

The works of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti

Mahamane Mahamoudou¹

In the name of Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful,
May His salutation and peace be upon the noblest of all prophets.
May the peace of Allah be upon you, and His mercy and blessings.

Al-Shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar ibn Ahmad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Habib Allah ibn al-Wafi ibn Umar al-Shaykh ibn Ahmad al-Bakkay ibn Muhammad al-Kunti, known as al-Shaykh al-Kabir, was born Arawan in 1729 and settled in Timbuktu in his youth. He died in 1811 in Bulunwar, which is over 100 kilometres from Timbuktu. The shaykh belonged to the Kunt, a famous tribe in the region known for its knowledge and piety and which traced itself back to ‘Uqba ibn Nafi’ – a companion of Prophet Muhammad and an Arab general who began the Islamic conquest of North Africa; he died in 683.

The shaykh studied all the Islamic disciplines, including its fundamental principles, its branches and its arts, such as jurisprudence, grammar, morphology, prophetic traditions, Qur’anic exegesis, astronomy, philosophy, internal sciences, external sciences,² and so on. He became skilful in all of these. Ahmad al-Bakkay, one of his grandsons, describes him thus in a poem: ‘He read the *Khulasa* [The Summary] of Imam Malik before the obligatory fasting of the month Ramadan [meaning that he had not yet reached the age of puberty when religious duties become obligatory for a Muslim – he was between seven and twelve years old]; his grandfather taught it to him and he was the shaykh of the path.’³

He was brought up in a Sufi environment under the tutelage of al-Shaykh Sayyid Ali ibn al-Najib and from him he took the Qadiri Sufi path. He renewed the Qadiri path, building many *zawiyas* and adding to it a number of prayers, litanies and other devotions. He was a pious and righteous teacher and had a relationship with all the scholars of the region, who flocked to him from all areas and tribes. He was also a skilled politician, clear in word and action, with good insight into matters. Tribal instability was very common in his time and he played an exemplary role in striving towards

Opposite: A folio from a manuscript on astrology. Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti discussed the stars and what was said about them in the Torah: the 12 towers and their division into 28 stations; every tower having two-and-a-third stations, and these towers being divided into 360 degrees; every tower having 30 degrees; that the sun passes once every year and by this an orbit is completed; and the moon completes a cycle in 28 days.

reconciliation and peace. In short, he was a wise teacher, general, judge, father and protector of those who sought refuge.

He spent his life admonishing, guiding, improving and educating all classes of people in Timbuktu and its surrounds. One of his students, the great shaykh, jurist and pious saint al-Shaykh Muhammad Abd Allah Su'ad, alluded to this in a poem praising Timbuktu:

Timbuktu was surrounded by safety
and abundance when he came to it
He resided in it with security
and he lead it to its guidance
It prospered and they too prospered
and those who came to it prospered⁴

Al-Shaykh al-Kabir's son wrote a biographical account of the shaykh's life in a huge volume which he did not complete and which he named *Kitab al-tara'if wa al-tala'id fi dhikr karama al-walida wa al-walid* (The Exquisite and Rare Regarding the Miracles of the Mother and Father).⁵ A brief synopsis of the volume follows.

INTRODUCTION: The appearance of a *karama* and its conditions and the difference between it and a *mu'jiza* and other unusual events and the refutation of those who reject the occurrence of a miracle.

CHAPTER 1: The birth of the two shaykhs (that is, Sayyid Mukhtar and his wife), their age at their death, their lineage and the beginning of their lives (how they started out and reached the status that they had); how the shaykh sought knowledge, his travelling for it and how he persevered in seeking it; those who studied under him.

CHAPTER 2: His piety and ascetic qualities while still being wealthy; his perseverance, respect, forgiving nature and courage; his politics.

CHAPTER 3: His knowledge, virtues and methods of teaching.

CHAPTER 4: His interaction with people: oppressors, leaders, 'ordinary' people, students, neighbours, relatives, friends and so on.

CHAPTER 5: Unusual deeds which are agreed upon as the pearls of his everlasting supernatural activities, that is, his miracles since he was considered a saint.

CHAPTER 6: Consensus of the entire nation, whether Bedouins or city dwellers, regarding his grand status, his leadership, his knowledge of the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition, his influence in *tasawwuf* and internal disciplines; people seeking his authorisation and travelling to him in the quest for knowledge.

CHAPTER 7: His bequests and correspondence, which are no less important than his other profound writings and great poetry; his death and the period just prior to it.

CONCLUSION: The unusual miracles of the *shaykha*, the mother (Sayyid Mukhtar al-Kunti's wife), her life history, her moral values, her love for her Lord, her chastity, her perseverance and polite nature, her generosity and compassion to all creation, her humility and the care that she offered to the poor and weak, her fear of her Lord and how she wept and cried, her honourableness and high aspirations.

Al-Shaykh al-Kabir's works

The shaykh was famous for his abundant writings and his beautiful style. He was very concerned about the condition of the community, and these thoughts are quite visible in his writings, which articulate his role, his activities and his diverse responsibilities. His writings portray his formulation of ideas and recommendations, as well as his successful analysis and treatment of problems. He left behind more than 100 important and diverse treatises dealing with a range of disciplines, such as history, *tasawwuf*, Islamic law, belief in the oneness of Allah, the Qur'an, *hadith*, *jihad*, politics, medicine, science, geography, poetry, astronomy and so on. A brief discussion of some of his most important works follows.

Works at the Ahmed Baba Institute and the Mamma Haidara Library

Fath al-wahhab 'ala hidaya al-tullab

THE AID OF THE GIVER FOR THE GUIDANCE OF THE SEEKERS

In this four-volume manuscript⁶ on Maliki jurisprudence, each volume exceeding 700 pages, al-Shaykh al-Kabir expounds on numerous legal and academic issues. I have researched the volumes since 1980:

- ❖ Volume 1 was copied from the original by Muhammad al-Mustafa ibn 'Umar ibn Sayyid Muhammad Ashiyya, and completed on 13 November 1853.
- ❖ Volume 2 was copied from the original in 1853 by al-Mustafa ibn 'Umar for Isma'il ibn 'Abd Allah.
- ❖ Volume 3 is in the handwriting of Baba ibn 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Sinb al-Hartani for Isma'il ibn 'Abd Allah.
- ❖ Volume 4 was copied by Muhammad al-Mustafa ibn A'mar on the order of al-Shaykh ibn Mawlay Isma'il ibn Mawlay 'Abd Allah in 1854. The volume was completed by Muhammad al-Mustafa in 1855.

Al-minna fi i'tiqad ahl al-sunna

THE GIFT IN EXPLAINING THE CREED OF AHL AL-SUNNA
(FOLLOWERS OF ORTHODOX SUNNI ISLAM)

This 519-page manuscript⁷ was copied from the original in 1859 in a beautiful, clear Sahrawi script. The manuscript consists of Islamic creed and touches upon many academic issues. The author was asked to:

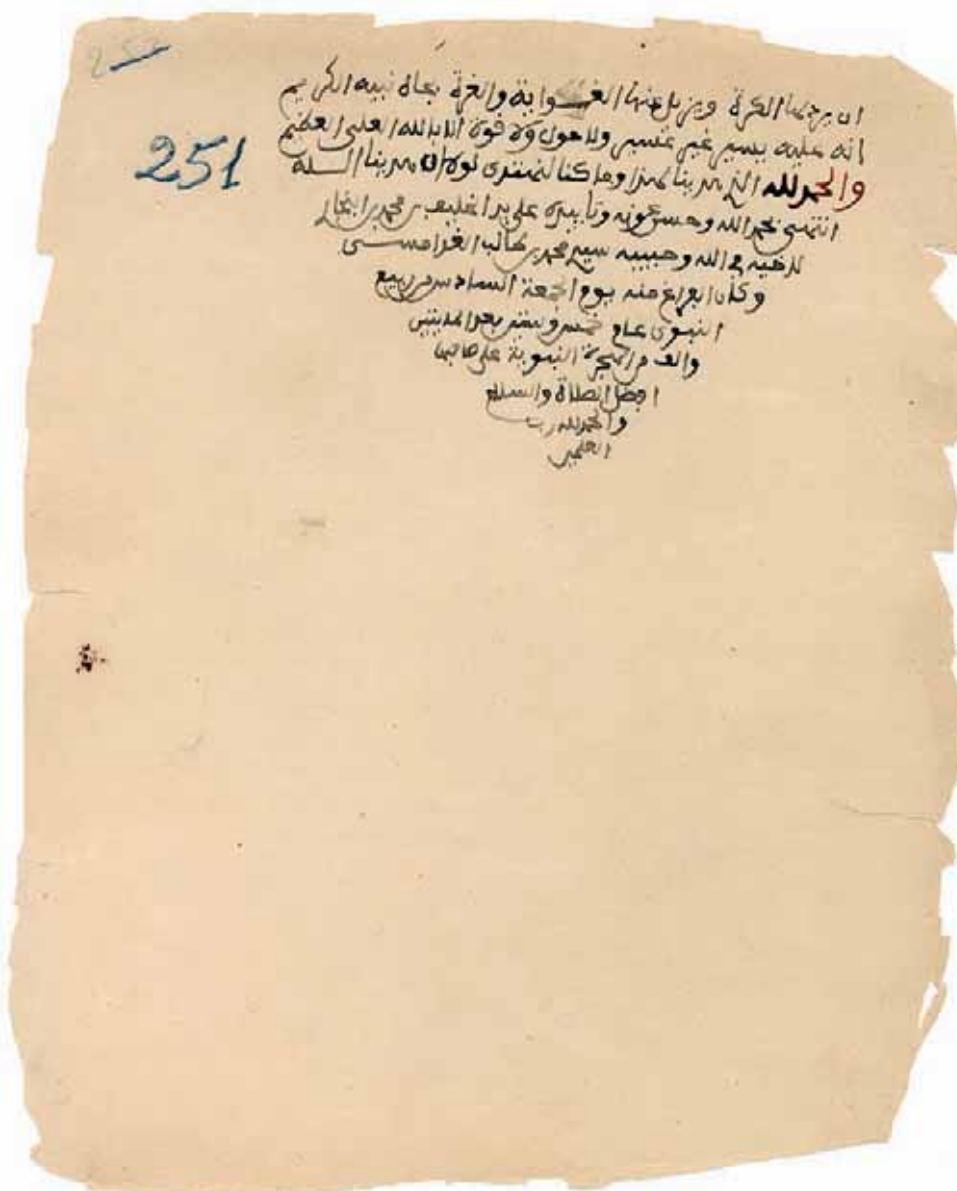
The shaykh was famous for his abundant writings and his beautiful style. He was very concerned about the condition of the community, and these thoughts are quite visible in his writings, which articulate his role, his activities and his diverse responsibilities. He left behind more than 100 important and diverse treatises dealing with a range of disciplines, such as history, *tasawwuf*, Islamic law, belief in the oneness of Allah, the Qur'an, *hadith*, *jihad*, politics, medicine, science, geography, poetry, astronomy and so on.

The following topics are also covered in the manuscript: types of faith and believers, the nourishing of faith and the benefits of *istighfar* (seeking forgiveness); the infallibility of the prophets; major sins and how they are distinguished from minor sins; predestination; the unbelief of all nations except the Islamic nation; the invalidity of fire worshipping; the glorification of mountains and birds and the signs of the last hour, such as the descending of 'Isa (Jesus) and the coming of *dajjal*; the letters that were revealed at the beginning of the Qur'an.

compile a brief but comprehensive book as the need may be, so that all can benefit from it, whether he be a free person or slave, woman or child, because of its easiness and its concise explanation on the unity of Allah which leads to knowing Him, and the clinging to the tails of His messengers and saints, and it should be free from fanaticism and negligence, both being a defect in religion, and I have said that many ignorant people entered upon the discussion of this discipline, i.e. the unity of Allah, and their branding of ordinary Muslims of the *umma* of Muhammad [saw] as non-believers.⁸

Al-Shaykh al-Kabir explains the origin and meanings of the word *tawhid* – knowledge that is a gift that must be tasted and that isn't acquired through research and studies – and also what is contained in *Sura al-Ikhlās* (Chapter 112 in the Qur'an). He deals with this in detail, using proof from the Qur'an, prophetic traditions, stories and other texts. He also speaks about his preference for some parts of the Qur'an over others, the interpretation of *ayat al-kursi*,⁹ the different types of *shafa'a*, the Prophet being the best of prophets, and gives an overview of the science of astronomy.

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The final page of *al-Minna fi i'tiqad ahl al-sunna* by Sayyid Mukhtar al-Kunti.

al-Mukhtar and his travels and visits to Walata; the fruits of knowledge; statues; the four mosques; the parables used by Allah; types of glorification of the angels; the glorification of inanimate objects; the remembrance of Allah after prayers; a compendium of remembrance and numerous invocations; the names of the satans (the devils) and how they mislead people; the performance of righteousness; the wisdom of recurring and extraordinary events; Allah's words: 'Allah did not make for man two hearts in his chest'; the necessity of believing in the night journey of the Prophet; the virtue of seeking forgiveness; the virtue of certain *adhkar* and *adhkar* to be said in the mornings and evenings; the virtue of beneficial knowledge and that which follows it; the reality and nourishment of faith; types of humility; the validity of the faith of the follower.

Al-Jar'a al-Safiya wa al-nafha al-kafiya

THE PURIFIED DOSAGE AND SUFFICIENT FRAGRANCE

The compilation of this six-chapter manuscript¹² was completed in June 1793. Al-Shaykh al-Kabir called it by this title because, according to him, it was based on the Book (*al-Qur'an*), prophetic tradition and stories of the prophets and saints. The work was also abridged under the title *al-Rashfa al-shafiya min al-jar'a al-safiya* (The Curing Gulp of the Purified Dosage).¹³

In the introduction al-Shaykh al-Kabir mentions all the books that he used as references, such as the six primary sources in *hadith*, *al-Tarhib wa al-tarhib* (The Encouragement and Discouragement), '*Amal al-yawm wa al-layla* (Rituals for the Day and Night), *al-Rawda* (The Garden of the Seekers) of al-Nawawi, *al-Irshad* (The Guidance), *al-Rawd al-aniq* (The Eloquent Training), al-Samarkandi's book, al-Quti's book *al-Lubab* (The Core), *Sunan al-salikin* (The Ways of the Travellers), *al-Ashwaq fi masarih al-'ushaq* (The Yearning of the Lovers) and the book (title not mentioned) of Ibn al-Khatib.

He alludes to many topics, including *khalwa*, special characteristics of the Prophet, the seeking of knowledge, remedies for ailments of the heart, intermediation, well-known *awliya*, refutation of the claims of some Islamic sects, recommendation of seclusion with Allah, the divisions of the inner self, types of disciplines, the meaning of linguistics, evil scholars and *dajjal*, the realities of *dhikr* and the relationship of love, Allah does not occupy a particular direction,¹⁴ the blameworthiness of arguing, general ethics, interaction with people, the usage of tobacco, corruption, spreading mischief, killing, and doing good towards the family and women and the punishment of those who degrade them.

Kashf al-lubs fi ma bayn al-ruh wa al-nafsREMOVING THE CONFUSION REGARDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
THE SOUL AND THE INNER SELF

In this 12-chapter manuscript,¹⁵ which was not completed, the shaykh points out that the *nafs* (ego) tries to overwhelm knowledge with ignorance and incompetence and, no matter how hard you try to repel it, the soul or human desires are always able to deceive you. And if you try to perceive and understand it, it defies you by being invisible. The shaykh portrays the *nafs* as a petite body that clings to the limbs, just like water clings to a green plant. He also alludes to the benefits of the *nafs*, the hardness of the heart, cleansing of the outer and inner self, and consciousness of one's self publicly and privately. He states that religion only becomes victorious through the pious *awliya*, and discusses the world of spirits and souls, its strengths and weaknesses, its delicateness and heaviness and how to bring harmony between the two. He explains that sins are to the heart like poison is to the body, causing harm on various levels. Then he uses parables and stories to explain the results of committing sins and the harm it brings. Some of the outcomes of sin are the prevention of the light of knowledge, the prevention of suste-

nance and obedience, loneliness, difficulty of affairs, darkness in the heart, minimising the lifespan, expulsion of blessings, and baseness and contamination of the intellect. Sins bring about factors of destruction in this world and in the hereafter, as well as the wrath of Allah and cursing by the animals.¹⁶

Al-Shaykh al-Kabir also speaks about *tawhid* and its divisions, such as the unity of Allah's qualities, names and actions. He extracts all the creeds from the chapter *al-Ikhlās* (Chapter 112 of the Qur'an) and explains the status of spirituality, as well as the great name of Allah. He discusses when the reality of faith is realised in a person, and whether spiritual 'essence' and the nature of a person are physical or abstract.

Then he returns to a discussion on seeking knowledge and things that bring about *taqwa* (consciousness of Allah) consciousness of Allah, things that impede the process of *taqwa*, types of innovations, the heart being the container of every presence, and conditions and ailments of the heart and the limbs. He also discusses in detail division and sectarianism according to *ahl-al-kalam*.

Fiqh al-a'yan fi haqa'iq al-Qur'an

THE SPECIFIC JURISPRUDENCE REGARDING THE REALITIES OF THE QUR'AN

or

Lubb al-albab fi haqa'iq al-sunna wa al-kitab

THE CORE OF ALL CORES REGARDING THE REALITIES OF
THE PROPHETIC TRADITION AND THE BOOK

The shaykh wrote this two-volume manuscript¹⁷ after some of his students asked him to clarify the phenomenon of rain clouds, which form part of the hidden things.¹⁸ He responded by adding all realities and precisions required from such a work in clarifying the realities of the rain clouds, rain, lightning, thunder and the land of the unseen, and refuting the ideologies of those who go astray.¹⁹

In the first volume he embarks on a 245-page discussion of clouds, their meanings, their formation, the time of their formation and people's fears and apprehensions when they don't come in time. Then he speaks about storms and water and their benefits, the *jinn* and their existence, and what is specific to this *umma* regarding the criteria of *hadith* and its narration. He also discusses the similarities between humans and animals, the difference between internal and external waters, different types of earth, types of inspiration, and types of speech (essential, explicit and implicit).

He discusses the stars and what was said about them in the Torah, the 12 towers and their division into 28 stations, every tower having two-and-a-third stations, and these towers are divided into 360 degrees, every tower having 30 degrees that the sun passes once every year and by it an orbit is completed, and the moon completes a cycle in 28 days, and why they are called towers.²⁰ He also speaks about the bee and how nectar is used, as well as about the objectives of the Qur'an and the sciences extracted from it.

In the second volume of 467 pages he concentrates on the rights of scholars, their high positions, their different types and levels and what their rights are as well as their duties and obligations. Then he speaks about the striving of the inner self and what the seeker is in need of, the conditions of desire and its obstacles, fear and hope and its realities, what affords the seeker true perception and what takes it away from him, the ailment of self-appraisal, enlightenment, obstacles and strategising in the repelling of Satan, taste and its meaning, the difference between love and intimacy, the virtue of travelling, prophetic medicine, the principles of virtue and interest, fairness towards spouses, the wisdom of neglecting the two meanings of *al-Ikhlās* and the causes that inspire writing.

Al-Burad al-muwasha fi qat' al-matami wa al-rusha

THE EMBELLISHED GARMENTS IN THE ERADICATION OF GREED AND CORRUPTION

This manuscript²¹ consists of two volumes. In the introduction to the first volume the shaykh points out the reason for writing the work. He then starts by speaking about two litigants who appear in front of a judge; the second litigant has no evidence. The judge passes a verdict while his eyes are – metaphorically – tightly shut against the facts. The shaykh then goes on to describe types of bribery, the person who pays it, the one who accepts it and its danger to society; the judiciary and what the responsibility of the community is when a judge is unjust; trust keeping and what it entails; ignorance; the prohibition against plundering; giving gifts to witnesses; and the four conditions pertaining to appearing in front of a judge: equality between the two litigants; equality in intention, stopping greed that is current and that can occur in the future; and making a firm decision. Some narrations mention a fifth condition (which is unknown).

He also discusses the principle of *halal*; the prohibition against consuming people's wealth wrongfully; the reality of *fiqh*; charging a fee for work done; justice and its conditions; innovations; types of intuition; the role played by the heads of a tribe in a community; mocking religious ordinances such as usury;²² acceding to oppression; taking bribes; fanaticism and deceit; breaking or violating trust; the consequences of certain calamities, especially the calamity of fanaticism that may destroy a village. Here he explains that Allah gave a dispensation for everything except four things: *dhikr*; fulfilling a trust; justice; and honouring agreements. He discusses this extensively, so much so that he goes into a discussion of certain doubtful areas such as the use of tobacco. Then he discusses involvement with that which is abominable; attaching importance to responsibility; taking care of subordinates; the just ruler and calamities that can be anticipated when a ruler is unjust; protecting the youth by establishing workshops for artisanship; showing compassion to all creation; and punishments and beating.

In the second volume he discusses what is recommended for rulers, leaders, governors and judges; electing ministers; affording good, sincere advice and counselling; and having good employees who are pious and truthful. Then he discusses the crime of false testimony and different trades such as tailoring, agriculture, horsemanship, well digging,

script copying, metal work, weaving, butchery and tanning. A discussion follows on the acquisition of wealth and its importance; what is necessary for the seeker of knowledge; exceeding the bounds during debates; an encouragement of travelling in the quest for knowledge; the virtue of listening to *hadith*, and being in the company of scholars and honouring and respecting them; the virtue of knowledge and remembrance of Allah; piety in religion; deceit in religion and swearing a false oath; usury and contracts; that which causes the contamination of the intellect; that which leads to failure; good character, charity and its acceptance; saving the one who wants to destroy; consequences of affording a guarantee; to hit a woman means to do so with a handkerchief and not with a stick; marital rights; *halal*; and *haram*, which is built upon two things: filth and corruption.

Kashf al-niqab al-asrar fatiha al-kitab

THE UNVEILING OF THE MASK PERTAINING TO THE SECRETS OF
THE OPENING CHAPTER OF THE BOOK (THE QUR'AN)

This manuscript²³ discusses *sura al-fatiha* (Chapter 1 of the Qur'an) – what it contains, its titles, its disciplines, sciences extracted from it, and so on. The shaykh explains that *sura al-fatiha* consists of various subjects such as *tawhid*, the greatness of the names and qualities of Allah, the secrets of the letters,²⁴ special features of the names and shapes in the Qur'an, historical knowledge and legal rulings. Then he discusses the *fatiha* and its correct articulation in detail: truthfulness and its signs; confronting Satan and his assistants; the best charity is the charity of water; discussion on usury; ignorance is the gravest sin; the rights of relatives; the meaning of worship; praiseworthy and blame-worthy innovations; the meaning of success; humility in prayer; humility of the limbs; and a chapter on what is indicated in the *fatiha* pertaining to the names of Allah.

Fath al-wadud fi sharh al-maqsur wa al-mamdud

THE AID OF THE BELOVED IN ELUCIDATING THE SHORTENED AND THE LENGTHENED POEM

This manuscript²⁵ is a commentary on the poetic treatise *al-Maqsur wa al-mamdud* (The Shortened and the Lengthened Poem), written by Imam Muhammad ibn Malik, author of the well-known *al-Alfiyya* (The One Thousand), a didactic poem with 1 000 couplets on Arabic grammar. The poem consists of 157 verses without any introduction. It is an unusual and profound poem, each verse consisting of four words, two with short vowels and two with long vowels. All the words have a similar pronunciation but different meanings. It is eloquently written and structured and contains deep Sufi thoughts – only those who are deeply rooted in the Arabic language and its literary styles will be able to interact with this poem.

Shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar mentions the following in the introduction to his commentary on *al-Maqsur wa al-mamdud*:

With the praise of Allah and His assistance in accomplishing our objectives, the book *al-Maqsur wa al-mamdud* has increased in beauty and splendor with this

commentary, because I have surpassed its order in a way that my ocean covers his river, my fruits overwhelm his flowers, though we are in different eras, him having the virtue of precedence and I having the advantage of following [many other scholars]...And I have added to his book verses of revelation, I have beautified it with the strangeness of the language, I have brought forth in it great admonitions, strange questions, stories of notables, notes on literature and poets, stories of the prophets and saints, issues such as staying away from oppression and hatred and the calamities they cause, encouragements and discouragements, strange legal issues, rational theories...So it became sweeter than honey...

The manuscript was completed in 1786 and contains approximately 200 pages. It was printed for the first time in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and edited by Dr Mamun Muhammad Ahmad.²⁶

Al-'Ilm al-nafi'

THE BENEFICIAL KNOWLEDGE

This manuscript²⁷ speaks about the conditions of the heart; devotion to *dhikr*, benefits and types of *dhikr*; honouring agreements; the benefits of advice; intention; gratitude; the actions of the limbs;²⁸ the consequences of bad character; a discussion of the prophetic saying 'Religion is advice'; and the grand status of the saints.

Jadhwah al-anwar fi al-dhabb al-manasib awliya Allah al-akhyar

ILLUMINATION ON REFRAINING FROM DISRESPECTING THE STATIONS
OF THE CLOSEST FRIENDS OF ALLAH

This manuscript²⁹ is a refutation of al-Mukhtar ibn Bawn Sahib al-Ihmirar, who rejected the miracles of the saints (the shaykh had also refuted Ibn Bawn in several other poems before he wrote this manuscript³⁰). The manuscript looks critically at the reality of a friend of Allah (a saint), who he is, how he became a saint, the saint's miracles, and the difference between these unusual events and *istidraj* (something unusual committed by a sinful person). The manuscript contains many examples of the miracles of the prophets and the companions, and the shaykh gives an in-depth explanation of these using Qur'anic proofs, prophetic statements and convincing Sufi expressions. It is worth mentioning that he was able to convince Ibn Bawn to such an extent that the two of them exchanged brotherly letters and poems of love. Ibn Bawn repented and took back everything he had rejected pertaining to the miracles of the saints.

Nuzhah al-rawi wa bughyah al-hawi

THE WALK OF THE NARRATOR AND THE DESIRE OF THE CHARMER

This is a very valuable manuscript³¹ about *tawhid* and prophetic history. It deals with the following topics: the oneness of Allah and understanding this without exaggeration or negligence; the beginning of time; astronomy; the birth of the Prophet; the

beginning of revelation and the night journey (*al-isra'*); the special features given to the Prophet above all other prophets regarding the unseen world from the time that he became a prophet until the final hour, that is, the end of time;³² the miracles that he shared with all other prophets; that which is specifically for him in bringing together all aspects and positions of previous religions;³³ information regarding the monks, priests, fortune-tellers, bad *jinn*s and glad tidings; information about the nearness of his prophethood and birth to the end of time; explanations of *halal*, *haram* and *shubha*; paradise and hell; divine wisdoms and prophetic expressions; medicines for the heart and body from plants, minerals and gems; the Prophet's special features and his *umma*; the non-prophet status of the sons of Ya'qub except for Yusuf; the Prophet's acts of worship; the beginning of the holy sanctuary, its sanctity, status and some of the traces of its inhabitants; the virtue of Medina and of the companions; ethics, advice and *tasawwuf*.

It is worth noting that in this manuscript Shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar al-Kunti summarised an entire library in one volume.

Al-Nasiha al-shafiya al-kafiya

THE CURING AND COMPREHENSIVE ADVICE

This manuscript³⁴ – in the handwriting of Nuh ibn al-Tahir and his brother – discusses the following topics: admonitions; guidance; cleanliness; beautifying and showing compassion to the self; sincerity; complete covenants; people of patience and righteousness at the time of a calamity; honouring agreements; brotherhood in Islam; types of bounties; extravagance; eagerness; moderation; guiding the foolish; goodness toward neighbours; the reality and etiquette of supplication; the danger of free mixing between men and women; miserliness; the unjust ruler; the sin of a scholar; seeking of knowledge; the importance of the remembrance of Allah; an explanation of how Allah mentioned the five daily prayers in a single verse (Qur'an 30: 17–18: Glory be to Allah when you enter into the night and into the morning...); and Allah's greatest name.

Al-Irshad fi masalih al-'ibad

THE GUIDANCE IN THE INTEREST OF THE SERVANTS (OF ALLAH)

This two-volume manuscript³⁵ admonishes and reminds religious fanatics of the truth and refutes those who brand Muslims as unbelievers. It also includes information on the different religious sects and alludes to numerous arguments between these sects.

Al-Kawkab al-waqqad fi dhikr al-mashayikh wa haqa'iq al-awrad

THE PIERCING STAR IN MENTIONING OF THE SCHOLARS AND THE REALITIES OF THE LITANIES

This manuscript³⁶ explains the meaning of a *wird* and its linguistic and technical origin, discusses revelation and inspiration, and presents proof that shows that the litanies are taken from the Qur'an and prophetic statements. Other topics covered are: supplication and its etiquette; the miracles of the saints; honouring and respecting scholars, and the

The commentary on *al-Maqsur wa al-mamdud* is eloquently written and structured – only those who are deeply rooted in the Arabic language and its literary styles are able to fully interact with this poem.

conditions for becoming a scholar; the reality of light, fear and hope taken from his book *Nudar al-dhahab*; the origin of midnight prayers (*tahajjud*); the signs of sainthood; an explanation of the word *shaytana* (to acquire Satanic qualities); the distinction between the Satan of *jinn* and Satan of mankind; the difference between the knowledge of the worshipper and that of the Worshipped; issues regarding the remembrance of Allah, its times, its abridgement, what must be done if it is missed, adding to it and what to do if the time is too short to perform it; the difference between the person who negates and what is being negated; the difference between the one whom Allah grants completion in knowledge and action, and acting without knowledge;³⁷ neglecting the self; the meaning of *al-huyuli* (Greek philosophical term for matter); prophetic traditions and their interpretation; and prophetic supplications for certain occasions. He ended the manuscript with accounts of the prophets and pious scholars.

Al-Tadhyil al-jalil al-'adim al-mathil

THE GRAND APPENDIX AND THE IDEAL NON-EXISTENCE

This manuscript³⁸ describes a shaykh who guides (*al-murabbi* – the spiritual master who initiates and guides the seeker into the spiritual path and quest). It is very similar to *al-Kawkab al-waqad*, and is in fact found as an attachment to that manuscript.

Ajwiba Labat

THE RESPONSE OF LABAT

One copy of this manuscript³⁹ can be found at the Ahmed Baba Institute; another is held by al-Sayyid Bad ibn Muhammad al-Kunti in Amkawal. The manuscript is also called *al-Ajwiba al-Labatiyya* (The Labati Responses/Answers). It contains answers to some questions that were posed by his student Shaykh Labat, and gives information about kinds of medicine and medicines suitable for specific ailments, the virtue of marriage, the etiquette of husband and wife, the evil person, predestination, remembrance and its etiquette, the ruling of some thoughts of the heart (i.e. how one will be judged for one's secret thoughts), the etiquette of a follower (*murid*), the virtue of knowledge, trust in Allah and perseverance.

Nafh al-tib fi al-salah 'ala al-nabi al-habib

THE PERFUMED FRAGRANCE OF SALUTATIONS TO THE BELOVED PROPHET

This manuscript⁴⁰ contains numerous formulas of salutation on the Prophet. The shaykh's son wrote a commentary on this manuscript which he named *al-Rawd al-khasib fi sharh nafh al-tib* (The Fertile Garden on the Elucidation of the Perfumed Fragrance). The commentary was published a few years ago (exact date unknown) by Bamawi ibn Alfa Mawi al-Jinnawi, principal of the school in Bobojolaso.

Sullam al-ridwan bi dhawq halawa al-iman

THE LADDER OF SATISFACTION IN TASTING THE SWEETNESS OF FAITH

This manuscript⁴¹ contains answers concerning the ethics of the teacher and of teaching and learning. It also discusses these topics: the words of the Qur'an; that which the teacher instructs the student pertaining to cleanliness, prayer, names (such as the names of the months); the ruling of dry ablution used for the recital of the Qur'an;⁴² and the ruling on following the actions of a scholar. The shaykh explains that it is permissible for a legally responsible adult to leave off the learning of the individual obligations⁴³ only in order to learn the Qur'an, and then discusses the prophetic saying, 'There is no prayer for the neighbour of the mosque except in the mosque.'

Qasida fi al-nasiha wa al-irshad wa al-tawassul

POEM ON ADVICE AND GUIDANCE AND INTERMEDIATION

This manuscript⁴⁴ consists of a poem of approximately 304 verses. In it the shaykh mentions the names of some of the prophets, saints and pious people and their effects. He uses them as intermediaries to Allah. The poem starts like this:

Is it from His secret towards the callers that He moves,
Be kind to us and replace the difficulty with ease,

And ends like this:

So ask Allah for His assistance towards god-consciousness,
And for the flock that You have made our responsibility of freeman or slave,
Then the salutations of Allah and His peace,
Upon the selected one, the chosen of all people.

Al-Ajwiba al-muhimma liman lahu bi 'amr al-din himma

THE IMPORTANT ANSWERS FOR THE ONE WHO ATTACHES IMPORTANCE
TO THE ISSUES OF RELIGION

This manuscript⁴⁵ is different to the other legal works because it is not arranged according to the chapters of Islamic law, as was the norm. It covers approximately 45 issues pertaining to education, the acquisition of wealth, marriage, teaching, the etiquette of a man towards his household, the reality of brotherhood, ascetism, paying alms, the judiciary, leadership, laws of commerce, advanced trade, seclusion, supplication of decision,⁴⁶ the status of the purity of the water that comes from a well and other important issues.

Other titles at the Ahmed Baba Institute

The following titles may also be of interest to researchers:⁴⁷

- ❖ *al-Mir'ah al-maymuna* (The Blessed Mirror).
- ❖ *Matiyya al-khalas fi kalima al-ikhlas fi sha'n al-mu'allim wa al-muta'alli* (The Tools of Deliverance in a Sincere Word in the Relationship of Student and Teacher).
- ❖ *Manzuma li asma Allah al-husna* (A Didactic Poem on the Beautiful Names of Allah). This poem is *lamiyya*, each verse ending with the letter lam.
- ❖ *Maqala fi al-awliya wa karamatihim* (An Essay Regarding Saints and their Miracles).
- ❖ *Manzuma fi al-dhat al-ilahiyya* (A Didactic Poem on the Divine Essence). Many scholars have written commentaries on this poem.
- ❖ *Fatwa fi al-amwal al-ma'khudha min al-lusus wa al-muharibin* (Fatwa on Wealth Taken from Thieves and Combatants).
- ❖ *Manzuma fi madh al-Suqiyyin* (A Poem in Praise of the Suqiyyin [a tribe]).
- ❖ *Manzuma fi madh 'ashiratihi wa al-difa' anha* (Poem in Praise and Defence of his Clan).
- ❖ *Fatwa fi sha'n al-damm al-mustaqirr fi al-jawf ba'd al-dhabh* (Fatwa on Blood that Remains Inside an Animal After its Slaughter).
- ❖ *Manzuma fi al-istisqa'* (Didactic Poem on Praying for Rain).
- ❖ *al-Muthallath al-Kunti* (The Kunti Triangle). This triangle – an esoteric triangle used in Islamic numerology/astrology – was commented upon by Shaykh Sayyid Muhammad al-Kunti, who is also the compiler.
- ❖ *al-Manzuma al-musamma bi al-siham al-musaddada* (A Didactic Poem Called the Accurate Arrows). This is a very useful supplication as a defence against enemies.
- ❖ *Qasida sard al-masaha* (title not translatable into English). Some say this poem is by Shaykh Sayyid Muhammad.
- ❖ *Qasida li al-shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar al-Kunti fi al-wa'z wa al-irshad wa tarbiya al-awlad wa huquq al-azwaj* (A Poem of Sayyid al-Mukhtar al-Kunti Pertaining to Advice, Guidance, Rearing of Children and the Rights of Spouses). Its beginning reads: 'When will you wake up and your heart is disillusioned? And you will gain in years and months.'
- ❖ *al-Jadwal al-Kunti fi al-fa'l bi istikhray al-ayat al-qur'aniyya* (The Kunti Table of Luck Through an Extraction of Certain Qur'anic Verses). This is a table consisting of 12 columns and rows. Six Qur'anic verses are placed in it and they are used in *istikhara*. Another table consisting of 12 columns and rows is also used for the placement of Qur'anic verses or messages that will guide you.⁴⁸
- ❖ *al-Ism al-a'zam* (The Greatest Name [of Allah]). He taught and dictated this manuscript to his son Shaykh Sayyid Muhammad ibn Shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar al-Kunti. The manuscript is about the sublime position of the most sublime name of God, namely Allah.
- ❖ *Fadl al-kilab 'ala akthar mimman yalbas al-thiyab* (The Preference of Dogs Above Most of Those Who Wear Clothes i.e. humans) I haven't seen this manuscript, but

its title has been mentioned in various oral reports. According to these reports, the manuscript contains a discussion about dogs. It claims the dog is a very tame and friendly animal and it shows this through its different movements, aimed at acquiring friendship and love. It is also known for its loyalty and protectiveness. It amuses people with its bark and people become afraid of it.

Letter held by Muhammad Ould Ham

Risalah min al-shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar ila tilmidhihi Nuh ibn Tahir al-fullani (Letter from Shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar to his student Nuh ibn Tahir the Fullani) is in the collection of Muhammad Ould Ham in Amman. It consists of advice and reconciliation between him and Ahmad ibn Muhammad Lubbu.

Titles held by Bad ibn Muhammad al-Kunti

The following manuscripts are in the possession of the family of Bad ibn Muhammad al-Kunti in northern Bram in Amkawal:

- ❖ *Zawal al-ilbas fi tard al-waswas al-khannas* (The Dissipation of Confusion Through the Chasing Away of the Devil's Whispering).
- ❖ *al-Qasida al-jami'a bayn al-shari'a wa al-haqiqa* (The All-Encompassing Poem on [a Juxtaposition] between the Law and Reality).
- ❖ *Risala min al-shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar fi ikhmad al-fitan bayn al-qaba'il* (A Treatise of Shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar in Extinguishing the Infighting Between the Tribes).

Titles held by Bubakr ould Hammad

The following manuscripts are in the possession of Bubakr Wuld Hammad in Akmahur, northern Baran:

- ❖ *Wasiyyah li al-shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar fi ahwal taqallub al-zaman* (Exhortation by Shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar on the [Adverse] Conditions of the Vicissitudes of Changing Times).
- ❖ *Khitaf al-ghawwas fi lujaj al-makr li al-khawwas wa 'irfas 'iras al-dukhrus al-'usnus al-akhyas al-ruqas wa hays bays 'ala mashub al-naja wa mukharmis al-kharnus 'an thalb awliya Allah dhi al-makri wa al-adha* (this title speaks of a treatise in defence of the saints and refutes those who try to harm or disrespect them). Interpretation: *al-'iras* – unstable difference, *al-dukhrus* – the one who enters, *al-'usnus* – the weak, *al-akhyas* – a goat with a broken horn, *hays bays* – it is said of someone who tries to narrow a path or opportunity, *al-mukharmis* – the one who dismisses, *al-kharnus* – baby swine. Only the first page of this manuscript is in the possession of Bubakr Ould Hammad. It is said that the manuscript belongs to Shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar al-Kunti, and also that it is written in Spanish.

The successful preservation and protection of these manuscripts cannot take place unless attention is given to the cultural, educational and administrative aspects related to their safeguarding. Cultural centres and manuscript libraries need to be equipped with the necessary resources and staff in these centres should receive continuous training. The preservation of these manuscripts will be to the benefit of the whole world.

Conclusion

In summary, the works of this great scholar and wise man are important not least because of the extensive variety of subjects they address. However, many of these valuable works are being neglected and exposed to destructive conditions. In some cases, different sections of the same manuscript are held by different people in different places.

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NOTES

- 1 Translated from Arabic by Ebrahiem Moos and Mohamed Shaid Mathee.
- 2 External sciences, i.e. the exoteric; internal sciences, i.e. the esoteric sciences (spirituality, gnosticism, etc.).
- 3 Unpublished and uncatalogued manuscript in the Mamma Haidara Library.
- 4 Unpublished and uncatalogued manuscript in the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 5 Unpublished and uncatalogued manuscript in the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 6 Unpublished and uncatalogued manuscript in the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 7 Manuscript number 415 at the Ahmed Baba Institute and number 515 at the Mamma Haidara Library.
- 8 *Al-Minna fi i'tiqad ahl al-sunna*, manuscript number 415 at the Ahmed Baba Institute and number 515 at the Mamma Haidara Library.
- 9 Chapter 2 Verse 255 of the Qur'an, a very famous verse often recited by Muslims.
- 10 Najran was a city in Yemen in southern Arabia. The people were called Bani Najran (children of Najran). They were Christians with whom the Prophet Muhammad debated regarding the nature of Jesus and the oneness of Allah.
- 11 *Ridwan* means satisfaction; Allah was satisfied with the believers for swearing this allegiance with the Prophet (see Qur'an 48: 18).
- 12 Manuscript number 500 at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 13 Manuscript number 1657 at the Ahmed Baba Institute and number 137 at the Mamma Haidara Library.
- 14 Allah does not take up space or place, i.e. the debate whether God is in a particular space or place cannot be attributed to him since this is a quality of created beings and not the creator.
- 15 Manuscript number 3616 at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 16 God and animals curse the sinner; all creatures despise a person who sins and disobeys the commands of his Lord.
- 17 Manuscript number 2854 at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 18 The functioning of the clouds and how they work is not fully comprehended by humans; it is one of the secrets of Allah.
- 19 Meaning those disbelievers or sceptics who deny or doubt God's power to bring the clouds and therefore rain, especially because Timbuktu is a semi-desert/desert area.
- 20 This is a complex concept in Islamic astronomy/astrology.
- 21 The first volume is recorded under manuscript number 10215 and the second volume under number 10216, both at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 22 Meaning those who regard interest on money loaned as permissible. In Islam interest is an abomination and totally forbidden.
- 23 Manuscript numbers 10222-1418-1699-2479 at the Ahmed Baba Institute and number 4550 at the Mamma Haidara Library.
- 24 The letters of the alphabet; all have special spiritual features and secrets.
- 25 Manuscript number 2035 at the Ahmed Baba Institute and number 562 at the Mamma Haidara Library.

- 26 Publication details for this book are unknown.
- 27 Manuscript number 10219 at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 28 All those actions that involve your limbs, such as using your hands in prayer or to hit someone, your tongue in speaking good things or for slandering someone, etc.
- 29 Manuscript number 3111 at the Mamma Haidara Library (also held at the Ahmed Baba Institute).
- 30 One of the poems is listed under number 2046 at the Ahmed Baba Institute and another important essay on the miracles of the saints under number 2284.
- 31 Manuscript number 3076 at the Mamma Haidara Library (as above).
- 32 God granted Prophet Muhammad certain special gifts not given to the rest of the prophets, such as the night journey into heaven and standing in God's celestial court.
- 33 Islam is the final religion; all other religions are subsumed under Islam.
- 34 Manuscript number 1538 at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 35 The first volume is recorded under manuscript number 1834 and the second volume under number 1835, both at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 36 Manuscript number 1608 at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 37 One may have knowledge and not act on it and, in contrast, one may do things without knowledge.
- 38 Manuscript number 1805 at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 39 Manuscript number 1258 at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 40 Manuscript numbers 1607 and 1614 at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 41 Manuscript number 713 at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 42 In the absence of water, ablution is made with dust.
- 43 Things that every individual is personally required to know and enact.
- 44 Manuscript number 338 at the Ahmed Baba Institute.
- 45 *Al-Ajwiba al-muhimma liman lahu bi 'amr al-din himma*, manuscript number 1093 at the Mamma Haidara Library.
- 46 A prayer that is made before making any important decision in one's life, thereby seeking God's guidance.
- 47 *Al-Mira al-maymuna*, manuscript number 1814; *Matiyya al-khalas fi kalima al-ikhlas fi sha'n al-mu'allim wa al-muta'allim*, manuscript number 1821; *Manzuma li asma Allah al-husna*, manuscript number 1254; *Maqala fi al-awliya wa karamatihim*, manuscript number 2284; *Manzuma fi al-dhat al-ilahiyya*, manuscript number 2983; *Fatwa fi al-amwal al-ma'khudha min al-lusus wa al-muharibin*, manuscript number 2716; *Manzuma fi madh al-Suqiyin*, manuscript number 2649; *Manzuma fi madh 'ashiratihi wa al-difa' 'anha*, manuscript number 1752; *Fatwa fi sha'n al-damm al-mustaqirr fi al-jawf ba'd al-dhabh*, manuscript number 1766; *Manzuma fi al-istisqa'*, manuscript number 2372; *al-Muthallath al-Kunti*, manuscript number 9590; *al-Manzuma al-musamma bi al-siham al-musaddada*, manuscript number 2349; *Qasida sard al-masaha*, manuscript number 2701; *Qasida li al-shaykh Sayyid al-Mukhtar al-Kunti fi al-wa'z wa al-irshad wa tarbiya al-awlad wa huquq al-azwaj*, manuscript number 4888; *al-Jadwal al-Kunti fi al-fa'l bistikhraj al-ayat al-qur'aniyya*, uncatalogued, author's own; *al-lsm al-a'zam*, manuscript number 413.
- 48 Through consulting these verses that speak of happiness and paradise or that speak of God's punishment and hell, one will get an order or advice regarding how to proceed with doing something (such as a job) or to desist from doing it.

