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AḤMAD AL-TIJĀNĪ (D.1815) AND MUḤAMMAD IBN AL-‘ARABĪ AL-DAMRĀWĪ (D.1789): THE AMBIGUITY OF A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MASTER AND DISCIPLE IN THE EARLIEST DAYS OF THE TIJĀNIYYA

Seydi Diamil NIANE*

Abstract: The relationship between master and disciple is a fundamental element of Sufism. There’s even a Sufi saying that Satan will be the master of the masterless. All Sufi brotherhoods respect this tradition. Thus, as the founder of the Tijāniyya Sufi brotherhood, Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī also had to play the role of spiritual guide to his disciples as he was responsible for their spiritual education. This article revisits the relationship between him and one of his earliest disciples, Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī. We will see that the latter was not a mere disciple and that, at times, he played the role of master insofar as he was supposed to be the intermediary between Aḥmad Tijānī and the Prophet in the early days of the Tijāniyya Sufi brotherhood. This relationship is unique because the Tijāniyya is essentially founded on the status it gives to al-Tijānī, whom it considers the one at the top of the hierarchy of sanctity, the Seal of the Saints. However, to gain access to specific mystical knowledge, Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī had to go through the intermediary of his young disciple.

Keywords: Shaykh – Murīd – Tijāniyya - Aḥmad al-Tijānī – Tāzī – Sufism - Islam in Africa.

Résumé : La relation entre maître et disciple est un élément fondamental du soufisme. Il existe même un dicton soufi selon lequel Satan est le maître des sans-mâîtres. Toutes les confréries soufies respectent cette tradition. Ainsi, en tant que fondateur de la confrérie soufie Tijāniyya, le cheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī devait également jouer le rôle de guide spirituel auprès de ses disciples puisqu’il était responsable de leur éducation spirituelle. Cet article revient sur les relations entre lui et l’un de ses premiers disciples, Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī. Nous verrons que ce dernier n’était pas un simple disciple et qu’il a parfois joué le rôle de maître dans la mesure où il était censé être l’intermédiaire entre Aḥmad Tijānī et le Prophète dans les premiers temps de la confrérie soufie Tijāniyya. Cette relation est unique car la Tijāniyya est essentiellement fondée sur le statut qu’elle accorde à al-Tijānī, considéré comme celui qui se trouve au sommet de la hiérarchie de la sainteté, le Sceau des Saints. Cependant, pour accéder à des connaissances mystiques spécifiques, le cheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī devait passer par l’intermédiaire de son jeune disciple.

Mots-clés : Shaykh – Murīd – Tijāniyya - Aḥmad al-Tijānī – Tāzī – Soufisme - Islam en Afrique.

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INTRODUCTION

Born in the mid-18th Century in Taza, Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī is one of the first and privileged disciples of Aḥmad al-Tijānī (d.1815), founder of the Tijāniyya Sufi order. The death of Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī occurred in 1789 in ‘Ayn Mādī, the birthplace of the founder of the Tijāniyya. He was twenty-eight years old at the time. In this sense, Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī has spent only a few years in the Tijāniyya, which was founded in 1781. However, he was among the few followers Aḥmad al-Tijānī took as an intermediary between him and the Prophet. This is why he was awarded the title of Great Intermediary (*al-wāsiṭa al-mu‘azzam*) in the Tijāniyya literature. Concretely, this would imply that Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī carried the messages of the Prophet to Aḥmad al-Tijānī and *vice versa*. The native of Taza said he saw Prophet Muhammad twenty-four times a day.

Our contribution proposes to analyze the nature of this relationship between Aḥmad al-Tijānī and Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī as well as the function of the latter in the early days of the Tijāniyya to determine whether he was a disciple distinct from the others. The analysis of the function of mediation (*wāsiṭiyya*), thanks to the tools of the Islamic studies approach, will allow us to situate better the role of Damrāwī in the development of the Tijāniyya.

To shed light on Damrāwī’s uniqueness among the other disciples of the Tijāniyya, it will first be necessary to present Aḥmad al-Tijānī and the place that the Tijāniyya brotherhood grants him in terms of sanctity. This will enable us to show that what makes the Tijāniyya unique among other Sufi orders is nothing other than the place that Aḥmad al-Tijānī occupies among the saints if we refer to the writings of his disciples. This will allow us to see how Damrāwī played a central role in the evolution of his master in the early days of the Tijāniyya.

We will then analyze the stages of Damrāwī’s life, beginning by discussing the delicate question of his biography concerning the critical gap in historical information about his life. Our corpus will mainly consist of the biographical annals (*trājim*) written by the authors of the Tijāniyya.

1. The Tijāniyya and the mystical status of Aḥmad al-Tijānī

The aim here is not to approach the Tijāniyya from a historical point of view. This has already been the subject of a remarkable collective work to which we refer the reader (J. L. Triaud & D. Robinson, 2000). We consider the Tijāniyya as an ideological movement that has produced many authors contributing to the intra-Islamic debate. Therefore, we will draw on the brotherhood's literature, which is purely hagiographic, to understand its intellectuals' mentality better. This hagiography is a resource to exploit since the biography of Aḥmad al-Tijānī is confused with that of the Tijāniyya.

Founded in 1781 by Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī (1737-1815), the Tijāniyya is part of the movement of reformed Sufism with its various branches advocating what Sufi literature defines as the Muḥammadian path (*al-ṭarīqa al-muḥammadiyya*). According to Éric Geoffroy (2003, p.197-198), the appearance of this expression dates back “around the 16th century and becomes recurrent in Sufism. [...] Reform Sufis relate directly to the spiritual entity of the Prophet, to the point where some claim to meet him in living flesh.” As part of this Sufi trend, the Tijāniyya is essentially based on the fact that it was the Prophet himself who gave Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī the order to found his Sufi brotherhood.

The founder's spiritual journey took him from country to country to meet Sufi masters. Among those he met, texts cite Ṭayyib b. Muḥammad al-Yamlaḥī of Wazzān (d.1767). The latter is said to have offered Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī his *wird* and asked him to initiate others into it. Something the founder of the Tijāniyya refused for reasons unknown to us (S. A. Ḥ. Barrāda, 2011, p.152; M. al-Mašrī, 2012, p.45).

Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Wānjalī¹ is the name of another saint often cited in Tijānī sources. Before Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī had spoken to him, reports 'Alī Ḥarāzīm Barrāda (2011, p.152), “Al-Wānjalī told him that he would attain the rank of as-Shādhilī”. Before founding his order, Ahmed Tijānī was initiated into the Qādiriyya, the Nāṣiriyya, and then the Ḥalwatiyya. He was initiated into the latter path by Muḥammad al-Kurdī (d.1780). He also met a particular Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allah al-Hindī (d.1774). 'Alī Ḥarāzīm Barrāda (2011, p.158-160), author of *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī* relates Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī's meeting with the last two saints:

¹ A famous Sufi whose tomb is in Taounate in northern Morocco.

When our Master was received by him, at their first meeting, Al-Kurdī immediately said to him: ‘Know that you enjoy God’s Love in this world and the next!’ ‘From where did you know this?’ asked our Master. ‘From God,’ replied Al-Kurdī [...] A few days later, Master Al-Kurdī asked him:

What do you want?

The Supreme Station on the Qutbāniyya, he replied.

You’ll have more, said Al-Kurdī.

Do you guarantee it? asked the Master.

Yes! he replied.

[...] When he was about to leave him to continue his journey to Mecca, Master Al-Kurdī made further promises and prayers for him to travel safely to and from Mecca. Arriving in Mecca [...] in the month of Shawwāl in the year 1187, he set out, as was his wont, to seek out the men of God. [...] It was then that he heard of the Master and valiant, the full moon and the sealed musk, the sun illuminating men, the moon of the circle of summits: Abū al-‘Abbās Sidi Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Hindī [...] When our Master asked for an interview, he refused, arguing that he was not yet authorized to meet people. Our Master obtained many favors from him. Al-Hindī told him what his quest would lead to: ‘You will inherit my knowledge, secrets, gifts, and lights.’ Writing to him, he tells his servant: ‘He is the one I have been waiting for. Tell him he will be my heir’. The servant said: ‘But Master, I’ve been in your service for eighteen years. Now that a man has come from faraway Maghreb, you tell me he will be your heir!’ ‘It’s him,’ says the master [...] ‘In this matter, there is no personal choice. It’s God who bestows His blessings on whomever He pleases. If it were up to me, I would have favored my son, to your disadvantage, a long time ago’.

Seven days later, according to writings of the Tijāniyya, Al-Hindī died after advising Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī to meet a mysterious figure from the Ḥalwatiyya brotherhood named Al-Sammān (d.1775). The latter is said to have promised him, in Medina, to reach the Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Šādīlī station.

Returning from the pilgrimage, he went back to Al-Kurdī in Egypt. Preparing to return, Al-Kurdī permitted Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī to initiate into the Ḥalwatiyya. Having declined Al-Kurdī’s offer, the latter then said to him: “Initiate people, I’m their guarantor” (S. A. Ḥ. Barrāda, 2011, p. 162). It was to this same Sufi order that Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī had initiated his first two disciples, ‘Alī Ḥarāzim Barrāda and Muḥammad b Al-Mašrī before the foundation of the Tijāniyya. After the latter’s foundation, they followed Aḥmad al-Tijānī into his new brotherhood. The fact that the founder of the Tijāniyya was initiated into these different Sufi brotherhoods makes Amadou Hampaté Bâ (1980, p.230) say that the Tijāniyya represents the sum or quintessence of all the brotherhoods that preceded it since the appearance of Islam.

According to Tijāniyya's writings, on his way from Fez, motivated by the intention of visiting Moulay Idrīs in Meknes, during a stopover at Qasr Abū Samgūn in 1781, Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī met the Prophet in person, who gave him the order to found his *ṭarīqa*: the Tijāniyya.

The point of tracing Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī's initiatory journey as recounted by Tijāniyya hagiography is to emphasize several points: 1) The centrality of Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī in the collective consciousness of the Tijāniyya; 2) a feeling of superiority that animates many followers of the Tijāniyya given the very status of the master who claims the highest station of holiness; 3) The Tijāniyya is in line with the tradition of reformed Sufism.

As indicated, Sheikh Aḥmad al-Tijānī's status is central to the brotherhood's intellectual production. Indeed, the founder of the Tijāniyya himself explicitly claims this status, saying on several occasions that he is at the top of the hierarchy of sanctity. These extracts illustrate this point:

The flood that emanates from the essence of the master of existence (the Prophet) is received by the spirits of the prophets. In addition, my spirit receives everything that emanates from the spirits of the prophets. From me, these spiritual floods go to all creatures, from the world's creation to the last day [...] All masters, from the world of the invisible, have received from me. (S. A. Ḥ. Barrāda, 2011, p. 32).

Pointing to his middle and index fingers, he said: "My spirit and the Prophet's one are like this. His sours the prophets, mine the poles, the gnostics, and the saints, from pre-eternity to the end of time" (S. A. Ḥ. Barrāda, 2011, p. 33).

"My two feet here," he had said to one of his disciples, "are placed on the necks of all the saints, from the creation of Adam to the end of time". The Tijāniyya is thus a Sufi brotherhood whose followers are driven by a sense of superiority due to Aḥmad al-Tijānī's claimed status as the best among the saints of Islam. Other statements made by its founder nourish this feeling intrinsic to the Tijāniyya. "The greatest poles of this community will not reach the stations of my companions", he said (M. Ṭ. Sufyānī, 1931, p. 10). "Our seal", he further attested, "is Muḥammadian. Whoever takes our *wird* will benefit with his parents. He will thus have benefited from our intercession immediately" (M. Ṭ. Sufyānī, 1931, p. 40) Bold as ever, he says: "If the great poles were aware of what God has reserved for my companions in Paradise, they would weep and say 'O Lord, You have given us nothing'" (M. Ṭ. Sufyānī, 1931, p. 46). All these statements have been the subject of much comment by Tijāniyya intellectuals and the brotherhood's detractors.

After analyzing his relationship with Aḥmad al-Tijānī, let's examine the role Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī played in the evolution of his master in the early days of the Tijāniyya. But first, we need to consider the difficulty the researcher who intends to write a biography of Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī has to face.

2. The Impossible Biography of al-Tāzī

The historical biography of Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī seems not easy to write with the scarcity of information we have about his life on the one hand and, on the other, because of the apologetic nature of the biographical collections of the Tijāniyya in which part of his life is narrated. When biographical narratives like Aḥmad Sukayrij’s *Kašf al- hijāb* discuss his life, they begin with his meeting with Aḥmad al-Tijānī. Nothing is said about his youth, schooling, and life before he crossed paths with the founder of the Tijāniyya. The only information we have is that he was before he met with Aḥmad al-Tijānī, a follower of the *ṭarīqa* of Ballāl ibn ‘Azzūz from Marrakech. But to ennoble his abandonment of this order to follow the Tijāniyya, the Tijānī writings do not hesitate to qualify Ibn ‘Azzūz as “satan of the ummah” (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 195) even if he was a famous Sufī and jurisconsult. To tell the life story of al-Tāzī, history from his biographers is mixed with legend. Before meeting Aḥmad al-Tijānī, no life is attributed to him. A complete unknown by his biographers.

The biographical collections of the Tijāniyya unanimously agree that he was one of the first disciples of the path. After several journeys in search of spiritual masters, as we saw, Aḥmad al-Tijānī took the direction of Abū Samghūn, where he settled in 1781, the same year in which he founded the *ṭarīqa* after being ordered by the Prophet to establish that path, according to the writings of the Sufī order (M. Mašrī, 2012, p. 55).

Muḥammad ibn al-Mašrī (d.1810), a contemporary of al-Tāzī and one of Aḥmad al-Tijānī ’s earliest disciples, reports in *Kitāb al-Jāmi’* that Aḥmad al-Tijānī began the journey to Abū Samghūn after detouring to Tāza to meet with Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī, “*who, at that time was one of his greatest disciples and one of his most beloved (kāna fī dālik al-waqt min akbar aṣḥābihī wa khāṣṣatihī min aḥbābihī)*” M. Mašrī, 2012a, p. 88). For his part, Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Sā’ih (d.1891) postulates in his now famous *Buḡyat al-mustafid* that:

During his stay in Abū Samghūn, Aḥmad al-Tijānī went to Tāza for the meeting of his companion and disciple, the great Gnostic and supreme intermediary, Sīdī Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī. The reason is that he was, at that time, one of the greatest disciples and beloved of our master [Aḥmad al-Tijānī]. The latter was very fond of him [...] and visited him during his lifetime and after his death (M. A. Sā’ih, 2005, p. 208).

Whichever version is chosen between the one by Ibn al-Mašrī and Ibn al-Sā’ih, it appears that the native of Tāza was one of the first to follow Aḥmad al-Tijānī. Muḥammad Rāḍī Gannūn even sees that Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī was the first and that he was in the company of Aḥmad al-Tijānī in Abū Samghūn at the time of Aḥmad al-Tijānī’s spiritual opening (*fath*), which would correspond to the founding of the Sufī order in 1781².

While we have little information about his life, and even his date of birth remains unknown, however the date and conditions of his death are documented. Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī died murdered in 1789 in ‘Ayn Māḍī. The two historiographers Aḥmad Sukayrij (d.1944) and Muḥammad al-Ḥajūjī (d.1951) report that he was killed by gunfire (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 152; M. Ḥajūjī, n.d., I, p. 280). They argue that the killing was caused by the jealousy of the people of ‘Ayn Māḍī. The nature of this jealousy, however, remains unclear.

Sukayrij provides two additional pieces of information. In *Raf‘ al-niqāb*, he merely said that a group of grudge-holders from ‘Ayn Māḍī assaulted him and then killed him (*ta‘addā jamā‘a min ḥasadat ṣāhib al-tarjama ‘alayhi fa qatalūhu bi ‘Ayn Māḍī*) without further detail (A. Sukayrij, 2014, III, p. 835). In *Kašf al-ḥijāb*, he explains the causes of this jealousy:

He [al-Tāzī] died murdered. Indeed, when he settled in ‘Ayn Māḍī and his miracles began to be known, the women of the town talked about him and belittled their husbands by comparing them with him. This caused some of his enemies to be jealous, and they hired someone to kill him (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 152).

Another version, reported by Sukayrij, says that his wife boasted about his merits in front of the wives of the other inhabitants of ‘Ayn Māḍī. This then provoked the jealousy of these women, who in turn attacked their husbands, who finally caused the death of al-Tāzī (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 197).

Muḥammad al-Ḥajūjī mentions that the jealousy wrought by Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī’s enemies was because of his numerous miracles. Ḥajūjī does not specify the role of their wives (M. Ḥajūjī, n.d., I, p. 280). After his assassination, revengeful wishes were expressed in

²See his footnote on the *Kašf al-ḥijāb* : A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 149, note n°2.,

his circle before being stopped on the orders of Aḥmad al-Tijānī (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p.152; 2014, I, p. 263).

Al-Tāzī, who died in 1789, was a member of the Tijāniyya but only in the first Algerian phase of the order and thus would not witness its apogee followed by the installation of Aḥmad al-Tijānī in Fez in 1798. As a result, he accompanied the founder of the Sufi order only during the first eight years of the Tijāniyya's history. Al-Tāzī played a decisive role during these years and was the intimate confidant of Aḥmad al-Tijānī. More to the point, it was after al-Tāzī's death that 'Alī Ḥarāzīm Barrāda, a close disciple of Aḥmad al-Tijānī and author of the now famous and controversial *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī*, became the secretary and new confidant of Aḥmad al-Tijānī (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 152). At his death, Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī was twenty-eight years old. However, miracles are attributed to him despite his young age. This gives his life a perhaps more emotional and symbolic dimension than historical. Let's examine some of these miracles reported in *Kašf al-ḥijāb*.

The first three miracles are related to the Tijāniyya. While Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī was in Tāza, Aḥmad al-Tijānī requested that he join him in Abū Samghūn. On his way, Tāzī's horse died. Thus, he instructed a spirit to enter the horse to continue the journey. Once he arrived in Abū Samghūn and al-Tāzī got off the horse, the horse fell to the ground, and earthworms came out of his body. It was out of the question for him to miss the call of Aḥmad al-Tijānī (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 197). The second story involves the wife of Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī, who desired honey when it was not the season. Faced with his wife's insistence, Tāzī said to her, "Go to the courtyard of the house; my master Aḥmad al-Tijānī has sent you your desire". Coming out, the woman finds a large quantity of honey (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 197). It was this same woman who was touting the miracles of al-Tāzī in the presence of the other women of the city, which was the cause of Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī al-Damrāwī's death. Another account relates that he used to employ his esoteric knowledge for magical purposes. He used to draw lines in public, and one reciting a formula caused dinar coins to come out of the ground. He stopped it only after receiving threats from Aḥmad al-Tijānī, who saw it as a hindrance to al-Tāzī's spiritual opening (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 196). A final account, this time unrelated to the Tijāniyya, says that during times of dryness, rain sometimes fell on his fields and not on those of others (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 196).

These accounts, probably mixed with legends, are certainly not intended to tell the historical truth about the life of Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī. They fill a void regarding a life we have no reliable information about. In the face of this void, the affective dimension of the miracle comes to take the place of the historical narrative. Let us now analyze the nature of the relationship between Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī and Aḥmad al-Tijānī to identify better the role of the native of Tāzā in the early times of the founding of the Tijāniyya order.

3. The nature of a relationship and the mysterious station of the *wāsiṭiyya*

The first piece of information that emerges from the writings of the Tijāniyya is that the relationship between Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī and his master Aḥmad al-Tijānī was based on love. Many of the merits attributed to al-Tāzī in the literature of the Sufī order would even be the results of this love that the native of Tāza had for Aḥmad al-Tijānī. Embracing the love for his master, al-Tāzī ended up loving the Prophet. The Mauritanian poet Aḥmad ibn Bābā al-‘Alawī writes in his *Munyat al-murīd* (n.d., p. 35):

Many are the disciples of Tijānī who, through his companionship
have had, in holiness, beyond their expectations.

Following the example of the love the Prophet bore for ibn al-‘Arabī
Who, with his Lord, occupies one of the high places.

The Prophet’s love for al-Tāzī is even confirmed by Aḥmad al-Tijānī in one of his words reported by Muḥammad al-Ḥajūjī, according to whom the founder of the Tijāniyya once said: “I swear by God that I have never seen the Prophet love a person as much as he loves Sīdī Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī and Sīdī ‘Alī Ḥarāzīm. By God, I swear that he loves them as he loves his children.” (M. Ḥajūjī, n.d., I, p. 277).

Elsewhere, Aḥmad al-Tijānī says that the Prophet urged him to take care of Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī and that he had rights over the founder of the Tijāniyya (M. Sufyānī, 1931, p. 16). This makes al-Tāzī a Tijānī disciple like no other in the sense that he alone benefits from this injunction by the Prophet addressed to Aḥmad al-Tijānī.

To understand these words of Aḥmad al-Tijānī, we must remember that the Tijāniyya is exclusively based on the fact that it was the Prophet himself who gave Aḥmad al-Tijānī the order to found the Sufī brotherhood. Like many other Sufī orders, the Tijāniyya admits the possibility of seeing the Prophet in the waking state and receiving messages from him after his physical death. It is with an understanding of this point that we can analyze Aḥmad al-Tijānī’s

remarks that return to the Prophet's attitude toward al-Tāzī. It also allows us to explore better the multiple times al-Tāzī claims to receive messages from the Prophet himself.

The writings of the Tijāniyya, including *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī*, speak of these visions of the Prophet that al-Tāzī enjoyed. One of these tells of a dream in which the Prophet teaches Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī some verses of poetry about the divine manifestation (*tajallī*), verses which he comments on for the native of Tāza. Awakened, Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī is surprised to memorize both the verses and his commentary by the Prophet. Later, he will see the Prophet in a waking state, and the latter says: "Were it not for the love you bear for Aḥmad al-Tijānī, you would never have seen me." (S. A. Ḥ. Barrāda, 2011, p. 129-131). Here are the verses in question:

It is by glorification and praise that manifests His Essence
and by the intention that the impediment was mine
It is by the Reality of Reality that you perceive His Reality
It will be hidden from me by the Truth and not by It.
His power embraces all the Order that He establishes
By the orientation and not by the Intention that my catch escaped them.
Dive into the sea of the Oneness, and you will perceive the Unity
The sails will be parted, and the dark will be revealed otherwise. (S. A.
Ḥ. Barrāda, 2011, p. 1131).

These verses' ambiguity legitimized the use of a prophetic commentary by the authors of the Tijāniyya. The history of Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī with Aḥmad al-Tijānī takes on another dimension with the analysis of the Prophet's visions in the waking state claimed by al-Tāzī.

The biographers of Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī declare that he saw the Prophet twenty-four times a day and in the waking state (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p.150; M. Ḥajūjī, n.d., I, p. 277-278). Sukayrij (2012, p. 150) conceives this as the reason for Aḥmad al-Tijānī's attention to him, which also led him to travel regularly to Tāza to visit his disciple. But what makes al-Tāzī a special tijānī is the position of *wāsiṭiyya* that he alone held among the followers of Aḥmad al-Tijānī. It even happens that the biographers or authors of the Tijāniyya name him only by the supreme intermediary (*al-Wāsiṭa al-Mu'azzam*) without mentioning his name.

Concretely, this station implies that Tāzī was the intermediary between the Prophet and Aḥmad al-Tijānī. This has caused some embarrassment among the writers of the Tijāniyya, who find it difficult to explain this privilege of Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī. Thus, Sukayrij explains that if al-Tāzī was the intermediary between the founder of the Tijāniyya and the Prophet, it was not necessarily because of the specificity of al-Tāzī but rather because of Aḥmad al-Tijānī’s shyness that prevented him from directly addressing the Prophet:

This great man [Tāzī] is of the prestigious elite of the disciples of our master [Aḥmad al-Tijānī], may God bless him. Moreover, he was an intermediary between our master, so may God be pleased with him, and may the Prophet be pleased with peace and salvation, in matters about which our master, out of excessive shyness, could not question the Prophet. By the way, this is a usual practice among the great saints of the Muḥammadian community. They use intermediaries between them and the Prophet, peace be upon him, to tell him about their needs that they cannot express to him because of their excessive shyness towards him and the fact that they get lost in front of his beauty during their meetings. This leads them to forget themselves and all their requests once they are in the hands of the Prophet, peace be upon him” (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 149-150).

However, the nature of this wāsiṭiyya function seems to go much further than the sphere in which Sukayrij wants to close it. He explains that al-Tāzī was the bearer of a special authorization (*ijāza*) to Aḥmad al-Tijānī from the Prophet. This *ijāza* entitled the founder of the Tijāniyya to use the prayer known as *Dawr al-anwār* (the circle of lights). The particularity of this one is that it would have been the Prophet himself who taught it to al-Tāzī, and he communicated it to his master (A. Sukayrij, 2012, p. 152). Al-Tāzī even assures that *Dawr al-anwār* and *Dalā’il al-khayrāt* of the famous Sufi Muḥammad al-Jazūlī (d.1465) draw their source from the same spiritual forces (A. Sukayrij, 2016, p. 341). The Prophet also teaches another prayer, called *Yāqūtāt al-muḥtāj*, to al-Tāzī. The latter then says to him: “Invite the believers to recite it and take an interest in it; Thanks be to God, it carries blessings” (A. Sukayrij, 2016, p. 156). *Dawr al-anwār* is not well known among the followers of the Tijāniyya, which has caused some to use its unavailability to fool some disciples into believing that they know this rare prayer. This has even prompted Sukayrij (2016, p. 341) to invite the followers of the Tijāniyya order to be content with the known *ḍikr-s* and not to pay attention to the esoteric pretensions of some disciples and *muqaddam-s*.

The question that needs to be asked to understand better Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī’s role in the early hours of the Tijāniyya is this: why does the Prophet teach him at first and ask him to be the bearer of the secrecy to Aḥmad al-Tijānī and not vice versa? It seems that al-Tāzī taught the founder of the Tijāniyya his accession to a mystical station which Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī placed between the Prophethood and the supreme station of the poles (*al-qutbāniyya*) according to Ḥajūjī (n.d., I, p. 278). How can Aḥmad al-Tijānī hold a spiritual position without knowing it to the extent that his disciple informs him? If we take the logic to its extreme, we would risk making al-Tāzī himself the master of Aḥmad al-Tijānī and not the opposite. This brings us back to the sociological context of the birth of the Tijāniyya, where disciples seemed to have spiritual claims that were supposed to be the monopoly of Aḥmad al-Tijānī (J. E. Adnani, 2000).

How about al-Tāzī dreaming of taking his master’s place? Posited as such, the question may seem intriguing, but it is legitimate. Sukayrij tells us in *Kaṣf al-ḥijāb* (2012, p.195) that despite his young age, Tāzī dreamed of the place of his master Aḥmad al-Tijānī after having benefited from the spiritual opening because of his affiliation to the Tijāniyya. For his part, Ḥajūjī reports that, on discovering a station between the prophecy and the supreme station of the sainthood, Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī desired to occupy it. It is then informed that the station was reserved for Aḥmad al-Tijānī. Thus, it is clear that al-Tāzī’s spiritual claims exceeded those of the ordinary followers of the Tijāniyya. His pretensions probably led him to use his spiritual knowledge for magical purposes. This was particularly the case when he used them to bring gold and silver coins out of the ground. Aḥmad al-Tijānī, probably embarrassed by this practice, forbade it to him with this threat: “If you do this again, nothing will bind us anymore.” It was only after this warning that Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī stopped this practice, which was beginning to make him famous.

CONCLUSION

It appears from the development and analysis we have offered in this contribution that Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī was anyone other than an “ordinary” disciple of the Tijāniyya. While it is a fact that Aḥmad al-Tijānī maintained close connections with several of his disciples, al-Tāzī’s place and role remains unmatched in the early days of the Tijāniyya. We might even assume that Aḥmad al-Tijānī’s reframing of al-Tāzī’s employments of esotericism and magic had something to do with the spiritual

claims of the native of Tāza. The function of the *wāsiṭiyya* that makes him the intermediary between Aḥmad al-Tijānī and the Prophet places the former in a curious situation in which Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī sometimes plays a role of disciple and sometimes the one of spiritual guide. In this sense, the status of al-Tāzī comes to throw a little more light on the historical and sociological conditions of the foundation of the Tijāniyya order, well studied by El Hadji Samba Diallo (2007-2008), which conditions were not necessarily marked by a perfect cohesion and a blind submission, without metaphysical pretensions of the first disciples of the Aḥmad al-Tijānī.

This role played by Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Damrāwī al-Tāzī is exciting given that the Tijāniyya bases its legitimacy essentially on the status it attributes to Aḥmad Tijānī as the Prophet’s heir and the best among the saints in the history of Sufism. Yet here we have a situation where the disciple, in this case al-Tāzī, sometimes becomes the intermediary between the Prophet and his master, Aḥmad al-Tijānī. This gives rise to one of the most ambiguous relationships between a master and his disciple in the history of the Tijāniyya.

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