

## Aḥmadu Bamba and the Preceding Sufi Heritage: Tracing the Intellectual Sources of Bamba's Sufi Writings\*

*Ahmedü Bamba ve Selefleri:*

*Bamba'nın Tasavvufî Yazılarının Fikrî İzlerini Sürmek*

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### Abstract

This study examines the intellectual formation of Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke (d. 1927), founder of the *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi order in Senegal, whose teachings have significantly shaped West African Islamic thought and practice. While the socio-political influence of *al-Murīdiyya* has been widely acknowledged, the intellectual foundations of Bamba's Sufi thought remain insufficiently explored. This research hypothesizes that Bamba's thought was profoundly shaped by classical Sufi figures such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), 'Abdu-l-Wahhāb ash-Sha'rānī (d. 973/1565), Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493), Ibn 'Atā' Allah as-Sakandarī (d. 709/1309), as well as Mauritanian scholars including Sīdī Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu (d. 1226/1811) and Muḥammad ibn al-Mukhtār ad-Daymānī (d. 1166/1753). Notably, Bamba distanced himself from speculative and philosophical Sufism, instead emphasizing a practical, ethically grounded Sufism centered on spiritual discipline, moral reform, and communal service. Through textual analysis and historical contextualization, this study investigates how these intellectual and spiritual currents informed Bamba's synthesis of Sufi pedagogy and reform, contributing to a localized yet universal model of Islamic spirituality.

**Keywords:** Sufism, West Africa, Senegal, Aḥmadu Bamba, al-Murīdiyya Sufi Order

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## Özet

Bu çalışma, Senegal’de Mürîdiyye tarikatini kuran ve öğretileriyle Batı Afrika İslam düşünce ve pratiğini derinden etkileyen Ahmedü Bamba Mbacke’nin (ö. 1927) fikir dünyasının teşekkülünü incelemektedir. Mürîdiyye’nin sosyo-politik etkisi yaygın olarak kabul edilmekle birlikte, Bamba’nın tasavvuf anlayışının entelektüel arka planı yeterince araştırılmamıştır. Bu araştırma, Bamba’nın düşüncesinin Ebû Hâmid el-Gazzâlî (ö. 505/1111), Abdu’l-Vahhâb eş-Şa’rânî (ö. 973/1565), Ahmed Zerrûk (ö. 899/1493), İbn Atâullah el-İskenderî (ö. 709/1309) gibi büyük sufilerin yanı sıra, Muhtâr b. Ahmed Küntî (ö. 1226/1811) ve Muhtâr ed-Deymânî (ö. 1166/1753) gibi Moritanya kökenli âlimlerin etkisiyle şekillendiği hipotezine dayanmaktadır. Bamba, hususen spekülâtif ve felsefî tasavvuftan uzak durarak, mânevî disiplin, ahlâkî ıslah ve toplumsal hizmet merkezli pratik ve etik temelli bir tasavvufu ön plana çıkarmıştır. Bu çalışma, metin analizi ve tarihsel bağlamlandırma yoluyla, söz konusu entelektüel ve mânevî akımların Bamba’nın tasavvufî eğitim ve ıslah anlayışına nasıl yön verdiğini incelemekte ve kökleri yerel ancak nitelikleri evrensel olan bir İslâmî mâneviyat modeline katkılarını ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tasavvuf, Batı Afrika, Senegal; Ahmedü Bamba, Mürîdiyye

## Introduction

The study of Islamic intellectual history is enriched by figures whose contributions have shaped religious thought and left enduring legacies within specific socio-cultural contexts. One such figure is Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, the founder of the *al-Murîdiyya* Sufi order in Senegal. Revered for his deep spirituality and transformative teachings, Bamba emphasized unwavering faith, devotion, and a disciplined spiritual journey toward Allah. His life, deeply rooted in the pursuit of knowledge, religious observance, and moral excellence (*iḥsân*), profoundly influenced the Sufi tradition in West Africa, particularly in Senegal.

Over the past few decades, a growing body of scholarship has explored the multifaceted dimensions of Aḥmadu Bamba’s life and the development of *al-Murîdiyya*. These works have shed light on the historical, spiritual, literary, and social aspects of his legacy. Despite the richness of this scholarship, one critical area remains underexplored: the intellectual sources and Sufi figures that shaped Aḥmadu Bamba’s Sufi writings and spiritual vision.

This study seeks to fill that gap by investigating the intellectual and spiritual founda-

tions underpinning Aḥmadu Bamba’s Sufi writings. Understanding these foundations is crucial for situating Bamba’s thought within the broader Sufi tradition and assessing the originality of his contributions. This study argues that Bamba’s Sufi vision was shaped by a creative and selective engagement with classical Sufi texts and ideas, deeply rooted in earlier traditions yet distinctly adapted to his historical and cultural milieu in colonial Senegal.

To pursue this inquiry, the study is guided by two central research questions: How did Aḥmadu Bamba engage with and adapt existing Sufi traditions to articulate his teachings? What are the key sources cited or echoed in his literary corpus, and how do they reflect his intellectual and spiritual lineage? By addressing these questions, the research aims to achieve two primary objectives. First, it seeks to identify and analyze the Sufi sources embedded in Bamba’s written works—his poetry, letters, treatises, and sermons—with special attention to his engagement with classical Sufi literature. This textual analysis is intended to reveal recurring themes

and references that indicate his intertextual dialogues with past Sufi masters. Second, the study aims to establish a conceptual map of Bamba's intellectual heritage that can serve as a foundation for future research on *al-Murīdiyya*'s significance within both West African Islam and the global Sufi tradition.

The study begins with a biographical overview of Aḥmadu Bamba, followed by situating his writings within the broader Sufi tradition through examining his approach towards earlier Sufi literature. The research further explores Bamba's major Sufi works, then provides a detailed analysis of the texts and scholars that influenced his Sufi thought. The study concludes with reflections on Bamba's contributions to Islamic intellectual and spiritual history, offering a foundation for future research on the global significance of *al-Murīdiyya*.

### 1. Aḥmadu Bamba: A Short Biography

Aḥmadu Bamba's complete name is Aḥmad or Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥabībullāh.<sup>1</sup> He is renowned by various nicknames in Senegal, such as *Serigne Touba* (the *Sheikh* of Tūbā), *Borom Touba* (the owner of Tūbā),

*Seugn Bu Mak Bi* (the greatest *Sheikh*), and *Khadīm ar-Rasūl* (the Prophet's Servant).<sup>2</sup> He was born in 1854<sup>3</sup> in Mbacké Bawol, a city built by his great-grandfather Muḥammad al-Khayr in 1781.

Aḥmadu Bamba was descended from a distinguished family known for their piety, knowledge, nobility, and righteousness. His father, well-known as Momar Anta Sali, was a noble scholar, recognized by Muslims as an *imām*, and admired by the kings and princes for his wisdom, knowledge, sincerity, and sound judgment.<sup>4</sup> He established a prominent Islamic school and served as a respected judge and an advisor to Prince Latjor Joob (d.1886).<sup>5</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba's mother is Sokhna Maryam Bousso (Mām Jāra), renowned as *Jāratullāh* (the Almighty's neighbor) for her piety and devoted worship.<sup>6</sup> Bamba grew up immersed in Qur'ānic education and had substantial knowledge of *sharī'a* sciences and language under his family's guidance. His thirst for knowledge led him on numerous journeys across the country to seek wisdom and experiences of different scholars.<sup>7</sup>

Aḥmadu Bamba began his educational activities as an assistant teacher in his father's school, where he displayed extraordinary teaching and writing skills, earning admiration, especially from his father, who eventually entrusted him with overseeing a significant portion of the school's administration and teaching. Following his father's passing, he continued this role for a year. Then, in the early days of 1883, he gathered the students

1 Important sources for Ahmadu Bamba's Biography are as follows:

a. Muhammad Abdullah al-'Alawi, *Nafahāt al-Miskīyya fī al-Sīrati al-Mbakkiyya*, ed. Mohammed Bamba Drame and Abu Madyan Shu'ayb Thiaw, (Rabat: Dār al-Amān, 2019).

b. Muhammad al-Bashir Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm fī Sīrati al-Sheikh al-Khadīm*, ed. Dr. Muhammad Shakrun, (Cairo: Dar Al-Muqattam for Publishing and Distribution, 2017).

c. Muhammad al-Amin Diop ad-Daghani, *Irwaa'u an-Nadīm min 'Adhbi Ḥubbi al-Khadīm*, edited by a group of researchers, (Rabat: al-Ma'ārif al-Jadīda Printing Press, 2017).

d. Rawdu al-Rayahin, *al-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke Abdullah awa Khadīmu Rasūlihī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr for Printing and Publishing, 2022).

e. Muhammad al-Murtada Mbacke, *al-Murīdiyya al-ḥaqīqa wa al-wāqī wa āfāq al-mustaqbal*, (Rabat: al-Ma'ārif al-Jadīda Printing Press, 2011).

2 See 'Abdou Diouf, *Murīdiyya: A Revivalist Sufi Order in Senegal*, (MA, Ibn Haldun University School of Islamic Studies, 2021), 9.

3 Some reports have said that he was born in 1853, while others suggest 1855, 1856, and 1857. See Rawdu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 19.

4 Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 47.

5 Ibid.

6 Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 10.

7 Rawdu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 27.

and said: “Let whoever has accompanied us for only learning (mere learning of knowledge) go where they wish and seek what suits them. And whoever desires what we desire, let them hasten in our path and abide by our command.” This declaration caused a significant stir among those deciding whether to stay or depart, eventually resulting in a select few remaining and becoming the initial nucleus of the *Murīdiyya* Sufi order.<sup>8</sup>

Aḥmadu Bamba stated that Prophet Muḥammad instructed him as follows: “Raise your companions through high determination (*himma*), not only teaching.” Embracing this directive, Aḥmadu Bamba encouraged his followers to exert themselves through rigorous exercises, fasting, frequent remembrance of God, strict observance of purity, and seclusion from people, particularly women, surpassing others in their commitment.<sup>9</sup>

A resentment among Bamba’s detractors began to grow, as large numbers responded to his call and rallied around him. This led to suspicions and allegations made to the French colonial authorities dominating the region.<sup>10</sup> Conflicts ensued between the Sheikh and the colonial power, which resulted in his exile to Gabon from 1895 to 1902, then to Mauritania from 1903 to 1907, followed by a period in the area of Djolof in Senegal from 1907 to 1912, and eventually the house arrest in the city of Diourbel from 1912 until his passing in 1927. His body was laid to rest in his city, Touba, where his shrine became a renowned place of pilgrimage.<sup>11</sup>

Aḥmadu Bamba’s contributions to Sufism reflect his broader mission to fight against ignorance and religious innovations (*bid‘a*) through the dissemination of knowledge and

spiritual reform. At the heart of his intellectual legacy is a vast body of Sufi literature that includes poetic and didactic works aimed at guiding disciples (*murīds*) on the spiritual path. He produced foundational texts such as *Masālik al-jinān* (Pathways of Paradise), which explores the principles and branches of Sufism, and *Ḥuqa-l-bukā’u* (On Weeping Over Deceased Sufis), which addresses the ethics of Sufi life and the relationship between the shaykh and the disciple. Other notable works include ethical guides like *Nahj qaḍā’ al-ḥāj* (The Path to Fulfilling the Need), abridgements of classical texts such as *Munawwir aṣ-ṣudūr* (Illumination of the Hearts), and devotional poems like *Maghāliq an-nīrān* (The Locks of Hell) and *Jālibat al-burūr* (The Bringer of Good Fortunes). His teachings extended to reflections on detachment from the world in *Silk al-jawāhir* (Gems on the String), and he composed numerous collections of letters, *fatwās*, and legal opinions addressing various aspects of Islamic thought. A significant portion of his oeuvre also comprises praise poems dedicated to Allah, Prophet Muḥammad, and spiritual themes, many of which can be found in manuscript form. Through this rich corpus, Bamba not only revived and systematized Islamic knowledge but also provided a comprehensive Sufi framework that continues to shape the *Murīdiyya* tradition.

## 2. Aḥmadu Bamba and the Preceding Sufi Heritage

Aḥmadu Bamba employed *Baghdādī* Sufism to address existential issues facing a society oppressed by two dominant forces: the aristocratic power and the French colonial power.<sup>12</sup> However, Aḥmadu Bamba engaged with *Baghdādī* Sufism critically, extracting

8 ad-Daghānī, *Irwā’u an-Nadīm*, 75.

9 Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 63.

10 ad-Daghānī, *Irwā’u an-Nadīm*, 109–111.

11 See Muhammad al-Murtada Mbacke, *al-Murīdiyya*, 81; ad-Daghānī, *Irwā’u an-Nadīm*, 128.

12 See Muhammad Gallay Ndiaye, “al-Jadal al-‘aqīm bayn al-anā wa-l-ākhar fī qirā’at at-turāth al-khadīmiyy,” *al-Wa’y al-Murīdiyyu* 1, (2008): 40.

its essence and aligning it with the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. He emphasized grounding Sufi discussions in these foundational texts, which is evident in his *fatwās* and correspondences. Bamba carefully chose reliable references in Sunnī Sufism, avoiding the inclusion of questionable or incorrect opinions attributed to specific Sufi figures. His approach prioritized purity and authenticity in Sufi teachings that also influenced his writings and teachings, which will be elaborated on later in this study.<sup>13</sup>

Aḥmadu Bamba followed a unique methodology in dealing with these sources and references, which can be outlined as follows:

1. Representing the most essential purposes of serious scientific research, such as:
  - a. Collecting scattered pearls of wisdom within the pages of Sufi books and compiling them into a single classification, similar to his work *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*.
  - b. Many students overlook the importance of abbreviating lengthy books due to their difficulty and complexity, resulting in a lack of understanding of their subject matter. Commenting on the references he used when composing his book *Masālik al-jinān* he said: "But their books were lengthy, which most of this generation neglected."<sup>14</sup>
  - c. Explaining complex issues in Sufism and reorganizing them creatively to simplify and clarify concepts.
  - d. Discovering new insights and correcting errors made by some individuals due to shortcomings in understanding language and context or deviating from the truth. In *Masālik al-jinān* he said:

13 See Ahmad Mokhtar Lo, "Manhaj Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba fī tahdhīb al-fikr aṣ-ṣūfī wa tanqiyatih," *The African Scholars Journal of Islamic Studies* 4 (2021): 382.

14 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, ed. Rawdu-r-Rayahin, (Rabat: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif al-Jadīda. 2017), 59.

Some claim to seek closeness to Allah, abandoning worship until they perish, leading them astray due to misunderstanding, defiling their minds, and lacking knowledge. This is because they interpreted the term 'certainty' at the end of Surah *al-Hijr*, – meaning Allah's statement, 'And worship your Lord until there comes to you the certainty' – to mean attaining certainty, when, in fact, it means death.<sup>15</sup>

The editors of *Masālik al-jinān* highlight that Aḥmadu Bamba's contribution to the book went beyond mere versification of Muḥammad al-Yadālī's (d. 1166/1753) *al-Khātima*; instead, he presented it within the context of his personal Sufi perspective, integrating his educational methodology for social reform and religious renewal. The book, therefore, serves as a summary of the distinctive *Murīdī* Sufi thought shaped by Aḥmadu Bamba's unique contributions.<sup>16</sup>

2. Selecting and categorizing Sufi sources, relying only on the most authentic and reliable ones that align closely with the *Sunnah*. Philosophical Sufi works, such as those by Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) and al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), are excluded due to their controversial nature. Despite the different views among scholars regarding these figures, ranging from efforts to seek excuses for to efforts to exonerate them, Aḥmadu Bamba chose to refrain from mentioning their names in his writings. He avoided mentioning them in his books, and did not rely on their work to determine or formulate his thoughts or take any position indicating agreement or condemnation towards them.<sup>17</sup>

3. Avoiding Sufi Esoteric Discourses (*Shaṭaḥāt*): One common criticism levelled at both classical and contemporary

15 Ibid. 177.

16 Ibid. 21.

17 Lo, *Manhaj Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 386-387.



Sufi thought is the proliferation of peculiar behaviors and statements among the general public. These often contradict the principles of *sharīʿa* and the fundamentals of religion, leading their proponents to be accused of straying from the faith and facing condemnation and curses from believers, especially among the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*.<sup>18</sup> The phenomenon of “*shaṭḥ*” is attributed by researchers to the prevailing intellectual trend in Sufi thought since the third century of the Hijra. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Badawī (d. 2002) states: “We find genuine *shaṭḥ* for the first time with Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/875) in the third century of the Hijra, where he employs the original form of this phenomenon, namely speaking in the first-person narrative.”

Aḥmadu Bamba’s writings clearly reflect a deliberate avoidance of relying on Sufi authorities associated with this school, demonstrating caution by adhering strictly to the purified *sharīʿa* and distancing himself from such influences. We do not find any indication of adopting or promoting such *shaṭaḥāt* in his writings. Instead, he opposes them, elucidating a sound approach to dealing with the Sufi heritage based on careful selection and discernment. In a *fatwā* about some Sufi concepts and terminologies, he responded, saying:

As for your question about apparent annihilation (*al-fanāʾ az-ẓāhir*) and inner annihilation (*al-fanāʾ al-bāṭin*), apparent annihilation means not stepping out of the circle of the purified *Sharīʿa*, while inner annihilation is your stillness under the carpet of illuminated *Ḥaqīqa*. (...) In the distinction between *al-Aḥadiyya* and *al-Wāḥidiyya*: *al-Aḥadiyya* is the removal of everything else from the heart besides Him, and *al-Wāḥidiyya* is the removal of

the love of inclination towards anything other than Him from the heart. (...) And in the distinction between *al-Maḥw* and *Maḥw al-Maḥw*: *al-Maḥw* is the absence of seeing anything other than the reward of Allah, Blessed and Exalted, and *Maḥw al-Maḥw* is the absence of seeing what emanates from you to your Lord of good deeds.<sup>19</sup>

In this *fatwā*, Aḥmadu Bamba did not conventionally interpret these terms as the proponents of *shaṭḥ* understood them. Instead, he associated them with precise *sharīʿa* meanings devoid of any implication of union (*ittiḥād*) or incarnation (*ḥulūl*).

It is important to clarify that while Aḥmadu Bamba avoided explicitly citing the works and scholars of this school in his Sufi writings, this does not mean he refrained from mentioning them in all his writings. He mentioned some of them in his supplicatory poems, praying to Allah for their sake. This is exemplified in his renowned poem *Khamsatu-r-rijāl*, where he invoked Allah through the intercession of Prophet Muḥammad and five esteemed Sufi figures, including Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 234/848?).<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Aḥmadu Bamba’s approach to Sufism was characterized by a careful selection of the Sufi heritage, distinguishing between its beneficial and problematic aspects. He sought ways of grounding Sufi concepts on their foundational sources, which are the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, and thus, reviving practical Sufism in Senegal while avoiding philosophical interpretations. In addition to *Baghdādī* Sufism, he integrated elements from his African heritage

18 Ibid. 388.

19 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmūʿat aṣ-ṣuḡhrā*, ed. the Khadmīyya Association for Researchers and Scholars, (Rabat: Maṭbaʿat al-Maʾārif al-Jadīda, 2018), 85.

20 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān saʿādāt al-murīdīn*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya, (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzīʿ, 2021), 339-341.

that aligned with Islamic *sharīʿa*<sup>21</sup> into his teachings, infusing his Sufi thought with an African essence.

### 3. Aḥmadu Bamba's Sufi Writings: Influential Figures and Sources

This section delves into the key figures and sources that profoundly influenced Aḥmadu Bamba's Sufi writings throughout his life, focusing on the books he frequently referenced. This analysis is essential for elucidating the fundamental characteristics of Bamba's Sufi thought. By examining these foundational influences, we gain deeper insight into the development and distinct characteristics of his spiritual and intellectual legacy.

The section will begin by discussing the key figures in Bamba's life, focusing on their role in his spiritual and intellectual progression until he declared that he had been ordered to pledge allegiance exclusively to Prophet Muḥammad. This discussion will highlight the sources Bamba frequently referenced in his Sufi writings. Each stage contains numerous sub-stages, which will be carefully analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of Bamba's spiritual evolution and literary contributions. The approach adopted here is to provide a brief overview of each scholar's life, followed by a concise discussion of their presence in Aḥmadu Bamba's writings, and concluding with examples of their influence.

#### 3.1. Before Pledging Allegiance to Prophet Muḥammad (1854-1893)

This stage is considered one of the most significant phases in Aḥmadu Bamba's life.

21 See Moustapha Diope al-Kokkiyyu, *al-'Umda fī naẓariyyati al-khidma*, (Rabat: Maṭba'atu al-Ma'ārif al-Jadīda, 2019), 163; Gallay Ndiaye, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba: Sabīl as-salām*, (Rabat: Maṭba'at al Ma'ārif al-Jadīda, 2011), 10.

During this period, his Sufi personality was formed, and he proclaimed his call for renewal, while outlining the principles of his Sufi order. Moreover, this stage marked the prolific production of his scholarly legacy, including his most renowned works on Sufism and other fields. Additionally, this period witnessed numerous political and social changes that Aḥmadu Bamba interacted with, playing a prominent role in shaping his Sufi thought, as previously discussed. Reflecting on the course of Aḥmadu Bamba's life during this stage and the developments that occurred in his Sufi persona, we can divide this period into three sub-stages: the stage of upbringing and the initiation into the Sufi path, the stage of seeking knowledge and authorship, and finally, the Stage of Collecting Sufi *wirds* and searching for sheikhs.

##### 3.1.1. The Stage of Upbringing and Initiation into the Sufi Path

This stage, covering roughly from Aḥmadu Bamba's birth in 1854 to 1866 when he turned twelve, overlaps with the subsequent stage. During this period, his mother, Sokhna Maryam Bousso, had a prominent role, as she had a profound influence on Bamba's education and spiritual life. The significant influence of his father, Muḥammad ibn Ḥabībullah, during this period is also remarkable, noting that under his guidance, Bamba engaged in ascetic practices, fasting, and constant remembrance of Allah.<sup>22</sup>

##### 3.1.2. The Stage of Seeking Knowledge and Authorship

This stage extends from Aḥmadu Bamba's early pursuit of knowledge until his father's passing in 1881, marked a crucial phase in his scholarly development. This period laid the foundation for his Sufi journey

22 See Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 130-132.

and marked the beginning of his profound engagement with Sufi literature. In this stage, Aḥmadu Bamba's intellectual development was influenced by prominent figures such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), 'Abdu-l-Wahhāb ash-Sha'rānī (d. 973/1565), Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493), Ibn 'Aṭā' Allah as-Sakandarī (d. 709/1309), and Mauritanian scholars like Sheikh Sīdī Mukhtār al-Kuntīyyu (d. 1226/1811) and Muhammad ibn al-Mukhtār ad-Daymānī (d. 1166/1753). These scholars played crucial roles in shaping Aḥmadu Bamba's understanding of Sufism and contributed significantly to his Writings.

### 3.1.2.1. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) is considered one of the renewers (*mojaddid*) of the fifth century of the Hijra. He represents a symbol of moderate Sunnī Sufism, adhering to the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* while rejecting esoteric and gnostic views that influenced some Sufis through the impact of philosophy or ancient Eastern religions.<sup>23</sup> Al-Ghazzālī had a notable impact on Aḥmadu Bamba in his early stages of spiritual development, and this influence continued into the later stages of his life, with al-Ghazzālī consistently present in Bamba's Sufi thought. Some aspects of this influence can be summarized as follows:

1. The first Sufi book acquired by Aḥmadu Bamba in his early days was al-Ghazzālī's *Bidāyat al-Hidāya* (The Way of Salvation). He thoroughly read and studied this book, then versified it into poetry in 1875 to facilitate memorization for his students. He named this work *Mulayyin aṣ-Ṣudūr* (The Soother of Hearts). Later, during his stay in Mauritania in 1906, he abridged and refined the book and change the title to

*Munawwir aṣ-Ṣudūr* (The Enlightener of Souls). This book was the primary source for Aḥmadu Bamba's early involvement in Sufism. Bamba narrates a captivating tale of his first book acquisition, *Bidāyat al-Hidāya*. He recounts seeing it with a Mauritanian in the region of Sālum and negotiating its purchase for a dirham. Wanting to honor his commitment, Aḥmadu Bamba took the Mauritanian to collect the price from a well-known merchant who was a disciple of his father. However, upon seeing Aḥmadu Bamba's ragged clothing, the merchant reprimanded him and provided a new white garment, urging him to discard the old one. Aḥmadu Bamba outwardly complied yet secretly retained his old garment. After the encounter, he returned to the Mauritanian, exchanged the new garment for the book, and dedicated himself to studying it diligently.<sup>24</sup>

2. In his early life, Aḥmadu Bamba extensively engaged with the works of al-Ghazzālī, particularly focusing on *Minhāj al-Ābidīn* (The Path of the Worshipers) and *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences).<sup>25</sup> This led to his heavy reliance on these works and their author, especially *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn* which served as a primary source for Aḥmadu Bamba's work *Masālik al-jinān*. Additionally, al-Ghazzālī's *Minhāj al-Ābidīn* was also an essential source for some of Aḥmadu Bamba's writings, *fatwās*, and valuable advice, such as *Faṭḥ al-Manān fī Jawāb 'Abd ar-Raḥmān* (The Gift

23 See Shams ad-Dīn adh-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām an-nubalā'* (Beirut: ar-Risāla Foundation, 1985), 322-346.

24 See ad-Daghānī, *An-Nubdha al-mubāraka*, (Unpublished manuscript, private collection of Khadim Cheikhouna Mbacke, Senegal: Touba, nd.), 8-9.

25 Serigne Elhadj Mbacke, *Waxtāne Serigne Touba*, (Unpublished manuscript in Wolof language, private collection of Khadim Cheikhouna Mbacke, Senegal: Touba, nd.), I: 35.



of the Gracious (God) in Response to ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān) and *Silk al-Jawāhir fī Akhbār as-Sara’ir* (The String of Jewels on the Accounts of Inner Secrets).

If we delve into the book *Masālik al-jinān*, which is regarded as Bamba’s most comprehensive work on Sufism, representing his profound insights on the practical aspects of Sufi thought, we see him frequently referring to al-Ghazzālī to the extent that he specifically uses the term “*qāla*” (he said) to refer to al-Ghazzālī, while mentioning other scholars by their names. In the introduction of this book, Bamba states: “But when I mention ‘he said’ with the pronoun (he), it refers to the famous al-Ghazzālī. And for others among these people (the Sufi scholars), I explicitly mention their names.”<sup>26</sup>

Examples of his reference to al-Ghazzālī include his statement in his book *al-Jawhar an-Nafīs* (The Precious Jewel): “The reality of *riyā’* (showing off) according to the wise people, is performing worship intending to seek people’s praise. And *riyā’* according to our Imām al-Ghazzālī, is the abundance of righteous deeds with virtues, so that he may attain in the hearts of people an amazing status in life.”<sup>27</sup> In his poem *Tazawwud ash-Shub-bān* (Provisions of the Youth) he refers to al-Ghazzālī’s definition of Sufism and states that: “The definition of Sufism according to al-Ghazzālī, is stripping our hearts for Allah, with disdain for anything other than Him, out of the heart and body, may Allah guide us.”<sup>28</sup> Additionally, in his *Masālik al-jinān* he cites al-Ghazzālī’s perspective on Sufism: “As for Sufism, it is an obligatory duty according to al-Ghazzālī, without falsehood.”<sup>29</sup>

26 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 60.

27 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzī’, 2022), 224.

28 Ibid. 577.

29 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 108.

In his book *Silk al-jawāhir*, Aḥmadu Bamba extensively relied on the books *al-Minhāj* and *at-Tibr al-masbūk* by al-Ghazzālī. An example can be found in one of his statements in *Silk al-Jawāhir*:

And al-Ghazzālī said in *al-Minhāj*: ‘Know that I asked some of our teachers about the practice of our saints in reciting Surat *al-Wāqī’a* during times of hardship. Is it not intended thereby that Allah Almighty would alleviate their hardship and grant them some worldly provision as customary? So how can the desire for worldly enjoyment be legitimate through actions of the Hereafter?’<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, in the same work, Bamba stated:

And in *at-Tibr al-masbūk* by al-Ghazzālī – may Allah be pleased with him – he states that Moses (peace be upon him) was supplicating to his Lord on the mountain, saying in his supplication: ‘O Lord, show me Your justice and fairness.’ So, Allah said, ‘O Moses, you are a bold and impulsive man who cannot endure patiently.’ Moses replied, ‘O Lord, I am capable of patience with Your help.’<sup>31</sup>

3. In Aḥmadu Bamba’s view, al-Ghazzālī was more than a great Sufi scholar from whom knowledge was acquired; he was also deeply revered and regarded as a spiritual guide in Sufism. This is evident in how Aḥmadu Bamba often refers to al-Ghazzālī as “our Sheikh” or “our Imām” in his writings. For example, in *Masālik al-jinān*, he says: “Like our Sheikh, the reformist al-Ghazzālī.” And in the poem *Jālibat al-masarra wa dāfi’at al-maḍarra* (The Bringer of Delight and the Repeller of Harm),

30 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Touba: n.p., 2020), 87-88; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Minhāj al-‘ābidīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Muqattam, 2017), 348.

31 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 55; al-Ghazzālī, *at-Tibr al-masbūk*, 48-49.

he states: “Our Imām, our Sheikh al-Ghazzālī.” In addition, as a sign of his belief in al-Ghazzālī’s spiritual authority, Bamba included him among the five names from whom he wished to be his intercessors. In his famous poem “*Khamsatu ar-rijāl*” (The Five Men), he says:

O our Lord, to You I complain of my state,  
through the Prophet and the five men:  
My sheikh and savior ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlanī,<sup>32</sup> the possessor of knowledge and gnosis. Then Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī,<sup>33</sup> the venerable saint, the resolute. Then Ṭayfūr ibn ‘Isā<sup>34</sup> the saint. Then Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī. The fifth is Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī,<sup>35</sup> the prominent saint. O our Lord, O our Lord, O our Lord, O our Lord, O our Lord, respond to us. Through Muṣṭafā, the best of creations, Aḥmad, bring them to me at my death tomorrow. Save me through their status from disgrace and guide me through them to the right path. And rectify what has become corrupt in my affairs. Their status makes my path easy.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, it is evident from the foregoing discussion that al-Ghazzālī significantly influenced Aḥmadu Bamba, both as a scholar and

as a Sufi. This influence is prominently evident in Bamba’s Sufi writings from the early to the later stages of his life. This influence is manifested in the continuous reference to al-Ghazzālī in his writings and his reliance on his books and concepts in analyzing and interpreting matters of religion and Sufi thought. Furthermore, the influence is evident in the incorporation of al-Ghazzālī’s rejuvenating approach and ideas in a manner that harmonizes with Aḥmadu Bamba’s vision, making it effectively responsive to his time and environment.

### 3.1.2.2. Aḥmad Zarrūq

Sheikh Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Isā al-Barnasī (attributed to the Berber tribe of Barānis) al-Fāsī, known as Zarrūq (d. 899/1493), was a prominent *faqīh*, a Sufi leader, and a Sheikh of the *Shādhiliyya* order. He authored works in various fields.<sup>37</sup> Aḥmad Zarrūq is also considered one of the Sufi figures to whom Aḥmadu Bamba frequently referred to in his writings, particularly in some of his advice to his disciples, as will be demonstrated. Among Zarrūq’s books that Aḥmadu Bamba often referred to in some of his compositions and *fatwās* are: ‘*Uddat al-murīd aṣ-ṣādiq* (The Preparation of the Sincere Disciple), *Urjūza: ‘ūyūb an-naṣf wa dawā’uḥa* (The Poem: The Flaws of the Self and Their Remedies), *an-Naṣīḥa al-kāfiyya* (The Sufficient Advice), *an-Nasā’ih az-Zarrūqiyya* (Zarrouqian Advice), and *Qawā’id at-Taṣawwuf* (Principles of Sufism).

One example of his reference to Zarrūq in his writings is his elucidation of the principles of Sufism in his admonition entitled *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*, where he said:

Take this, O Maḥmūd, if [Allah] the Exalted wills, it will heal a seeker and a desired

32 Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlanī (d. 561/1166), the founder of the *Qādiriyya* Sufi order.

33 Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī *al-Kabīr*, Ṭayfūr ibn ‘Isā ibn Surooshān (d. 234/848?), one of the prominent Sufi masters in *Khurāsān*.

34 Ṭayfūr ibn ‘Isā ibn Ādam ibn ‘Isā *az-Zāhid*. He shares his name with his father, and place with the previously mentioned figure. (See Abū ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān as-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt as-Ṣūfiyya*, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1998), 68; ‘Abdu-l-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *ar-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1974), 6.

35 Ma‘rūf ibn Fayrūz al-Karkhī al-Baghdādī (d.200/815), one of the renowned early ascetics and Sufi masters.

36 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān sa‘ādāt al-murīdīn*, 339-341.

37 See ‘Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Mu‘jam al-mu‘allifīn* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1957), I: 155.

one from distress. If you inquire about Sufism, to be counted among those who have gnosis. Then Sufism has well-known principles, nine things according to the people of gnosis. The first is adherence to the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the chosen, the one of correctness. And abandoning desires and innovations (*bida'*). Likewise, venerating the humble, devout sheikhs. Excusing the faults of all creatures. Perpetuating the *wird* for the sake of Allah. Among them is the abandonment of all permissions (*rukhas*) and the abandonment of interpretations, for this is what 'Zarrūq' explicitly stated. He said, 'These are the principles; whoever neglects them is deprived of reaching [Allah].'<sup>38</sup>

This statement originates from the book *'Uddat al-murīd aṣ-ṣādiq*, where Zarrūq quotes Abū al-Qāsim an-Naṣrābādhī (d. 367/978) saying: "The foundation of Sufism is adherence to the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*, abandoning desires and innovations, venerating the sanctities of the sheikhs, excusing the faults of creatures, perpetuating the regular *wirds*, and abandoning permissions and interpretations." Then Zarrūq added: "I say, these are the principles; whoever neglects them is deprived of reaching Allah."<sup>39</sup>

Another example of his referral to Zarrūq's books is his mention of *al-Waṣiyya*<sup>40</sup> (The Letter) in the same previous poem, in the context of mentioning some qualities of the seeker:

And it came from them that five qualities lead the seeker to attainment and union. The first is adherence to congregational

prayer, for it enriches the follower. And the second is avoidance of stubborn people, in private and in public, and from corrupt individuals. Except for advising them gently (...), Zarrūq mentioned this in '*al-Waṣiyya*.' May he remain content and dignified.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.1.2.3. Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī

Jalāl ad-Dīn 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad al-Khuḍayrī as-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) was an eminent Sufi<sup>42</sup> and Islamic scholar known for his expertise in jurisprudence, *hadith*, *Usūl al-Fiqh*, history, and literature. He authored nearly 600 works, including *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, *al-Alfiya fī muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīth*, and *Tafsīr al-jalālayn*.<sup>43</sup> In his writings, Aḥmadu Bamba frequently references the works of as-Suyūṭī. One notable example is *al-Jāmi' aṣ-ṣaghīr*, a collection of *hadith* arranged in alphabetical order by as-Suyūṭī. Aḥmadu Bamba cites a *hadith* from this book in his poem *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*, where he states:

We have received from the best of creation – peace, and blessings be upon him, the bestower of gifts - that preoccupation with the faults of creation, hardness of heart due to the rejection of truth, love for the world, and lack of modesty, and injustice - where there is no limit. Five qualities render deeds null, and a sixth for them is prolonged hope. Narrated by Sheikh Jalāl ad-Dīn in '*al-Jāmi' aṣ-ṣaghīr*' with clarification.<sup>44</sup>

38 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣughra*, ed. the Khadmiyya Association for Researchers and Scholars, (Rabat: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif al-Jadīda, 2018), 188-189.

39 Abū al-Abbās Aḥmad Zarrūq, *'Uddat al-murīd aṣ-ṣādiq* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2006), 37.

40 A letter composed by Zarrūq addressed to two of his students, embedded within the collection titled *an-Naṣā'ih az-Zarūqiyya* (The Zarūqian Counsels).

41 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣughra*, 196-197.

42 For more information about as-Suyūṭī's Sufi affiliations, see Ferzende İdiz, *İmam Suyuti: Tasavvuf Risaleleri* (Istanbul: Nizamiye Akademi Yayınları, 2017); Éric Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie* (Beirut: Presses de l'Ifpo, Institut Français de Damas, 1996), 516.

43 See Khayruddīn az-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām* (Beirut: Dār al-Ilm Lilmalāyīn, 2002), III: 301.

44 Ibid. 192.

*Bushrā al-ka'ib fī liqā' al-ḥabīb* (Consoling the Bereaved Through Reunion with the Deceased) is another book by as-Suyūṭī, in which he discusses the conditions of the intermediate realm (*barzakh*). It is summarized from his larger work, *Sharḥ aṣ-ṣudūr bi sharḥ aḥwāl al-mawtā wa-l-qubūr* (The Expanding of the Chest or Commentary on the State of the Deceased in the Grave). Aḥmadu Bamba extensively quoted from this book in his work *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, especially in the second chapter, where he collected *hadiths* and reports related to the trials and tribulations of the grave. For example, he states: “as-Suyūṭī said in *Bushrā al-ka'ib bi liqā' al-mawlā al-ḥabīb*: ‘It was narrated from Bilāl ibn Sa’d that...’”<sup>45</sup> and “In ‘*Bushrā al-ka'ib*’ also Ibn Abī ad-Dunyā narrated...”<sup>46</sup>

Aḥmadu Bamba also cited verses of as-Suyūṭī in his treatise *Miftāḥ al-ghuyūb* (The Keys of the Unseen) while discussing the deeds beneficial to a person in the grave, without mentioning the name of the book. Upon investigation, it was found that as-Suyūṭī mentioned these verses in his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Here is the text quoted by Bamba:

Indeed, the esteemed Imām as-Suyūṭī – may Allah be pleased with him – compiled several qualities, urged by the Prophet – peace and blessings be upon him – in the form of a report, with his statement – peace and blessings be upon him –: ‘When a person dies, his actions are sealed except for ten qualities.’ He versified them as follows: ‘When the son of Adam dies, no actions continue upon him except for ten: Knowledge that he disseminated, a supplicating offspring, planting palm trees, and ongoing charity, inheriting a Qur’ān, endowing a stream, digging a well, or the provision of water, a house for the travel-

er, built for refuge, or a place erected for remembrance, teaching the noble Qur’ān, so grasp these from the narrations with precision.”<sup>47</sup>

### 3.1.2.4. ‘Abdu-l-Wahhāb ash-Sha’rānī

Sheikh Abū al-Mawāhib ‘Abdu-l-Wahhāb ibn Aḥmed ibn ‘Alī al-Ḥanafī, attributed to Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyya, ash-Sha’rānī al-Maṣrī (d. 973/1565), was one of the most prominent scholars of his time and among the esteemed masters of Sufism. He authored numerous works in various fields.<sup>48</sup> ash-Sha’rānī is considered one of the Sufi figures who had a prominent presence in the writings of Aḥmadu Bamba during this stage of his life. It has been established that Bamba, at the beginning of his path, extensively studied the books of ash-Sha’rānī, especially his book *Kashf al-ghumma* (Lifting the Hardship).<sup>49</sup> Among the books of ash-Sha’rānī frequently referred to by Bamba are *Laṭā’if al-minan* (The Subtle Blessings), known as *al-Minan al-kubrā*, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya fī ma’rifat qawā’id aṣ-ṣūfiyya* (The Sacred Illuminations on the Knowledge of the Principles of Sufism), *al-Kawkab ash-shāhiq fī l-farq bayn al-murīd aṣ-ṣādiq wa ghayr aṣ-ṣādiq* (The Supreme Star on the Difference between the Sincere and Insincere Wayfarer), *Tanbīh al-mughtarrīn* (The Advices of the Great Ones), and *Mukhtaṣar at-tadhkira fī aḥwāl al-mawtā wa-umūr al-ākhira* (Summary of Reminder of the Conditions of Dead and The Affairs of Afterlife).

Perhaps the most significant book of Aḥmadu Bamba, where the influence of ash-Sha’rānī’s

45 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 133.

46 Ibid. 134.

47 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū’at al-kubrā*, (Unpublished manuscript, private collection of Khadim Cheikhouna Mbacke, Senegal: Touba, nd.), 578-579.

48 See Kaḥḥāla, *Mu’jam al-mu’allifīn*, VI: 218.

49 Serigne Elhadj Mbacke, *Waxtāne Serigne Touba*, I: 35.



works is evident, is the poem entitled *Huqqa al-bukā'u*, in which he extensively refers to several books of the latter. For example, when describing the qualities of “the sincere disciple” in this poem, he says: “Among their qualities is immersion in the knowledge of *sharī'a* alongside the knowledge of truth before the discipline of the self. Because disciplining the self with guiding people before delving into these two sciences is conducive to arrogance and misery.”<sup>50</sup> These two verses encapsulate the meaning of ash-Sha'rānī's statement in *al-Kawkab ash-shāhiq*: “Among the ethics of sincere disciples is that none of them seeks to enter the path of a group until after immersing himself in the sciences of until he is allowed to proceed to another matter.”<sup>51</sup>

In the same poem, Aḥmadu Bamba also mentions the pillars of sainthood (*al-wilāya*): “The pillars of the house of the Sufis are four, on them is founded the structure of *al-wilāya*: Silence and prolonged hunger followed by wakefulness, and isolation, through the company of sheikhs of indications.”<sup>52</sup> Here, Aḥmadu Bamba rephrases two verses with the same meaning found in ash-Sha'rānī's book *al-Anwār al-quḍsiyya fī ma'rifat qawā'id aṣ-ṣūfiyya*.<sup>53</sup> Thus, one can trace the verses of this poem and find many of them referenced in the works of ash-Sha'rānī.

An example of Bamba mentioning the name of ash-Sha'rānī in his writings is the statement in his poem *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*: Top of Form

50 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, “*Huqqa al-bukā'u*” in *al-Muntqā min qasā'idī 'Abdullāh wa khadīmi rasūlih*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li-n-Nashr wa at-Tawzī', 2024), 370.

51 'Abdu-l-'Abdu-l-Wahhāb ash-Sha'rānī, *al-Kawkab ash-shāhiq fī'l-farq bayn al-murīd aṣ-ṣādiq wa ghayr aṣ-ṣādiq* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1991), 33.

52 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Huqqa al-bukā'u*, 370.

53 'Abdu-l-'Abdu-l-Wahhāb ash-Sha'rānī, *al-Anwār al-quḍsiyya fī ma'rifat qawā'id aṣ-ṣūfiyya*, 2nd Edition, (Cairo: Dār Jawāmi' al-Kalim), 39.

Indeed, the principles of the Sufi people are seven, all of which our Lord has adorned us with. Holding fast to the Book of Allah and emulating the Messenger of Allah. Eating *halāl* and avoiding sin, the fifth is safeguarding oneself from harm. The sixth is fulfilling rights and repentance from transgression. These are affirmed by our master ash-Sha'rānī, The knower, the verifier, the divine.<sup>54</sup>

Another example of his referral to ash-Sha'rānī's books is his statement in the same preceding poem:

The qualities of the sincere disciple, in brief, [are] four, I have organized [them] for fear of delusion. [The first is] sincerity in the love of the Sheikh forever, then obedience to his command wherever it is found. And absolute abandonment of objection [toward his deeds], even inwardly, as they narrated. And alongside it is the submission of choice, due to his good opinion without denial. So, whoever combines these qualities among the disciples will attain certainties. Look for this in the *Laṭā'if* of ash-Sha'rānī, you will find it [there] like rubies and corals.<sup>55</sup>

Another primary reference for this poem, which we did not mention before, is the book *Tā'iyat as-sulūk ilā malik al-mulūk* and its commentary, both authored by the scholar Sīdī Aḥmad 'Arab ash-Sharnūbī, who passed away in 994/1586. Although the book's name is not explicitly mentioned in the poem, comparing the two works reveals many similarities, sometimes even leading to repeating some verses with minor variations.

### 3.1.2.5. al-Kuntiyyu and His Son

During this period, the names of Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu (d. 1226/1811)

54 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣughhrā*, 189.

55 Ibid. 192.

and his son Sheikh Muhammad al-Khalifa al-Kuntiyyu (d. 1241/1826) also emerged. Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār ibn Aḥmad ibn Abi Bakr al-Kuntiyyu was considered one of the most prominent scholars of Shinqīt, the Sahara, and West Sudan. He was the Sheikh of the *al-Kuntiyya* branch of the *Qādiriyya* Sufi order in his time. He was a knowledgeable, devout, politically influential, wise man and a social reformer.<sup>56</sup> His son Sheikh Muḥammad, who was nicknamed as “*al-Khalīfa*” for succeeding his father in the leadership of the *Qādiriyya al-Kuntiyya* Sufi order for fifteen years, was a devout worshipper and a knowledgeable jurist. He authored numerous works in various fields.<sup>57</sup>

Aḥmadu Bamba’s relationship with these two figures was a strong spiritual bond, as they were primarily his spiritual mentors in the *Qādiriyya* order. Bamba received the *Qādiriyya* *wird* from his father, Sheikh Muḥammad, who, in turn, received it from Sheikh Samba Tukloor Ka. Sheikh Samba received it from Sheikh Sīdiya al-Kabīr in Mauritania,<sup>58</sup> who was initially a disciple of Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu and later of his son, Sheikh Muḥammad al-Khalīfa. This highlights the depth of the relationship between Aḥmadu Bamba’s family and the Kunta family.

Aḥmadu Bamba frequently relied on the books of these two sheikhs in his writings during this period, especially in his book *Masālik al-jinān*. In the introduction of the book, he stated that one of his references in its composition was *Junnat al-murīd* (The Paradise of the Disciple), a work on Sufism by Sheikh Muḥammad al-Khalī-

fa.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, in his poetic composition *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*, he relied on the book of the latter titled *aṭ-Ṭarāʾif wa at-Talāʾid fī Karāmāt ash-Sheikhayn al-Wālida wa-l-Wālīd* (The Rare and Precious Accounts of the Miracles of the Two Shaykhs: the Mother and the Father), which is a biography of his parents, enriched with extensive Sufi knowledge. As for Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār, we find his book *al-Kawkab al-waqqād* (The Shining Star -a book focusing on *wirds* and Sufi masters-) presented in Aḥmadu Bamba’s book *Masālik al-jinān*. Additionally, his book *Naṣīḥat al-batt li jamīʿi Kunta* (some advice to his people) can be considered a primary reference for Aḥmadu Bamba’s *Faṭḥ al-man-nān fī jawāb ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān*.

Examples of al-Kuntiyyu’s presence in Aḥmadu Bamba’s writings are numerous and often both the father and the son are mentioned together. Notably, in *Masālik al-jinān*, while discussing predecessors who wrote about Sufism he states: “I found Sufis, the chosen ones, have authored books that have secrets. Like (...) our Sheikh al-Kuntiyyu the one with the lights, the Aid of humanity, the Pole of guidance, al-Mukhtār. And our Sheikh al-Khalīfa, the supported by the truth from the Lord of the worlds, Muḥammad.”<sup>60</sup> Similarly, in recounting the dispute on reciting the Qurʾān loudly or silently, he said: “The debate among the noble sheikhs regarding reciting the Qurʾān loudly versus secretly remains ongoing. (...) Some sought a middle ground on this matter, (...) and it was the choice of our Sheikh al-Mukhtār, upon him be the satisfaction of the Creator. So, my brother, refer to *Junnat al-murīd* by our righteous Sheikh al-Khalīfa the wise.”<sup>61</sup>

Examples of his specific reference to Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu include his

56 See Ahmad ibn al-Amīn ash-Shinqītī, *al-Wasīṭ fī tarājumi udabāʾi shinqīt* (Cairo: ash-Sharika ad-Duwalīyya li aṭ-Ṭibāʾa, 2002), 361.

57 See Abū Bakr al-Wulāfī, *Minah ar-Rabb al-Ghafūr* (Nouakchott: Maktabat al-Qarnayn, 2014).

58 See Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 233.

59 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 60.

60 Ibid. 58.

61 Ibid. 85.

words in *Faṭḥ al-mannān fī jawāb ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān*:

And in ‘*Naṣīḥat al-batt li jamī‘i Kunta*,’ by our great Sheikh, Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār - may Allah be pleased with him and make us among his followers - he said: ‘I advise you to fear Almighty Allah and control your tongues; for indeed, the tongue is the worst of enemies and the truest of friends. If you control it or remember Allah with it, you will be safe.’<sup>62</sup>

He also mentioned in the book *Masālik al-jinān* where he discusses the difference between *mu‘jiza* (miracles) and *karāma* (spiritual gifts): “What suffices as a *mu‘jiza* for the Prophet may be permissible as a *karāma* for the Saint. Because he is His inheritor, for the prophets are the proofs of our Lord to creation. (...) But the *‘iṣma* (infallibility) of the prophets is obligatory, unlike that of the saints. This is a statement of Sīdī al-Mukhtār in *al-Kawkab al-waqqād*, do not overlook it.”<sup>63</sup> Here, he narrates the statement of Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu indicating that: “Everything that could be a *mu‘jiza* for the Prophet could also be a *karāma* for the Saint (...) The prophets are infallible, and the saints are protected. They share in *‘iṣma*, except that the infallibility of the prophets is obligatory while the immunity of the saints is permissible.”<sup>64</sup>

Examples of his reference to Sheikh Muḥammad al-Khalīfa include his words in “*Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*” after discussing the five etiquettes of the Sufis: “These five [etiquettes] confined the Sufi’s etiquettes in

a concise form. All of this was mentioned in *aṭ-Ṭarā‘if* by our Sheikh al-Kuntiyyu, the knowledgeable.”<sup>65</sup> In the same work, where he discusses the importance of time management for the *murid*, he says: “The sincere seeker revolves according to the dictates of his time [i.e., the present] and does not covet the time that lies ahead, for that [i.e., the anticipation of the future] prevents rectification of what is present. So, contemplate *Junnat al-murīd* by our esteemed Sheikh al-Kuntiyyu.”<sup>66</sup> The text of Sheikh Muḥammad al-Khalīfa in *Junnat al-murīd* states:

The true seeker revolves according to the dictates of time, without turning his attention to another time or circumstance for the betterment of what that time or circumstance has given him, for it is incumbent upon him to fulfill the rights of time, to adhere to the proper conduct within it, and not to anticipate another time. For his inclination toward another time prevents him from fulfilling the rights of the first time in which he has been established, and accomplishing what is required of him, contrary to what is expected.<sup>67</sup>

In the Sufi compilations of Aḥmadu Bamba, there are several poetic books in which he versified works authored by previous Sufi scholars. When Bamba rewrites these books in poetic form, he aims to facilitate their memorization for students. He goes beyond mere versification, often condensing the original text, explaining it, or adding further insights. In the following sections, we will mention the Sufi figures who had a notable impact on Bamba’s writings, as they -at least- had one book that was the foundation for one of Bamba’s Sufi compositions.

62 Rawḍ ar-Rayāḥīn, *Min waṣāyā Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke*, (Rabat: Maṭba‘at al Ma‘arif al-Jadīda. 2018), 75-90.

63 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 82-83.

64 Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu, *al-Kawkab al-waqqād fī dhikr faḍl al-mashā‘ikhi wa haqā‘iq al-awrād* (Riyadh: King Saud University Library - Manuscripts Department, no. 7246, nd.), 1.

65 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣuḡhrā*, 195.

66 Ibid. 191.

67 Sheikh Muḥammad al-Khalīfa al-Kuntiyyu, *Junnat al-murīd dūn al-marīd* (Morocco: Dār Abī Raqrāq, 2012), II: 214.

### 3.1.2.6. Sheikh Muḥammad ibn al-Mukhtār al-Yadālī (ad-Daymānī)

Sheikh Muḥammad ibn al-Mukhtār ibn Muḥammad ibn Saʿīd ad-Daymānī al-Yadālī (d. 1753) was one of the scholars of the Shinqīt region. He was a prominent jurist, well-known for his righteousness. He followed the *Shādhiliyya* Sufi order. He authored numerous works, some even attribute around fifty to him.<sup>68</sup> His book *Khātimat at-Taṣawwuf* (The Conclusion of Sufism) is considered the main reference that Aḥmadu Bamba relied upon in composing his book *Masālik al-jinān*. *Khātimat at-Taṣawwuf* is a book of *tawḥīd* following the method of the Sufis, the people of spiritual insight and gnosis. Aḥmadu Bamba also relied on another book on *tafsīr* by al-Yadālī entitled *adh-Dhahab al-ibrīz fī tafsīr kitāb Allah al-ʿazīz* (The Pure Gold in Interpreting God's Holy Book).

In the introduction of *Masālik al-jinān*, Aḥmadu Bamba elucidates his preference of *Khātimat at-Taṣawwuf*: “Most of this generation abandoned their (the early Sufis) books, due to their length. Therefore, I chose, seeking help from Allah, to versify the book written by al-Yadālī, as it gathered all that was scattered among the predecessors, and being as the conclusion of Sufism.”<sup>69</sup> He also mentions the name of the book and its sources he relied upon: “I named it *Masālik al-jinān fī Jamʿi Mā Farrqah ad-Daymānī* (The Paths of Paradise in Compiling What ad-Daymānī Scattered), as everything he mentioned in the *Khātimat*, I have brought in this book in the form of verses. Then from *adh-Dhahab*, I derived some benefits to complete this work. And perhaps, in it, I may add some more from others for completeness.”<sup>70</sup>

68 See ash-Shinqītī, *al-Wasīt*, 223.

69 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 59.

70 Ibid. 60.

### 3.1.2.7. Sheikh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥājī ash-Shinqītī (ad-Dalḥājī)

Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥājī (d. 1252/1836) was among the prominent scholars renowned for his expertise in linguistics, jurisprudence, the sciences of the Qurʾān, and genealogy. He authored works such as *Tahrīr an-naẓar fī sharḥ asmāʾ as-suwar* (An Analytical Commentary on the Names of the Sūras) and *Tuḥfat al-walīd fī aḥkām at-tajwīd* (The Gift of the Child on the Rules of Tajwīd). ad-Dalḥājī died few years before Aḥmadu Bamba's birth. He belonged to the *Īdulḥāj* tribe, one of the famous Mauritanian tribes, who collectively pledged allegiance to Aḥmadu Bamba and joined his Sufi order.<sup>71</sup>

ad-Dalḥājī wrote a treatise on ethics and morals, which Aḥmadu Bamba versified in 212 verses and named *Nahj qaḍāʾ al-ḥāj fī mā min al-adab ilayhi al-murīd yāḥtāj*. This treatise combines noble character traits and exquisite manners that draw the servant closer to his Lord. It covers topics such as self-discipline, behavior towards others regardless of their status, and manners towards parents. Additionally, it addresses the etiquette of seeking knowledge, such as sincerity, piety, reverence for one's teachers, and a diligent approach to learning. Aḥmadu Bamba states in the introduction of this book that:

Today, I stand ready to respond to some of the devoted *murīds* who requested a structured guide to refine their manners, which is a necessary task. (...) So, I hastened to fulfill their request, seeking contentment and reward [from Allah]. Its content is the prose of our saint, al-Ḥājī, and its through. I hope to fulfill the need. (...) I named it *Nahj Qaḍāʾ al-Ḥāj* (The Path to Fulfilling

71 See Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Nahj qaḍāʾ al-ḥāj, fī mā min al-adab ilayhi al-murīd yāḥtāj*, ed. Dāʾirat Fath al-Ghaffār (Rabat: Maṭbaʿat al-Maʾārif al-Jadīda, 2017), 19-20.



the Need) in harvesting the teachings of our Sheikh, ad-Dalhājī.<sup>72</sup>

At this stage, alongside the previously mentioned books, there are additional sources that Aḥmadu Bamba referenced in his writings. These sources also played a notable role in shaping his Sufi ideas. However, because they are cited less frequently than the earlier works, they will be discussed separately in the next section.

### 3.1.2.8. Lesser-Cited Sources in Aḥmadu Bamba's Sufi Writings

In this section, I will discuss the infrequently mentioned sources that are explicitly referenced—either by name or by the author's name—in Aḥmadu Bamba's Sufi writings. The methodology employed involves providing a brief overview of the author, then introducing the titles and the themes of the book(s) referenced in Bamba's writings, and finally to indicate where reference to this book was made.

It is worth noting that Aḥmadu Bamba frequently incorporates the expressions of early Sufi figures, whose sayings are widely spread in classical Sufi texts, such as *ar-Risāla* by 'Abdu-l-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), *al-Luma'* by Abū Naṣr as-Sarrāj aṭ-Ṭūsī (d. 378/988), *at-Ta'arruf* by Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990), *Ṭabaqāt aṣ-Ṣūfiyya* by Abū 'Abd ar-Raḥmān as-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), *Qūt al-Qulūb* by Abū Ṭālib al-Makī (d. 386/996), and others. Furthermore, statements of renowned Sufis such as Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (d. 161/778), al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ (d. 187/803), Yaḥyā ibn Mu'adh (d. 258/872), are always mentioned in Bamba's works without specifying the source from which the sayings were derived. Consequently, it is not easy to trace the sayings back to a specific source, as they are presented in many books.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 25-26.

### 1- *Shajarat al-yaqīn wa takhlīq nūr sayyid al-mursalīn wa bayān ḥāl al-khalā'iq yawm ad-dīn* (The Tree of Certainty and the Creation of the Light of the Prophet and the States of the Creature on the Day of Judgment)

This book, attributed to Imām Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī<sup>73</sup> (d. 324/935), is a doctrinal work that addresses issues related to the Day of Judgment. Its attribution to Imām al-Ash'arī is subject to debate, and it has been printed under various titles and attributed to different authors. Much of the content in the second section of Bamba's *Dīwan silk al-jawāhir* is taken from this book, including some chapter titles, as indicated by his statements: "... concluded from *Shajarat al-Yaqīn* by al-Ash'arī,"<sup>74</sup> and "...and in *Shajarat al-Yaqīn* by al-Ash'arī..."<sup>75</sup>

### 2- *Tanbīh al-ghāfilīn bi-ahādīth sayyid al-anbiyā' wa-l-mursalīn* (The Warning of the Heedless with the Sayings of the Head of the Prophets)

It is a book of sermons, ethics, and spiritual guidance, authored by Abū al-Layth Naṣr ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad as-Samarqandī (d. 373/983), the Hanafī jurist, *hadīth* scholar, and ascetic known as Imām al-Khudā. He is also the author of a Qur'ānic exegesis called *Baḥr al-'Ulūm* (The Ocean of the Sciences) and a

<sup>73</sup> The founder of the Ash'arī school of thought. He was one of the diligent theologian *Imāms*. He was born in Baṣra. He initially followed the Mu'tazilite doctrine and advanced in it but later recanted and openly opposed them. He passed away in Baghdād. It is said that his authored works reached to three hundred books, including *ar-Radd 'alā al-Mujassima*, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, and *al-Ibāna 'an uṣūl ad-diyaanat*. See az-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, IV: 263.

<sup>74</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 148.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 150.

book on Islamic mysticism named *Bustān al-ʿarīfīn* (The Garden of the Gnostics).<sup>76</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba frequently referred to this book in his writings, especially in his advice poem, *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*, where he stated:

It was mentioned that the fortress against Satan consists of three things, which my statement has bestowed. The first is the mosque, the second is the continuous remembrance of Allah at all times, and the third is the recitation of the Qurʾān with purity and contemplation of its meanings. This was mentioned by Sheikh as-Samarqandī, the prominent and esteemed scholar.<sup>77</sup>

### 3- *Makārim al-akhlāq* (Nobilities of Character):

This book was authored by Amīn ad-Dīn Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan aṭ-Ṭabrīsī (d. 548/1153), an esteemed linguist and commentator within the Imāmī Shia school. He is attributed to Tabaristan. Among his works are *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān wa-l-furqān* and *Jawāmiʿ al-jāmiʿ* also in *tafsīr*.<sup>78</sup> This book is considered one of the renowned Shia sources dedicated to ethics and morality. Aḥmadu Bamba referenced it in one of his responses found in *al-Majmūʿat al-kubrā*, where he said: “And in *Makārim al-akhlāq* by aṭ-Ṭabrīsī – may Allah be pleased with him – some wise men advised a man, saying to him: ‘O man, do not approach your wife at the beginning, middle, and end of the month, for insanity, leprosy, and madness hasten towards her and her child...’”<sup>79</sup>

76 See az-Zarkalī, *al-Aʿlām*, VIII: 27.

77 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmūʿat aṣ-ṣuḡhrā*, 193.

78 See az-Zarkalī, *al-Aʿlām*, V: 148.

79 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmūʿat al-kubrā*, 646.

### 4- *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif* (Benefits of Intimate Knowledge)

It is one of the classical Sufi books, authored by Abū Ḥafṣ Shihāb ad-Dīn ʿUmar ibn Muḥammad al-Qurashī al-Bakrī as-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), a Shāfiʿī jurist, commentator, and preacher, among the great Sufis. He was a leading Sufi master in Baghdād and the author of several works including *Nughbat al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* and *Jadhb al-qulūb ilā muwaṣalat al-maḥbūb*.<sup>80</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba mentioned the name of this book in his poem *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*, where he quoted the words of Yaḥyā ibn Muʿādh from it, saying: “They say that the noble angels weep for the seeker (*murīd*) if he is gourmand, [they do that] out of mercy for him. Find that in the book of *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*.”<sup>81</sup>

### 5- *at-Tadhkira fī aḥwāl* *al-mawtā wa umūr al-ākhirā* (Summary of Reminder of the Conditions of Dead and The Affairs of Afterlife)

It is one of the most renowned books on the conditions of the deceased and matters of the Hereafter. It was authored by Abū ʿAbdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abū Bakr al-Andalusī al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272). He was a Mālikī jurist and one of the eminent scholars in *tafsīr*, known for his piety and devoutness. He originally hailed from Cordoba, then journeyed eastward and settled in Munyat ibn Khasīb in the north of Asyut, Egypt, where he passed away. Among his notable works are *al-Jāmiʿ li aḥkām al-Qurʾān* in twenty volumes, and *al-Asnā fī sharḥ asmāʾ Allah al-ḥusnā*.<sup>82</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba mentioned this book in *Miftāḥ al-ghuyūb*, discussing the

80 See az-Zarkalī, *al-Aʿlām*, V: 61-62.

81 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmūʿat aṣ-ṣuḡhrā*, 191.

82 See az-Zarkalī, *al-Aʿlām*, V: 322.

form of the “*Sirāt*” (the bridge over Hell), saying: “Regarding its arches, in the *Tadhkirat* of Sayyid al-Qurṭubī –may Allah be pleased with him– some scholars stated: None will traverse the *Sirāt* until they are questioned at seven arches. As for the first arch, one will be asked about faith in Allah, the Exalted...”<sup>83</sup>

## 6- *Bahjat an-nufūs* (The Beauty of the Souls)

This book was authored by Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdullah ibn Abī Jamra al-Azadī al-Andalusī (d. 695/1295), a renowned scholar, commentator, *hadith* specialist, Mālikī jurist, and Sufi. He was known for speaking the truth, commanding good, and avoiding people. Among his works is the abridgment of *Saḥīḥ al-bukhārī* titled *Jam‘ an-nihāya fī bidāyat al-khayr wa ghāyat al-ghāya*.<sup>84</sup> The book *Bahjat an-nufūs* is a commentary on his *Jam‘ an-nihāya*. Aḥmadu Bamba mentioned this book in his *Masālik al-jinān* where he discusses “*tafakkur*” (contemplating), stating: “Ibn Abī Jamra, a pillar of religion, may Allah be pleased with him at all times, explicitly stated that *at-tafakkur* in times, is the best of deeds for the believer.”<sup>85</sup>

## 7- *al-Ḥikam al-‘Aṭā’iyya* (The Book of Wisdoms)

One of the works Aḥmadu Bamba drew upon in *Masālik al-jinān*, alongside the works of al-Yadālī, al-Ghazzālī, al-Kunṭiyyu and his son, is the *al-Ḥikam al-‘Aṭā’iyya* by Tāj ad-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah as-Sakandarī (d. 709/1309). The latter was a prominent Mālikī jurist and a *Shādhilī* Sufi, regarded as one of the pillars of the *Shādhiliyya* Sufi order. He was a knowledgeable scholar whose

lessons were attended by many people. He left many writings behind, the most famous of which is his book *al-Ḥikam*, mentioned earlier, a small book compiling many Sufi aphorisms.<sup>86</sup>

An example of Aḥmadu Bamba’s reference to *al-Ḥikam* in *Masālik al-jinān* is as follows: “As for the one who rejects the importance of the *wird*, mocking it out of dislike and disdain, He is ignorant, as stated by the scholar Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah in his text *al-Ḥikam*.”<sup>87</sup> This statement encapsulates the meaning of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah’s saying: “Only the ignorant belittles the *wird*.”<sup>88</sup> In another passage from the same book, Bamba says: “Our Sheikh, the knowledgeable one, Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah, said at the beginning of *al-Ḥikam* that among the signs of reliance on action is a decrease in hope when committing faults.”<sup>89</sup> This is the equivalent of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah’s saying: “Among the signs of reliance on action is a decrease in hope when committing faults.”<sup>90</sup>

## 8- *al-Madkhal ilā tanmiyat al-a‘māl bi taḥsīn an-niyyāt wa at-tanbīh ‘alā ba‘ḍ al-bida’ wa-l-‘awā’id* (Introduction to the Increase of the Deeds through Perfection of the Intentions)

This book reveals the flaws and innovations (*al-bida’*) practiced by people. It was authored by Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-‘Abdarī al-Fāsī al-Mālikī, known as Ibn al-Ḥāj (d. 737/1336). He was one of the renowned scholars known for his asceticism and righteousness. Among his many works are *Bulūgh al-qaṣd wa-l-munā*

83 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 583.

84 Sirāj ad-Dīn ‘Umar ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-‘awliyā’* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1994), 439.

85 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 94.

86 See Kaḥḥāla, *Mu‘jam al-mu‘allifīn*, II: 121.

87 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 83.

88 Tāj ad-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah as-Sakandarī, *al-Ḥikam al-‘Aṭā’iyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Andulus al-Jadīda, 2010), 36.

89 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 119.

90 Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah, *al-Ḥikam*, 3.

*fī khawāṣṣ asmāʿ Allah al-ḥusnā, Shumūs al-anwār wa kunūz al-asrār* (The Suns of the Lights and the Treasures of the Mysteries), and his most famous book, *al-Madkhal ilā tanmiyat al-aʿmāl*.<sup>91</sup> The name of Ibn al-Ḥāj appears frequently in the jurisprudential, Sufi, and doctrinal writings of Aḥmadu Bamba. He relied on him for his *fatwā* regarding whether it is permissible to pour *Zamzam* water into a well for blessings, as he states in *al-Majmūʿat aṣ-ṣughra*: “Know that blessing is only by following the Prophet’s (peace and blessings be upon him) example. Ibn al-Ḥāj warned against those innovations introduced there...”<sup>92</sup>

**9- *Rawḍ ar-rayāḥīn fī hikāyāt aṣ-ṣāliḥīn*  
(Paradise of the Basils in the Stories of the Righteous Ones)**

This book is a collection of stories, accounts and anecdotes of great Sufi saints. It was written by ʿAfīf ad-Dīn Abū as-Saʿādāt, Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdullah ibn Asʿad al-Yāfiʿī ash-Shāfiʿī (d. 768/1366). He was a Sufi poet who authored books on jurisprudence, language, history, and mathematics. His notable works include *ad-Durr an-naẓīm fī khawāṣṣ al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* (The Pearls Strung in the Qurʾān) and *Asnā al-mafāḥir fī manāqib ash-Sheikh ʿAbdu-l-Qādir* (The Most Brilliant Glory in the Virtues of ʿAbd al-Qādir).<sup>93</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba relied heavily on this book in a letter of advice to one of his followers, which is fully mentioned in *al-Majmūʿat aṣ-ṣughra*. He frequently cited many anecdotes of saints from it. He generally mentions the story in full and then gives the title of the book which he refers to. Bamba also referred to this book in *Dīwān*

91 See Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam al-muʿallifīn*, XI: 284.

92 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmūʿat aṣ-ṣughra*, 83.

93 See Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam al-Muʿallifīn*, VI: 34.

*silk al-jawāhir* as follows: “It is narrated from al-Yāfiʿī about some saints who said: ‘I asked Allah to show me the stations of the people in the graves...’”<sup>94</sup>

**10- *Kitāb an-nūrayn fī iṣlāḥ ad-dārayn*  
(The Book of the Two Lights in Reforming the Two Realms)**

This book discusses ways of refining the souls and enlightening the hearts. Its main purpose is to encourage the journey towards Allah. The book was authored by Jamāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān ibn ʿOmar, famously known as al-Ḥubayshī (d. 780/1378), a Shāfiʿī jurist from Yemen. Among his works are *al-Baraka fī faḍl as-saʿy wa-l-ḥaraka* (Blessings in the Virtue of Striving and Motion) and *Masāʾil aṭ-ṭalāq* (The Matters of Divorce).<sup>95</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba mentioned him several times in his book *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*. He is also referred to as “al-Yamanī,” like “in *Kitāb an-nūrayn* by al-Yamanī...”<sup>96</sup> Additionally, he is called as “al-Ḥubayshī,” as in the following statement: “...as mentioned by al-Ḥubayshī in *Kitāb an-nūrayn*.”<sup>97</sup>

**11- *ar-Rawḍ al-fāʾiq fī al-mawāʾiz wa ar-raqāʾiq* (The Superior Garden of Sermons and Spiritual Advice)**

This book is a work of sermons and guidance, comprising speeches, *hadiths*, stories, and the virtues of pious people. It was authored by Sheikh Abū Madyan Shuʿayb ibn Saʿd al-Makkī al-Maṣrī (d. 810/1408), known as “al-Ḥarīfīsh.” He was a renowned scholar, ascetic, and Sufi preacher.<sup>98</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba

94 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 183.

95 See az-Zarkalī, *al-Aʿlām*, VI: 193.

96 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 165.

97 Ibid. 128.

98 See Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam al-Muʿallifīn*, IV: 302.



extensively relied on this book in a letter of advice to one of his followers, which is fully included in *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣuḡhrā*. He often cited many stories of saints from it. An example of his statement is as follows: “In *ar-Rawḍ al-fā'iq* it is mentioned that as-Sarī as-Saqāṭī—may Allah have mercy on him—passed by a man lying on the ground, drunk, with wine spilling from his mouth, saying: ‘Allah, Allah.’ as-Sarī then raised his gaze to the sky and said...”<sup>99</sup>

**12- *al-Ḥiṣn al-ḥaṣīn min kalām sayyid al-mursalīn*  
(The Fortified Fortress)**

This is a book about the supplications and invocations transmitted from the Prophet Muḥammad. It was authored by Imām Shams ad-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf ad-Dimashqī ash-Shafī'ī, known as Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429). He was a prominent Qur'ān reciter and memorizer of *ḥadīth* of his time. He was born and raised in Damascus, where he established a school called “*Dār al-Qur'ān*.” He traveled to Egypt several times.<sup>100</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba cited this book frequently in his *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, often referring to Ibn al-Jazarī as “ad-Dimashqī,” in his statements like: “In *al-Ḥiṣn al-ḥaṣīn* by ad-Dimashqī...”<sup>101</sup> and “...as stated by ad-Dimashqī in *al-Ḥiṣn al-ḥaṣīn*.”<sup>102</sup>

**13- *ad-Durr ath-thamīn wa-l-mawrid al-mu'īn*  
(The Eighth Pearl and the Helpful Source)**

This is a commentary on the book *al-Murshid al-mu'īn 'alā ad-darūrī min 'ulūm ad-dīn* (The Concise Guide to the Basics of the

Deen) by the Mālikī jurist 'Abdu-l-Wāḥid ibn 'Āshir (d. 1040/1631). This book was authored by Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Mayyāra al-Fāsī (d. 1070/662). He was a Mālikī jurist from Fez, renowned as a scholar with deep expertise in various sciences, and known for his trustworthiness, piety, and devoutness. Among his works are *Fath al-'alīm al-khallāq bi-sharḥ Lāmiyat az-Zaqqāq* (Discovering the All-Knowing Creator through the Commentary of Zaqqāq's *Lāmiyat*) and *al-Itqān wa-l-iḥkām fī sharḥ Tuhfat al-Hukkām* (Precision and Perfection in Explaining the Gift of Rulers).<sup>103</sup> The book includes an introduction to the Ash'arī credo and a conclusion on the principles of Junaydī Sufism. It was mentioned in Aḥmadu Bamba's poem *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*, where he discusses the struggle against the self, saying: “It is established among the scholars that the wise [people] have unanimously agreed, that there is no path to happiness on the Day of Judgment when the terror appears, except by restraining the self from every desire, and from all passions, with great restraint. Look for this in *ad-Durr ath-thamīn* by our Sheikh Mayyāra, the astute scholar.”<sup>104</sup>

**14- *Kitāb an-Naṣīḥa*  
(The Book of Advice)**

It is a poem on Sufism and noble ethics, consisting of 128 verses. It was authored by Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Abdu-l-'Azīz ibn Rashīd ibn Muḥammad al-Hilālī as-Sijilmāsī (d. 1175/1761). He was a Mālikī jurist known for his piety and asceticism. He wrote a commentary on the *Mukhtaṣar* of Sheikh Khalīl and authored other works in various fields. Renowned for his devoutness and renunciation of worldly pleasures, he performed the pilgrimage twice and studied under scholars

99 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 249.

100 See az-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, VII: 45.

101 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 89.

102 Ibid. 128.

103 See az-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, VI: 11.

104 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣuḡhrā*, 193.

from the Hijaz and Egypt. He also wrote a book about his travels.<sup>105</sup>

Aḥmadu Bamba mentioned this poem in his book *Masālik al-jinān* while discussing the benefits of knowledge, saying: “In the poem of our Sheikh al-Hilālī—may Allah, the Glorious, be pleased with him—: ‘knowledge [is what] engenders fear of the All-Knowing (Allah); whoever lacks this fear is a reprehensible ignorant.’”<sup>106</sup> He also referenced it in his treatise on advice *Faṭḥ al-mannān* when talking about eating lawful and unlawful food, stating: “al-Hilālī—may Allah be pleased with him—said: ‘Whatever the tongue reaps, a person will find on the Day of Judgment.’”<sup>107</sup> In another context of the same book, he quoted: “Ahmad al-Hilālī—may Allah be pleased with him—said in his poem: ‘Every piece of flesh that has grown from unlawful means, the fire [Hell] is more deserving of it, as is established [in a *ḥadīth*].’”<sup>108</sup> Additionally, Aḥmadu Bamba relied on this book in various parts of his work *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*.

### 15- *al-Waṣīyya* (The Testament)

This is a poetic composition on the virtues of ethics and the beauty of manners. It was authored by Sheikh Ḥammād ibn Allamīn al-Majlisī ash-Shinqīṭī (d. 1255/1840). He was a renowned linguist and genealogist. Proficient in the science of biography and Arab lineage, he was also deeply engaged in various Islamic sciences. He was known for his asceticism and devotion. Among his works is *Rawḍ an-nihāya fī sharḥ Naẓm al-Ghazawāt* (The Commentary on the Rules of Combat).<sup>109</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba quoted verses

105 az-Zarkalī, *al-A‘lām*, I: 157.

106 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 70.

107 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at al-kubrā*, 30.

108 Ibid. 32.

109 See ash-Shinqīṭī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 352.

from this book in his work *Masālik al-jinān* under the chapter on etiquette and virtues, saying: “And the author of *al-Waṣīyya* also said, addressing his son with virtue: ‘Embark on the virtues of ethics, with deeds pure from hypocrisy...’”<sup>110</sup>

### 16- *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn wa-falāḥ aṭ-ṭālibīn* (Memorial of the Disciples and Salvation of the Seekers)

It is a poem on advice and etiquette, consisting of 204 verses. It was authored by Sheikh ‘Umar ibn Sa‘īd Tāl al-Fūtiyyu (d. 1280/1864), one of the prominent Sufi scholars in Senegal and West Africa and a notable figure in the *Tijāniyya* order. He led the largest armed *jihād* movement in West Africa against the pagans and the French. He met his demise during fierce battles against his enemies, and it is said that he disappeared under mysterious circumstances on February 12, 1864, in the “Banjagara” cliffs in Mali. He left many books behind, the most famous of which are: *Rimāḥ ḥizb ar-raḥīm fī nuḥūr ḥizb ar-rajīm* (The Lances of God’s Party against the Throats of the Satanic Faction), *Bayān mā waqa‘a* (A Clarification of the Events That Took Place), and this book in question *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*.<sup>111</sup>

Aḥmadu Bamba quoted a verse from this book in his work *al-Jawhar an-naḥīs*, where he discusses the etiquette of prayer: “And his (the prayer’s) state should be like the saying of ‘Umar [al-Fūtiyyu], who is adorned with piety and knowledge: ‘And be when you enter the prayer, like a person who is in his death bed.’”<sup>112</sup>

110 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 148.

111 See Muhammad al-Muntaqā Ahmad Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa ad-durar fī sirat ash-Sheikh al-Ḥāj ‘Umar* (Tunis: Dār al-Burāq, 2005).

112 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 251.

**17- *Shudhūr al-adhkār al-māḥiya li al-awzār wal-muhayyi'a li ḥuṣūl al-anwār wa-l-asrār* (Fragments of Remembrances that Wipe Out Sins and Prepare for the Attainment of Light and Secrets)**

This is a book on *adhkār* (remembrances) and *wirds*, authored by Sheikh Sīdiya ibn al-Mukhtār ibn al-Hīb al-Abīrī al-Mūrītānī (d. 1284/1868). He was a prominent Sufi scholar who studied under Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu and his son Muḥammad al-Khalīfa. He then established his own scholarly and Sufi circle in his hometown, attracting students from all over the Islamic West (Arab and African regions). He also opposed to the French colonial attempts to occupy the country. He authored numerous letters addressed to his contemporaries, *emirs* of his time, tribal leaders, and the French governor of West Africa. Additionally, he wrote treatises on social and ethical guidance, the science of Qur'ānic recitation (*tajwīd*), and commentaries on grammar and other subjects, all of which are currently in manuscript.<sup>113</sup>

Aḥmadu Bamba referred to this book in *Faṭḥ al-mannān fī jawāb 'Abd ar-Raḥmān* while discussing the importance of piety and fearing Allah, stating: "In *Shudhūr al-adhkār* by our Sheikh Sīdiya ibn al-Mukhtār—may Allah be pleased with him and us through him—it is mentioned that the benefits are based on beliefs and that piety is the source of all wisdom and the sum of all goodness and blessings. Whoever seeks knowledge should fear Allah..."<sup>114</sup> He also quoted this book multiple times in his *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir* where he explains the properties of certain verses, sūrahs, and names, he said: "And in *Shudhūr*

*al-adhkār al-māḥiya li al-awzār* by our Sheikh Sīdiya—may Allah have mercy on him and benefit us with his blessings: And among what is used for safety from enemies..."<sup>115</sup>

An analysis of the books referenced in Aḥmadu Bamba's writings reveals that they constitute a substantial part of the Sufi heritage that shaped his thought. Notably, none of the works associated with philosophical Sufism are included among these sources, which underscores his deliberate avoidance of that particular school of thought. Furthermore, Aḥmadu Bamba's intellectual openness is evident, as he did not hesitate to draw from a Shia text, despite doctrinal differences.

### 3.1.3. The Period of Collecting Sufi *Wirds* and Searching for Sheikhs

This stage is what some researchers call "the stage of wandering among the sheikhs," it extends from the death of his father in 1881 to his direct allegiance to the Prophet Muḥammad in 1893. It is considered one of the most crucial stages in the life of Aḥmadu Bamba, as he embarked on numerous journeys -some lasting up to nine months- during this period between different regions within Senegal and Mauritania. During these travels, he visited many scholars and saints, both living and deceased, sought permission (*ijāza*) from scholars, and received *wirds* from the sheikhs of the Sufi orders.<sup>116</sup> He was given the *Shādhiliyya wird*, the *Tijāniyya wird*, and renewed the *Qādiriyya wird*, the sect into which he eventually initiated.<sup>117</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba describes this period in the following poem where he recounts his journey on the path of Sufism:

115 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 98.

116 See ad-Daghānī, *Irwā'u-n-nadīm*, 86.

117 See Rawḍu, *Sheikh Aḥmadu Bamba*, 107-111.

113 See ash-Shinqīṭī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 240-243.

114 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at al-kubrā*, 24.

Since I reached the age of reason, I have been a seeker of knowledge of Allah, repentant. I wandered among the scholars and saints with my intention, actions, and words, so that my life's efforts would not go to waste, for the sake of a good reckoning. Until I devoted myself in the year 1311/1893 to serving "the best of creatures" [Prophet Muḥammad] the Highest.<sup>118</sup>

He also announced his reformist thoughts during this period, now known as the principles of "*al-Murīdiyya* Order." He began raising his followers in a Sunnī Sufī way after receiving permission from Prophet Muḥammad in 1883.<sup>119</sup> This period highlights personalities that influenced Aḥmadu Bamba's character and writings significantly, three of them standing out in particular, Sheikh 'Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī<sup>120</sup> (d. 561/1165), Sheikh Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī<sup>121</sup> (d. 656/1258), and

Sheikh Aḥmad at-Tijānī<sup>122</sup> (d. 1230/1815). We will briefly examine Aḥmadu Bamba's associations with these figures and their representation in his corpus.

### 3.1.3.1. The Three Sheikhs: al-Jīlānī, ash-Shādhilī, and at-Tijānī

When examining the writings of Aḥmadu Bamba, one can observe a deep respect and love for the Sufī saints (*awliyā*). He consistently upholds their stature without diminishment, offering unwavering reverence and recognition to each. The esteemed position of the *awliyā* in Aḥmadu Bamba's perspective is evident in his following words: "The love of all the *awliyā* is incumbent, and anyone who opposes the chosen ones is prohibited. [May] upon all the *awliyā* [be] the contentment of the One [Allah], who made them His mercy in every era."<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, his son Sheikh Muḥammad al-Bashīr quoted Aḥmadu Bamba as follows: "The honor of the *awliyā*, prophets, and diligent scholars is poisoned; speaking ill of them is like drinking the poison of venom."<sup>124</sup>

118 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Bidāyat as-sulūk* (Touba: Maktabat Dār al-Quddūs, 1972), 7.

119 See Ibid. 38-39.

120 Abū Ṣāliḥ 'Abdu-l-Qādir ibn Mūsā ibn 'Abdullah al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1165), the founder of the *Qādiriyya* Sufī order. He was knowledgeable in numerous fields of study, including Qur'ānic exegesis, *ḥadīth* sciences, Ḥanbalī jurisprudence, jurisprudential differences, principles of *fiqh*, and Arabic grammar. He recited the Qur'ān in various form of recitations and issued legal opinions according to the Shāfī'ī and Ḥanbalī schools of law. See al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-'awliyyā*, 120.

121 Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn 'Abdullah ibn 'Abdul Jabbār ash-Shādhilī al-Maghribī (d. 656/1258) was a Sufī scholar, and the founder of the *Shādhiliyya* Sufī order. He began his spiritual journey studying under Imām 'Abd as-Salām ibn Mashīsh (d. 625/1228?) in Morocco, who had a profound influence on his scholarly and Sufī life. Later, he traveled to Tunisia and secluded himself for worship on Mount Zaghwān, where he deepened his spiritual practices and studied under Abū Sa'īd al-Bājī (d. 628/1231). He then journeyed to Egypt and settled in Alexandria, where he attracted followers and disciples, and his Sufī order gained prominence in Egypt. He was renowned as one of the spiritual luminaries of his time. He passed away in the valley of Himaythara in the desert of Aydhāb while travelling to Mecca in the year 656/1258. See Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-'awliyyā*, 458; Salāḥ ad-Dīn as-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfī bi al-wafayāt* (Beirut: Dār Ihya' at-Turāth, 2000), XXI: 141.

122 Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Mukhtār at-Tijānī (d. 1230/1815) was born in the village of 'Ain Mādī (Algeria). He memorized the Qur'ān at the age of seven and delved into the study of various Islamic sciences and literature. He began issuing legal opinions (*fatwās*) at the age of sixteen. He was a Mālikī jurist, an interpreter of the Qur'ān, a *ḥadīth* scholar, and a prominent Sufī. He embarked on spiritual journeys during which he met numerous saints and righteous individuals from whom he gained knowledge. In the year 1196/1782, the Prophet Muḥammad granted him permission to spread the *wird* that was assigned to him, in the village of Abī Sam'ūn in Algeria. He later moved to Fez, which became the main center for the *Tijāniyya* Sufī order, from where it spread to various regions. See Sīdī 'Alī Ḥarāzīm Barāda, *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī wa bulūgh al-amānī fī fayḍ sīdī Abī al-'Abbās at-Tijjānī* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Maḥmūdiyya, 1318 AH), 19-40.

123 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Jālibat as-Sa'āda*, (Unpublished manuscript, private collection of Khadim Cheikhuna Mbacke, Senegal: Touba, nd.)

124 Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 103.



Despite Aḥmadu Bamba's profound love and respect for the *awliyā'*, he did not consider them all to be of equal stature. While recognizing the distinctive merits of each, he identified three figures - al-Jīlānī, at-Tijjānī, and ash-Shādhilī- as his principal spiritual mentors and practiced their *wirds* for a long time before receiving his own. Bamba often mentions them together in the same verse or poem where he talks about his spiritual guides during this period, as in these verses: "I have accepted the Messenger of Allah- may Allah's endless prayers and peace be upon him- as a prophet and a messenger. I have accepted his Book and the Ka'ba as a guide and a *qibla*. I have accepted the *awliyā'* as mentors guiding me to my Lord. With a particular adherence, with perfection, to al-Jīlānī, ash-Shādhilī, and at-Tijjānī."<sup>125</sup> Aḥmadu Bamba took pride in having these three as his spiritual guides in Sufism and frequently mentioned it in his writings: "My mentors are our master al-Jīlānī, and ash-Shādhilī along with at-Tijjānī."<sup>126</sup>

There are numerous examples in his writings where he mentions these three mentors. Given space limitations, a single illustrative example will be provided for each. Bamba gives reference to the words of Sheikh 'Abdu-l-Qādir, where he enumerates the pillars of Sufism:

Our Master, the Imām al-Jīlānī, said- [may he] continue to be pleased and revered: Indeed, Sufism is built upon eight pillars: The generosity of al-Khalīl (Abraham), the contentment (*riḍā'*) of Ishāq (Isaac), the patience of Ayyūb (Job), who surpassed, the allusions of Zakariyyā (Zechariah), such is the solitude of Yaḥyā (John), the

wool of Mūsā (Moses), so count it, the asceticism of 'Īsā (Jesus), and the poverty of our beloved Maḥmūd, blessings and peace be upon him.<sup>127</sup>

The origin of this quotation is indeed found in the book *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* (The Revelations of the Unseen) by Sheikh 'Abdul Qādir al-Jīlānī in prose and cited as it is.<sup>128</sup>

In regard to the words of Sheikh Aḥmad at-Tijjānī, an example of such a statement can be found in his definition of Sufism in a preceding poem. He said: "Our Sheikh, *ar-raḍīyyu*, at-Tijjānī, who remains among the people like coral, said: Verily, Sufism is obedience to the command of the One whose majesty endures while avoiding all that He has forbidden, outwardly and inwardly, from where He is pleased, exalted is He, not from where you are pleased, so understand with intellect."<sup>129</sup> The origin of this quotation is to be found in at-Tijjānī's *Jawāhir al-Ma'ānī* (The Gems of Meanings): "The reality of Sufism is obedience to the commands and avoidance of prohibitions, both outwardly and inwardly, from where Allah is pleased, not from where you are pleased."<sup>130</sup>

References to Sheikh Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī's teachings appear with less frequency in Aḥmadu Bamba's corpus compared to the two aforesaid sheikhs. This could be attributed to the limited availability of Shādhilī's books during that period, as the Shādhiliyya order did not have a significant presence in Senegal compared to the other two Sufi orders. However, it would not have prevented Aḥmadu Bamba from acquiring books of *Shādhiliyya* from Mauritania or

125 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān as-ṣalawāt 'alā an-nabī al-hāshimī*, (Unpublished manuscript, private collection of Khadim Cheikhouna Mbacke, Senegal: Touba, nd.)

126 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *A Poem Embroidered with the Letters of Bism Allāh ar-Raḥmān ar-Raḥīm*, (Unpublished manuscript, private collection of Khadim Cheikhouna Mbacke, Senegal: Touba, nd.)

127 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣuḡhrā*, 190.

128 See Sheikh 'Abdul Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Futūḥ al-ghayb* (Dhaka: Markaz al-I'lām al-'Ālamī, 2014), 126-127.

129 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣuḡhrā*, 190.

130 Sīdī 'Alī Ḥarāzīm Barāda, *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1997), I: 286.

Mauritanian traders in his country, as he previously did when purchasing some rare Sufi books. Nevertheless, the impact of some other sheikhs of the *Shādhilīyya* order is quite eminent in Bamba's writings, as he relied on the works of al-Yadālī and Ibn 'Aṭā' Allah, as we explained earlier. The following passage from the aforementioned poem demonstrates the incorporation of ash-Shādhilī's teachings in Bamba's works, where he addresses the causes of spiritual blindness (*al-baṣīrat*). He said: "The reasons for the blindness of insight are three, all of them are veils. Say: abundance of disobedience, pretense in obedience, and covetousness for creation. So, look for these in *Rūḥ al-bayān* after '*fahum lā yarji'ūn* (but they will not return)' in the *al-'awān* (al-Baqara 2/18)."<sup>131</sup>

This statement includes the words of Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī Bursawī (d. 1137/1725), the author of the book *Rūḥ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*—where he said: "And the causes of blindness of insight are three: the sending of the senses in the disobedience of Allah, covetousness for the creation of Allah, and pretense in the obedience of Allah."<sup>132</sup> In this text, said the source this statement is not mentioned, but in the book *Īqāz al-himām fī sharḥ al-Ḥikam* (The Awakening of Spiritual Aspirations in the Commentary of the *Ḥikam*) the author Ahmad ibn 'Ajība (d. 1224/1809) attributed it to Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī stating: "Sheikh Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī -may Allah be pleased with him- said: 'Blindness of insight is in three: the sending of the senses in the disobedience of Allah, covetousness for the creation of Allah, and pretense in the obedience of Allah.'"<sup>133</sup>

131 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣuḡhrā*, 191.

132 See the commentary on the 19th verse in Sūrat al-Baqara in the book *Rūḥ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī Bursawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2008).

133 Ahmad ibn 'Ajība, *Īqāz al-himām fī sharḥ al-Ḥikam* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2023), I: 108.

Thus, considering that ash-Shādhilī passed away five centuries before Ḥaqqī's birth, it strongly suggests that the original statement was from ash-Shādhilī's tradition.

### 3.2. The Period from Pledging Allegiance to Prophet Muḥammad to His Passing (1893- 1927)

The year 1893 marks a significant landmark in Bamba's personal and spiritual development, which is evidenced in various aspects of his life: his personality, his writings, his public statements, and even the methods he employed in educating his followers. The main reason behind this shift lies in the cognitive rupture he experienced in that year, when he declared his abandonment of all Sufi sheikhs and *wirds* and confined himself to Prophet Muḥammad as his only spiritual guide, along with the Qur'ān as his sole *wird*. The following excerpts from his writings during this timeframe clearly manifest the change in his thought:

Today, I pledge allegiance to the chosen Messenger, to do service (*khidma*) for him, and I ask Allah for fidelity. I pledge to Allah to take the Book [Qur'ān] in service to the chosen one [Muḥammad], the gate of Truth. The most deserving of all creatures of my service, in prose and verse, is the Messenger of Mercy [Muḥammad].<sup>134</sup>

He also said: "It has become clear to everyone with reason, that my means [Sheikh] is the Messenger [Muḥammad]."<sup>135</sup> "His [Allah's] noble book has become my *wird* and has expelled my adversaries."<sup>136</sup> "The book of my

134 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Futūḥ al-mukarram*, ed. 'Abdu-l-Qādir Mbacke Sheikh Maymūna (n.p., 2010), 10.

135 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Manāhil aṣ-ṣāfiya*, (Unpublished manuscript, private collection of Khadim Cheikhuna Mbacke, Senegal: Touba, nd.)

136 Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-Qur'āniyya*, ed. 'Abdu-l-Qādir Mbacke Sheikh Maymūna (n.p., 2010), 285.

Lord has become my intimate friend, after the Prophet [Muḥammad] became my leader.”<sup>137</sup>

These citations reveal a decisive shift in Bamba’s spiritual affiliations, marking his exclusive alignment with Prophetic guidance and the cessation of other influences. Moreover, all his writings and actions would be directed towards serving Prophet Muḥammad. While this study has previously analyzed the figures shaping Bamba’s early works, it now investigates how this doctrinal shift manifested in his writings during this critical period.

### 3.2.1. The Period of Shift in Aḥmadu Bamba’s Writings

This period represents one of the most prolific phases in Aḥmadu Bamba’s life in terms of writing. However, most of these writings consist of poems in which he praises Prophet Muḥammad, sends blessings upon him, or expresses gratitude to Allah for the blessings bestowed upon him. This phase is therefore notable for its absence of scholarly literature on Aḥmadu Bamba, particularly in the field of Sufism. Moreover, the books on Sufism he authored during this period mostly consist of the rewrites of his earlier works with some moderations. For instance, he rewrote his book *Mulayyin aṣ-Ṣudūr*, which was originally an adaptation of al-Ghazzālī’s *Bidāyat al-Hidāya* and renamed it *Munawwir aṣ-Ṣudūr*. Similarly, he rewrote his book *Masālik al-jinān*, which was originally an adaptation of *Khātimat at-Taṣawwuf* by al-Yadālī and retitled it *Masālik al-jinān fī Khidmat al-Muṭahhar al-Janān*.

A comparative analysis of Bamba’s engagement with Sufi textual traditions reveals both continuities and divergences between his earlier and later works, particularly in terms of autonomy and the method of reference.

An example of continuity is the reference to certain Sufi figures in Aḥmadu Bamba’s writings, although less frequent compared to the earlier stage. Al-Ghazzālī remains a key reference point, with Bamba’s *Munawwir aṣ-Ṣudūr* directly engaging with *Bidāyat al-Hidāya*, as previously mentioned. Likewise, we see Bamba relying on al-Ghazzālī, Ahmad Zarrūq, and Abū al-Abbās al-Hilālī es-Sijilmāsī (d. 1175/1761) in his book *Masālik al-jinān aww Mawāhib al-Mannān*,<sup>138</sup> which is his third book with this title.

The points of divergence all stem from the shift of his thought and change in his approach during this period. This period reveals Bamba’s mature intellectual persona -that of an autonomous Sufi thinker, firmly grounded in tradition yet intellectually independent. This marks a notable difference from his earlier phase as a young seeker of knowledge, when his seminal Sufi writings primarily engaged in synthesizing existing scholarly traditions. This emerging independence is manifested most clearly in his responses and *fatwās*, where he gradually moves away from textual reliance on earlier authorities. From this point on, he offers answers and *fatwās* directly from his own personal opinion.

During this period, his thoughts may at times reflect those of other Sufis; however, this may merely be a resemblance, or it could be attributed to the fact that Sufism encompasses a range of expressions and insights that emanate from Allah to the hearts of His saints, each of whom conveys them according to their own spiritual state. Therefore, expressions may converge due to the unity of the source. Evidence of this can be found in a narrative where Aḥmadu Bamba gave a response to a question, and then one of the attendees remarked that the response was taken from *al-Hikam* of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah. Aḥmadu Bamba

137 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Futūḥ al-mukarram*, 13.

138 See Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 418-420.

replied, “*Bal innahū min ‘aṭā’i Allah, ‘wa-mā kāna ‘aṭā’u rabbika maḥzūra*”<sup>139</sup> (Rather, it is from the gifts of Allah, and the gifts of your Lord are not prohibited). This explains his decision to revise some of his earlier works while omitting references to previously cited scholars. It also implies that he reached a state of direct inspiration from Allah and the Prophet Muḥammad, the ultimate sources of all wisdom and understanding.

Another sign of this shift is his avoidance of traditional honorifics like ‘our Sheikh’ or ‘my Sheikh’ when referring to scholars—a practice common in his earlier works. Instead, in this later phase, he no longer acknowledges any spiritual guide apart from the Prophet Muḥammad. When mentioning other scholars, he does so with profound reverence, praying for divine blessings and mercy upon them. However, since his allegiance was devoted solely to Prophet Muḥammad, he no longer referred to them as his sheikhs. We observed hints of this in his discussion of the three sheikhs, but the distinction becomes even more evident when comparing two texts from different books: *Masālik al-jinān fī Jam‘ Mā Farrqahū ad-Daymānī*, which he authored in the first phase, and *Masālik al-jinān fī Khidmat al-Muṭahhar al-Janān*, which he authored in the second phase. In the first book, he mentioned the names of some scholars who wrote about Sufism, saying:

I found Sufis, the chosen ones, have authored books that have secrets. Like our sheikh, the reformist al-Ghazzālī, and Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah, the one with greatness. And our Sheikh “al-Kuntiyyu” the one with the lights, the Aid of humanity, the Pole of guidance, “al-Mukhtār.” Our Sheikh “al-Khalīfa” the supported one by the truth from the Lord of the worlds, “Muḥammad.” And our Sheikh the *Mu-*

*fassir*, Muḥammad, who belongs to the *Daymān* tribe.<sup>140</sup>

Here, we notice that he referred to four as his sheikhs. However, in the introduction of his second book, which is a reworking of the first, he said:

I found Sufis, the chosen ones, have authored books that contain virtues. Like the Sheikh, the one with abundant talents, al-Ghazzālī, may the one who brings down revelation be pleased with him. And the Sheikh with abundant talents, al-Kuntiyyu, may the hidden bestower be pleased with him. And like “al-Khalīfa,” his supported son [by Allah] Muḥammad, who has always been a master. And like the saint, the miracle of the Merciful, Ibn as-Sa‘īd, the accomplished one from the *Daymānī* lineage.<sup>141</sup>

Here, despite being described as “sheikhs,” they are no longer referred to as “his sheikhs” as before. Nonetheless, the verses show the extent of his respect and reverence for them.

## Conclusion

The intellectual growth of Aḥmad Bamba was deeply influenced by his education, his interactions with scholars, and the scholarly traditions he engaged with. Bamba was born into a scholarly family, and from a young age, he was immersed in Islamic education. His early involvement in Qur’ānic studies, jurisprudence, and Sufi ethics formed the intellectual foundation for his later contributions to Islamic thought. Bamba’s formation of *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi order represented a transformative moment in Senegalese Sufism.

This research delved into the influential scholars and sources that shaped Aḥmadu Bamba’s Sufi thought, emphasizing how his

139 Serigne Elhadji Mbacke, *Garabu Touba*, (Unpublished manuscript, private collection of Khadim Cheikhuna Mbacke, Senegal: Touba, nd.), II: 74.

140 Ibid. 58.

141 Aḥmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 407.



spiritual and intellectual journey was deeply rooted in practical application rather than philosophical Sufism. It detailed Bamba's relationship with key figures through direct mentorship and the study of their works and traces the phases of his intellectual development before he pledged allegiance to the Prophet Muḥammad. The period from 1854 to 1893 was a transformative phase in Aḥmadu Bamba's life, during which his Sufi identity was shaped, and he began to outline his principles for spiritual renewal. This phase saw Bamba's deep intellectual engagement with Sufism and other disciplines, producing significant works that would later define his scholarly legacy.

Prominent Sufi figures, such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, Sheikh Ahmad Zarrūq, Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī, 'Abdu-l-Wahhāb ash-Sha'rānī shaped Bamba's intellectual formation. These scholars offered him a rich array of spiritual and ethical teachings that he would later synthesize with his Sufi works. In addition to these classical figures, Bamba's intellectual development was further shaped by the Kunta family, a major source of Sufi thought in West Africa. The Kunta family, including figures like Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu and his son Sheikh Muḥammad al-Khalīfa al-Kuntiyyu, provided Bamba a framework for understanding ethics, piety, and the practical application of Sufi teachings. as seen in his works like *Masālik al-jinān* and *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*. Key influences included some Mauritanian scholars like Sheikh Muḥammad ibn al-Mukhtār al-Yadālī, whose *Khātimat at-Taṣawwuf* Bamba versified, and Sheikh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥājī ash-Shinqīṭī, whose treatise on manners and ethics became a key reference for Bamba's *Nahj qaḍā' al-ḥāj*.

In addition to these primary books, which Bamba cited frequently, he also drew from

various less-cited sources to enhance his understanding of piety, knowledge, and spirituality. These works include texts such as *'Awārif al-ma'ārif* by al-Suhrawardī, *al-Ḥikam al-'Aṭā'iyya* by Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh as-Sakandarī, *Rawḍ ar-rayāḥīn* by al-Yāfī'ī, *Tā'iyyat as-Sulūk ilā malik al-mulūk* and its commentary by ash-Sharnūbī, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn* by 'Omar al-Fūtiyyu, and *Shudhūr al-adhkār* by Sheikh Sīdīya al-Kabīr, among others. The absence of philosophical Sufi texts from his references underscores his purposeful avoidance of that debated tradition. Yet his scholarly openness shines through in his unhesitating use of Shia sources, transcending sectarian differences.

This period of Bamba's life, marked by his travels and spiritual education, culminated in the foundation of *al-Murīdiyya* Order in 1883, during which he sought spiritual guidance from key Sufi figures like Sheikh 'Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Sheikh Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī, and Sheikh Aḥmad at-Tijānī. Their influence was crucial in shaping Bamba's teachings and the development of *al-Murīdiyya*. However, Bamba's spiritual journey came to a climax in 1893, when he formally abandoned all intermediaries and devoted himself entirely to serving Prophet Muḥammad. This shift is considered a crucial phase in the growth of *al-Murīdiyya* order, where Bamba emphasized "*al-khidma*" (service) to the Prophet. This guiding principle would define his spiritual legacy.

Despite his spiritual independence, Bamba continued to honor and praise his former sheikhs and recognized their contributions to Sufism. His poems and writings during this time reflect his unique position as someone who was both deeply connected to the Prophet and still respectful of the legacy of earlier Sufi masters. This balance allowed him to maintain his independent spiritual

path while fostering mutual respect with the followers of the other orders.

Bamba's writings during this period further illustrate his spiritual maturing. He produced fewer scholarly works but engaged heavily in poetry, often praising Prophet Muḥammad and expressing gratitude for the divine blessings he received. His later works were more personal and independent, marked by a reduced reliance on earlier Sufi texts and a greater emphasis on direct spiritual experience. While his writings occasionally echoed the teachings of other Sufi figures, this was less about citing them as authorities and more about reflecting the universal spiritual truths he had received directly from Allah and the Prophet. In his revised versions of earlier texts, Bamba refrained from invoking specific Sufi sheikhs as his direct mentors, further emphasizing his singular devotion to Prophet Muḥammad as his only spiritual guide. This shift underscores the extent to which Bamba's identity and spiritual practice had evolved, setting him apart as a uniquely independent figure in the Sufi tradition.

The primary focus of Bamba's intellectual and spiritual journey was the integration of practical Sufism into everyday life. Different from many other Sufi scholars who emphasized mere theoretical knowledge or philosophical discourse, Bamba's approach was fundamentally practical. His teachings centered around practical action, particularly in the areas of worship, work, and service. His intellectual contributions were not abstract ideas but were deeply rooted both in his own experience and that of his followers.

Can Bamba's approach be viewed within the context of Neo-Sufism? Neo-Sufism, as discussed by scholars like Fazlur Rahman, Bernd Radtke, Nehemia Levtzion, and John Voll, emerged as a response to challenges in the 18th and 19th centuries, with Sufi leaders

focusing on *sharī'a*, organized brotherhoods, and societal roles.<sup>142</sup> Despite the problematic nature of the term,<sup>143</sup> Bamba's thought, as we have outlined in this study, shares many similarities with the general characteristics associated with the term Neo-Sufism. Thus, *al-Murīdiyya* order might reflect the trend of neo-Sufi brotherhoods adapting to political and colonial contexts while preserving a devotional core.

Further research into Aḥmadu Bamba's understanding of key Sufi terms is essential for gaining a deeper insight into his unique spiritual practices and approach to Sufism. Additionally, a more comprehensive investigation into Bamba's works in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology, and Arabic language would contribute to a broader understanding of the intellectual foundations of his teachings beyond the realm of Sufism. A comparative examination of Bamba's Sufi teachings in relation to other influential West African Sufi traditions would reveal commonalities, divergences and unique contributions of his methodology. These studies would offer a more nuanced understanding of Bamba's historical significance and clarify distinctive features of his spiritual paradigm.

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142 See John Voll, "Neo-Sufism: Reconsidered Again," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 42 (2013): 314-330.

143 For the term's main characteristics, see R. S. O'Fahey, and Bernd Radtke. "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered," *Der Islam* 70, 1 (1993): 52-87.

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