

desired goals and purpose. Indeed, he learned the sciences exhaustively and mastered all their disciplines, distinguishing himself in a very short period of time. So Allah appointed him as a mercy for His servants and as a benefit for both the ancestors and the contemporaries.

In all of this, his education was personally undertaken by his father, a man of famous reputation and firmly established qualifications. Praise be to Allah, he received from him the precious gems of beneficial learning, the gifts of the secrets (*asrār*), the remembrances (*adhkār*) and the sacred law (*sharīʿa*).

Then Allah granted him complete spiritual illumination (*fath*), presenting him with sciences bestowed by divine grace. So he excelled in them as well. He did not study these sciences under any human being: he was taught only by the One who is All-Knowing, by means of divine inspiration (*ilhām*). He remained unceasingly devoted to the acquisition and provision of beneficial knowledge, until many seekers of sacred learning were attracted to him. Students derived benefit from his school (*madrasa*), and righteous erudite scholars received training at his hand, as evidenced and confirmed by the people of discernment and perception. His blessing thus spread to all the brethren, and his degree was exalted above all peers.

Affiliation with the Tijāniyya Sufi Path

He received the Tijāniyya Order from the unique figure of his epoch, the proof of the people of his era, the copious well of Tijānī litanies (*awrād*) and secrets, and the assembly point of its lights and remembrances (*adhkār*): his Shaykh and father, the erudite scholar, the wise exemplar, the undoubted deputy (*khalīfa*) of Shaykh al-Tijānī and the bearer of his flag in the western lands, al-Ḥājj ʿAbd-Allāh b. Sayyid Muḥammad. He was indeed the Shaykh, the Imam, one of the eminent saints, who combined in his person the sacred law (*sharīʿa*) and divine Reality (*ḥaqīqa*) and so became the guide of the Sufi way. May the Most Generous Lord never cease exalting him to the most praiseworthy station (*al-maqām al-aḥmad*).

After receiving the Ṭarīqa, a great yearning entered the young Shaykh's perfected, lofty, serene, and well-pleasing soul.²³ His lofty spiritual aspiration (*himma*) was awakened anew, and with such force that it would have demolished the unshakable mountains had it been directed towards them. It led him to harvest the fruits of divine sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-ḥaqqaniyya*), heavenly experiences (*al-adhwāq al-malakūtiyya*) and angelic secrets (*al-asrār al-jabarūtiyya*), to a point that no one before or after him could aspire. How splendid are these verses of the eloquent orator, erudite scholar and excellent poet, in which he eulogizes this Shaykh:

23 Shaykh ʿAlī Cisse's use of words such as *al-naḥs al-kāmila* and *al-naḥs al-marḍiya* convey the meaning that Shaykh Ibrāhīm had, at this early stage, completed the purification of the soul (*tazkiya al-naḥs*) central in Sufi doctrine.

The famous pole (*quṭb*) of the Tijāniyya, its crown and Imam
And his predecessors were (also) its crowns.

Owner of the highest rank, unreachable
By the gnostics, whatever the exalted nature of their gnosis.

By him, the sacred law has had its reputation enhanced
By him the divine Reality has had its stature elevated.

But for him, both of them would have been barren shells
Their pillars in ruins.

So he then embarked on the task of benefitting the people with the sciences of divine bestowal and experiential knowledge of the Lord. He devoted himself to this task morning and evening, day and night.

Knowledge and Character

As for his grasp of the Qurʾān and the Sunna, his good manners, education, guidance, linguistic fluency, eloquence, and proficiency, he feasted on these sciences and monopolized them. Trying to match his mastery of them would be like seating an uninvited guest at the table where he dines. The learned and cultured men of his time, near and far, testified to his learning. When he spoke, the eloquent Arabs would fall on their knees in front of him, raising their heads and lending him their ears. He commanded all the sciences, both transmitted and rationally deduced. He would decipher their meanings as he saw fit, extracting the pearls from their treasure-troves on the spur of the moment. As for his knowledge of the divine realities (*al-ḥaqāʾiq al-rabbāniyya*), the sacred gnostic sciences (*al-maʿārif al-qudsiyya*) and the spiritual states pertaining to the Essential Being (*al-aḥwāl al-dhātiyya*): he was their standard-bearer, the key to their doors, their beacon (*mishkāt*), their lamp (*miṣbāḥ*) and their lantern (*zujāja*).²⁴

He was copiously endowed with excellent merits and virtues. Neither the pen nor the tongue can describe the extent of such glorious qualities or the abundance of his benefit for his Lord's creatures. From his bounty, good conduct, and generosity, he tenderly provided for those in need, like a mother nursing her child; continuously struggling to please the Kind and Beneficent Lord. Those whom he nurtured attained (spiritual) maturity always in love of his nurturing. So his reputation soared and his mention spread to the farthest horizons.

24 The reference here is to the Qurʾān (24:35), *Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His Light is as a niche (mishkāt), wherein is a lamp (miṣbāḥ). The lamp in a glass (zujāja), the glass is, as it were, a glittering star... Mishkāt is here translated as "beacon" to reflect what most Qurʾān interpreters understand to mean the place wherein a lamp is placed to give off more light (for which "niche" is only a partial translation). See Edward Lane, Arabic Lexicon, p. 1590.*

The triumphant banner of virtue was firmly planted at his feet, without dispute or dissension. In every single moment, he never ceased bestowing moral excellence, blessings, and the overflowing surplus of his bounty. His grace, noble generosity and beneficence were showered everywhere. His excellent qualities are beyond enumeration, and no record could contain a complete list of his merits even if all the world's pens were used until they snapped on their scrolls.

Writings

As for the excellence of his poetry and prose, his mastery of the skills of rhetoric and explanation, and his eloquent use of the pen and the tongue, Saḥbān and Ḥassān could not have matched him!²⁵ He is the author of numerous literary compositions, as well as many reports, informative responses and useful notes, in which he reconciles the differences in the texts of the Imams who are reliable sources of guidance. His literary works include the following:²⁶

Kāshif al-ilbās ʿan fayḍa al-khatm Abī al-ʿAbbās [The removal of confusion concerning the flood of the saintly seal Abū al-ʿAbbās (Aḥmad al-Tijānī)];

Masarra al-majāmiʿ fi masāʾil al-jāmiʿ [The charm of compositions, concerning the issues relating to the congregational mosque];

al-Khamr al-ḥalāl: fi madḥ Sayyid al-Rijāl [The lawful wine, in praise of the leader of men];

Taysir al-wuṣūl ilā ḥaḍra al-Rasūl [The facilitation of attainment to the presence of the Messenger];

Tīb al-anfās fi madāʾih al-khatm Abī al-ʿAbbās [The perfume of breaths in praises of the seal Abū al-ʿAbbas];

Rawḍ al-muḥibbīn fi madḥ al-ʿārifīn [The garden of the lovers, in praise of the gnostic sages];

al-Nūr al-rabbānī fi madḥ al-Sayyid Aḥmad al-Tijānī [The divine light in praise of Sayyid Aḥmad al-Tijānī];

Rūḥ al-adab limā ḥawā min ḥikam wa adab [The spirit of good morals, and what it contains of wisdom and manners];

25 Saḥban and Ḥassān were famous for their eloquence and their eulogies in the time of the Prophet.

26 Other important works were written after Shaykh ʿAlī Cisse wrote this introduction. For a complete list of Shaykh Ibrāhīm's writings, see Ousmane Kane, John Hunwick and Rüdiger Seesemann, "Senegambia I: The Niassene Tradition," in Hunwick (ed.), *Arabic Literature of Africa*, vol. 4, *The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 279–301.

Nūr al-baṣar fī madḥ Sayyid al-Baṣhar [Light of the eye in praise of the master of humankind];

al-Sirr al-akbar wa al-kibrīt al-aḥmar [The greatest secret and the red sulfur];

Tuḥfa al-atfāl fī ḥaqāʾiq al-afʿāl fī al-ṣarf [The children's gift, concerning the real meanings of verbs in conjugation];

al-Fayḍ al-Aḥmadī fī al-mawlid al-Muḥammadī [The Aḥmadan bounty concerning the Muḥammadan birthday];

Tabṣira al-anām fī jawāz ruʿya al-Bārī fī al-yaqza wa al-manām [The enlightenment of humanity: concerning the permissibility of the vision of the Creator while awake or asleep]; and

Rūḥ al-ḥubb fī madḥ al-quṭb [The spirit of love in celebration of the saintly pole].

Bringer of the Flood (*fayḍa*)

Allah established him as a spring (*manḥal*) for the spiritual wayfarers, one who provides hope for aspirants and seekers, help for those in need, support for the destitute, and nourishment for the starving. Allah endowed him with the Flood (*fayḍa*) mentioned by the Hidden pole, the renowned Muḥammadan Seal, our Shaykh and our assistance, the owner of the effusion (*fayḍ*), our master Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tijānī. And this *fayḍa* has spread and continued without interruption, for its occurrence comes near the End of Time. At his hand, thousands upon thousands attained to the perfection of experientially-witnessed gnosis (*al-maʿrifa al-ʿayāniyya al-shahūdiyya*). Many, both White and Black, would come to him each day in droves from all regions of the earth to enter into our Tijāniyya Order, the repository of divine favor and gifts of gnosis. No one who received from him this prodigious litany (*wird*) failed to gain from it the benefit of divine aid and access to the realms of gnosis. As the most excellent poet has written:

O the best of those at whose door is found waiting the excellent ones;
Their own retinues vie with each other to visit him

Indeed, the success of the creation is found in visiting you
And in neglecting visiting you is its deprivation

By your fragrance the creation achieves (its needs)
And white people have followed the black in visiting you.

You have lightened the dreariness of your disciples' journey
No longer do they dread its boulders and rocks

You are the Imam, the leader of the way, its physician