

Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat: the Veteran Algerian Scholar, Mujahid, and Tamuqrāwī

الشيخ محمد الطاهر آيت علجت العالم المجاهد المعمر التيمقراوي الجزائري



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Abstract:

Sheikh al-Tahir Ait Aljat, the veteran Algerian scholar and mujahid from Tamuqrā, born in 1917 and deceased in 2023, received instruction in the various religious, linguistic, and rational sciences from numerous shaykhs in different centers of learning (zāwiyas) across the country, including Algerian scholars and scholars of the Zaytuna tradition. The number of his students reached dozens, indeed hundreds, from all regions of the country. Until his very last days, the shaykh devoted himself to forming men rather than authoring books, as this approach best suited the era in which he lived. He did so through his teachings and explanations in Mālikī jurisprudence, Qur'anic readings (qirā'āt), and the Arabic language—grammar, rhetoric, morphology, and other disciplines. In addition, he reviewed certain jurisprudential and linguistic booklets related to specific acts of worship and wrote their introductions, as well as composing commendatory prefaces for some books.

The shaykh was distinguished by qualities rarely combined in a single person: profound knowledge, armed struggle, the education of people in various sciences both before and after independence, generosity, and gentleness in dealing with all people. He is thus a figure rightly described as a “public personality,” and a seasoned one at that, having lived through the period of French colonialism and independence. He struggled against France with both word and weapon.

Key words: al-Tahir; Ait Aljat; scholar; mujahid; Tamuqrāwī.

Introduction

1. Definition of the Research Topic and Its Importance:

God Almighty sent the messengers to guide people so that they might succeed in both abodes, and the last of them was our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Seal of the Prophets and the Leader of the Messengers. They conveyed the message and fulfilled the trust; thereafter, scholars succeeded them generation after generation, transmitting and conveying the religion so that no time or place would ever be devoid of them, lest people have any argument against God Almighty after the prophets and the scholars on the Day of Resurrection. For this reason, he ﷺ said: *"The scholars are the heirs of the prophets"*¹

Accordingly, scholars of Islamic law deserve reverence and esteem for this prophetic inheritance. Among the ways of honoring them—and what is due to them from us—is to care for their biographies, to uncover the abundance of their knowledge, and to highlight their efforts. Among these venerable contemporary figures—distinguished scholars in general, and exceptional Algerian scholars in particular—are those whose entire lives were a form of jihad in the path of God: in acquiring knowledge and disseminating it across various fields. Among them is Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat, the veteran Algerian scholar and mujahid from Tamuqrā.

The scholars of his time bore witness to his scholarly rank, praised his merit, and attested to his strong memorization, vast learning, and deep knowledge, owing to his mastery of numerous disciplines.

2. Objectives of the Research:

The objectives are as follows:

- Introducing a distinguished Algerian figure, Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat.
- Presenting his personal and scholarly life.
- Presenting his jihadist life during the Liberation Revolution (1954).
- Providing concise insights into the life of this Algerian scholarly personality, as encouragement for students of knowledge and researchers to study him and his various sciences through rigorous and purposeful academic research.
- Honoring the scholar himself by immortalizing his legacy and introducing his struggle and sacrifices for the sake of religion, الوطن (the homeland)—as we presume, without ascribing purity to anyone before God—and the Muslim Ummah as a whole; for there is no good in a nation that does not value its scholars, muftis, and jurists.
- Addressing the people of Algeria—its present and future generations—so that they may recognize the merit of this exceptional scholar and draw illumination from his scholarly and militant journey, rich with experience.

- **3. Research Problem:**

There is a principal question that expresses the research problem in general, along with subsidiary questions that outline the elements and details of the topic.

- **Principal question:** What is the scholarly and revolutionary stature of Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat that enabled him to attain a lofty rank among the great figures and mujahidin of Algeria in the modern era?
- **Subsidiary questions:** Who is Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat? What are the most salient features of his personal, scholarly, and revolutionary life? What are his works and legacies? What are the fields of his intellectual and scholarly activity? What are the most prominent luminous milestones of his life?

4. Research Plan:

This article comprises an introduction that includes its essential elements—namely, defining the topic and its importance, the objectives, the research problem, and the plan—followed, after the introduction, by sections addressing Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat's personal and scholarly life, as well as his principal intellectual and scholarly fields, his works and legacies, and the most prominent luminous milestones of his life. The conclusion is devoted to the main findings of the research and a number of recommendations.

First: The Birth and Upbringing of Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat

He was a great scholar and a renowned figure in our country—indeed, throughout the Islamic world—one who joined the younger generation to the elders. He is Muhammad al-Tahir ibn Amqran ibn Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat, born in Thamuqrā in Beni Aïdel, Akbou District, Béjaïa Province, on 7 February 1917. He was a Ḥasanī noble by lineage, descending from the Household of the Messenger of God ﷺ.²

- He grew up in a righteous and blessed upbringing. He memorized the Qur'an at the age of eleven, twelve, or thirteen, and studied under a number of shaykhs from his region, among them the righteous shaykh Awqāsī, who was versed in the Qur'an and its readings, as well as Muḥand al-Ṭayyib and 'Alī.

His grandfather had a religious zawiya in Béjaïa Province, which at that time was a destination for people seeking to learn religion and various sciences. There, Muhammad al-Tahir grew up and was nurtured upon noble character, companionship with books, and the company of scholars.

He hailed from a scholarly family with a strong religious and cultural presence in Beni Aïdel and the surrounding regions, adhering to the Mālikī school of law.

Influenced by this environment, he devoted his life to knowledge until he became a reference in Mālikī jurisprudence.

Second: The Sheikh at the Zawiya of Sidi Yahya

His soul yearned for further learning, so he went to the Zawiya of Sidi Yahya in the thriving area of Amalou in Béjaïa Province. There he studied under two eminent scholars: the first, Lahlu al-Khayyārī, widely acknowledged for his mastery of Mālikī jurisprudence and Qur’anic readings; and the second—under whom our shaykh completed his training and whose name he often mentioned—Sa’īd al-Yijrī. He studied with them various disciplines: *Mukhtaṣar Khalīl*, the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Mālik, *al-Jazariyya* in tajwīd, *al-Durrar al-Lawāmi’* on the principles of the reading of Imām Nāfi’, and *al-Tabsira* by al-Būjlīlī. He remained in their company for four years.³

Third: The Sheikh at the Zawiya of Belhamlaoui

Seeking further advancement, he traveled to Constantine to the Zawiya of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Belhamlaoui in al-‘Uthmāniyya, west of the city of Constantine. There he studied with a number of distinguished shaykhs—both Zaytūnī and Algerian—and attended many lessons in a wide range of religious and worldly sciences, including geography, history, and mathematics. He also attended the lessons of the eminent scholar Ibn Bādis and was influenced by him.⁴

Fourth: The Sheikh's Return to His Village of Thamuqrā

He then returned to his village and birthplace and devoted himself to teaching there in Thamuqrā. After traversing various centers of learning—Thamuqrā itself being an ancient and venerable zawiya founded by the great mufti and eminent scholar Shaykh Yahya al-'Aydli, the grandfather of Shaykh Ait Aljat, which had flourished in past centuries before circumstances led to the decline of its teaching and scholarship—the shaykh returned and revived it anew in 1937. He restored learning and knowledge there and established a program comparable to the great centers of learning in the East and the West, teaching all sciences: Qur'anic exegesis, Hadith, jurisprudence, legal theory and principles, grammar, morphology, rhetoric, poetry, and other disciplines. His students, when they went to al-Zaytuna, attained the highest ranks due to the similarity of curricula.⁵

Fifth: The Sheikh as Judge of the Revolution

- He remained in this state until shortly before the revolution. France did not approve of his activities, for the shaykh was an enlightening revolutionary scholar who pursued a path of enlightenment and mobilization: enlightenment through knowledge and learning, and mobilization by stirring souls to resist the oppressive colonizer. The authorities sought to exile him from his zawiya and did so for a year; he then returned and continued teaching and graduating students there. When the Liberation Revolution broke out in 1954, the shaykh immediately joined it along with his students. The zawiya became a refuge for heroic mujahidin until the colonizer blew it up and burned it entirely. One hundred (100) of the shaykh's students were martyred, among them leaders within the ranks of the National Liberation Front, all of whom fell in that blessed encounter.
- After the revolution, the shaykh became a companion of Colonel Amirouche. He served as a judge of the Liberation Revolution, a mufti, and a reference for people in their religious affairs. As his reputation spread, his zawiya became a religious, charitable, and social institution, regarded by the mujahidin youth as a sanctuary. Given his central role and societal effectiveness, the revolutionary fighters selected him in 1954 as their mufti and as an arbiter to resolve disputes and

conflicts in accordance with Islamic law. He would move with groups of soldiers among battalions in villages and hamlets to adjudicate various issues raised by citizens and by the revolution, issuing answers as God enabled him⁶. When the role of his zawiya grew, French forces destroyed it in late 1956.

Sixth: The Sheikh as Envoy of the Mujahidin in Tunisia and Libya

Colonel Amirouche then sent him to Tunisia in 1957 to supervise Algerian students studying at al-Zaytuna, and thereafter to Tripoli at the office of the National Liberation Front. Acting on the orders of the revolution's leaders, he traveled to Tunisia and, upon assuming his duties there, transformed the headquarters designated by Colonel Amirouche to house students and wounded fighters into a school named *Madrasa al-Naṣr* (the School of Victory). An educational committee was formed comprising the teachers: Shaykh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat, Arzāqī Kattāb, Sa'īd, Dāwūd, Muhammad al-Sharīf Qāhir, Ṣāliḥ Washām, Abū Bakr Zarūqī, and al-Bashīr al-Majdūb. Each was assigned one or two subjects to prepare students to pass the examination granting access to the first year of middle school.⁷

- In the summer of 1960, the shaykh visited several countries of the Arab East, beginning from Tunisia to Libya, then Cairo, Damascus, Beirut, and Amman in Jordan. He was keenly attentive to the conditions of Algerian students there and to their social circumstances, as most were students of his zawiya or had been sent by Colonel Amirouche from the Third Wilaya for study or military training. The journey culminated in a visit to Jerusalem, where he prayed, visited historical sites, spiritual shrines, and heritage landmarks, and then the city of Galilee, where he met intellectual, political, and religious figures—Algerian and non-Algerian alike.⁸
- He then went to Tripoli in 1957, where his mission in Libya was eminently diplomatic, socially engaged through field practice, and cultural by designation—the title of his assignment being “Cultural Attaché” (Ait Aljat, 2016)⁹. He supervised the organization of jihad and support for the revolutionaries through the external office of the National Liberation Front in Tripoli, and he remained there until the revolution succeeded and the country achieved independence.¹⁰

Seventh: Offices and Responsibilities Held by the Sheikh

Throughout his rich career of scholarly and enlightening service, Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat held numerous positions, the most notable of which are as follows:

1. He served as the supervisor and shaykh of the Zawiya of Shaykh Yahya al-‘Aydli in the municipality of Thamuqrā, Bējaia Province, in 1937.
2. He assumed the duties of issuing fatwas and adjudication for the Algerian National Liberation Army in 1954.
3. He was appointed supervisor of Algerian students at the Zaytuna Mosque-University in 1957.
4. He was chosen as coordinator of the Algerian Revolution in Tripoli in 1957.
5. After returning to his homeland, he worked as a teacher at ‘Uqba ibn Nāfi Secondary School in Algiers in 1963, then at ‘Ammāra Rachid Secondary School in Ben Aknoun. He remained in secondary education teaching Islamic and Arabic sciences until his retirement in 1978.
6. After his retirement from teaching, Sheikh Mouloud Qassim—then Minister of Religious Affairs and Endowments—contacted him and said: “I see that you have retired from teaching; you should not remain inactive. We welcome you to work with us on a contractual basis”.¹¹
7. He was a founding member of the Algerian Islamic Da‘wa League in 1989.
8. In 2016, he was appointed President of the National Fatwa Committee and the Committee for Crescents and Legal Times, a position he held until his death in 2023.

Eighth: The Sheikh’s Works ¹²

This may be clarified as follows:

1. In 1978, at the request of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, he returned to mosque-based activity, where he engaged in:
 - a. Preaching and religious guidance at the Hydra Mosque and other mosques.
 - b. Conducting lessons in jurisprudence, Hadith, grammar, Qur’anic readings, tafsir, and other Islamic and Arabic sciences at his home and at the mosque of his neighborhood in Bouzareah. The number of books taught exceeded forty-three (43), and the number of his registered students exceeded forty-eight (48).¹³
2. The shaykh did not devote himself to authoring books; rather, he devoted himself to forming men. Among this are:

- a. *A commentary on the Matn al-Rahabiyya*, presented in a simple, methodical pedagogical style that aids students in understanding and memorization.
 - b. His undertaking of jurisprudential and linguistic reviews of certain booklets related to specific acts of worship and writing introductions for them, such as the booklet *How Do We Pray*, as well as the works of Shaykh ‘Ammār Bu Ḥafṣ al-Zammūrī, whose publication was supervised by his student Belqassem Ait Hammu.
 - c. Writing a commendatory preface for the book *al-Rihla al-‘Aliyya ilā Minṭaqat Tuwāt* by Shaykh Muhammad al-Bāy Bel‘ālam, imam and teacher in Aoulef, Adrar.
 - d. Writing a commendatory preface for the book *Multaqā al-Adilla al-Aṣliyya wa-l-Far‘iyya al-Muwaddiḥa li-l-Sālik Fath al-Raḥīm al-Mālik* by Shaykh Muhammad al-Bāy Bel‘ālam.¹⁴
3. Despite his engagement in guidance, preaching, teaching, and issuing fatwas, Sheikh Ait Aljat did approach authorship—mostly orally through lectures and teaching rather than written composition. He edited, corrected, abridged, and explained works, including:
 - a. A commentary on Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī’s *Risāla* in Mālikī jurisprudence.
 - b. A series of lessons explaining *al-Muwatta’* of Imām Mālik ibn Anas.
 - c. *Tartīb al-Furūq* (the arrangement of juridical distinctions).
 - d. A commentary on *Mukhtaṣar Khalīl* in Mālikī jurisprudence.
 4. The shaykh did not focus on writing because he concentrated his efforts on teaching. Later, his students took the initiative to collect his lessons and explanations with the availability of technological means such as video recordings and audio tapes. Many of his lessons remain published in recorded form on da‘wa websites, covering various sciences and disciplines.¹⁵
 5. The shaykh also contributed to the correction of certain works and provided assistance to researchers and university students in preparing their academic theses, attending the defenses of their dissertations as encouragement¹⁶.
 6. The shaykh possessed a continuous chain of transmission back to the Messenger of God ﷺ and was licensed in the ten Qur’anic readings. Dr. ‘Ali ibn Sa‘d al-Ghamidi, professor at Umm al-Qura University in Mecca—after arranging an appointment—met Sheikh al-Tahir Ait Aljat in Mecca and read to him *Manẓūmat Ibn Yarrī*, then *Kitāb al-Tabsira* by Shaykh Muhammad al-Būjlīlī. Dr. al-Ghamidi was deeply affected by the shaykh’s kindness, his gracious response to his request, his warm reception, and the effort he exerted to complete the audition, finalize the reading, and provide the necessary clarifications and annotations. He subsequently composed a poem in his honor entitled *al-Nujūm al-Zawāhir fī Madḥ al-Imām*

Ṭāhir (“The Radiant Stars in Praise of Imam Tahir”), from which the following verses are cited:

7. O seekers of knowledge and noble distinction,
Turn to the door of the righteous shaykh, Tahir.
The Crusaders persisted in the land of our shaykh,
Imposing upon the best of people the worst of hardships.
Yet our imam did not remain with hands bound,
Nor did he accept the abasement of the free.
Rather, the shaykh of honor advanced with a noble band,
Defending the religion and the honor of the chaste.
Thereafter the imam arose as a teacher,
Calling to the Lord of all creation without weariness.
Virtues were gathered in the person of Tahir,
Such as are rarely found in anyone but Shaykh Tahir.
Peace be upon you, O Shaykh Tahir,
Peace upon you at the beginning and at the end.¹⁷

8. **7. Dr. Mas‘ūd Flūsī’s Synthesis of the Shaykh’s Works**

Dr. Mas‘ūd Flūsī concisely summarized the discussion regarding the works of Shaykh al-Ṭāhir Ait Aljat as follows: Those who wrote about him after his death mentioned that, over many decades—especially after his retirement in 1978—he continued to deliver lessons in jurisprudence, grammar, the science of Qur’anic readings, inheritance law, and other Islamic and linguistic sciences. Some also stated that he left behind manuscript works in these fields and provided a list of their titles. These titles are of great importance, as most of them revolve around commentaries on the well-known sources of Mālikī jurisprudence in the Islamic West. Among the titles mentioned are: a commentary on *al-Muwatta’* of Imām Mālik; a commentary on the *Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī; a commentary on *Mukhtaṣar Khalīl*; a commentary on *Tartīb al-Furūq* by al-Qarāfī; and a commentary on *Matn al-Raḥabiyya* on inheritance law by Muwaffaq al-Dīn al-Raḥbī. In addition, there are commentaries on certain linguistic sources, such as: a commentary on Ibn Mālik’s *Alfiyya* in grammar; a commentary on *Lāmiyyat al-Af‘āl* by Ibn Mālik; a commentary on *al-Jawhar al-Maknūn* in rhetoric by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhḍarī; a commentary on *al-Ājurrūmiyya*; and others.

He then remarked: It appears that all these beneficial scholarly works are merely dictated notes (*amālī*) or oral lessons that were not written down. They may have been recorded—either in whole or in part—or they may be scattered among the hands of his students and disciples who attended them in person by sitting before the shaykh. It is difficult to assume that they are all available with the shaykh’s family or his closest

students, even if we suppose that they were all recorded—a far-fetched assumption given our Algerian reality, where it is rare to find someone who attends a lesson by a scholar or imam and records what he hears, whether in writing or with a recording device.¹⁸

He then raised legitimate and logical questions regarding the shaykh's works, saying: If we assume that these recordings were available long ago during the shaykh's teaching career, why were they not transcribed, written, and published during the shaykh's lifetime—may God have mercy on him—when it would have been possible for him to review them himself, retaining what he deemed important and omitting what he considered unworthy of preservation? Why were these recordings not uploaded to internet platforms such as YouTube, so that those who wished could watch them if they were visual or listen to them if they were audio? Moreover, why did his son, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣāliḥ—may God have mercy on him—not collect, edit, and publish these works, as he did, for example, with the fatwas of Shaykh al-Mawlūd al-Ḥāfiẓi?¹⁹

He further added, posing another question: Were there close students and disciples of the shaykh who accompanied his lessons for many years and recorded them, or were his listeners merely ordinary individuals who attended at times and were absent at others?²⁰

He then reached a painful conclusion, namely the distressing reality experienced by Algerian scholars: that they did not have true students who cared to record their lessons, benefit from them, and transmit them to later generations through editing, printing, and publication. Otherwise, where are the lectures of Shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Bādis—may God have mercy on him—and his lessons in tafsīr, hadith, and jurisprudence over a quarter of a century? Where are the lessons and lectures of al-Ibrāhīmī, al-Tibsi, and others among the luminaries of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars—may God have mercy on them all? And where are the lessons and lectures of Algeria's scholars after independence, such as Shaykhs Aḥmad Ḥammānī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Shaybān, Aḥmad Saḥnūn, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jīlālī, Aḥmad Tawfīq al-Madanī, 'Alī Maghribī, Aḥmad al-Aṭrash al-Sanūsī, Muḥammad Bāy Bel'ālam, and other distinguished figures—may God have mercy on them?²¹

Ninth: The Shaykh's Most Important Teachers ²²

Among the most prominent of them are:

1. Shaykh Muḥammad Amqran Ait Aljat (his father), with whom he memorized the Noble Qur'an.
2. Shaykh al-Sa'īd al-Yijrī, one of the founders of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars in 1931, and deeply versed in Islamic and linguistic sciences.
3. Shaykh Muḥammad Wā'li al-Ṭayyibī.
4. Shaykh al-Ḥalū (or 'Umāra) al-Khayyārī, who was highly proficient in Arabic, Islamic sciences, and the Qur'an.
5. Shaykh al-Sa'īd al-Ḥannāshī.
6. Shaykh Miṣbāḥ al-Tūnisī, from whom he studied Arabic language sciences (grammar, morphology, and rhetoric), as well as creed and logic.
7. Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazwānī al-Tūnisī.
8. Shaykh al-Ṣāliḥ Awqāsī.
9. Shaykh Maḥmūd Qarība al-Tūnisī.
10. Shaykh al-Sa'īd ibn Mālīk al-Ya'lāwī, from whom he studied educational subjects, inheritance law, and jurisprudence.
11. Shaykh Aḥmad al-Khālīdī, from whom he studied *Mukhtaṣar Khalīl* and aspects of composition and formal writing.
12. Shaykh Muḥammad al-Mīzūnī al-Tūnisī, from whom he studied jurisprudence of transactions.
13. Shaykh al-Rabī' al-Zaytūnī al-Tūnisī, from whom he studied tajwīd and literature.
14. Shaykh al-Sa'īd Abahlūl.
15. Shaykh al-Ḥāmidī ibn Qurī.
16. Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Qurī.
17. Ibn Bādis.

Tenth: The Shaykh's Offspring

God blessed him with righteous offspring—all of them, male and female, engaged in education across various levels, from primary to university education²³. Among his most prominent and well-known children is his son, the professor and author Muḥammad al-Ṣāliḥ Ait Aljat, who passed away before him in 2023.

Eleventh: The Shaykh's Most Prominent Students ²⁴

The shaykh's students numbered in the dozens, indeed in the hundreds, from all regions of the country. He spent twenty years at the zawiya, then taught at the two secondary schools ('Uqba and 'Ammāra), and thereafter moved from one mosque to another after his retirement until his death. Among the most notable of his students are:

1. Professor, jurist, judge, and reformer Muḥammad al-Sharīf Qāhir al-Maqrāwī, President of the Fatwa Committee of the Supreme Islamic Council (d. 2016).
2. Professor and historian Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr Bel'allām, mujahid, researcher, and author.
3. Professor, historian, and author Mouloud Qassim Nait Belqacem, Minister of Original Education and Religious Affairs, and one of the founders of the Islamic Thought Forums in Algeria (d. 1992).
4. His son, Professor and author Muḥammad al-Ṣāliḥ Ait Aljat (d. 2023).
5. Professor Zubayr Ṭawālibī al-Tha'alībī, head of organization in the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars (d. 2017).
6. Dr. jurist Muḥand Idir Mishnān, researcher, author, and advisor at the Algerian Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments.
7. Shaykh Abū 'Abd al-Salām.
8. Shaykh Kamāl Hudūd.
9. Amīn Bourzāḥ (B.A. in Islamic Sciences).
10. Fayṣal Bou 'Abd Allāh (M.A. in Islamic Sciences).
11. al-Sa'dī Sa'dī (supervisor of recording the lessons on audio tapes for more than ten years).
12. Murād Ṣaghīr (M.A. in Islamic Sciences).
13. Shaykh Aḥmad Iqrūfhā al-Maqrāwī.
14. Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Būzghūb.
15. Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Zaqarūr.

Twelfth: Awards, Decorations, and Honors Bestowed upon the Shaykh

Shaykh Ait Aljat received numerous decorations and awards in recognition of a life devoted to the service of Islam and the defense of Algeria, including the following:

1. He was honored on the occasion of the 56th anniversary of Algeria's Independence by the Organization of the Sons of Mujahidin.
2. He was honored by the *Association al-Kalima for Culture and Media* in recognition of his efforts in serving the Arabic language.
3. On more than one occasion, he was honored by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments in Algeria.
4. He received multiple honors from associations, councils, and institutions, among the most notable of which were the High Council for the Arabic Language in Algeria and the Supreme Islamic Council, in recognition of his service to the Arabic language and his role in issuing fatwas—indeed, no fatwa would be issued without the shaykh having a considered opinion on it.²⁵

Thirteenth: The Luminous Aspects of the Shaykh's Life

Among them are the following:

1. Early brilliance, as is often the case with the great figures of Islam: memorizing the Qur'an at a young age; eagerness to learn; and commitment to the company of the righteous and virtuous scholars.
2. *Keep the company of those whose breasts are repositories of knowledge; For whoever associates with them comes to the fore.*

*Beware of accepting the companionship of the deficient,
Lest you descend in rank from your loftiness and be diminished.*

3. High resolve in steadfastness, education, and teaching during the period of occupation—at a time when circumstances did not favor many people in seeking knowledge. Nevertheless, he pursued the path of action filled with hope and reliance upon God Almighty. God fulfilled his hopes through many of his students and disciples, who became scholars, jurists, preachers, and symbols within the Algerian state. Indeed, his students were like moons and stars in the sky of Algeria, and he was granted felicity through them.
4. Jihad and steadfastness with arms alongside the heroic Amirouche; numerous accounts of this are narrated by elders to the young in Kabylia.
*For long he protected the lands of Zwāwa,
Guided by Amirouche the valiant.
Ask the tribes about the virtues of our shaykh—*

*Their narrators are the elders and chiefs.
To you, my master, I offer pearls of praise,
With whose verses poems are adorned.*

These lines are from a poem composed in praise of Shaykh al-Tahir upon his completion of teaching *al-Muwatta'*, written by Muhammad Bou Salama—may God prolong his life.

5. He served as a judge of the National Liberation Army, which attests that the spirit of the Liberation Revolution was Islamic, for among its judges, muftis, and authoritative references was the shaykh himself.
6. Gentleness and humility toward all people, including scholars, students of knowledge, and the wider Algerian populace. He was exemplary in these noble traits: students would visit him at his home, where he would host them with a smile that never left his face and personally serve them. When students wished to depart, he would carry their shoes for them—such was the way of firmly grounded God-fearing scholars who were sincere with God, and whom God honored in return.
7. He was distinguished by calmness; as some of his students stated, they never once saw him angry.
8. He was a symbol of the steadfast scholar-teacher close to the Ummah, sharing in its hopes and pains. Shaykh Ahmad Sahnoun had instructed that, upon his death, the shaykh should lead his funeral prayer—which he indeed did. He used to say of him: “He is a friend among the friends of God,” and steadfastness is the greatest miracle; God honored him with both forms of struggle.
9. Dr. Yahya Bouaziz mentioned that he contacted Shaykh al-Tahir Ait Aljat several times, hoping he would write his autobiography in his own hand, as others had done, but the shaykh did not comply—later excusing himself, perhaps out of reluctance to speak about himself.²⁶
10. The presenter of the program *Minā'ir min 'Uḏamā' al-Jazā'ir* stated: “I conducted an interview with him when he was 103 years old, and he read with his own eyes without glasses. I was reminded of the saying: ‘Limbs that we preserved in youth—God preserves for us in old age.’”

He also related a story told to him by Muhammad al-Salih al-Sadiq: when the shaykh arrived in Tripoli, an apartment was rented for him overlooking the home of an Italian woman who had daughters. The shaykh completely sealed that window. Those who had lived there before him had caused the woman embarrassment, but when the shaykh arrived, she suffered no harm from him. She asked about him and was told he was a man of the National Liberation Front. She said: “If all the mujahidin possess such morals, you will surely triumph.”

11. After Algeria's independence, he devoted himself to calling to God, spreading Islamic values, promoting tolerance, and rejecting extremism and deviant ideas. In 1989, he joined a number of scholars and thinkers in the Algerian Islamic Da'wa League, whose priorities included bringing Islamic movements closer together and unifying the efforts of the Ummah's scholars.
12. He maintained excellent relations with all people and was truly a public figure, offering counsel to institutions and national movements alike. His students Shaykh Hamza Belqassem and Zubayr Tawalbi—both with tearful eyes—recounted that the shaykh would take it upon himself to carry the students' shoes and hand them back one by one, without the slightest sense of pride or pretension.²⁷
13. He was a social reformer across times and places. By way of example (without limitation), he intervened in the case of Berriane in Ghardaïa between Arabs and Ibadis, alongside Youssef Benkhedda. The shaykh traveled to Berriane to quell the discord between the two groups, and those efforts were crowned with success by God's grace.²⁸
14. He exerted great efforts in the service of the Arabic language. Although he did not author independent works devoted exclusively to Arabic sciences, he was deeply committed to elevating and preserving the language. His students undertook to write down what he delivered in lessons held in study circles and mosques. Students and teachers alike would study with him and present to him matters related—especially—to linguistic texts and their commentaries, such as the *Alfiyya*, *Matn al-Ājurrūmiyya*, *Qaṭr al-Nadā*, and others, as well as prosody and rhetoric. They would travel from various regions to benefit, memorize, and present their work to him. He was honored with the medal *Servant of the Arabic Language*.²⁹
15. Recitation of the Noble Qur'an and reading books were among the dearest activities to Shaykh Muhammad al-Tahir. He used to say: "The life of nations is through knowledge, knowledge is through reading, and when reading disappears, life becomes pitch darkness—savagery and insolence".³⁰

Fourteenth: What People of Knowledge and Merit Said about the Shaykh

Among what has been said about him by scholars—this being but a small portion—is the following:

1. Dr. al-Hadi al-Hasani described him by saying: "The shaykh used to repeat the saying, 'We neither tear apart nor become extremist,' thus making him a symbol of moderation and balance".³¹
2. Dr. 'Abd al-Razzaq Qassoum said of him: "He was foremost in the prayer rows, leading people in the mosques, just as he was foremost in jihad, urging people

toward sacrifice for the liberation of the homeland. Thus, the shaykh was a true role model embodying the committed imam, repeating the maxim: ‘We do not accept an imam to lead us in prayer unless he leads us in the ranks of jihad’.³²

3. His companion Shaykh Muhammad al-Salih al-Sadiq described him thus: “He was characterized by a sense of humor and a constant smile; everyone who studied under him loved him and felt at ease with him. He never became angry, which made him an exemplar of the moderate scholar”.³³
4. Professor ‘Abd al-Karim Bouammama stated: “We must acknowledge the magnitude of his deeds and the goodness of his actions—what he offered this Ummah by nurturing generations upon sound religious understanding and shaping human character through knowledge and learning. In appreciation of his scholarly efforts, whose effects endure, this venerable shaykh and courageous mujahid traversed the mountains of the Third Wilaya alongside Judge Amirouche as a judge and guide, deserving of recognition, honor, and reverence...”.³⁴

Fifteenth: Works Written *about* the Shaykh and Works *by* Him

First: Works Written about Him:

Among them are the following:

1. *Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat and His Reformist Efforts*, by Zahia Kharfi, Master’s thesis in Islamic Sciences, specialization in Da‘wa and Media, supervised by Dr. Khadra Ali, Department of Usul al-Din, Faculty of Islamic Sciences, Martyr Hamma Lakhdar University, El Oued (1445–1446 AH / 2023–2024 CE).
2. *The Efforts of the Amazigh of Béjaïa in Defending and Promoting the Arabic Language – Sheikh Tahir Ait Aljat as a Model*, by Dr. Faiza Taybi Ahmed, from Hassiba Ben Bouali University, Chlef, Algeria, presented to the High Council for the Arabic Language during the period 27–30 Jumada al-Akhirah, corresponding to 17 May 2013, in Dubai.
3. *Reflections on the Book “My Memories with My Companion Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat”*, by Dr. Mouloud Ouaimer, al-Basā’ir Newspaper (digital edition), 15 April 2024.
4. *A Century-Long Journey in the Life of Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat*, by Sheikh Muhammad al-Salih Ait Aljat, Publications of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2nd ed., Abjadiyat for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, 2016.

Second: Works in Which He Is Discussed:

Among them are the following:

1. *Figures of Thought and Culture in Protected Algeria*, by Dr. Yahya Bouaziz, 1st ed., 1995, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, in which he discusses a large number of cultural and intellectual figures of Algeria, including Sheikh al-Tahir Ait Aljat.
2. *The Zawiya of Sheikh Yahya al-'Aydli: A Beacon of Knowledge and a Stronghold of Jihad, with a Register of the Martyred Students among Its Graduates*, by Muhammad al-Salih Ait Aljat (the shaykh's son). This work provides a detailed account of the martyred students who graduated from the zawiya and was introduced by Sheikh Muhammad al-Saghir Bel'allam. It comprises 322 pages.³⁵

Sixteenth: The Shaykh's Passing

Thus, he remained a teacher, educator, and steadfast guardian at the frontiers of construction and renewal after having been a steadfast guardian at the frontiers of jihad and liberation. He passed away on 13 June 2023, after a life filled with goodness, blessings, works, and achievements. Our shaykh lived beyond a full century by seven years. He died at Mustapha Pacha Hospital in the Algerian capital after a health setback and was buried at Aissat Idir Cemetery in Beni Messous on Wednesday, 14 June 2023.

He was mourned by the Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, as well as by the International Union of Muslim Scholars, the Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq, the Global Islamic Parliamentarians Forum, and a number of local and international religious figures and organizations.³⁶

Conclusion: General Findings and Recommendations

First: General Findings of the Study (Summary and Synthesis)

- Sheikh Muhammad al-Tahir Ait Aljat was a veteran Algerian scholar and mujahid from Thamuqrā, born in 1917 and deceased in 2023.
- He received instruction in the various religious, linguistic, and rational sciences from numerous shaykhs in different centers of learning across the country, including Algerian scholars and scholars of the Zaytuna tradition—among them

his father Sheikh Muhammad Amqran Ait Aljat, with whom he memorized the Qur'an, Sheikh al-Sa'id al-Yijri, Sheikh Misbah al-Tunisi, and others.

- The shaykh's students numbered in the dozens, indeed the hundreds, from all regions of the country. Among the most prominent of them are: the jurist, judge, and reformer Muhammad al-Sharif Qahir al-Maqrawi; the historian, mujahid, researcher, and author Muhammad al-Saghir Bel'allam; the historian and author Mouloud Qassim Nait Belqacem; and his son, the author Muhammad al-Salih Ait Aljat.
- Until his final breath, the shaykh devoted himself to forming men rather than authoring books, as this approach best suited the era in which he lived.
- He left behind explanations and audio recordings in Mālikī jurisprudence, the Arabic language, and Qur'anic readings, including: commentaries on *al-Muwaṭṭa'* of Imām Mālik, the *Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, *Mukhtaṣar Khalīl*, as well as explanations of linguistic sources such as Ibn Mālik's *Alfiyya*, *Lāmiyyat al-Af'āl*, and *al-Jawhar al-Maknūn* in rhetoric by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhdarī, among others.
- He conducted jurisprudential and linguistic reviews of several booklets related to specific acts of worship, wrote introductions to them, and authored commendatory prefaces for certain books.
- The shaykh was a seasoned personality who lived through the period of French colonialism and independence: during the former he played the role of educator, teacher, and armed mujahid; during the latter he played the role of reconstruction and nation-building.
- During the Liberation Revolution, the shaykh and his students were sent abroad for education, training, and formation, preparing men to become leaders of the country after independence, in accordance with the conviction shared by the shaykh, Colonel Amirouche, and the mujahidin that victory would come by God's will.
- The shaykh combined qualities rarely found in a single person: profound knowledge, armed struggle, teaching people in various sciences before and after independence, generosity, and gentleness toward all people. He is thus rightly described as a true public figure.

Second: Recommendations

- Students of knowledge and researchers of all disciplines are urged to devote attention to Algerian scholarly figures—each within his field, whether from earlier or more recent generations—by conducting academic research (Master's, Magister, Doctoral theses) and organizing national and international conferences devoted to their lives and works.
- Such an exceptional Algerian figure fully merits comprehensive academic studies, in view of his multifaceted roles as linguist, jurist, teacher, and educator.
- His recorded scholarly legacy in the various disciplines—jurisprudence, legal theory, Qur'anic exegesis, and others—should be collected, critically edited, and published for the benefit of the wider public.
- The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments, the Supreme Islamic Council, the High Council for the Arabic Language, and Faculties of Islamic Sciences are encouraged to support researchers in collecting and preserving the heritage of Algerian scholars in general, and that of Sheikh al-Tahir Ait Aljat in particular, especially in the linguistic, juridical, exegetical, and Qur'anic recitation fields, through national and international conferences, biographical projects, and Master's and doctoral research initiatives.

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