

**Personal manuscript libraries in the Touat region between care  
and availability - the library of Sheikh Muhammad Bayy  
Bila'lam as a model**

خزائن المخطوط الشخصية بإقليم توات بين العناية والإتاحة - خزانة الشيخ محمد باي بلعالم  
أنموذجاً -

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**Abstract:**

The significant geographical and regional position of the Touat region has played a prominent role in the scientific renaissance it experienced throughout the ages. As a crossroads for the caravans of pilgrims and merchants, and a link between various countries and emirates, Touat became a hub for scholars, jurists, and righteous individuals who journeyed there from all directions. This influx enriched its libraries and manuscript collections with numerous important works, reflecting the cultural heritage and the intellectual and scientific maturity the region had achieved.

The scholars of the region paid special attention to these manuscripts, collecting, preserving, and passing them down from generation to generation. Among these scholars was Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam (may Allah have mercy on him), who dedicated himself to collecting scholarly Islamic manuscripts, working on editing and republishing them. Most of his works involve editing, explaining, and studying valuable and useful manuscripts. He was a pioneer in reviving many of them and presenting them anew in a refined form.

He also owned a private library that includes rare manuscripts covering various disciplines and themes such as Qur'anic manuscripts, Qur'anic sciences, Hadith, jurisprudence, legal verdicts, scholarly correspondence, grammar, and literature. He gathered them from various regions — some from scholars who resided in the Touat region, and others from neighboring countries such as Mali, Mauritania, and Morocco, as well as some acquired from Egypt and the Hijaz.

**Keywords:** manuscript, Personal manuscript libraries, Touat, Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam

**ملخص:**

لقد كان للموقع الجغرافي والإقليمي الهام لمنطقة توات دور بارز في النهضة العلمية التي عرفت عبر العصور، كونه مركز عبور لقوافل الحجاج والتجار، ورابطاً بين العديد من الدول والإمارات، فصار مجمعاً للعلماء والفقهاء والصالحين، النافلين إليه من كل حذب وصوب، ما أثرى الخزائن والمكتبات بالكثير من المخطوطات في مواضيع مهمة، تعبر عن الإرث الثقافي والنضج العلمي والمعرفي الذي بلغته المنطقة، كما كان لعلماء المنطقة عناية بتلك المخطوطات وجمعها وحفظها، وتوارثتها الأجيال وتعاقب عليها الخلف بعد السلف.

ومن أولئك العلماء الشيخ محمد باي بلعالم -رحمه الله- الذي اعتنى بجمع المخطوطات العلمية الشرعية، وسعى إلى تحقيقها وإعادة نشرها، فأغلب مؤلفاته ما بين تحقيق مع شرح ودراسة لمخطوطات مفيدة قيمة، وقد كان له قصب السبق في إحياء بعضها وإعادة بعثها في ثوب قشيب، كما أن له مكتبة خاصة تحتوي على مخطوطات نادرة، في فنون وأغراض متنوعة، كالمصاحف وعلوم القرآن والحديث والفقه والفتاوى والمراسلات العلمية والنحو والأدب، وقد جمعها من مناطق متعددة، فبعضها لعلماء أقاموا في إقليم توات، كما تضم بعض المخطوطات من دول الجوار مثل: المالي وموريتانيا والمغرب الأقصى، كما اقتنى بعضها من مصر والحجاز.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** مخطوط، خزائن المخطوطات الشخصية، توات، محمد باي بلعالم.

## Introduction:

The Touat region in southwestern Algeria is considered a repository of manuscripts and historical documents, containing numerous libraries that represent the civilizational heritage of a pioneering scholarly movement that began in the 9th century AH (15th century CE). Touat emerged as an economic and cultural center whose influence extended beyond its borders to neighboring countries.

Touat was adorned with the garment of knowledge, and its sons—both scholars and students—dedicated themselves to the pursuit of learning. They sparked a scientific renaissance in the region and secured a respected position among other intellectual centers. In fact, Touat contributed to the formation and development of other scholarly cities such as Timbuktu, which still acknowledges the merit and influence of this region. Despite its somewhat delayed development compared to other areas, Touat became a haven for knowledge and scholars, attracting students, travelers, researchers, and intellectuals. Manuscript libraries were an indispensable part of this scholarly life.

Due to its remoteness from major emirates, states, and administrative centers, Touat did not have manuscript collections and libraries in the same institutional form as found in larger scholarly cities. Historical records show that the rulers of the emirates and kingdoms who once controlled the region paid little attention to developing such knowledge repositories. Their primary focus was to exploit the region as a source of revenue through taxes and levies, and to use its inhabitants as soldiers for military campaigns into neighboring areas. As a result, Touat did not experience the same development in library culture as its sister cities. Instead, a unique pattern of manuscript collections emerged—what could be termed “popular” or “family-owned” libraries—established by individuals or small groups who gathered manuscripts with whatever resources they had and enriched them with what came into their possession.

Scholars in Touat, both in the past and present, have devoted themselves to preserving and caring for these collections, making their contents accessible to researchers and students of knowledge. Each scholar, within their capacity and level of expertise, has sought to highlight these manuscripts and promote awareness of their significance.

This study aims to demonstrate the care shown by Touat’s scholars for manuscript libraries and the special value these manuscripts held in the region. It seeks to address the following questions:

- What are the categories, types, and forms of manuscript libraries in the Touat region?

- What are the most important manuscript libraries currently found in Touat?
- Who is Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam, and what are the most valuable manuscripts in his collection?
- What efforts did Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam undertake in editing, preserving, and disseminating the scholarly heritage of Touat, and how did he make it accessible to researchers and those interested in manuscript studies?

To answer these questions, the study is divided into the following sections:

1. **Introduction:** Highlights the importance of the topic, the research questions, structure, and methodology.
2. **An Overview of Family-Owned Manuscript Libraries in the Touat Region:** Their patterns and characteristics.
3. **Biography of Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam and His Scholarly Status.**
4. **Treasures of Manuscripts in the Library of Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam.**
5. **Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam's Care for Touat Manuscripts.**
6. **His Efforts in Editing and Publishing Touat's Scholarly Heritage.**
7. **Access to Manuscripts in Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam's Library and His Reception of Researchers.**
8. **Conclusion:** Summarizes the key findings and provides recommendations and suggestions.

To achieve the intended goal of this research, I adopted an approach consistent with standard academic methods and scholarly investigation. I utilized the **descriptive-analytical method** to document and assess the current state of manuscript libraries in the Touat region, exploring their features and characteristics. I also employed the **historical method** to trace the origins of these libraries and recount some historical events related to their collection and transmission across generations. This method was also used in writing the biography of Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam—the subject of this study. In addition, I used the **comparative method** to draw comparisons between different types of libraries and highlight their similarities and differences.

### **1- Definition of Family-Owned Manuscript Libraries in the Touat Region (Translated to English):**

The Touat region has long been known for its abundance of family-owned or community-based manuscript libraries, many of which were established by scholars and reformers. These libraries can be categorized into two main types:

### **1-1: Manuscript Libraries Affiliated with Zawiyas (Religious Institutions) in Touat**

These are libraries established by their founders as part of a zawiya (Islamic religious school or center), serving students and visitors under the supervision of the head of the zawiya. Some notable examples include:

**1-1-1: The Library of the Awlad al-Qadi Family**  
Located in the Qasr of Awlad Sa'id in Timimoun. It was originally managed by Qadi Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Mas'ud al-Tazdayti (d. 895 AH), and later by his son Abu al-Makaram 'Abd al-Karim (d. 941 AH). The family continued to maintain and enrich the library, and it remains in the care of their descendants to this day.

**1-1-2: The Library of the Al-Bakri Family**  
Located in Tamentit, it was founded by Shaykh Maymun ibn 'Umar al-Marini (d. early 10th century AH) and is considered one of the oldest and richest libraries in the area. Under its second founder, Shaykh al-Bakri ibn 'Abd al-Karim (d. 1133 AH), it contained around 3,000 manuscripts.

**1-1-3: The Library of the Zawiya of Sidi Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim al-Maghili**  
Located near his mausoleum, it is said to have been established in the 10th century AH (Bel'alem, **The Exalted Journey to the Touat Region: Mentioning Some Scholars, Monuments, Manuscripts, Customs, and Touat's Regional Connections**, 2005, p. 441).

**1-1-4: The Tanlan Library**  
Founded by the scholar Sidi Ahmad ibn Yusuf al-Tanlani (d. 1078 AH).

**1-1-5: The Library of the Riqani Zawiya**  
Established by Mawlay 'Abd Allah al-Riqani (d. 1148 AH).

**1-1-6: The Library of the Qantara Zawiya (Religious Lodge):**  
It was established in the 11th century AH (17th century CE). It is said that Sheikh Omar bin Muhammad bin Al-Mustafa (d. 1157 AH / 1744 CE) was deeply interested in it and gathered its books. Sheikh Moulay Ahmed Al-Tahiri described it, saying:  
"In this village, there is a large library containing books on all branches and disciplines of Islamic law. Every time a king of Morocco ascended to power, he would send a complete collection of valuable books to this zawiya, covering every field and all areas of knowledge." (Al-Tahiri & Naseem, 2010, p. 95)

There are other libraries in the region, but what I have mentioned here suffices as an example

These examples represent only a portion of the many zawiya-affiliated libraries throughout the Touat region.

### **1-2: Personal Libraries in the Touat Region**

These are private libraries owned by individual scholars. It is rare to find a scholar in the region without his own library. Some examples include:

#### **1-2-1: The Library of Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Isma‘il al-Jarari (d. 1064 AH)**

Enriched by books gifted to him by an Ottoman vizier during his visit to Istanbul. He brought them to Touat and requested that they be transferred to the Prophet’s Mosque after his death. Unfortunately, many of them were damaged by termites and decay. (Al-‘Ayyashi, no date, p. 64)

#### **1-2-2: The Library of Muhammad ibn al-Mabrouk al-Badawi (d. 1196 AH)**

Described by Shaykh Mawlay al-Tihami al-Ghitawi as a rich and well-known reference library in the fields of jurisprudence, history, literature, and more. It became a destination for students and researchers.

#### **1-2-3: The Library of Muhammad ibn Malik al-Fulani (d. 1248 AH)**

He established this library himself, writing some of its manuscripts by hand, with the help of copyists from Touat and the lands of Takrur (Bay, p. 11) (West Africa).

#### **1-2-4: The Library of al-Hasan ibn Sa‘id al-Bakri (d. 1286 AH)**

He invested heavily in his library, acquiring rare and valuable books, and left behind a collection that covered all branches of knowledge. (Al-Bakr, p. 172)

#### **1-2-5: The Library of Shaykh Muhammad Bayy Bila‘lam**

Located in the city of Aoulef, Adrar Province, Algeria. It contains around **419 manuscripts**, including books, poems, handwritten documents, fatwas, and legal opinions. Shaykh Bila‘lam founded it when he began teaching and leading prayers in Aoulef in 1952. From the beginning, he intended the library to be a public endowment, accessible to researchers and students. The collection includes manuscripts inherited from his scholarly ancestors—members of a respected scholarly family in Touat—as well as others gifted by individuals, families, and libraries from across the region. It also includes photographic copies of important manuscripts from other Touat libraries. (Abdullah S. H., Interview with Sheikh Hamed Lamine Abdullah, librarian of Sheikh Bay Balam Library in Aoulef, on September 25, 2023.)

There are many other private libraries belonging to scholars in this vast region, which are too numerous to fully list here

### **1-3: The Importance of Manuscripts to Touat's Scholars and Key Family Libraries**

Touat witnessed a scientific renaissance from the beginning of the 10th century AH, marked by a strong scholarly interest in copying, collecting, and acquiring books. The region's strategic position as a hub for pilgrims and trade caravans made it a critical passage for books and scribes. Scholars often bought books from merchants or borrowed them from other owners to make copies during their stay in the area. This environment created fertile ground for manuscript culture.

Touat's scholars succeeded in gathering hundreds of thousands of manuscripts, forming the many libraries we know today in the region's scholarly centers. The value placed on manuscripts became a defining feature of Touat's scholarly identity.

One of the early scholars interested in manuscripts was **Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Kabir**, who collected fiqh (jurisprudence), hadith, and historical manuscripts, which he used in his school's curriculum in central Adrar. A manuscript he loaned to the Ja'fari family's library in Bouda still bears his name.

**Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz Sidi 'Umar al-Mahdawi** also collected numerous manuscripts on jurisprudence and history. He utilized them to produce scholarly works, the most notable being "Qatf al-Zaharat fi Dhikr 'Ulama' Touat" ("Plucking the Blossoms: On the Scholars of Touat"), which introduces the region's scholars based on the materials he gathered.

Among more recent scholars, Judge and Scholar 'Abd Allah al-Balbali al-Kusami made a significant contribution to manuscript preservation through his well-organized library in the Qasr of Kusam—one of the most important family-owned collections in the region (**Omar, Qatf al-Zahrat min Akhbar 'Ulama' Tuwat., 2002, pp. 9-13**).

Also noteworthy is the continued effort of the al-Bakri family of Tamentit, especially Shaykh al-Hajj Ahmad Didi al-Bakri (d. 1951), who diligently preserved his ancestral manuscript heritage and used it as part of his educational curriculum (**Abdullah B. , 2011/2012, pp. 80-84**)

## **2. Biography of Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam:**

## 2-1: His Birth and Early Life

Muhammad ibn Muhammad ‘Abd al-Qadir ibn Muhammad al-Mukhtar ibn Ahmad al-‘Alim, known as **Sheikh Bayy**, was one of the contemporary Touat Fulani **scholars**. He was a religious scholar, linguist, grammarian, historian, literary figure, poet, preacher, and prolific author. He was born in **1348 AH / 1930 CE** in the village of **Sahil** in **Qobli**, located in the Adrar Province of southern Algeria.

He memorized the Qur’an and learned the basics of jurisprudence and Arabic under the guidance of his father and Sheikh ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Makki. He then joined **the Tahiriya School in Sali**, where he studied for seven years. His teacher, **Mawlay Ahmad ibn Mu’ti al-Sab’i**, attested to his knowledge, intelligence, diligence, and commitment, and granted him a scholarly license (ijazah).

## 2-2: Founding of His Islamic School

In the early **1950s**, Sheikh Bayy (may Allah have mercy on him) founded the **Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umayr School for Islamic Sciences** in the city of **Aoulef**. His goal was to educate both male and female students in religious and linguistic matters to eliminate ignorance and combat the illiteracy imposed by brutal colonialism (Balam M. B., *Al-Rihla Al-‘Uliyya*) on the people of his homeland.

When French colonial authorities began to tighten their grip on scholars and religious leaders, he was compelled to close the school to protect his students from the oppression of the occupiers.

However, after **Algeria gained its independence**, he quickly reopened the school, which soon began to attract a large number of students—even from distant regions. This growing number of students led Sheikh Bayy to introduce a **boarding system** in **1964**. To ensure the school kept pace with modern demands, he established an **internal code of conduct** to regulate student commitment and encourage discipline and perseverance. (**Hafidh, (Rijal Sadaqu, p. 16)**)

## The School’s Curriculum

The school—or rather, this **Islamic stronghold**, as one might call it—offered a structured and comprehensive curriculum:

- **Qur’an Memorization:** Conducted in levels, starting from a preparatory stage and culminating in a sixth level where the student completes the memorization of the entire Qur’an.
- **Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh):** Taught according to the **Maliki school**, with an open-minded and non-dogmatic approach.

• **Theology (Tawhid):** Studied without over-complication or philosophical entanglements, relying strictly on the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

• **Arabic Language Sciences:** Including grammar (nahw), morphology (sarf), rhetoric (balaghah)) ( **Balam M 'Al-Rihla Al'-Uliyya** ) (, and related fields

### A Notable Feature of the School

A remarkable and admirable aspect of this school is that the **main reference texts used by the students were authored by Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam himself**. As a prolific writer (as will be detailed later), he provided much of the curriculum material.

Many scholars, jurists, imams, and Qur'an teachers graduated from this school. The majority of them went on to serve in the religious and educational sectors across Algeria, fulfilling their responsibilities with distinction

### 2-3. Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam's Endowments to the Prophet's Mosque Library

He made repeated visits each year during the Hajj and Umrah seasons to the **Prophet's Mosque Library**, located at Bab 'Uthman in Medina, where he studied numerous valuable Islamic manuscripts. Sheikh Muhammad Bayy donated a significant collection of his own manuscripts—both printed and handwritten—to this library, particularly works by Algerian scholars. His endowments include:

- Multaqā al-Adilla al-Aṣḥiyya wa al-Far'iyya al-Muwaddaḥa li-s-Sālik 'alā Faṭḥ ar-Raḥīm al-Mālik (4 volumes)
- al-Istidlāl bi-l-Kitāb wa-s-Sunnah an-Nabawiyyah (a commentary/scholar's edition in 2 volumes)
- Zād as-Sālik (2 volumes)
- Faṭḥ ar-Raḥīm al-Mālik fī Madhhab al-Imām Mālik
- Kashf al-Jalbāb 'alā Jawharat aṭ-Ṭullāb fī 'Ulūm al-Furūḍ wa-l-Ḥisāb
- Kashf ad-Dithār 'alā Tuḥfa al-Āthār
- Rukā'iz al-Wuṣūl 'alā Manẓūmat al-'Umrīṭī fī 'Ulūm al-Uṣūl
- al-Miftāḥ an-Nūrānī 'alā al-Madkhāl ar-Rabbānī fī al-Gharīb al-Qur'ānī
- Minḥat al-Aṭrāb 'alā Malḥat al-I'rāb (**Madinah, Manuscripts of the Library of the Prophet's Mosque (Descriptive Catalog), 2008, p. 213**)
- ...among others. In recognition of his contributions, the library administrators dedicated a special wing in his name to house all his donated

works, symbolising the deep roots and longstanding tradition of Islam in Algeria. (Balam M. B., (Al-Rihla Al-'Uliyya), p. 507)

## **2.4. His Writings**

Sheikh Bayy was an extraordinarily prolific author, producing **42 works** spanning Qur'anic sciences, hadith terminology, jurisprudence, usul al-fiqh (principles), grammar, and history. His writings reflect a deep encyclopaedic knowledge and a distinctive methodology, especially in his structured legal commentaries that tied classical texts to the evidentiary principles of the Maliki school.

His extensive travels—such as the Hajj and journeys throughout Islamic lands—enabled scholarly exchanges and broadened his exposure, enhancing his writing (Balam M. B., (Al-Rihla Al-'Uliyya), p. 86) and teaching. His works include

- **Qur'anic Sciences**

- Diyā' al-Ma'ālim 'alā Alfīyyat al-Gharīb by Ibn al-'Ālim
- al-Miftāḥ an-Nūrānī 'alā al-Madkhāl ar-Rabbānī

- **Hadith**

- Kashf ad-Dithār 'alā Tuḥfa al-Āthār

- **Jurisprudence**

**(Fiqh)**

Includes titles such as Faḥ ar-Raḥīm al-Mālik, al-Jawāhir al-Kanziyya, Zād as-Sālik, al-Istidlāl bi-l-Kitāb wa-s-Sunnah, and many comprehensive multi-volume works linking legal texts to foundational evidence.

- **Inheritance**

**Law**

**(Furū')**

Works such as ad-Durra as-Sunniyya fī 'Ilm Mā Tarithuhu al-Barriyya and Kashf al-Jalbāb.

- **Usūl**

**al-Fiqh**

Titles include Rukā'iz al-Wuṣūl and Mūyyasar al-Huṣūl 'alā Safīnat al-Uṣūl.

- **Grammar**

**(Nuḥū)**

Grammar works like al-Lu'lu' al-Manzūm, Kifāyat al-Manhūm, and several detailed commentaries.

- **History**

**and**

**Biography**

Works such as Qabīlat Flān fī al-Mādī wa-l-Ĥādir and travel and biographical accounts including al-Rihla al-'Ulyā ilā Manṭiqat Ṭuwāt.

- **Prophetic Biography (Sīra)**

- Faḥ al-Mujīb fī Sīrat an-Nabī

- **Miscellaneous**

She wrote essays about subjects like the Islamic turban, gave a variety of lectures, and authored travelogues.

Sheikh Bayy passed away on 24 Rabī' II 1430 AH / April 19, 2009 CE. (Balam M. B., (Al-Rihla Al-'Uliyya), pp. 380-385)

### 3. Treasures of Manuscripts in Sheikh Muhammad Bayy Bila'lam's Library

Sheikh Bayy devoted himself to assembling a rich collection of manuscripts during his scholarly career. Many were inherited from his father, Muhammad 'Abd al-Qādir al-Fulānī, and his grandfather, Muhammad al-Ḥasan al-Fulānī. Others were donated by acquaintances connected with Touat's manuscript collections, or sent from Timbuktu and the Sahel region—especially manuscripts from scholars of Kunta, with whom he maintained strong ties.

Below are some of the rare and valuable works housed in his library (the list is selective rather than exhaustive):

- al-Badr al-Ṭālī' fī Ḥall Jam' al-Jawāmī' by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864 AH)
- al-Bard al-Muwashshī fī Qaṭ' al-Maṭāmi' wa-l-Rashā
- Takmila al-Khazarjiyya fī al-'Arūḍ by Muhammad ibn Abī al-Muzmirī (d. 1160 AH)
- al-Talkhīṣ al-Mufīd 'alā Risālat Ibn Abī Zayd by Muhammad al-Amīn ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Fulānī (d. 1254 AH)—four complete copies
- Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wa-l-Ḥikam by Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī (d. 795 AH)—a rare Maghrebi-Arabic copy
- al-Dhahab al-Ibrīz fī Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-'Azīz by Muhammad ibn al-Mukhtār al-Yayālī (d. 1166 AH)
- Raqm al-Ḥullāl fī Niẓm ad-Duwal by Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 776 AH), corrected copy dated 903 AH
- az-Zilāl fī al-Ḥalāl wa-l-Ḥarām by Ḥajrāmī al-Barnāwī (d. 1169 AH)
- ash-Shumūs aṭ-Ṭawālī' biẓalām Mā Aḥdatha 'inda al-Qubūr by Muhammad ibn Bādī al-Kuntī (d. 1388 AH)
- A rare Eastern copy of **Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim**, with marginal variant readings
- al-'Awāriḍ al-'Atīqa and al-Faṭḥ al-Fayyāḍ fī Sharḥ Shifā' aṭ-Ṭālib
- Fiqh al-A'yān fī Ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān by al-Mukhtār ibn Aḥmad al-Kuntī
- al-Fawāṣil fī Nashr Mā Lzamzam min al-Fiḍāl
- Mukhtaṣar nawād al-ziyādāt by Abī Zayd al-Tanānī (d. 1189 AH)
- Nuzhat an-Nazar wa-nukhbat al-Fikr by Ibn Farḥūn (d. 746 AH)
- Niḍār adh-Dhahab min Kulli Fan Muntaḥab by al-Mukhtār ibn Aḥmad al-Kuntī
- al-Nafḥa ar-Rundiyya fī Sharḥ at-Tuḥfa al-Wardiyya—a manuscript copied by the author's student
- al-Wajīz 'alā Mukhtaṣar Khalīl—two complete copies
- Wiqāyat al-Muta'allim min al-Laḥn al-Muthallam by Muhammad ibn Bādī al-Kuntī

This extraordinary collection reflects Sheikh Bayy's dedication to preserving rare works and his commitment to intellectual legacy.

#### **4. Sheikh Mohammed Bay Boulalem's care for the Touat manuscript :**

At the beginning of the 1970s, Sheikh Muhammad Bay began to feel the necessity of spreading and introducing the nation to the heritage of the scholars of Tuat, and the obligation to disseminate and serve it—especially when the province of Adrar started organizing study days and scientific conferences about the scholars of Tuat and their intellectual and scientific contributions

Through these events, he began to publish some lectures to introduce the scholars and highlight their role in the scientific renaissance that Tuat experienced, as well as their efforts in enriching the movements of authorship and education. These included figures such as Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Karim al-Maghili, Imam Muhammad ibn Ab al-Mazmari, Judge Si Hamza al-Fulani, Sheikh Ibn al-'Alim al-Zajlawi, the scholar Abd al-Rahman al-Tanlani, and others.

In those lectures, he relied on manuscript collections that he frequented and regularly consulted. (Balam M. B., *Al-Rihla Al-'Uliyya*, p. 150)

March 1980, Issue No. 11: Glimpses into the Method of Education in Tuat Through Scientific Heritage and Its Associated Customs.  
April 16, 1981, Issue No. 20.

And Issue No. 15, dated March 20, 1980, in which a lecture was published titled "An Introduction to Some Scholars of the Sahara and the Dialogues That Took Place Between Them," delivered at the third symposium. This article mentions his previous symposiums, where he addressed several topics.

In the first symposium, he spoke about "The Manuscripts Left to Us by the Scholars of Tuat Until Now."

In the second symposium, he discussed "Selections from Poetic and Prose Manuscripts by Poets of Tuat."

As for the third symposium, held in 1980, he addressed "An Introduction to Some Scholars of the Sahara and the Dialogues That Took Place Between Them."

He began the lecture with the words:

"...what took place between the eminent scholars of discussions and debates on religious and legal topics, which shows that Tuat and the surrounding Saharan regions were like a jungle of lions—eminent figures who grappled with one another on this land in the pursuit of knowledge, seeking to clarify the legal truth and the ideal method left to us by the Lawgiver." (*Al-Qabas Magazine*, 1980, p. 77)

## **5 – Sheikh Muhammad Bay's Efforts in Editing and Publishing Tuat Heritage:**

May Allah have mercy on him; he devoted himself to collecting the Islamic scholarly manuscripts of the scholars of Tuat and worked diligently to edit and republish them. Most of his works are commentaries, explanations, versifications, or scholarly studies of valuable and useful manuscripts. After reviewing the works of Tuat's scholars, he felt it was his duty to spread and serve this heritage, dedicating all his time and efforts to editing, explaining, and preserving them.

He firmly believed that manuscripts are a part of the legacy of Tuat's scholars and serve as important testimony to the scientific and cultural glory that the region once attained. In fact, the interest in heritage and the efforts to revive, analyse, and study it with balanced scholarly rigour is a way to honour and immortalise the memory of those scholars—a celebration and preservation of their legacy—provided it is approached with sound, objective, and committed methodology.

Sheikh Muhammad Bay Bel'alam (may Allah have mercy on him) was a pioneer in reviving some of these works and reintroducing them in a refreshed and accessible form. Below is a brief overview of some of his edited works:

- **Ḍiyā' al-Ma'ālim 'alā Alfīyyat al-Gharīb li Ibn al-'Ālim**  
In this work, the Sheikh came across the Alfīyyah (thousand-line poem) written by Sheikh Muhammad ibn al-Sayyid Muhammad ibn al-'Ālim al-Zajlawi al-Tuwāti. The author had compiled rare and unusual words found in the Qur'an and versified them into more than a thousand lines. Sheikh Muhammad Bay edited this work and published it in two volumes. He completed the final draft in early Jumada al-Thani, 1409 AH. **(Balam M. B., (Al-Miftah al-Nurani 'ala al-Madkhal al-Rabbani li al-Mufrad al-Gharib fi al-Qur'an), p. 79)**

- **Al-Miftāḥ al-Nūrānī 'alā al-Madkhal al-Rabbānī fī al-Gharīb fī al-Qur'ān**  
Sheikh Muhammad Bay edited the poem "Gharīb al-Qur'ān" (Rare Words in the Qur'an) by Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir al-Tilili al-Sufi from Algeria. He explained it and published it. He completed the final draft in early Sha'bān of the year 1409 AH.

- **Fath al-Jawād: Commentary on the Poem al-'Aziyyah by Ibn Bād**  
This is a commentary and critical edition of the poem by Sheikh Muhammad ibn Bādī al-Kuntī on Matn al-'Aziyyah, covering topics such as monotheism (tawḥīd), acts of worship, transactions, inheritance, and ethics. The final draft was completed on the morning of Friday, the 11th of Jumādā al-Ūlā, 1408 AH. **(Balam M. B.,**

(Fath al-Jawad: Commentary on the Poem al-‘Izziyyah by Ibn Bad), no date, p. 285)

**-Al-Mabāḥith al-Fikriyyah: Commentary on al-Urjūzah al-Bakriyyah**  
An edited and annotated commentary on the poem al-Awlawiyyāt by Sheikh Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Bakrī al-Tinlānī al-Tuwātī. It includes content on monotheism, jurisprudence (fiqh), and ethics. He completed it on Thursday, the 5th of Shawwāl, 1414 AH. **(Balam M. B., (Al-Mabahith al-Fikriyya: Commentary on the Bakriyyah Urjuzah), no date, p. 293)**

**- Marji‘ al-Furū‘ ilā al-Ta’ṣīl min al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah wa al-Ijmā‘ al-Kafil**

This work consists of ten volumes and is a commentary and critical edition of the poem by Sheikh Khalīfa ibn Ḥasan al-Sūfī, based on the Mukhtaṣar Khalīl. The poem is titled Jawāhir al-Iklīl. Sheikh Muhammad Bay followed a specific methodology in editing it. The final draft was completed on the evening of Thursday, the 17th of Dhū al-Qa’dah, 1422 AH **(Balam M. B., (Marji‘ al-Furu‘ ila al-Ta’sil min al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah wa al-Ijma‘ al-Kafil: A Commentary on the Poem of Khalifah ibn Hasan al-Sufi on the Poem of Khalil titled Jawahir al-Ikleel), 2009, p. 279).**

**- Kashf al-Jilbāb: Commentary on Jawharat al-Ṭullāb in the Science of Inheritance and Arithmetic**

This is an annotated edition of the commentary on the poem Jawharat al-Ṭullāb by the scholar ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakūṭī al-Malāykhāfi al-Tuwātī. The final draft was completed on the 13th of Jumādā al-Ūlā, 1407 AH **(Balam M. B., (Kashf al-Jilbab: Commentary on Jawharat al-Tullab in the Sciences of Inheritance and Arithmetic), no date, p. 1119).**

**- Fawākih al-Kharīf: Commentary on Bughiyyat al-Sharīf in the Noble Science of Inheritance** — A commentary and critical edition of the Bughiyyat al-Sharīf poem by Sheikh Muhammad ibn Badi al-Kunti. Completed in **Jumada II, 1407 AH. (Balam M. B., Fawākih al-Kharīf: Commentary on Bughiyyat al-Sharīf in the Noble Science of Inheritance, no date, p. 89)**

**- Al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm: Commentary on Nuzhat al-Ḥulūm** — A commentary and critical edition of the poem by Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ab on the text Al-Ajurrumiyya. It was finished on **8 Rabi‘ al-Mawlid, 1407 AH. (Balam M. B., Al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm: Commentary on Nuzhat al-Ḥulūm, No date, p. 116)**

**- Awn al-Qayyūm: Commentary on Kashf al-Ghumūm** — A commentary and critical edition of the poem by Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ab (based on the introduction by Ibn Ājurrūm). Completed on **28 Jumada I, 1407 AH.**

- **Al-Tuḥfat al-Wasīmah ‘alā al-Durrat al-Yatīmah** — A commentary and critical edition of an anonymous poem on inheritance. Completed on **13 Jumada I, 1413 AH** (Balam u. B., No date, p. 53).

- **Al-Ghuṣn al-Dānī fī Tarjamat wa Ḥayāt al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Umar al-Tinlānī**—A biographical work on Sheikh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Umar al-Tinlānī, completed on 25 Rajab I, 1424 AH. (Balam M. B., **Al-Ghuṣn al-Dānī fī Tarjamat wa Ḥayāt al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Umar al-Tinlānī**, 2004, p. 53)

- **Inqishā‘ al-Ghumāmah wa al-Ilbās ‘an Ḥukm al-‘Imāmah wa al-Libās** — A single-volume work of **109 pages**, covering twenty topics, completed on **2 Jumada II, 1419 AH**. The author concluded it with his critical edition of a pleasant poem by Muhammad ibn Badi al-Kunti called *Murīḥ al-Bāl min Aḥkām al-Inti‘āl* (Balam M. B., **Inqishā‘ al-Ghumāmah wa al-Ilbās ‘an Ḥukm al-‘Imāmah wa al-Libās min Khilāl Su‘āl as-Sa‘īd Harmās**, studied and edited by Omar bin ‘Araaj, 2012-2013) (May Allah have mercy on him).

## 6. Making Manuscripts Accessible and Welcoming Researchers

One of the most significant obstacles facing researchers and heritage preservationists is the practices of some manuscript holders—locking them away and refusing access. This leads many researchers to abandon their work on heritage, as most manuscript collections—especially family libraries in the Tuwat region—remain inaccessible to scholars for various reasons. Owners often cite theft and looting by visitors: borrowers who don’t return manuscripts, poor preservation leading to deterioration from disasters and floods, brittle, stuck pages, and mold infestation due to improper storage. As a result, many owners restrict access. Their concerns are understandable, particularly since some visitors lack the necessary expertise to handle fragile manuscripts—an observation commonly shared by manuscript custodians.

However, Sheikh Muhammad Bay (may God have mercy on him) had a different approach. He believed that welcoming researchers and supporting their work honored the authors of those manuscripts and helped preserve their intellectual legacy from neglect and loss. He warmly welcomed dozens of researchers into his personal library, encouraged them in heritage work, and provided them with copies and images of manuscripts. He even assigned his students to assist visitors in his private office. Many researchers gratefully acknowledged his invaluable support in their studies and relied on him for access to rare manuscripts and books. He stood in stark contrast to other closed-minded scholars limited in their academic outlook.

Among those who testified to his generosity was Dr. Mohammed Hawtiyah, who met him in the 1980s and benefited greatly from his help in research on the Tuwat region. Others included Prof. Dr. Mabrouk al-Misri, Prof. Dr. Mohammed Jeradi—who frequently consulted with him while working on his doctorate

examining the legal rulings of al-Zajjālūy—and Prof. Dr. al-Hamdi Ahmad, among many others. (Iblali, Social and Cultural Contributions of Sheikh Muhammad Bay Balam in the Tuwat Region (1348 AH / 1430 AH / 1930 CE–2009 CE), Master's thesis in Modern and Contemporary History, 2012/2013, p. 128)

Following Sheikh Bay's death, his successors continued his legacy of transparency. Fearing the loss of his treasured collection, they embraced modern technology—digitizing, photographing, and cataloging the manuscripts. They welcomed several research centers, allowed access for imaging and indexing, and supported national projects for reviving Arab heritage and preserving the Algerian heritage library. These teams spent days at the library, fully digitizing and organizing the entire collection onto CDs to ensure researchers could easily access and reference the materials anytime. (al-‘Annab, 2023, p. 6)

### **Conclusion:**

- Manuscripts are part of the Islamic nation's heritage and history. Preserving them, diligently reviving them, and making them available to researchers is a way of celebrating and immortalizing the nation's glories and scholars.
- The Tuwat region is known for its numerous family or community manuscript collections established by scholars and reformers, who gathered manuscripts and enriched their libraries with what they could access, using the resources available to them.
- Scholar Sheikh Muhammad Bay Balam made a significant scholarly contribution to the Tuwat region, especially in the field of manuscripts. He was one of its earliest advocates, practically calling for the preservation of this cultural heritage, its cataloging, and promotion.
- Sheikh Bay also helped bring these manuscripts to light and made them available to researchers, with hundreds of valuable and rare manuscripts housed in his library.
- He made tremendous efforts to edit and comment on some manuscripts and introduced many lesser-known scholars through their writings and manuscripts.
- Sheikh Bay continually encouraged the community to share their manuscripts and make them accessible to researchers, ensuring the benefit would be communal since these works belong to everyone.
- Sheikh Muhammad Bay Balam laid a foundational stone in preserving and editing manuscripts across the Tuwat region.
- He served the heritage of his region and its scholars, highlighting their contributions to the Maliki school. Among his efforts were issuing the work *Al-Wajiz fi Sharh Mukhtasar Khalil* by al-Zijali, publishing works of Moulay Ahmed al-Tahiri, the poetic compositions of Muhammad ibn ‘Abb al-Muzammiri, and books by Muhammad ibn Badi and others in his writings and lectures.

• Sheikh Bay believed that welcoming and supporting researchers honored the original authors of these manuscripts and helped safeguard their legacy from obscurity and loss. He received dozens of researchers in his private library, encouraged them to serve heritage, and provided them with copies and images.

• After his passing, those who managed his library followed his example by making manuscripts accessible and welcoming researchers. To preserve his collection, they oversaw the digitization, photographing, and sharing of the manuscripts with scholars and researchers.

• He recommended that specialized centers for manuscript editing and digitization-especially the Manuscripts Center in Adrar and the Manuscripts Lab at Ahmed Draia University-along with researchers in the field, pay attention to the heritage of Tuwat scholars, as the region holds a vast manuscript treasury with thousands of unique and rare works. Sadly, many have been lost due to poor preservation and natural disasters, and many remaining manuscripts are still in very poor condition, eaten away by mold and rodents. He also urged the preservation of Sheikh Muhammad Bay Balam's own heritage, which comprises over forty manuscripts across various disciplines.

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