With the Name of Allah, Most Merciful, Ever-Merciful.

A BIOGRAPHY OF:

SHAYKH MUHAMMAD AL-AMIN
B. MUHAMMAD AL-MUKHTAR
AL-JAKANI AL-SHANQITI,

AUTHOR OF THE MAGNIFICENT TAFSIR OF
THE QUR’AN KNOWN AS ADWA’ AL-BAYAN

(MAY ALLAH SHOWER HIS MERCY UPON HIM)

(incomplete, draft)

Based on a lecture given in honour of his deceased Shaykh by his esteemed student
the late Shaykh ‘Atiyyah Muhammad Salim, former Judge in the Shari’ah Court of
Madinah Munawwarah.

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Announcement of his death, funeral prayer and condolences

Everyone deserves to receive condolences on the news of the departure of Shaykh Muhammad Amin, but three people deserve it more than anyone:

1. Shaykh ‘Abdul ‘Aziz b. Baz, due to his 21-year friendship with, and esteem of, the Shaykh.
2. Shaykh ‘Abdul ‘Aziz b. Salih, the first to recognise his worth in Saudi Arabia and the one who facilitated the Shaykh’s stay there.

Qadi ‘Iyad reported that one of his Shaykhs said, “What is the matter with you people? You take knowledge from us and benefit from us, then you mention us without invoking mercy upon us!” May Allah shower His Encompassing Mercy upon our Shaykh, and may Allah have mercy on the people of knowledge amongst the Muslims in every time and place.

I believe truly that the biographies of men are the educators of the generations, i.e. through their knowledge and landmarks in their lives.

Departed to the mercy of Allah and His Beautiful Presence, the man of virtue, symbol amongst the landmarks, the majestic Shaykh, Imam, man of high aspiration, pure of
soul, exalted in status, noble and generous in disposition, having beautiful character,
chastity in speech and praiseworthy qualities, the pious and trustworthy, our father the
Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin al-Shanqiti.

He passed away on the morning of Thursday 17th Dhul Hijjah 1393 H (1973 CE) in
Makkah after returning from the Hajj. His funeral prayer was led by the respected
Principal of the Islamic University, Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn ‘Abdullah Ibn Baz, in
the Makkkan Haram after the Zuhr Prayer that day, and he was buried in the Ma’allah
Cemetery.

On the night of Sunday 20th Dhul Hijjah after ‘Isha prayer, the funeral prayer was
performed for him in absentia in the Prophet’s Mosque, led by the respected Shaykh
‘Abd al-‘Aziz b. Salih Al-Shaykh, Imam and Khatib of the Prophet’s Mosque and
Head of the Shari’ah Authority of Madinah and of the Courts of the Madinah district.
Countless pilgrims participated in this prayer.

One of the amazing coincidences and good omens was that the Imam recited in the
‘Isha prayer the following ayat: in the first rak’ah, “Truly, those who had faith and
worked righteousness, for them the Gardens of Paradise were a welcome. They live
there for ever, never wanting to depart from there, …” to the end of Surat al-Kahf
(i.e. the last four ayat of the surah); in the second rak’ah, he recited the last few verses
of Surat Maryam, including, “Truly, those who had faith and worked righteousness,
the Most Merciful will grant them Love …” I asked the respected Imam about his
recitation: did he intend and choose these ayat or did they happen to come to his
mind? He, may Allah protect him, replied, “No, they happened to come to mind. Is
there any comment?” I said, “It is an amazing coincidence, since you prayed over the
Shaykh al-Amin rahimahullah afterwards, so I thought you recited them with that
purpose in mind, but it was beautifully appropriate.”

His funeral prayer in absentia was also held at the Islamic University of Madinah and
at many other mosques.

He died rahimahullah after reviving sciences that had faded and left a lasting legacy.
He cultivated multitudes, thousands of graduates of the colleges and institutes of
Riyadh and of the Islamic University of Madinah Munawwarah.

He did not die until he had left in every library and home his Adwa’ al-Bayan to repel
the darknesses and guide to the path. Thus it is neither far-fetched nor an
exaggeration to say: he has not died who has left such a legacy …

People did not write about him, for he did not like that. Yet the young and old, near
and far, the scholar and the layman, all knew him because his actions and his works
spoke for him. Thus his death was not a loss to any particular individual, family,
group or district, but to the entire Islamic world.

I only wrote a few lines about him before, which were published in the introduction to
his lecture on the ayat about the Attributes of Allah. He died with only a little written
about him, such as his birth and childhood. So I now write something about him, not
to introduce him since everyone knows him, but to attempt to do justice to him, which
I cannot.
Three types of biographies

Any biography of a person is considered from two aspects: facts about his life, and his character and methodology.

Biographers always fall into one of three categories:

1) The friend under the influence of the person. He often falls under the sway of emotion, so only looks from one angle. It is said about him, “The eye of pleasure ignores Kalilah’s defects…”

2) The ardent opponent who falls under the sway of his vehemency, so the rest of the previous line of poetry is true about him, “… Just as the eye of wrath exposes the faults.”

3) The moderate and objective writer who seeks to evaluate with balanced scales. Such a person will miss many matters that he is not enthused with, without this being a shortcoming.

Thus, no writing about any person is entirely accurate or complete. Friends and opponents may be reluctant to write biographies, fearing the accusation of being biased and influenced by emotion. Others may be reluctant, fearing that they will not do justice since they did not know the subject well. Thus, unique personalities may depart without their biography being recorded, so those present lose him and later generations lose the story of his life. Remember, the biographies of men are the educators of the generations.

The respected father, Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin rahimahullah had an outstanding personality and a clear character, known to anyone who met him, attended his gatherings, listened to his teaching sessions, read his books or even heard about him. His reputation reached the horizons.

Writing about his like rahimahullah is very difficult due to the the numerous aspects of his personality and the breadth of his scholarly scope. There is no source for writing about him except association and long companionship with him, and gathering reports from his closest friends. Yet the people who have most right to write about him are his students and sons. Although Allah honoured me with his companionship and a lengthy association, by day and night, resident and travelling, within and outside the Kingdom. I learnt many, many things from him. Therefore, I see myself as having most right to write about him, yet when I bring to mind that exemplary personality I hesitate to write. But this is the situation with every biographer: he cannot comprehensively capture his subject, neither concisely nor in detail, so why should I not contribute what I can, the student of a shaykh having most right to write about him? All this without emotion taking me to great lengths, nor awe and respect forcing me to be too concise. He was indeed my Shaykh, and dearer to me than my own father!
He was actually my father in many ways, for I lived under his care for many years in his house, and one roof would gather us in the same room for long periods. He cared for me like one of his sons, and often made sacrifices to give me preference over himself. But dearer than that were the knowledges and traditions that he passed down to me: cultural guidance, virtue in character, loftiness in personality. He did this through his sittings, conversations and lessons without limit and without worrying about the time, for all his sittings were sittings of knowledge, rahimahullah. All his conversations were regarding cultured manners and guidance. He would not need to prepare for any lesson, nor research to answer a question.

I did not have any special time with him due to the numerous brothers who studied with him, living with him in his house, except one specific time: study time between Maghrib and ‘Isha for a period of two years whilst we were in Riyadh. During this time, I studied with him the tafsir of Surat al-Baqarah. That study was my main capital for most of what I earned, and upon it was the foundation of my real study, whether of fixed curricula or otherwise. This was because all chapters of fiqh were included in that study, and most of the principles in Usul were employed in those discussions. Thus it is not far-fetched to say that all surahs after it are commentaries on it, or that whoever knows its tafsir well finds the tafsir of following surahs easy. This study was also the reason for the compilation of the two books, Daf’ Iham al-Idirab (Refuting the Misconception of Contradiction within the Qur’an) and Adwa’ al-Bayan (Explanation of the Qur’an by the Qur’an). Each of them resulted from the process of question and answer. I also studied Usul, fundamentals of Logic and subtle matters of Balaghah (Rhetoric) during that time.

I was honoured to serve him, and fortunate to have his companionship. I feel a heavy debt upon me in writing about him, so this will only be a start, not the end and perhaps others will complete what is left or lacking.

**Biographies and autobiographies**

Biographies are of two types: autobiographies and external biographies. Several scholars and philosophers wrote autobiographies, including:

1) Ibn Sina (d. 428) – his autobiography was a reference for all his students who wrote about him.


3) Ibn al-Khatib (d. 776)

4) Ibn Khaldun (d. 805)

5) Suyuti (d. 911), and others.

What I shall write is in a sense a mixture of biography and autobiography, since much of it is what I heard from him directly and what I sensed and felt of his life during my long companionship with him. May Allah make his life a good example for his
students, and make amongst his sons a fitting follow-up to a precedent of goodness. May He reward us in our affliction and give us goodness in place of it. May He shower him with His Mercy and admit him to the expanses of His Garden …

Biographical facts, as heard from him directly

Name: Muhammad al-Amin, a proper name compounded from two names. Use of “Muhammad” in the name is to draw blessings from it.

Nickname: Abba, with a prolonged hamzah and doubled ba’.

Father’s name: Muhammad al-Mukhtar b. ‘Abd al-Qadir b. Muhammad b. Ahmad Nuh b. Muhammad b. Sidi Ahmad b. al-Mukhtar, of the descendants of Talib Awbek, who is from the descendants of Karir b. al-Muwafi b. Ya’qub b. Jakin al-Abar, forefather of the large and famous tribe known as the Jakanis, and also as the Tajkant.

Tribal lineage: This tribe traces back to Himyar, as the Mauritanian poet Muhammad Fal says, invoking their eloquence as proof of their Arab origin,

*We, the sons of Hasan, our eloquence proves
That our lineage is traced to the purest Arabs.*

*If there is no evidence that we are Arab,*

*Our tongue proves that we are
Look at every rhyming line that we have*

***

Another poet explains the lineage of this tribe to Himyar by saying:

*O you who doubt that we are Arab:*

*Our age and colour made you belie us!*

*The mark of Arabness is clear in our qualities*

*In our forefathers were dignity and faith:*

*The lions of Himyar and the champions of Mudar,*

*With red swords, they were never humiliated.*

The special qualities of Arabness were found abundantly in the Shaykh and in his family and relatives, in poetry and prose. Different sciences and arts were also abundant in his home and tribe. One of their poets explained their inheriting a grounding in Arabness from their mothers by saying to the sceptic:

*We have the eloquent Arabness, and we have*

*Most right out of everyone to carry it in our ribs.*

*You have plucked it from books and learnt it*

*While we have been suckled in it directly.*

Date of birth: 1305 H (?)

Place of birth: He was born near an oasis called Tanbeh in the district of Kifū, region of Shanqit, now known as the Islamic State of Mauritania. Note that Shanqit
(Chinquett) was, and still is, also the name of a village in the district of Atar in remote north-western Mauritania.

**Local situation**

The society was composed of Arabs and non-Arabs, although Arabic was the language of all.

The non-Arabs, descended from negroes, tended to be farmers and craftsmen.

The Arabs tended to be of two types: cultured and uncultured. The cultured ones were those who are occupied with education and trade. The uncultured ones were occupied with trade and raids. The Arabs consisted of numerous tribes: some tribes concentrated on education, others on raids and fighting.

The Jakani tribe uniquely combined education with the arts of war, whilst avoiding the looting of other people’s property. Their tradition of education was strong in both situations: whether they were settled or wandering nomadically, as said by one of their Shaykhs, the ‘Allamah al-Mukhtar b. Buna,

_We are an organised riding-party of nobles,_
_Most honourable of our time, worthier than the rest._
_Well-bred camels’ backs are our school:_
_There we explain the religion of Allah in full._

As for generosity of nature, this was ingrained in them, a quality with which children would grow young, and the elders would grow old. One of their customs was that whenever a delegation of guests stayed at someone’s house, all the neighbours would send whatever they had, whether much or little, in order to participate in serving the guests.

This was the environment in which our Shaykh was brought up. I heard him say: My father passed away whilst I was a child. I was still reciting _Juz’ ‘Amma_ (Part 30 of the Qur’an) then. I inherited a substantial amount of animals and wealth. So I then lived with my mother’s relatives, for my mother was my father’s cousin (daughter of his paternal uncle). I memorised the Qur’an from my maternal uncle ‘Abdullah b. Muhammad al-Mukhtar b. Ibrahim b. Ahmad Nuh, Ahmad Nuh being my father’s great-grandfather too.

**His Education**

He memorised the Qur’an in the house of his maternal relatives, from his maternal uncle ‘Abdullah, as mentioned above. He was ten years old at the time.

He said: I then learnt the script of the ‘Uthmani Mushaf (the Mushaf al-Umm or Source-Copy of the Qur’an) from my cousin (maternal uncle’s son), Sidi Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Mukhtar. I also studied with him _Tajwid_ in the recitation
of Nafi’, the narration of Warsh via Abu Ya’qub al-Azraq and the narration of Qalun via Abu Nashit. I took the sanad (chain of narration) back to the Prophet (sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) in that from him when I was sixteen.

**Types of Qur’anic Study**

Studying the sciences of the Qur’an is regarded as a multi-faceted complementary curriculum, and not limited simply to memorisation and recitation. Rather, it extends to knowledge of the script of the mushaf: where letters are joined up or discrete, where prolongations are part of the script or are pronounced without the presence of a letter of prolongation, and other such matters.

The next discipline is to learn exactly the features of the mushaf, whether in script or recitation. In this science, a famous and well-known poem is *al-Bahr* (“The Ocean”) by Muhammad b. Bujah. In this composition, every word that is mentioned in the Qur’an precisely once, twice, thrice … up to twenty-seven times, including compounded forms, is explained. Each number of repetitions forms a separate chapter.

For example, the word *a’yunuhum* (“their eyes”) in the nominative case occurs precisely three times in the Qur’an: “their eyes were …” [al-Kahf, 18:101], “they turned, with their eyes …” [al-Tawbah, 9:92] and “their eyes revolving …” [al-Ahzab, 33:19]. Ibn Bujah summarises this thus:

“*Their eyes,* nominatively, without presence [i.e. referring to an absent third party] After *were,* *turned* and *revolving.*”

Similarly, the word *ashya’* (with ‘ayn, meaning “similar groups”) occurs precisely twice: “as was done with groups similar to them in the past,” [Saba’/Sheba, 34:54] and “We destroyed your similar groups, so is there any to take admonition?” [al-Qamar, 54:51]. The corresponding line in al-Bahr reads,

“*Similar groups,* is there any to take admonition? And in Sheba in the past, is their mention.

Our Shaykh studied all of this in his childhood, and even composed further verses as an addendum to it to increase its benefit. For example, he composed the following regarding the last lines mentioned above, explaining the vowels and grammatical cases of the occurrence of the word:

*In Surat al-Qamar He addressed and accused, But in absentia in Saba’, making it genitive.*

i.e. In Surat al-Qamar the reciter is being addressed since the *ashya’* belong to the second person plural and are in the accusative case, whilst in Surat Saba’ the *ashya’* belong to the absent third person and are in the genitive case.

This type of study is extremely rare, except as Allah wills. It is an amazing scholarly pursuit to preserve the script and words of the Qur’an from change and alteration, and
one of the consequences of Allah’s promise to safeguard this Qur’an, revealed from Himself, Glorified is He!

**Fiqh, Grammar and Arabic Literature**

Our Shaykh further said: During this period of learning, I also studied some of the concise texts regarding Malik’s fiqh, such as the poetical treatise of the Shaykh Ibn ‘Ashir, and comprehensively studied Arabic literature with my aunt (wife of my maternal uncle), mother of my cousin. In other words, his cousin taught him the special sciences of the Qur’an, whilst his cousin’s mother taught him Arabic literature. He said: I learnt from her:

- the basics of grammar, such as the *Ajrumiyyah*
- wide-ranging studies in the genealogy and history of the Arabs
- the Life of the Prophet (SAWS)
- the poem on Military Expeditions by Ahmad al-Badawi al-Shanqiti that exceeds 500 verses, plus its commentary by the author’s nephew Hammad
- the poem on Arab Genealogy by the afore-mentioned author that has thousands of verses, plus its commentary by the afore-mentioned commentator regarding the descendants of ‘Adnan, for the commentator died before commenting on the verses related to the descendants of Qahtan

Thus, his mother’s relatives’ household comprised his first school, for he studied with his uncles, aunts and cousins. As for the rest of the fields of study, he said:

Maliki *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence) – this was the dominant *Madhab* of the land. I studied the Mukhtasar Khalil (Concise Text of Khalil), beginning its study with Shaykh Muhammad b. Salih and continuing until the section on ’*Ibadat* (Ritual Worship). I then studied with him half of the *Alfiyyah* of Ibn Malik (Poetical Treatise on Arabic Grammar).

He then studied the other fields with numerous *mashayikh*, all of them being Jakanis and some of them being famous ‘ulama of the land. They included:

1) The Shaykh Muhammad b. Salih, famously-known as Ibn Ahmad al-Afram
2) The Shaykh Ahmad al-Afram b. Muhammad al-Mukhtar
3) The Shaykh and ‘Allamah, Ahmad b. ‘Umar
4) The Great Faqih, Muhammad al-Ni’mah b. Zaydan
5) The Great Faqih, Ahmad b. Mud
6) The ‘Allamah, Expert in Various Fields, Ahmad Fal b. Aduh

Our Shaykh said: I took all subjects from these mashayikh: *Nahw* (Grammar), *Sarf* (Morphology), *Usul* (Foundations of Law), *Balaghah* (Rhetoric) and some *Tafsir* (Commentary on the Qur’an) and Hadith. As for Logic and Etiquettes of Research and Debate, we attained this through our own study and research.

[Shaykh ‘Atiyyah says:] The above is what he dictated to me and I recorded.
It should be remembered that all the fields that he studied with mashayikh or from books, he did not stop there. Rather, he was always analysing and studying, attaining more and more proficiency until he became virtually an expert in every field. In fact, he had his own ijtihad and independent research in each field, and we shall touch upon some of these under his methodology for scholarly study and his scholarly legacy.

**His Methodology in Scholarly Study**

Before explaining his scholarly methodology in his studies, we shall glimpse at the dominant and general methodology of his land for students of knowledge and their manner of attaining it.

Studying is regarded as an essential part of life in that land amongst the nomads, whether they are settled or wandering. If a Shaykh settles in one place for a time, delegations of students come to study with him and take from his knowledge. If he settles permanently to teach continually, he is known as a “Murabit” (one who guards the frontier) due to his permanent stay to spread knowledge.¹

The Murabit does not take any payment from his students; if he is well-off, he helps his needy students. Students who have travelled from afar may also help the needy students of that place. The students stay around the Shaykh’s house, setting up tents or temporary houses where they live and have gatherings of knowledge: study, discussion and revision.

The Murabit may be a specialist in one or more fields. If he is a specialist in one field, he teaches in turn different groups of students who are at various levels of study, e.g. beginner, intermediate, advanced. If he specialises in several fields, he divides the student groups according to subject as well.

**Single-subject Study**

The student does not study more than one subject at a time, but rather completes studying one subject before moving on. E.g. he completes a study of Nahw (Arabic grammar) before turning to Balaghah (Rhetoric), Fiqh (Law) before studying Usul (Foundations of Law) to completion. This applies whether the student studies with one shaykh or more.

**Manner of daily study**

The student begins by writing as much text on wooden tablets as he can memorise. Once he has memorised it he erases it and writes another section, continuing until he has memorised a portion of the recommended text according to the usual division.

¹ Presumably, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf’s famous Mauritanian teacher, Shaykh Murabit al-Hajj, takes his title from this category. – U.H.
E.g. in Grammar, the *Alfiyyah* [of Ibn Malik] is divided into four portions, as is the text of Khalil in Fiqh. Once the student has memorised his portion of the text, he comes to the teacher who explains the text according to the student’s capacity to absorb, without opening any book or referring to another source. Once all the students have done this, they go away to revise amongst themselves and discuss what the Shaykh said. They may refer to some commentaries to compare against what they have heard. They do not move on in that study until they reckon that they have learnt everything there is to learn in that chapter. The emphasis is not upon speed or finishing a book: it is upon understanding and absorbing each chapter of study. It is said about one student who was well-known for his high intelligence and capacity to absorb that he would only cover two lines at a time from the text of Khalil. Upon being asked why he did not cover more even though he had a high capacity to absorb, he replied, “I am in a hurry to return to my family.” When it was said to him that the hasty one takes a bigger section at a time he replied, “I wish to perfect what I learn so that I am not forced to study it again, thus becoming delayed.”

**Shaykh al-Shanqiti’s Study**

The studies of the Shaykh were carried out in this manner, except that he showed outstanding abilities in some aspects that are rarely found in others. These can be summarised thus:

1- As mentioned previously, he had an opportunity to study that others rarely have, for the house of his maternal relatives was his first school and he did not need to travel to begin his study. He was also his parents’ only child, and was thus shown special care and attention.

2- He said, *rahimahullah*: I used to be more inclined towards play than towards study until I learnt the letters of the Arabic alphabet and they began teaching me them with the vowels: *ba fathah ba*, *ba kasrah bi*, *ba dammah bu* and similarly with *tha* etc. I asked them whether all letters were treated this way, and they replied in the affirmative so I said, “Enough – I can recite all of them like this,” so that they would leave me alone. They said, “Recite them,” so I recited them all, based on the three or four that they had taught me. Thus they recognised that I had learnt the underlying principle and left me alone. From that time, I began to love reading and studying.

3- He further said, *rahimahullah*: When I had memorised the Qur’an and learnt the ‘Uthmani script, surpassing my fellow-pupils, my mother and her family gave me special attention and determined to send me for studies in other subjects. My mother prepared two camels for me: one having my saddle and books; the other carried my provisions and money. A servant accompanied me with a number of cows. My dress and saddle were prepared in the best possible way out of happiness and encouragement for me in seeking knowledge. This was how I began the path of seeking and attainment.

A life of study is based upon complete love and a lack of formality, whether amongst students or between students and their teacher, along with total adab and respect. It is punctuated by cultured humour and poetical exchanges. Of these, the Shaykh
rahimahullah narrated to me, saying: I came to a Shaykh in order to study with him, and he did not know me so he asked who I was (he was sitting amongst a group of his students). I replied spontaneously:

This is a young man from Jakan, affected by Longing, who has departed from the Arabic tongue. High aspiration has cast him towards you: When the lightning of knowledge flashed, its light shone *** So he came, hoping for a formation of cloud To dress his tongue with its shining ornaments. He became constrained by ignorance of grammar, Unable to distinguish the ‘ayn’s form in fa’ala, So he has come today with yearning, passionate: With Praise to Allah, seeking nothing else. i.e. he wanted to study the Lamiyyah al-Af’al (Poem in Lam about Arabic Verbs).

He continued to be foremost in seeking knowledge, and one of his shaykhs imposed upon him that he should master two subjects together at a time, due to his quick mind and high capacity. He thus gained a high aspiration in study and attainment.

One of his colleagues proposed to him [i.e. offered him a female relative’s hand] in marriage, to which he replied, encouraging the seeking of knowledge:

Sincere friends called me to marriage, Offering me the fair and beautiful. *** They said: marry a coquettish one, With charming looks and a roving sash. She smiles with soft lips, That turn clear water into wine. *** Her glances are like the piercing of arrows, That make the heart taste painful wounds. No wonder, for the glances of the fair-eyed, Strike like polished spears. How many have they killed ***, With no weapons other than fragile eyelashes? I said to them: leave me alone, for my heart Is screaming today from clear ignorance. I am preoccupied with untouched virgins, Whose faces are like the light of dawn. I see them in the parchment, wearing Veils over their beautiful meanings. I spend the night thinking about them, until they dawn Upon the slow-minded with lowered wing. I have deflowered them, forcing myself upon them, Although their honour was not to be violated.2

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2 The last few lines worrying employ a metaphor involving rape. – U.H.
Yes, he used to spend nights seeking knowledge, studying, researching and thinking until he overpowered difficult matters.

He rahimahullah narrated to me, saying: I came to the Shaykh to study with him and he explained the text to me as usual. However, he did not satisfy me fully and did not quench my thirst. I left at the end of my study session with him, feeling the need to remove some confusion and clarify some obscurity. It was Zuhr time, so I took some books and sources and studied them until ‘Asr. However, I had not fulfilled my need so I continued until Maghrib, but I had still not finished. My servant lit some firewood for me so that I could study by its light, as per the usual practice of the students. I continued studying, drinking green tea every time I became tired or lazy. My servant remained at my side, kindling the fire. This continued until the dawn broke. I had remained in my seat, getting up only for the obligatory prayers and to eat. Finally, as the day progressed, I completed my study and clarified my confusion, finding this part of the studies clear and understood like the rest. I therefore finished studying and went to sleep, instructing my servant not to wake me for my usual lesson for that day. This was because I had attained enough in that session and needed to rest after the rigours of the all-night vigil.

He spent the night thinking about them, until they dawned
Upon the slow-minded with lowered wing.

This is a lesson for his students, a path for the seekers of knowledge, in patience ***. Allah has benefited me through this incident in my studies and teaching, especially in a difficult case of inheritance that I had not studied with anyone, for the examinations used to be regarding details, not the core principles ***. (This is incidentally a flaw of today’s organised education.) Every time I became impatient in researching it, I remembered his story (rahimahullah) and persevered until I reached the goal, Praise be to Allah. This lasted from afternoon until the depths of the night, but how much was my delight and enjoyment at succeeding!

Reluctance to Compose Poetry

Despite possessing this tender poetic ability with sweet, overflowing meanings and a simple, generous style, he (rahimahullah) would generally refrain from reciting poetry, even though he had memorised copious amounts of it. He composed the following lines regarding this:

***

I did ask him once (rahimahullah) about his refraining from poetry despite his outstanding ability in it. He replied, “I have not seen it to be an attribute of the best of the people; I fear that I will became famous for it (poetry). I think of the lines attributed to Imam al-Shafi’i:

Were it not that poetry demeans the people of knowledge,
I would this day be a better poet than Labid.
Also, a poet speaks about every matter, and the sweetest poetry is that which is most untrue. Therefore, I do not bother with too much of it.”

However, he (rahimahullah) did compose a number of poetical treatises about various subjects, as I will explain later if Allah wills.

**His work in his native country with the French colonial rulers**

This was similar to other people of knowledge in his land: teaching and giving fatwa. However, he had became famous for his ability and insight as a judge. Despite the presence of the French colonial rulers, the natives of his land had huge trust in him and therefore came to him for judgment, delegations coming from distant places to wherever he would be staying.

**His method in judgment**

When the two parties came to him, he would ask them to put in writing their willingness to refer to him for judgment and their acceptance of his judgment. He would then write the claimant’s claim, underneath which he would write the defendant’s defence, followed by his verdict alongside the claim and defence. He would then give this document to the two parties and say, “Take this to any Shaykh or Governor that you wish.” As for the mashayikh, they would agree with any judgment that he gave, whilst the governors would immediately enforce any judgment issuing from him. He would judge in all matters except those involving murder and the hudud (statutory punishments).

Cases involving murder were treated specially: the French authorities would enforce capital punishment for murder, but only after careful investigation, a thorough, comprehensive trial, and the agreement of two of the leading ‘ulama of the land with the verdict. These two experts comprised the Murder Panel: no execution of a murderer would be carried out unless they agreed to it. Our shaykh rahimahullah was a member of this panel.

**His leaving his land**

By the time he left his land he had become extremely precious and highly-respected. He was a landmark of his land and commanded the respect and trust of all its people, whether governors or governed.

He left his country in order to fulfil the obligation of the Hajj, intending to return afterwards. He travelled by land, writing a collection of precious treatises during his journey. The last of these was a discussion of issues in logic, in a debate with the ‘ulama of the Ma’had ‘Ilmi (Knowledge Institute) at Umm Durman, Sudan.
After he had reached Saudi Arabia, his intention changed: he now wished to stay here. Perhaps it is instructive and good to mention the reason for this change. Like others in his land, he had heard accusations against this country, about their being “Wahhabis.” However, chance meetings can change viewpoints, “for when Allah wishes a matter, He enables its causes.” A strange coincidence was that our Shaykh ended up in a neighbouring tent to that of the Prince Khalid al-Sudayri\(^3\) at one of the stations of the Hajj, with neither of them knowing of the other. Prince Khalid, who had a great taste for literature, was discussing some lines of poetry with his companions. The discussion continued until they asked the Shaykh to participate, and found him to be an ocean without a shore. From that sitting and tent, a new idea emerged. The Prince asked him to visit two Shaykhs when he reached Madinah: Shaykh ‘Abdullah al-Zahim and Shaykh ‘Abdul ‘Aziz b. Salih, hafizahullah.

In Madinah, he met the two of them. He was explicit with them about what he had heard about the country; they replied with wisdom about the way of the people here: their madhhab in fiqh and their path in ‘aqidah. Shaykh ‘Abdul ‘Aziz b. Salih presented our Shaykh with Al-Mughni as the basis of the madhhab and with some of the works of Shaykh-ul-Islam (Ibn Taymiyyah) as a guide to the ‘aqidah. The Shaykh read these and continued his meetings with the other Shaykhs, with long sittings. Our Shaykh found that the people of this country followed a known madhhab of an Imam of Ahl al-Sunnah, Ahmad b. Hanbal rahimahullah, and a sound path in ‘aqidah based on the Qur’an, Sunnah and the way of the Salaf. Thus, the forgery of false accusations disappeared and the source of the true reality became apparent. The relationship between the two sides became entrenched and a mutual desire developed that the Shaykh should stay here in order to benefit the Muslims.

Our Shaykh, rahimahullah, desired this Noble Neighbourhood and would say, “There is no deed greater than explaining the Book of Allah in the Masjid of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.” He was appointed to do this by order of King ‘Abdul ‘Aziz rahimahullah, for the two afore-mentioned Shaykhs were the closest of people to him; Shaykh ‘Abdul ‘Aziz b. Salih had even studied sarf (morphology) and bayan (rhetoric) with him.

\(^3\) The men of the ruling family of Saudi Arabia, Al-Sa’ud, tend to marry women from the Al-Sudayri family.