

***Tijaniyyah in North Africa and the Eighteenth Century Muslim World (U.S.A: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), pp. 289, by Zachary Valentine Wright***

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The 18<sup>th</sup>-century history of North Africa was a unique one because of the emergence of the Tijaniyyah Sufi order in 1798, which since then, has changed the historical narratives of and about Islam almost throughout the world. Its emergence, teachings, and understanding of both the spiritual and the temporal worlds, paved the way for the evolution of intriguing polemical debates for and against it<sup>1</sup>. On this crossroads, therefore, Wright's *Realizing Islam* succinctly explains a significant aspect of the history of the Tijaniyyah Sufi order and its relations with the larger 18<sup>th</sup>-century Muslim world, which is mainly overlooked by many historians.

Aptly crafted in five successive chapters, the author traces the history of the Tijaniyyah in North Africa with particular reference to its unique tradition of searching for the 'truth' through the guidance of *Shuyūkh* (Islamic scholars). The author argues that it is this guidance that shaped the nascent Tijaniyyah followers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to be asking questions on the verification, realization, and actualization (*Tahqīq*) of Islamic religious identity (p. 1). This supposition is,

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<sup>1</sup> For details, see; DeWeese Devin, 'Khojagānī Origins and the Critique of Sufism: The Rhetoric of Communal Uniqueness in the Manāqib of Khoja 'Alī 'Azīzān Rāmītanī'. In *Islamic Mysticism Contested* (Brill, 1999), 492-519, Ryan Patrick, 'The mystical theology of Tijānī Sufism and its social significance in West Africa', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 30, no. 2 (2000): 208-224, Ridgeon Lloyd, *Sufi castigator: Ahmad Kasravi and the Iranian mystical tradition* (Routledge, 2006), Hermansen Marcia, 'Global Sufism: "theirs and ours"', in *Sufis in Western Society* (Routledge, 2009), 26-45., Van Bruinessen Martin, 'Sufism, 'popular' Islam and the encounter with modernity', *Islam and modernity: key issues and debates* (2009): 125-157, Sirry Mun'im, 'Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and the Salafī Approach to Sufism', *Die Welt des Islams* 51, no. 1 (2011): 75-108, Sirriyeh Elizabeth. *Sufis and anti-Sufis: The defence, rethinking and rejection of Sufism in the modern world* (Routledge, 2014).

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therefore, contextualized within the Tijaniyya concept of the ‘Muhammadan Spiritual Path’, which serves as a means to share the realization of the human essence on earth, in line with the Prophetic teachings.

Wright, further argues that human self-realization (*Tahqīq al-Insāniyyah*) is enshrined in the Sufi tradition and was not only peculiar to Sheikh Ahmad al-Tijani, the founder of the Tijaniyyah Sufi order and his disciples but is also central to the teachings of other Sufi scholars of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who derived their version(s) of the concept from the happenings of their age. The author also observes that the growth of the Tijaniyyah Sufi order in North Africa, as well as its spread to the Middle East, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Muslim countries in Europe and the Americas, made it one of the most widely spread Sufi orders in the world.

Employing different epistemological strategies, Wright opines that the history of the Tijaniyyah in North Africa and beyond is defined by an extensive intellectual tradition that challenges the seeming notion of the stagnation of the Muslim world, especially in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries probably as a result of Western ascendancy (p. 19). On this basis, therefore, the author ties the success in the spread of the order to the efforts of the 18th-century Islamic scholarly revival.

While chapter one of the book provides a general overview of the historical development of the Tijaniyyah Sufi order in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, particularly through the individual contributions of some Sufi scholars of the time such as Ibrahim al-Kūrāni and Mustapha al-Bakri, chapter two dwells on the biography of Sheikh Ahmad al-Tijani, his contributions to both Sufism and Islamic scholarship, as well as analyses al-Tijani’s esoteric opinions from the standpoint of some recently discovered unpublished sources dealing with issues such as his legal methodology, smoking, and slavery, the limits of speculative theology, unity of being, etc. in chapters three and four, Wright analyses the Sufi notion of self-actualization within the esoteric parameters of the realization of humanity before zooming his discussion to al-Tijani’s claim of spiritual authority (Khātīm al-Awliyah) overall Sufi orders in the world, as well as its intriguing perspectives. Chapter five, which is the final one, raises important questions regarding the practicality of the Tijani philosophical notion, especially that which is considered a ‘sinful’ one but finding solutions in the Tijani Sufi order that laid the foundation for its spread.

Wright’s book is an important contribution not only to Sufi studies but also to Muslim intellectual and spiritual traditions. This is because, the book bridges the gaps left by earlier researchers, especially by giving serious academic consideration

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to the Tijaniyyah within the ambiance of Sufism, as well as its place in the context of 18th-century revivalism.

Through many years of extensive fieldwork, the author has unearthed many recent primary documents relating to Sufism. Some of these ‘unknown’ and unpublished primary documents are; al-Tijani’s *Kunnāsh al-rihla* (Travel Notebook) and Ali Harāzimi’s *Mashāhid* (Spiritual Encounters). Despite the internal weaknesses of most of these sources in terms of bias and historical falsifications, Wright outrightly calls for the popularization of the Sufi ‘internal’ narratives, while dispelling the common fear of most historians on the hagiographical nature of most Sufi sources. Besides, one important thing to also note is that the author cites many quotations more than necessary, which run throughout the text. A simple paraphrase of such lengthy quotations would have helped.

### Bibliography

- DeWeese Devin, ‘Khojagānī Origins and the Critique of Sufism: The Rhetoric of Communal Uniqueness in the Manāqib of Khoja ‘Alī ‘Azīzān Rāmītanī’. In *Islamic Mysticism Contested* (Brill, 1999).
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