Guide by His grace to the straight path. As reported by Shaykh Aḥmad ibn al-Mubārak in *al-Ibrīz*, on the authority of the cardinal pole [al-qutb 'Abd al- 'Azīz ibn ibn Mas'ūd ad-Dabbāgh: "The path of thankfulness is the original path, for it is the one that was followed by the hearts of the Prophets and the bosom friends among the companions and others. It consists of worshipping Him in accordance with the true devotion of servitude and complete detachment from all favors, together with acknowledgment of weakness, shortcoming and the failure to accord Divinity its rightful due; and the constancy of all that in the heart through the passage of the hours and the times. When He recognized their truthfulness, He rewarded them with that which is His noble generosity required, including access to intimate knowledge of Him, and attainment of the secrets of belief in Him. Then, when the practitioners of spiritual exercise (*riyāda*) heard what was granted to these people, including access to intimate knowledge of Him, and attainment of the secrets of belief in Him, they adopted that as the object of their quest and their desired goal. They embarked on its quest by means of fasting, vigil, sleeplessness and constant spiritual retreat, until they obtained what they obtained. Migration on the path of thankfulness has thus been, from the outset, towards God and towards His Prophet, not towards illumination and the acquisition of phenomena, while migration on the path of spiritual exercise has been for the sake of illumination and the obtainment of degrees. The journey on the former has been the journey of the hearts, and on the latter the journey of the bodies. Success on the former comes as a surprise, which cannot be

anticipated by the servant, so while the servant is at the stage of repentance and seeking forgiveness for sins, lo and behold, the clear illumination comes to him! The two paths are both correct, but the path of thankfulness is purer and more correct. The two paths converge on the need for spiritual exercise but in the case of the former it is the exercise of the hearts consisting of their devout attachment to the Lord of the Truth, and its strict requirements are adherence to His door, taking refuge with God in the states of movement and the states of rest, and keeping one's distance from the negligent lapses that intervene between the moments of present awareness. In summary, therefore, spiritual exercise consists of attaching the heart to God, and constancy in that, even if the outer being is not involved in a considerable amount of worship. That is why its practitioner would fast and break fast, keep vigil and sleep, spend time with the women, and perform all the duties of the Sacred Law that are incompatible with the exercise of the bodies."

On another occasion, after saying: "Migration on the path of spiritual exercise has been for the sake of illumination and the obtainment of degrees," he added:

"Then, after obtaining illumination, one of them remains committed to his first intention, so his heart becomes preoccupied with the things he witnesses in the realms of being. He rakes delight in what he sees, such as mystical revelation, walking on water and traveling by leaps and bounds, and he considers that to be the ultimate goal. This is one of those whose hearts are devoid of God at the outset and the end, so he is one of the greatest losers, those whose effort in the life of this world has gone astray, although they reckon that they are doing good work. Also included among them is someone whose intention alters after he has obtained illumination and by the mercy of God. He takes him by the hand, so his heart becomes attached to the Lord of Truth and he turns away from everything but Him. This condition, acquired by this person after illumination, is the first stage on the path of thankfulness, so how great is the distance between the two paths and the difference between the two pursuits!

"To put the matter in a nutshell: The journey on the path of thankfulness is the journey of the hearts, and on the path of spiritual exercise it is the journey of the bodies. The intention in the former is pure, and in the latter it is mixed. Illumination in the former comes as a surprise, which cannot be anticipated by the servant, for it is divine (*rabbānī*), and in the latter it is obtained by subterfuge and devices, for it is divided into the two previous aspects. Illumination in the former is obtained by no one except the true believer, the gnostic, the beloved, the one who is near, contrary to illumination in the latter, for you have heard that the monks and the Jewish rabbis have spiritual exercises by which they have acquired something from the temptations. As for combining the two paths, it is possible for the individual to attach his heart to God in all his states of movement and states of rest, and to devote his outer being to strenuous efforts and exercises. God knows best, of course."

Everything set forth above is indicated by the speech of our Shaykh, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him and make him well pleased, and may He be well pleased with us for his sake, as recorded in *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī* where he has said:

"In the wise counsel that I have to offer you, the second matter is abstinence from material things forbidden by the sacred law, meaning unlawful food, drink, clothing and dwellings.... The next matter is indispensable, for it is the beginning and the end of all matters: namely, the attachment of the heart to God, racing to Him and abandoning everything apart from Him, in general and in particular. If the servant is capable of letting the heart go towards God, in every respect and in every condition, by sensing the movement of the heart, that is the ultimate goal." And he has also said: "It is necessary for the wayfarer to enter the evening and the morning, and to spend the day and the night, without having any wish except for two things: the first is the wish for God, in preference to all existing beings, needing nothing from them because of Him, disdainful of their regard and

scornful of choosing anything apart from Him. God must be the starting point of his pursuit and its ultimate destination, the beginning of his pursuit and its end, its inception and its conclusion. He must be totally engrossed in all of that, so that not a single instant remains in which he seeks anything else, because the desire for something else is either greed or folly.

Secondly, the wishes of the wayfarer must also include his becoming entirely devoted to God, uninfluenced by the opinion of others, completely attached to Him in terms of the innermost being, the spirit, the mind, the soul, the heart, the outer being, so that one single atom of him will be at odds with God Exalted and He will be in conformity with his wishes, stripped of all desires, choices, plans, favors, lustful appetites and selfish interests. In all of that, he will be in harmony with God, having no personal motive, no personal means and involvement. That must be an act of servitude to God Almighty for His sake, and a fulfillment of what is due to His Divinity, so that something may return to him from Him. He must not prefer God in order to satisfy his wish, but purely because of his Lord's divinity, not in despair of His blessing, so that he will not be subject to disapproval, and He will hold him in high regard because of the perfection of his praiseworthy qualities."

The meaning of everything set forth above is also indicated by a passage from a speech that was dictated by the Chieftain of Existence and the Emblem of Witnessing, our master and our patron Muḥammad, God bless him and give him peace, to one of the companions of the Shaykh, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him and make him well pleased, and may He be well pleased with us for his sake, in a state of wakefulness, not of sleep. The companion was instructed to take it to the shaykh, for he was told:

"God's Messenger has said: 'tell him,' meaning the shaykh: "Here is the explanation of worship, which is subdivided into four parts: the first consists of detachment [from this world] and dedication to God with perfect deeds and complete sincerity. This dedication must be spontaneous, and what he intends by this dedication must be to extol God, magnify Him, glorify Him and sanctify Him, and to praise God, according to the condition he is in. He must not intend to gain anything by his worship, nor expect anything from it, so that his actions will ascend God, enter the opened door, and become preoccupied with transformation in the manner we have mentioned at the beginning. There must be no pause in the study of His saying:

‘Those who believe, and do righteous deeds, those are the best of creatures.’ (98:7)
for the people of righteous conduct are those who do not intend to gain anything by their deeds, in the form of benefit or profit. He must ask in his worship for nothing except the assistance and perfect well-being that he requests for his afterlife. Tell him the best request. If one of them asks, let him ask for pardon and well-being. If his intention in it is detachment and dedication is attainment to a station, or if he is seeking knowledge or a secret, his deeds will ascend until they arrive at a door that is locked, so they will sit there, expecting it to be opened in a while and hoping that their owner will return and say:

"My worship is for God. I do not seek any object of need." Then, if he is inspired and says this, they will go back and enter the opened door, but if he does not say what has been mentioned, those deeds will go back scattered, like the gusting of the wind in the air. They will wander about until they come to rest, in the sense that they will turn against him in desperation, until the Prophet says: "Tell my beloved at-Tijānī that all of these meanings are in the Glorious Qur’ān and say to him: "This Book will guide you to what I have commanded you to do. I have told you not to aim at anything, nor to strive in greedy pursuit of anything. You must exert yourself in worship and opposition to the lower self, for greedy desire for what the human being aims at in worship causes the postponement of illumination (*fath*). " You must tell him: "It causes the postponement of illumination," and tell him: "it is the impediment to illumination," up to three times...."

God Exalted is He is the enabling Guide, by His grace, to the straight path and to Him is the return and the homeward journey.

Appendix IV: Chapter 43 of the *Rimāh*

Why this path of ours is called at-Ṭarīqa al-Aḥmadiyya al-Muḥammadiyya al-Ibrāhīmiyya al-Ḥanīfiyya at-Tijāniyya

Success is achieved with the help of God Exalted, for He is the Guide by His grace to the straight path. You should know that the full name of this path (*ṭarīqa*) of ours comprises several names, arranged in this order:

al-Aḥmadiyya al-Muḥammadiyya al-Ibrāhīmiyya al-Ḥanīfiyya at-Tijāniyya. If you wish, you may call it: at-Ṭarīqa al-Aḥmadiyya, or at-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya, or at-Ṭarīqā al-Ibrāhīmiyya al-Ḥanīfiyya or at-Ṭarīqa at-Tijāniyya.

Suppose you raise the question, “why have you given it several names, while other *ṭuruq* have been given a single name?” My answer will be: It has been given many names because it is endowed with excellent merits and special qualities; with which others are not endowed, and the multiplicity of names is indicative of the superiority of the object named. As we are told in *as-Sirāj al-munīr*:⁵²¹ “It—meaning *surat al-Ikhlāṣ* has many names, and the multiplicity of names is indicative of the honor of the object named.”

According to Ibn Abī Jamra in *Bahjat an-nufūs*:⁵²² “the probable reason why it (meaning, the *Fatīḥā*) has been called by many names is the fact that it is endowed with excellent merits and special qualities, with which others are not endowed, and the multiplicity of names is indicative of the superiority of the object named, either absolutely or generically. That is [also] why the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, was called by five names. According to one of the religious scholars: “The total number of his names is approximately one hundred, whereas the other Prophets have only one name each. That is because he, God bless him and give him peace, is the Holder of the Furled Standard and the Praiseworthy Station. The multiplicity of names is due to the magnitude of his worth. The same applies to the multiplicity of God’s names, glorious is He, for there is nothing like Him, so nothing resembles His Names, because of their multiplicity and their magnitude.

In the case of our path, once you have understood the reason why its full name comprises several [adjectival] names, arranged in a particular sequence, you must realize that the significance of its being Aḥmadī is still unclear to you. We must therefore describe and explain the Aḥmadī Reality (*al-Ḥaqīqa al-Aḥmadiyya*), to make it clear to you as quickly as possible. Every intelligent observer views its being called Aḥmadī from a particular standpoint, so let us quote what our shaykh, (at-Tijānī), had to say on the subject, in his commentary on the Occult Invocation of Blessing (*as-salāh al-ghaibiyya*):

“As for the Aḥmadī Reality, it is the subject previously discussed in connection with the statement: “every giver of praise in the universe has praised God, but no one in the universe has praised God to the same extent as the Prophet has praised Him. Furthermore, the Aḥmadī Reality is one God’s mysteries, so no one has discovered what it contains in the form of intuition, knowledge, secrets, bountiful favors, manifestations, exalted states and pure virtue, and no one has had any experience of it, not even any of the other Messengers and Prophets. Its station is peculiar to him alone, God bless him and give him peace.

⁵²¹ The 16th century *tafsīr* of Egyptian scholar Al-Khaṭīb al-Sharḥīnī.

⁵²² Andalusian commentary on the *ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī.

“As for all the attainments of the Prophets and the Envoys, all of the angels and those drawn near, all of the Poles and the champions of the truth, and all of the saints and the gnostic sages, whatever they have achieved, as a whole and in detail, it has come from the gracious bounty of the Muḥammadan Reality.

As for the Aḥmadī Reality, no one has obtained anything from it, for it is peculiar to him alone, because of the perfection of its glory and the extreme degree of its sublimity.”

Once you have come to know the meaning of the Aḥmadī Reality, and the understanding of it has been grasped by your mind, you should know that our Path is called “Aḥmadī” for several reasons:

First, it is called “Aḥmadī” because of its having originated from the Chieftain of Existence and the Sign of Witnessing, whom God has named Aḥmad, God bless him and give him peace, in in His definitive Book:

[Jesus said]: “[I am] also bringing good tidings
of a Messenger who will come after me,
whose name will be Ahmad.” (61:6)

so the adjective “Aḥmadī” has been applied to that which emanates from him, God bless him and give him peace.

Second, it is called “Aḥmadī” because of its stemming from the gracious favor bestowed by our patron, God bless him and give him peace, upon Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad [at-Tijānī].

Third, it is called “Aḥmadī” in order to draw attention to the fact that he, may God be pleased with him, is the first of the saints and their supporter, even though his physical existence came later, for he already existed in reality.

As previously mentioned, Ibn ‘Arabī al-Ḥātimī said: “the meaning of the Prophet’s saying, ‘I was a Prophet while Adam was between the water and the clay’ is, ‘I was a Prophet in actual fact, aware of my Prophethood, while Adam was between the water and clay.’” He then went on to say: “none of the other Prophets was a Prophet, nor aware of his Prophethood, except when he was sent [on his mission] after his coming into existence with his material body, and his complete fulfillment of the preconditions of Prophethood.” Then he added: “the Seal of the Saints was likewise actually a saint, aware of his sainthood, while he was between the water and the clay, and none of the other saints was a saint in actual fact, nor aware of his sainthood, except after his acquisition of the Divine characteristics that are stipulated in the definition of sainthood.” Once this has been thoroughly understood, you will not be mystified by the previously mentioned statement: “Every giver of praise in the universe has praised God Exalted but no one in the universe has praised God to the same extent as the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, has praised Him.” Once you have grasped this, you should know that the Seal of the Saints has surpassed every giver of praise in the giving of praise to God, for none of the saints has praised God to the same extent as the Seal of the Saints has praised Him, because he is the heir who inherits from the source, and who recognizes the degrees.

[Ibn ‘Arabī] al-Ḥātimī said: “The Seal of the Saints is the inheriting saint, and who recognizes the degrees and ascertains the entitlement of their holders, in order to give each creditor his rightful due, for that is one of the virtues of the Chieftain of the Envoys, the Captain of the Community.”

My master said about the elite, just as Sha‘rānī said in *Durar al-ghawwās*: “this community has two comprehensive Seals, and every degree and station has an inheritor. [...] Every saint there has ever been, or will ever be, can only receive from these two seals, one of whom is the Seal of the sainthood of the elite, while the other is the one by whom the common sainthood is sealed, for there will be no saint after him until the advent of the Hour.”

It is obvious, plain and clear, from the speech of these two masters, that the Seal of the Saints has surpassed every giver of praise in the giving of praise in the giving of praise to God, for none of the saints has praised God to the same extent as the Seal of the Saints has praised Him. The one from whom something is received takes precedence ahead of the recipient, since it can never be correct to rank the provider of support behind the recipient of support. That is why his Path became the Path of love and thankfulness, as previously explained in the seventeenth chapter of this blessed book⁵²³, because of its having originated from the bountiful sphere, from which God removed the beneficence of anyone other than his ancestor, God bless him and give him peace, who said: “No creature among the Shaykhs of the Paths has any benefit to bestow upon you, for I am your intermediary and your supporter in fact. You must therefore abandon whatever you have received from all the Paths.” He also told him: “You must adhere to this Path without secluded retreat or isolation from the people, so that you may reach your station which you have been promised. You will thus proceed without constraint and restriction, and without a great deal of strenuous exertion. You must also abandon all the saints, for God has mustered the people of this Path by sheer grace, generosity and munificence, and their noble Lord does not put them in need of secluded retreat and isolation from the people, so they go about their business without constraint and restriction, and without a great deal of strenuous exertion. They were appealing by giving praise for the tremendous favor that God had specially conferred upon them, and by giving thanks for the superabundance that He had generally bestowed upon them. Because of what has been mentioned, it came to be called the Aḥmadī path.

Fourth, it is called “Aḥmadī” because the station of its master, in relation to the stations of all the saints, is like the station of Aḥmad in relation to the stations of all the Prophets, because the Shaykh said, may God be pleased with him: “I am the Chieftain of the Saints, just as God’s Messenger, God bless him and give him peace, was the Chieftain of the Prophets.”

He also said: “A saint neither drinks nor quenches his thirst, except from our ocean, from the origin of the universe until the blowing on the trumpet.” He also said, may God be pleased with him, while pointing with his two fingers, the index finger and the middle finger: “His spirit, God bless him and give him peace, and my spirit are like this: His spirit, God bless him and give him peace, supports the Messengers and the Prophets, peace be upon them, and my spirit supports the Cardinal Poles, the gnostic sages and the saints, from sempiternity to eternity everlasting.”

He also said, God be pleased with Him, that the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, had informed him that his spiritual station was higher than all the spiritual stations. He also said God the Exalted be well pleased with him: “The relationship of the Cardinal Poles with me is like the relationship of the common folk with the Cardinal Poles.” He also said: “We have a degree in the sight of Allah, which reaches such a height in the presence of God that I am forbidden to divulge its definition to you. If I were to express it, the masters of truth and gnostic wisdom would be unanimous in declaring me guilty of unbelief (*kufṛ*), to say nothing of other people. It is not the degree that I have mentioned to you. No indeed, it is beyond that.”

He also said, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, when speaking to his companions: “You should know that God’s bountiful grace has no limit, and that bountiful grace is in the hand of Allah, who gives it to whom He will. Let me also tell you that my station in the presence of God in the Hereafter will not be attained by any of the saints, and not one of them will come close to it, whether his importance be great or small. Of all the saints, from the time of the Companions until the blowing on the trumpet, there is not one who will attain to our station, and not

⁵²³ “Informing them that the Friend of God is known, befriended, loved and served for nothing other than the sake of God, and that [a disciple] will benefit from such a person in matters of this world and the next, even though it may take a period of time.”

one of them will come close to it. I did not tell you that until I heard it for certain from the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace. As for the relationship of the degrees of the people of this Path with the degrees of the people of the other Paths, it is like that, to the point where it reaches a limit that I am forbidden to mention and divulge.”

He also said, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him: “If the greatest Cardinal Poles came to know what Allah has prepared for the people of this Path, they would weep and they would cry: ‘O our Lord, You having given us nothing!’ I said: ‘if this is the condition of the Cardinal Poles in relation to them, what do you think of those below them, including the champions of the truth, the gnostic sages and the saints? If this is the condition of those just mentioned, what do you think of the people of their Paths, who have not attained to their degrees?’” He referred to what we have mentioned, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, in his saying: “We have a degree in the sight of God [...]” to the point where he said: “The peculiarity of that degree is this: if someone is not on his guard against changing the heart of our companions, with no respect for our companions, God will banish him from His nearness, and He will deprive him of what He has bestowed upon him.” He also referred to it in his saying, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him: “Not one of the men of distinction will have all his companions enter the Garden without reckoning and without chastisement, whatever sins and acts of disobedience they may have committed, not one of them except me alone.” Beyond that, it is not permissible to mention what he told me about them, and which the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, guaranteed. It will not be seen and known except in the Hereafter.

In this context, we should also mention some of the expressions from the remembrances (*adhkār*) of this Path, in order to call attention to the fact that it has reached the extreme limit of excellence, that the degree of its people can in no way be attained by any others, and that it is Aḥmadi for certain. Let us therefore say:

O God, bestow blessing and peace upon our master Muḥammad, the Opener of what is locked, and the Seal of what has gone before, the Helper of the truth with the truth, and the Guide to Your straight, and upon his family, in keeping with his value and his tremendous worth, the kernel of Divine mercy, the realized ruby encompassing the center of comprehensions and meanings which fills all the receiving oceans and receptacles, Your complete and most straight path which no one can encompass or measure up to, oh God, we praise you as you are worthy of praise, and we thank you as you are worthy of thanks, for what you have bestowed upon me [...].⁵²⁴

As for why this path of ours is called “Muḥammadan” (Muḥammadiyya) despite the fact that all the paths of God’s people are alike in that respect, there are many reasons for it:

First, all the bountiful effusions (*fuyūdāt*) bestowed upon all the saints flow from only one source, that being his [the Prophet Muḥammad’s] essential nature, God bless him and give him peace, just as all the bountiful effusions bestowed upon all the Prophets flow from only one source, that being his essential nature (*dhātihī*). Our path is called “Muḥammadan” because of this complete connection. Our shaykh said: “The bountiful effusions that flow from the essential nature of the Chieftain of Existence, the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, are received by the essential natures of the Prophets, and everything that flows and emanates from the essential natures of the Prophets is received by my essential nature, from which it is distributed to all creatures, from the origin of the world until the blowing on the trumpet.” Once you have understood this, the reason for calling it “Muḥammadan” will not be concealed from you.

⁵²⁴ Until the end of this benediction, which includes selected excerpts from invocations such as *Jawharat al-Kamāl*, *Ḥizb al-Baḥr* and *al-Ḥizb al-Sayfī*.

Second, our shaykh, may God be well pleased with him, receives his unique support from the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, and not one of the Prophets is aware of the bounty that is peculiar to him, because he has received a common temperament (*mashrab*) from him, God bless him and give him peace.

Third, it is his [the Prophet Muḥammad's] path, God bless him and give him peace, for a special reason, because he stated that explicitly to our shaykh [Tijānī], may God be well pleased with him, dispelling all doubts by telling him: "Your paupers (*fuqarā'*) are my paupers, and your disciples are my disciples," and by telling him, may God be well pleased with him: "Whenever you authorize someone, and he gives to others, it is as if they have received directly from you, by word of mouth, and I am a guarantor for them." This is evidence of their superiority over others. The Prophet, peace be upon him, also said: "you are the son of the beloved friend, and you have entered the path of the greatest deputy and the most renowned inheritor, the most virtuous at-Tijānī." This is sufficient good news for the people of his path, for its more important than this world and all its goods, and that the garden of paradise, its palaces and the rest of its delight, and there is no goal beyond it except beholding the countenance of our noble master.

Fourth, the fact that its people have a special characteristic by which they are distinguished from others, and by which they make it known that he, [the Prophet Muḥammad], peace be upon him, is their guarantor (*dāmin*) and their chargé d'affaires. (*mutawalli 'umūrahū*) Imprinted over their heart, close to their backs, is "Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh." On their heads is a crown of light that reads: "the Tijānī path, the origin of which (*mansha'uhā*) is the Muḥammadan reality." This is further evidence of their superiority over others.

Fifth, that Allah has sealed the stations of all the saints with our shaykh's station, and he has placed no spiritual station above it, except the stations of the prophets. He has made him the Hidden Cardinal Pole (*al-qutb al-matkūm*), the Sealed Isthmus (*al-barzakh al-makhtūm*), the well-known Muḥammadan Seal, and a center from which bountiful favors and knowledge emanate for all the Helpers (*al-aghwāth*). That complete relationship with the immaculate prophet will be clearly confirmed in the resurrection, and all the sincere ones form his path will thus be in a higher degree, in the presence of Go, than [even] the greatest cardinal poles (*aqṭāb*), apart from the companions of God's messenger, peace be upon him, as previously explained.

Sixth, our shaykh acquired the Divine perfections belonging to the saints, and he encompassed them all, as previously mentioned chapter thirty-six, just as God's messenger, peace be upon him, acquired all the Divine perfections belonging to the Prophets. This tremendous secret has pervaded his path and its people, so it is called "Muḥammadan" for this reason.

Seventh, his path is the last of the all the [Sufi] paths, so no saint will come after him with a new path, just as the Prophet's community (*milla*) is the last of the [religious] communities.

Our shaykh, may God be pleased with him, said: "All the paths will be incorporated into the path of Shādhilī, except this Muḥammadī Ibrāhīmī Ḥanīfī path of ours, for it is self-sufficient. We must therefore treat it as unique, because the Prophet, peace be upon him, gave it to us, directly from him to us." He also said: "nothing will reach you except with my help." He is the one who trained us and led us, to the point where we came into contact with the Prophet. Praise and thanks to God.

Eight, all the paths will be incorporated into his path, so they will be rendered obsolete. Its stamp will be imprinted on every stamp, and its stamp will carry no other, as previously explained, just as the law of God's messenger has replaced all [religious] laws.

Ninth, if someone abandons one of the litanies of the *shuyūkh* for the sake of entering this Muḥammadan path of ours, which God has honored above all the paths, God will keep him safe and sound in this world and the hereafter. They will therefore have no reason to be afraid of any affliction,

not from God Exalted, nor from His Messenger, God bless him and give him peace, nor from his shaykh, nor from anyone whomsoever among the living or the dead. As for someone who enters our company, but then backs away from it, they will be stricken by the afflictions of this world and the Hereafter, just as God's Messenger decreed [in relation to his community].

Tenth, the rightly guided Imām [al-Mahdī], may God be pleased with him will receive his path when the end of time arrives, and he will enter his company, as previously explained. The paths will thus become one single path, with the help of his appearance, if God so wills, just as the sacred laws have become one single sacred law, that being Islam.

Eleventh, the Prophet Muhammad, God bless him and give him peace, is fiercely protective of the people of this path, as he used to be protective of his companions, because its people are his paupers (*fuqarā'*) and his disciples, just like his companions. It has previously been mentioned that the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, informed the shaykh that whatever is offensive to the people of this path is offensive to him. It has also been mentioned that the shaykh said, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "we have a degree in the sight of God," to the point where he said, "the peculiarity of that degree is this: if someone is not on his guard against changing the heart of his companions, through lack of respect for them, God will banish him from His nearness, and He will deprive him of what He has bestowed upon him." All of this has to do with the secret because of which the path of our shaykh is Muḥammadan, in the special sense of the term.

Twelfth, the Prophet Muhammad, conferred a path upon this Shaykh, the Muḥammadan Seal (*al-Khātim al-Muḥammadī*) because of its being Muḥammadan, in the special sense of the term. As a result, the multiplication of the reward of the good deeds of its people, in comparison With the multiplication of the good deeds of the people of the other paths, is like the multiplication of the good deeds of the community [of Islam] in comparison with the multiplication of the reward of the good deeds of members of the other religious communities.

That is why some of its remembrances, the Matchless Sapphire (*al-Yāqūta al-Farīda*), for instance, recited one time, absorbs all the remembrances of the gnostic sages. Others, the Jewel of Perfection (*Jawharat al-Kamāl*), for instance, is equal to three times the worship of the entire world. In comparison with some of them, the Talismanic Treasure (*al-Kanz al-Muṭalsam*), for instance, recited one time, all acts of worship combined are like a drop in an ocean. No one will deny this, except someone who denies the existence of the remembrances in general, so no intelligent person will converse with him, because he has simply denied the master of the sacred law, God bless him and give him peace.

Thirteenth, our path is called "Muḥammadan" in order to draw attention to the fact that God treats its people as the lover treats his beloved. As previously mentioned, in the thirty-eighth chapter of this blessed book, Sayyidī Muḥammad al-Ghālī, may God the exalted be well pleased with him, informed me that the shaykh, may God be pleased with him, had informed him that the people of this path have received from God is a gracious quality peculiar to them, in addition to the gracious quality that is common to them and others.

Relevant in this context is the shaykhs saying, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him: "my companions will not be exposed to the horrors of the place of standing [at the resurrection], and they will not experience its thunderbolts and its earthquakes. Instead, they will be together with those who are safe at the gate of the garden, until they enter with the chosen prophet, God bless him and give him peace, in the vanguard of the first troop, along with his companions. Their permanent abode will then be in his vicinity in the Highest Heights, as the neighbors of his companions, God bless him and give him peace. Glory be to the One who graciously favors whomever He will with whatever He will, entirely of His own volition." He also said, may God be pleased with him: "my

companion would not be consumed by the hellfire, even if his sins were very many, provided that he had subsequently repented.”

Our path is called “Muḥammadan” in order to draw attention to the fact that its members are more numerous than those of the other paths, just as the members of this Muḥammadan community are more numerous than those of the other religious communities. As proof of that, it is sufficient to note that the rightly guided *imām* who is expected (*al-Imām al-Mahdī al-Muntadhār*) is included among its people, and all his followers, may God be pleased with him, are included among its people.

In view of all the reasons listed above, it is clearly apparent that the name of our master’s path is in keeping with the person for whom it is named.

As for why this path of ours is called Ibrāhīmī Ḥanīfī, there are several reasons for that: First, if it is to be called Muḥammadan, in the special sense of the term, it must necessarily be Ibrāhīmī, since God Exalted has said:

Say: “As for me, my Lord has guided me to a straight path,
a right religion, the community of Abraham, a sincere believer.” (6:161)

Those of humankind who have the best claim to Abraham
are those who followed him, and this Prophet
and those who truly believe;
and God is the Protecting Friend of the believers. (3:68)

Second, our path is called “Ibrāhīmī” in order to draw attention to the fact that God combined two stations for our shaykh: love (*maḥabba*) and bosom friendship (*khulla*). It being Muḥammadan necessitates its relatedness to the beloved (*ḥabībīyya*), because God’s Messenger, God bless and give him peace, is the holder of love and bosom friendship, for he is the beloved of God and His bosom friend (*khalīl*), as reported by al-Bukhārī and other traditional authorities. Furthermore, God Exalted has said in His definitive Book:

And who is better in religion than he who submits his will to God while doing good
and who follows the practice of Abraham, a man of pure faith? (4:125)

According to one of the commentators, the meaning of His saying, Exalted is He: “and who is better in religion than he who submits his will to God, while doing good?” is that he who submits is adorned with the garment of His majesty, from which the beauty of His sempiternal countenance shines forth, and he flies with the wing of love and ardent yearning in the air of His divinity, so he travels with God Exalted towards God Exalted for all eternity. Such are the way of his religion, and what religion is better than this?

Ibrāhīm ibn Adham said: “Abraham, peace be upon him, said: ‘to God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, and God is constantly encompassing all things.’ (4:16) and God has made it clear that the perfection by following His bosom friend, peace be upon him, ‘and who follows the practice of Abraham, a man of pure faith’ for his smashing the idols of nature with the ax of reality, at the expelling heavenly bodies from his mind and feelings:

When the night grew dark upon him he beheld a star.
He said: ‘This is my Lord,’ but when it set, he said:
‘I love not things that set.’

And when he saw the moon rising, he exclaimed: |

‘This is my Lord,’ but when it set, he said:
‘If my Lord does not guide me aright,
I shall surely be one of the folk who are astray.’

And when he saw the sun rising, he exclaimed:
‘This is my Lord! This is greater.’
But when it set, he said: ‘o my people,
I am free from what you idolize.’ (6:76-78)

Love is the kernel of bosom friendship (*khulla*). Since this Muḥammadan-Ibrāhīmī-Ḥabībī-Khalīlī Seal plunged into the ocean of this Divine grace, into which the people of his path have plunged, and since he followed this Prophet Muhammad, God bless him and give him peace, the Beloved Bosom Friend (al-Ḥabīb al-Khalīl), and the Prophet Abraham, peace be upon him, al-Khalīl, from both of whom he inherited these two spiritual stations, his path is called “Ibrāhīmī.”

Third, our path is called “Ibrāhīmī” because of its being an easy path, originating from the compact sphere of superior excellence, in which God installed the Hidden Cardinal Pole, the Sealed Isthmus [and the well-known Muḥammadan Seal, before the creation of the universe and what it contains, just as He chose Abraham for a Bosom Friend in that sphere of superior excellence, before the creation of the universe and what it contains. As God has said:

And We gave Abraham of old his proper course. (21:51)

The reason for calling it “Ibrāhīmī” is obvious, because it is the easiest of the Paths, just like the sacred law of Abraham, which is incorporated into the sacred law of Muḥammad, God bless him and give him peace. As God Exalted has said:

And strive for God’s sake with all the effort He deserves.
He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion,
[but only] the practice of your father Abraham. (22:78)

That is why our master’s path is the path of ardent love and affection, as we have previously explained in the twentieth chapter of this blessed book. The same is true of Abraham’s law. God has said:

Abraham was of a people obedient to God,
by nature upright, and he was not one of the idolaters;
thankful for His bounties;
He chose him and He guided him to a straight path. (16:120,121)

Fourth, our path is called “Ibrāhīmī” because all the people of the paths are unanimously agreed on the rectitude of Abraham, and there is no religious community whose people do not speak of him in the most laudatory terms, peace be upon our Prophet and upon him. The shaykh, may God be well pleased with him, holds this station as a Muḥammadan-Ibrāhīmī inheritance, because all the perfect people of God know that God has a saint who seals the stations of the saints with his station, and above his station there is no station except the station of the Prophets. Every one of them wishes to be that saint, to the point where one of them supposes that he is he, when the lightning bolt of that station flashes for him, and he supposes that he has obtained that wish. Then it becomes clear to him that he has not obtained it completely, and he submits the whole matter to the Creator of inspiration, in the knowledge that God will surely reveal him after concealment.

As for the shaykh, may God be pleased with him, it has been mentioned previously, in the thirty-third chapter of this blessed book, that the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, informed him by word of mouth, in a state of wakefulness not sleep, that he was the hidden saint. Because of this complete relationship, therefore, his path is called “Ibrāhīmī.”

Fifth, speaking of Abraham, blessing and peace be upon him, God Exalted has said:

In it [the Meccan Sanctuary] there are evident signs,

[one of them being] the Station of Abraham,

and anyone who enters it is safe. (3:97)

.... and the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, said about this shaykh, in connection with his path and its people: “you are included among those who are safe and sound, and everyone who loves you is included among those who are safe and sound. You are my beloved friend, and everyone who loves you is my beloved friend. Everyone who receives your litany is liberated from the Fire, he and his children, his wives and his offspring.” The shaykh said, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him: “rejoice at the good news! If someone is devoted to our love until he dies, he will be resurrected among those who are safe and sound, in whatever condition he may be, so long as he does not wear the garb of security from the cunning (*makr*) of God Exalted is He.” He also said, may God be well pleased with him: “if someone abandons one of the litanies of the shuyūkh, for the purpose of entering this Muḥammadan path, which God has honored above all the paths, God will keep him safe in this world and the Hereafter, so he will have nothing to fear from any horrors that may afflict him, not from God, not from His Messenger, God bless him and give him peace, and not from his shaykh, whoever he may be among the living and the dead.”

The shaykh said, may God be well pleased with him: “My companions will not be exposed to the horrors of the place of standing, and they will not experience its thunderbolts and its earthquakes. Instead, they will be together with those who are safe and sound at the gate of the garden, until they enter with chosen Prophet, God bless him and give him peace in the vanguard of the first troop, along with his companions. Their permanent abode will then be in his vicinity in the highest heights, as the neighbors of his companions.” The Prophet said, God bless him and give him peace: “you are the son of the beloved friend, and you have entered the path of the beloved friend, there is no intermediary between me and you, except this intermediary, for he is from me and I am from him. Everyone who enters my path, and comes beneath my wing and my protection, will have everything that has been mentioned by the greatest deputy, the most renowned inheritor, the most virtuous at-Tijānī.” This good news is sufficient, for it is because of this complete relationship that our path is called “Ibrāhīmī.”

Sixth, Abraham, peace be upon him, devoted himself sincerely to his Lord and Master, and turned away from everything apart from Him, until the enemies of God and his own enemies intended to cast him into the fire, so they placed him in the catapult, fettered and shackled. A single cry was then uttered by the heavens and the angels within them, and by all creatures except humankind and the jinn: “O our Lord, Abraham, your bosom friend, is being cast into the fire, and there is no one in your earth who worships You!” God responded by saying: “He is a bosom friend, and I have no other bosom friend. I am his God, and he has no God but Me. If he seeks help from anyone among you, or appeals to him, that person must assist him, for I have permitted him to do so. If appeals to no one but Me, I am Well-Aware of him and I am his Protector, so leave him to Me.”

When they were about to cast him into the fire, the keeper of the waters came to him and said: “if you wish, I shall put out the fire,” and the keeper of the air came to him and said: “if you wish, I shall cause the fire to fly up into the air,” but he told them: “I have no need for you. God is enough for me, and most excellent is The Custodian.” When they put him into the catapult and cast him

toward the fire, Gabriel approached him and said: “O Abraham, have you any need?” He replied: “as for needing you, the answer is no,” that is to say: “I turn toward none but my Lord and Master.” As God Exalted has informed us, Abraham said, peace be upon him:

I have turned my face toward Him

who created the heavens and the earth. (6:79)

... in other words: “I have surrendered my heart to the One who created it, and I have devoted myself to Him, cutting myself off completely from every distraction and preoccupation. As God has also informed us, Abraham then said:

But whoever follows me, he is from me (14:36)

That is to say, whoever follows me in the path of dedicated striving, love, bosom friendship and harmony, in the exertion of the spirit in the presence of the Creator of the heavens and the earth, that person is from me. In other words, his body is from my body, his heart is from my heart, his spirit is from my spirit, his innermost being is from my innermost being, and his temperamental disposition to love, intimate knowledge and bosom friendship is my temperamental disposition.

This magnificent Aḥmadī-lbrāhīmī path is the path of our shaykh, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, as we read in *Jawāhir al-ma’ānī*, where he said: “I advise you, first of all, to refrain from those kinds of food, clothing and housing that are forbidden by the Law.... As for the second point to be observed, which is essential, for it is the beginning and the end of all matters, it is dedicating the heart to God by fleeing to Him, returning to Him, and forsaking everything apart from Him, in general and in particular. If the servant is capable of riding the heart toward God in every respect and in every situation, by moving the feelings of the heart, that is the ultimate aim.

As he also said: “in the evening and the morning, in the day and the night, the traveler must strive for two things only: firstly, God Exalted is He, preferring Him to all created entities and being satisfied with Him. God Almighty and Glorious is He must be the starting point of his business and its conclusion, the beginning of his purpose and its end, its opening and its seal. He must immerse himself in everything involved in that, so there will no longer be a moment when he stives for anything but Him, because striving for something else is either greed or triviality. Secondly, the traveler must strive to be dedicated wholly to God Exalted, stripped of all desires, references, designs, pleasures, appetites and selfish interests, focusing all his attention on God and clinging to God, Almighty and Glorious is He, seeking His good pleasure and fulfillment of the right of His Lordliness for His sake, not to receive anything from Him in return.” Because of this complete relationship, our path is called “Ibrāhīmī-Ḥanīfī.”

Seventh, God commanded Abraham to settle his dependents in the Valley of the Sanctuary, without provisions and without transport, in order to purify the condition of his trust and his reliance on Allah, and so that he would attain to the perfection of bosom friendship. Abraham then called out to his Lord and his God, and made supplication in the Name of the Lord, appealing for the education of his dependents and his family, and their lodging in the abode of honor. He said:

Our Lord, I have settled some of my offspring

in an uncultivable valley near to Your Sacred House. (14:37)

The Sacred House is that which keeps its seekers away from every intimate friend except God. This contains an implicit reference to the education of his family in the realities of trust, contentment and submission, for this is the definition of *tarbiya*. From the firmly established, easy and tolerant *sunna* described as al-Ḥanīfiyyā al-Khalīliyya al-Ḥabībīyya al-Aḥmadiyya al-Mustafawiyya, may God’s blessings be upon them both [Muḥammad and Abraham], we have learned that the genuine gnostic must not rely on possessions and material means for the education of his dependents, during his lifetime and after his death, for God is sufficient for him.

Our shaykh, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, settled his children, they being the people of his path, near to the Sacred House of God, and no one who dwells beside him will perish. That is because God's greatest beloved, His most noble Messenger and His most splendid friend, our master Muḥammad, is the guarantor for the people of this path, their educator and the custodian of their affairs, with a genuine promise that cannot be broken, for he said, peace be upon him, to the shaykh, may God be well pleased with him: "whenever you authorize someone, and he gives to others, it is as if they have received directly from you, by word of mouth, and I am a guarantor for them."

This is one of the secrets on account of which the shaykh forbade the people of his path to associate with any of the *shuyūkh* of the other paths, because his ancestor and his loving friend, God bless him and give him peace, gave this path to him independently. He said, peace be upon him: "No creature among the shaykhs of the paths has any benefit to bestow upon you, for I am your intermediary and your supporter in actual fact. You must therefore abandon whatever you have received from all the paths." He also commanded him and the people of his path to refrain from visiting the saints. He let them know that any of them who visit the saints will be deprived of his presence, and in exchange for the benefit of such visitation, he promised them the benefit of visiting him, God bless him and give him peace, in the noble garden, and of visiting all the saints and the righteous, from the beginning of existence until that time." Because of this relationship, our path is called "Ibrāhīmī."

The fact that our path is called "Ibrāhīmī" is an indication that God treats its people as the bosom friend treats his bosom friend, just as the lover treats his beloved. As previously mentioned, its people have received from God a gracious quality peculiar to them, in addition to the gracious quality that is common to them and others. That is visible to them in this world and guaranteed to them in the Hereafter. As for this world, when I [Tāl] traveled from our land to the Two Sanctuaries and to the Shām, to and fro, I witnessed more of his blessings that I can possibly mention. As for the Hereafter, everything that has been mentioned about the excellence of his people, in this book and others, is quite insignificant, or rather like a drop in an ocean, in relation with that which is concealed.

We beseech God by His sheer grace to let us live in accordance with this path, to let us die in accordance with it, and to resurrect us in the company of its people, for the sake of him upon him it was bestowed by his ancestor, our master the Messenger of God and the best of humankind, may God the Exalted grant blessing and the most excellent peace to him and his family.

Ninth, God placed among the offspring of Abraham an incalculable number of the Prophets, the Messengers, the holders of the Sacred Laws, and others, as He has said:

We sent Noah and Abraham and placed Prophethood
and the Book among their offspring. (57:26)

Just as He has placed in this path an incalculable number of the minor and major saints, the masters of the paths, and others among humankind and the jinn. Our shaykh, may God be well pleased with him, has mentioned that the masters of the paths, who are among the finest of the people of his path, will reach a total number of six hundred from humankind and three hundred from the jinn, or something close to that. The mind betrays! (*al-dhihn khawwān*)

The Prophet, peace be upon him, informed our shaykh that anyone who loves him, may God the Exalted be well pleased with him, will not die until he becomes a saint. Since this applies to those lovers not one of whom has received his remembrances, what should we think about the people of his Path who are both immersed in his love and dedicated to his litanies?

We beseech God, by His sheer grace, to keep us faithful to his love until the Day of the Meeting with Him, and to resurrect us among the people of his love and his company. Let us strive

in the presence of God, so that He may bring us in contact with our master's ancestor [the Prophet] God bless him and give him peace. Amīn.

O Pardoners of faults, o Forgivers of sins, pardon me and forgive me, for You are All-Knowing of the mysteries.

Were it not that the hearts of the free are the tombs of the secrets, and were it not for the fear that the book might fall into the hand of one of the wicked—someone who has no share in the fragrant perfumes of the finest masters, so that ignorance and envy incite him to tear the reputations of the righteous to shreds, and he takes advantage of the intermediary without the gratitude that is the exemplary practice of the Chosen One—we would have presented here some of the secrets and lights of this path. In what we have written, however, there is sufficient for every fortunate person among those endowed with faculties of perception. The Prophet said, God bless him and give him peace:

Do not give wisdom to those who are unworthy of it!
God is the Enabling Guide by His grace to the straight path, and to Him is the return and the homeward journey.

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