

ISLAM, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY

ibn taymiyya's thought

corpus, reception, and legacy

mehdi berriah and
arjan post, eds

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Ibn Taymiyya's Thought: Corpus, Reception, and Legacy

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Corpus, Reception, and Legacy

Edited by
Mehdi Berriah and Arjan Post

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INTRODUCTION

Rethinking the Taymiyyan Phenomenon: Contexts, Corpus, and Reception

Mehdi Berriah and Arjan Post

Taqī l-Dīn Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm b. Taymiyya (661-728/1263-1328) is currently one of the most studied and famous medieval Muslim theologians, both in the Muslim world and in the West. Especially since the conference titled *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, held April 8-10, 2005 at Princeton University, which resulted in the landmark volume by the same title, academic attention for Ibn Taymiyya has increased exponentially. In spite of the growing attention for the Ḥanbalī shaykh, many avenues remain to be explored before we better understand the thought, impact, and influence of one of the most controversial and prolific medieval Muslim scholars.

The modern-day interest in Ibn Taymiyya is closely connected to his rich and complex writings, which, albeit supposedly scarcely known outside of Ḥanbalī circles in the centuries following the shaykh’s passing, have been rediscovered since the early twentieth century and greatly influenced many Muslim thinkers since.¹ The subsequent flowering of academic studies on Ibn Taymiyya over the last two decades has broadened our knowledge of his work and thought, including his position in matters of dogma, Sufism, logic, philosophy, and politics, but also the reading and reception of his writings after his death and during the modern period.

Although these works shed light on Ibn Taymiyya’s thought and nuance his positions, one can observe the persistence of certain prejudices and preconceived ideas presenting the Ḥanbalī scholar only as fanatic, rigorist, and radical.² This phenomenon can be partly explained by three main reasons:

1 Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 182-91.

2 George Makdisi, *L’Islam Hanbalisant* (P. Geuthner, 1983), 57-58, 61, 67; Yossef Rapoport and Ahmed Shahab, “Ibn Taymiyya and His Times,” in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Oxford University Press, 2010), 4; Yahya Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya et le mythe du grand

1. The reading of Ibn Taymiyya's opinions and positions through the lens of our twenty-first century sensibilities, leading to an anachronistic and subjective judgment of a scholar who lived almost 700 years ago. This observation is not meant in an apologetic sense. Rather, we merely mean to stress that there is an academic unfairness in selectively judging a scholar outside of his own context and times. While figures such as al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), to name but a few, are often automatically regarded as pillars of Islamic intellectualism, they too were naturally men of their times, conditioned by their respective context, its norms and sensibilities. Thus, like Ibn Taymiyya, they wrote on matters judged harshly by today's standards, such as jihad, capital punishment, *jizya*, etc., but they are not considered radical and rigorist like Ibn Taymiyya.
2. Analyzing and evaluating Ibn Taymiyya's thought based only on a narrow selection of his fatwas and writings – counting more than ten thousand edited pages – without taking into consideration the particular political, religious and cultural context in which he lived.
3. The appropriation of Ibn Taymiyya's writings by certain actors and ideologues of Muslim currents often described as rigorist, notably within Wahhabism and Salafism, as well as by strands of radical jihadism. Such currents lay claim to Ibn Taymiyya as a premodern authority to legitimize their ideology, positions and actions, often without consideration for the shaykh's context as Yahya Michot demonstrated in his works.³ As a result, Ibn Taymiyya is often per-

méchant barbu, entre islamisme mongolisant et mauvais orientalisme,” in *Études Taymiyyennes – Taymiyyan Studies*, ed. Yahya Michot (Albouraq, 2020), 35-54.

3 Yahya Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya, Mardin. Hégire, fuite du péché et “demeure de l’islam”* (Albouraq, 2004), 47-48, 58. Regarding the use of the so-called anti-Mongol fatwas, see Yahya Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya Against Extremisms* (Albouraq, 2012), XXV-XXVIII (introduction); Yahya Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya's ‘New Mardin Fatwa’: Is Genetically Modified Islam (GMI) Carcinogenic?,” *The Muslim World* 101, no. 2 (2011):130-181. See also Jon Hoover, “Ibn Taymiyya between Moderation and Radicalism,” in *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage*, ed. Elisabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 177-203. For another exemple with Ayman al-Zawāhiri, see Mehdi Berriah, “Ibn Taymiyya as a Hermeneutical Paradigm: Reception and Reactivation of Medieval Islamic Thought in the Jihadist Discourse of Ayman al-Zawahiri,” *Ijtihad Journal for Islamic and Arabic Studies* 2/4 (2025): 21-68.

ceived through the image of ideologists of these currents, who quote him as if he is their intellectual forefather.⁴

The best way to battle such prejudices is by continuing the academic study of Ibn Taymiyya, his thought, his legacy, and his influence throughout the centuries. The current volume means to contribute to this endeavor by publishing the partial proceedings of the international conference *Ibn Taymiyya's Thought: Corpus, Reception and Legacy* held at the Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l'homme (MMSH) in Aix-en-Provence on 9 and 10 November 2022. As the title suggests, the frame of the conference was purposely widely defined and sought to bring together a variety of specialists whose fields of research have connections with the figure and thought of Ibn Taymiyya. Participants contributed with papers on new or little-studied aspects related to Ibn Taymiyya's thought, on his persona, his students and followers, or the influence of his intellectual legacy in later times.

This conference was jointly organized by Mehdi Berriah, Arjan Post, Nadjet Zouggar, and Sarah Van Eyken, and was originally established as a part of two research projects:

- "The Taymiyyan Corpus of Jihad: Reception, Decontextualization and Instrumentalization by the Contemporary Jihadist Movements" (Mehdi Berriah), winning project of the call for projects 2020 "Islam, religion et société" of the Bureau central des cultes (BCC), French Ministry of Interior.
- "Questioning the Quiescence of the Ottoman Ḥanbalīs: The Genesis of Conservative Salafism" (Sarah Van Eyken).

The conference was realized thanks to the gracious support of all partner institutions: VU Amsterdam, KU Leuven, the Bureau central des cultes (BCC) of the French Ministry of Interior, the CNRS-UMR 8167 Orient et Méditerranée, Aix-Marseille University, the IREMAM (The Institute of Research and Study on the Arab and Islamic Worlds), the CEFREPA (The French Research Centre of the Arabian Peninsula) with its director Professor Makram Abbès, and the IISMM (Institut d'études de l'Islam et

4 Foreword by Syed Nomanul Haqq in the collective volume *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Oxford University Press, 2010), ix.

des sociétés du monde musulman). We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Nadjat Zouggar for her dedication and tireless efforts, which were instrumental in ensuring the smooth and exemplary organization of the conference held at the Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme (MMSH) in Aix-en-Provence.

As the 700th anniversary of the death of Ibn Taymiyya approaches, the current volume aims to give a platform to specialists in the field of Taymiyyan studies and share their particular expertise, thus contributing to a better understanding of what Donald Little calls the “Ibn Taymiyyan phenomenon,” meaning “the full impact of his activities and his writings on the development of Islam.”⁵

The nine papers that comprise this volume start with a focus on Ibn Taymiyya's own views on particular topics, including *jinn*, jihad, petitionary prayer, and his polemics in the field of theology and philosophy. We then move on to the centuries following his death up until modern times, which will take us far beyond the borders of Ibn Taymiyya's own geographical context. We start with the impact of the shaykh's theological views in the Mamluk and Ottoman context and continue toward the twentieth century where we will be exposed to his adoption by Muslim reformist thinkers and his impact in Turkey and modern-day France.

In his contribution, **Mehdi Berriah** highlights a little-known aspect of Ibn Taymiyya: his interest in the world of *jinn*, particularly their interactions with humans. Ibn Taymiyya addresses the topic of *jinn* in several passages of his writings, indicating his significant interest in the subject. He approaches it not only as a theologian, relying on religious texts, but also through an empirical lens, drawing from testimonies shared with him and his personal experiences. This interest in *jinn* and the broader *‘alam al-ghayb* (the world of the unseen) contrasts somewhat with the usual image of Ibn Taymiyya as an obstinate scholar, fiercely defending his positions on theological questions – especially those concerning *tawhīd* (the unity of God), divine names and attributes, and *kalām* – and as a critic of Aristotelian philosophy and certain Sufi figures and practices he deemed heterodox. Besides Ibn Taymiyya's positions on *jinn* from a religious and metaphysical standpoint, Mehdi Berriah reveals a lesser-known facet of the famous Hanbalite theologian: his practice of exorcism (*ruqya*) and his role as an exorcist (*rāqī*). Ibn Taymiyya's knowledge

5 Donald Little, “Did Ibn Taymiyya Have a Screw Loose?,” *Studia Islamica* 41 (1975): 111.

and experience with *jinn* demonstrate his attentiveness to the social phenomena of his time. The strength of popular beliefs surrounding *jinn* influenced the population of his time significantly, as is still the case today in some parts of the Muslim world. These popular beliefs could lead to practices resulting in *shirk* (polytheism), the gravest sin in Islam, against which Ibn Taymiyya repeatedly warned in his writings. The denunciation of *shirk* and the defense of *tawhīd* are among the central themes of his works, to which he devoted considerable energy.⁶

Certainly, jihadism is one of the currents wherein Ibn Taymiyya's work is deeply impactful. Several of his fatwas or sections of his books related to jihad have been put online, some even being translated into different Western languages. These texts have obviously served to fuel the jihad-takfirist ideology of various groups and organizations as well as their ideologues since the 1980s.⁷ Farid Bouchiba's article contributes to our knowledge of this aspect of the shaykh's thought by examining his *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār wa-muhādadanatihim wa-tahrīm qatlihim li-mujarrad kufrihim* (Summary Rule Relating to the Fight of Infidels and the Peace Treaty [Concluded with Them], as well as the Prohibition to Kill Them on the Sole Ground of Their Impiety). In addition to the analysis of the content of the text, Farid Bouchiba's article highlights doubts regarding the attribution of its authorship to Ibn Taymiyya. Indeed, despite the similarity of the writing style and argumentation of the *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara* with other works by Ibn Taymiyya, it is difficult to attribute the authorship of this epistle to him with certainty, as the original text on which this summary is based has not been found. As Farid Bouchiba points out, the original manuscript is lost, and the existing copies are late reproductions that are summaries rather than direct copies of the

6 Mehdi Berriah, "Mobility and Versatility of the 'Ulamā' in the Mamluk Period: The Case of Ibn Taymiyya," in *Professional Mobility in Islamic Societies (700-1750): New Concepts and Approaches*, eds. Mohamad El-Merheb and Mehdi Berriah (Brill, 2021), 120-122.

7 Johannes Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (Macmillan, 1986), 159-234; Yahya Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya: Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule* (Interface Publications, 2006), 27-62; Yahya Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya Against Extremisms. Texts translated, annotated and introduced by Yahya Michot* (Albouraq, 2012), xxiv-xxviii; Jon Hoover, "Ibn Taymiyya between Moderation and Radicalism," in *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretation of the Classical Heritage*, ed. Elisabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 179-203. For Meir Hatina, Ibn Taymiyya has been and remains a "cultural epic figure" for jihadists. Meir Hatina, "Remembering Our Heroes: Global Jihad's Militancy in a Comparative Perspective," *Middle East Law and Governance* 13/1 (2021): 107. See also Berriah, "Ibn Taymiyya as a Hermeneutical Paradigm," 21-68.

original. The name of the person who summarized the original text is unknown, and we only have the name of the copyist who lived over six centuries after Ibn Taymiyya. Farid Bouchiba's analysis suggests that the summarized nature of this epistle and some missing passages have caused confusion, leading scholars to conclude that the author rejects offensive jihad (*jihād al-ṭalab*). However, nothing in this epistle contradicts the legality of this type of warfare. The author does not deny that disbelief (*kufr*) can be a reason to expose a person to death; rather, he indicates that disbelief alone is not sufficient and must be accompanied by many other conditions. The existence of this epistle and its attribution to Ibn Taymiyya encourage further and renewed efforts in publishing his works, particularly through more thorough philological and editorial work. Such endeavors will undoubtedly refine our understanding of Ibn Taymiyya's writings and his thought.

After the topic of jihad, **Safaruk Chowdhury** takes us through a logical examination of the efficacy of petitionary prayer in Ibn Taymiyya's theology. Petitionary prayer involves asking God for something. Historically, Muslim scholars have identified certain puzzles related to this kind of prayer, including the following issues: if God knows everything, He already knows what a person will ask for, implying that petitionary prayer does not affect God's foreknowledge. If God is immutable and cannot change, this includes His decrees, decisions, and commands, suggesting that praying to God cannot bring about any change in Him. Finally, if God is absolutely good, He would already do what is best for everyone, whether or not they pray to Him, making prayer seem redundant. The focus of Chowdhury's article is on petitionary prayer and God's foreknowledge. After outlining the problem, Chowdhury details the axioms and assumptions underlying Ibn Taymiyya's doctrine of God's omniscience and his concept of causality. He concludes by thoroughly assessing some of the responses Ibn Taymiyya provides (and can potentially provide) to address this aspect of the problem.

For Ibn Taymiyya's polemics in the field of philosophy, **Adrien Candiard's** article provides an in-depth analysis of his refutation of Thābit b. Qurra's (d. 288/901) Concise Exposition of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, *Talkhīṣ* in Arabic, which focuses specifically on Book Lambda of the *Metaphysics*. As Ibn Taymiyya had no direct access to the works of Aristotle, it is through the *Talkhīṣ* that he intends to disprove the ancient Greek philosopher. His refutation takes up fifty pages in what is arguably

the shaykh's masterpiece, *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql* (Averting the Conflict between Reason and Revelation). Candiard guides us through the complex and, at times, repetitive structure of Ibn Taymiyya's arguments. He shows that, through his discussion of the *Talkhīṣ*, Ibn Taymiyya aims to lay bare the incoherence of the philosophers, especially in their overvaluation of the capacities of autonomous reason to reach God independent of revelation. Interestingly, Ibn Taymiyya does this without reliance on the texts of revelation themselves, the Qur'an or the Hadith, but rather on the basis of what he considers "sound reason" (*ṣarīḥ al-'aql*).

From here we move beyond Ibn Taymiyya to investigate his legacy in the following centuries. We start at the end of the Mamluk Sultanate with the figure of Yūsuf b. 'Abd al-Hādī b. al-Mabrid (d. 909/1503), whose theological position on the attributes of God (*al-ṣifāt*) is studied in **Arjan Post's** article. The point of departure here is the question where to position Ibn al-Mabrid within the spectrum of Ḥanbalī theology. The two main solutions prevalent in Ḥanbalī theology in dealing with the terms from the Qur'an and Ḥadīth whose literal meanings suggest physicality or spatiality for God are *tafwīḍ* (relegating knowledge of them to God) and *ithbāt* (affirming their concrete meanings without modality). Post starts by contrasting Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī (d. 620/1223) and Ibn Taymiyya as proponents of *tafwīḍ* and *ithbāt* respectively. On that basis, Post continues to analyze the language in passages from Ibn al-Mabrid's theological works relevant to the topic of the divine attributes to see which of the two positions he adhered to. This endeavor will show that theological language is not always as straightforward as it may seem at first and requires critical reflection before conclusions can be drawn regarding a scholar's position.

After Ibn al-Mabrid, we move on to Ottoman Damascus, where we examine the discussion on the divine attributes in **Sarah Van Eyken's** article. Van Eyken examines the writings of the eighteenth-century Ḥanbalī scholar Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Saffārīnī (d. 1188/1774) on the attributes of God to highlight the influence of Ibn Taymiyya, who was an authority for al-Saffārīnī in this regard. The article relies on an analysis of al-Saffārīnī's auto-commentary on his poem on creed entitled *Lawāmi' al-anwār al-bahīyya wa-sawāṭi' al-asrār al-athariyya*, (*The Splendidly Illustrious Lights and Luminous Beams of the Secrets of the Athariyya*). Van Eyken demonstrates that the foundation of al-Saffārīnī's understanding of the attributes of God is the principle of *ithbāt*, which affirms all attributes without distinction. Van Eyken points out that al-Saffārīnī draws

heavily on the works of Ibn Taymiyya and those of his principal students. It is clear that al-Saffārīnī regarded Ibn Taymiyya as a significant authority in theology. This indicates that at least some of Ibn Taymiyya's theological treatises circulated in the intellectual circles of the Hanbalites in the early eighteenth century. Although al-Saffārīnī's *Lawāmi' al-anwār* contains statements that lend themselves to different interpretations, the article concludes that the book as a whole strongly indicates that its author advocated a straightforward and sensible understanding of God's descriptions "without how" (*bi-lā kayf*), as he believed to have been the position of the *Salaf*. He renounced both the figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and the method of relegating the meaning of these texts to God (*tafwīḍ al-ma'na*). The article concludes by tracing unexplored research perspectives, including how Ibn Taymiyya's ideas were transmitted to scholars such as al-Saffārīnī.

The article by **Pieter Coppens** takes us to the modern period of Islamic reformism. In the early twentieth century, a debate arose among reform-oriented Islamic scholars on whether the first Umayyad Caliph, Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), deserved to be cursed (*la'n*). The debate started with a fatwa from Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍa (d. 1935) in his journal *al-Manār* in 1905, but in subsequent years spread to Southeast Asia, where reform-oriented Ḥaḍrami-'Alawī scholars wrote a number of treatises on the issue. This was urgent to them because the issue was closely related to their claimed special social status as descendants of the Prophet. The arguments of Ibn Taymiyya in favor of Mu'āwiya from his then recently published *Minhāj al-sunna* played a key role as the controversy unfolded, becoming a referee for the legitimacy of the arguments made by the different camps. This debate illustrates that it was not yet clear to Islamic reformers globally in this age what exactly should be the method to follow in source criticism, legal reasoning, and proper disputation. This was actively negotiated within an increasingly connected and diverse international network of reform-minded scholars, in which the works of Ibn Taymiyya slowly but steadily became a touchstone of correct method. In that process, they did not shy away from reassessing seemingly long-settled disputes within Sunni Islam.

Kadir Gömbeyaz takes us to twentieth-century Turkey and examines Ibn Taymiyya's impact there. He focuses on the perception of Ibn Taymiyya by the poet and thinker Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983), a significant influence on nationalist-conservative and religious circles in

modern Turkey. In his works from the late 1970s, Necip Fazıl described Ibn Taymiyya negatively, using terms like “the initiator of the era of ‘mind/‘aql’ delirium,” “a scorpion of faith that destroys religion from within,” and “a person who shows how not to believe, instead of how to believe, in Allah and His Messenger.” Gömbeyaz seeks to understand the sources and reasons behind Necip Fazıl’s negative portrayal of Ibn Taymiyya. Additionally, he traces the influence of Necip Fazıl’s perception of Ibn Taymiyya in later periods, highlighting that there is no single perception of Ibn Taymiyya in modern Turkey.

The influence of Ibn Taymiyya is palpable in the discourses of contemporary religious actors and ideologues as well as in literature. It is this latter area that **Daoud Riffi** explores in his contribution, which examines the reception of Ibn Taymiyya in French-speaking Islamic literature. Through the analysis of biographies dedicated to Ibn Taymiyya, his works that have been translated into French, and references to his work in the books of contemporary authors, Riffi highlights the central place that these writers accord to Ibn Taymiyya in the French-speaking Islamic religious heritage. This construction elevates Ibn Taymiyya’s words and teachings to authoritative status in various fields, making them difficult to refute or question. Some see him as a cornerstone in the intellectual renewal of Islam today, particularly concerning Western Muslims. Riffi also shows that this prominent figure of Ibn Taymiyya and his positions, often decontextualized, are utilized by certain religious actors, writers, and others, contributing to the often-turbulent debates within Islam in the French context.

To conclude this introduction, we gratefully acknowledge the KU Leuven Fund for Fair Open Access, together with the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) through its PhD project “Questioning the Quiescence of the Ottoman Hanbalis,” whose combined support made the open-access publication of this volume possible. Our sincere thanks likewise extend to Leuven University Press for their professional and attentive stewardship of the volume, and in particular to Veerle De Laet, Beatrice Van Eeghem, and Annemie Vandezande. Finally, we are grateful to the Leuven Centre for the Study of Islam, Culture and Society (LCSICS) for welcoming this volume into its book series *Islam, Culture and Society*, thereby providing an appropriate scholarly home for the contributions brought together here.

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CHAPTER 1

Jinn-s and Exorcism in Ibn Taymiyya

Mehdi Berriah

Abstract

Preconceived ideas often – or perhaps always – portray Ibn Taymiyya as a “jihadi extremist,” notorious for his harsh views on Christians and Shi’is, while also depicting him as a religious figure preoccupied solely with matters of theology, Sufism, and philosophy. However, the study of the Taymiyyan corpus highlights that the famous Ḥanbalite theologian was interested in everything related to the enigmatic and mysterious world of the *jinn*. Beyond his theological-religious positions on *jinn-s*, Ibn Taymiyya also considered them through an approach that would be called empirical today. In other words, he was interested in *jinn-s* from experiences related to him and, especially, from his own personal experience, which he reveals in his writings. Such experiences enabled us to learn a little more about Ibn Taymiyya’s thought and intellectual persona, and to understand him better.

Keywords: *Jinn-s*; exorcism; exorcist; *ruqya* (Islamic exorcism); *karāmāt* (miraculous acts attributed to saints); *tawḥīd* (unity of God); *shirk* (associationism); *maṣrūʿ* (possessed by a *jinn*)

Introduction*

In addition to theological and religious questions, the analysis of the Taymiyyan corpus reveals that the author had, to some extent, an interest in social and cultural phenomena related to the society of his time. Among these phenomena was war, in which he participated in various forms, whether by writing, preaching, or in person.¹ Perhaps this participation was part of jihad, which he considers a religious duty and an act

* I would like to thank Kamal Gasimov for his valuable comments and suggestions.

1 The question arises as to whether he was present on the battlefield for psychological support or if he fought weapon in hand. For more information, see Mehdi Berriah, “Mobility and Versatility of the *ʿUlamaʾ* in the Mamluk Period: The Case of Ibn Taymiyya,” in *Professional Mobility in Islamic Societies (700-1750): New Concepts and Approaches*, ed. Mehdi Berriah and Mohamad El-Merheb (Brill, 2021), 113-117; Mehdi Berriah, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Conception of Jihad: Corpus, General Aspects, and Research Perspectives,” *Teosofi* 12, no. 1 (2022): 50-51.

of worship.² However, it is certain that Ibn Taymiyya was interested in war as a science or art, with all that it implies in terms of both theoretical and practical knowledge.³ He was not the only person interested in this aspect, as evidenced by the ulema's interest in the art of *furūsiyya*.⁴

Another phenomenon that seems to have particularly attracted the attention of Ibn Taymiyya was *jinn*-s and their interactions with humans, as well as all the beliefs and practices inherent in this. He addresses the issue in various writings, sometimes dedicating a chapter to it and sometimes digressing from the initial subject to discuss *jinn*-s. If Ibn Taymiyya approaches the theme of *jinn*-s from a theological-religious perspective by relying on the texts, then it is unsurprising that he also does it based on information brought to him and, very interesting, on his personal experience.

This article explores Ibn Taymiyya's interest in the question of *jinn* and seeks to introduce new insights while maintaining continuity with previous works on the topic. Fifty years ago, Alfred Morabia, in a paper presented in September 1976 at the 8th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants in Aix-en-Provence (later published in the proceedings), analysed Ibn Taymiyya's critiques against some views on the supernatural. Morabia highlighted how Ibn Taymiyya viewed prodigies and demonic states – attributed to the Devil and his cohorts of demons – as the antithesis of the miracles performed by prophets.⁵ However, it is primarily Birgit Krawietz's pioneering work on the

2 Berriah, "Ibn Taymiyya's Conception of Jihad," 53-56.

3 Yahya Michot and Lina Stas, "Ibn Taymiyya's Fatwa on Martial Arts Training," *The Muslim World* 108, no. 3 (2018): 1-27.

4 Stephan Conermann, "Muḥammad zu Pferde im Kampf. Ein Beispiel für das Genre der *Furūsiyya an-nabawīyya* während der Mamlukenzeit (1250-1517)," in *Pferde in Asien: Geschichte, Handel und Kultur*, ed. Bert G. Fragner, et al. (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 51-61; Abbès Zouache, "Une culture en partage: la *furūsiyya* à l'épreuve du temps," *Médiévales* 64 (2013): 57-75; Mehdi Berriah, "Le cheval arabe chez les Mamelouks baḥriyya entre pragmatisme, symboles et représentations (XIII^e-XIV^e siècles)," *Arabian Humanities* 8 (2017): §15-18; Mehdi Berriah, "Représentations, sunnanisation et sacralisation de la *furūsiyya* à l'époque mamelouke (XIII^e-XVI^e siècle)," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 67 (2020): 229-246.

5 Alfred Morabia, "Prodiges prophétiques et surnaturel démoniaque selon Ibn Taymiyya," *Actes du 8e Congrès de l'Union européenne des arabisants et islamisants* (Edisud, 1976), 167-169.

subject and, more recently, Tobias Nünlist's book that have significantly advanced our understanding of demonology in Ibn Taymiyya's thought.⁶

This study is divided into two parts. First, *jinn*-s are briefly presented before studying the theological-religious positions of Ibn Taymiyya on these creatures. Second, the personal experiences Ibn Taymiyya reports regarding *jinn*-s are described, the analysis of which teaches us more about the thought and figure of Ibn Taymiyya and, above all, helps us to understand them better.

The scattered and diluted data in most of the author's writings mean this article does not aim for completeness. The results presented here are preliminary and far from definitive. For this work, I primarily relied on a selection of excerpts from the *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, particularly the epistle titled *Idāḥ al-dalāla fī 'umūm al-risāla lil-thaqalayn* (*Clarifying the Indication of the Universality of the Message for Both Human Beings and Jinn*).⁷ This epistle, along with Badr al-Dīn al-Shiblī's (d. 769/1367) work *Ākāḥ al-marjān fī aḥkāḥ al-jānn* (*The Coral Barriers on the Legal Rulings Concerning the Jinn*) is considered one of the most fundamental texts on the topic of *jinn* in Islam, as F. Meier described it.⁸

Furthermore, I used, to a lesser extent, other writings by Ibn Taymiyya such as *Kitāb al-istiḳāma* (*The Book of Rectitude*) as well as others work from the classical period of Islam. In an attempt to analyse the material, I employed the following method: I compared the information by cross-referencing different passages and extracts. Finally, these

6 Birgit Krawietz, "Dschinnen und universelle Ordnung des Islams bei Ibn Taymiyya," in *Islamstudien ohne Ende: Festschrift für Werner Ende zum 65. Geburtstag* (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002), 251-259; Tobias Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam: Eine Untersuchung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung schriftlicher Quellen aus der vormodernen Zeit (600–1500)* (De Gruyter, 2015), 1, 5, 8, 19, 28, 30, 33, 42, 71, 73, 85, 90, 93, 96-100, 101, 109, 116, 121, 130, 132, 154, 199, 206, 247, 273, 278, 287, 295, 297, 298, 341, 399, 512, 517. See also: Dunja Rašić, *Bedeveled: Jinn Doppelgangers in Islam and Akbarian Sufism* (State University of New York Press, 2024).

7 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. Taymiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim and Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad (Mujammā' al-Malik Fahd, 2004), 19:9-65. This treatise has also been published in Arabic separately several times and translated into English by Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips.

8 Quoted in Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam*, 19 note 94. Although al-Shiblī's work is regarded as the definitive reference in Arabic on Islamic demonology, it is important to note that in several passages of his book, al-Shiblī adopts and occasionally quotes verbatim ideas and positions that Ibn Taymiyya elaborates in his *Idāḥ al-dalāla*. This highlights the significant contribution of the Hanbalite theologian to the field of Islamic demonology.

elements were set in context with other medieval sources and contemporary works on the subject.

Jinn-s in Islam

The name *jinn* comes from the verb *janna/yajunnu*, meaning *satara*, “hide.” The etymology of *jinn* (pl. *jinān* and *jinna*) stems from the creatures it designates being “hidden” from humans.⁹

Other cultures contain references to invisible creatures and spirits that can only make us think of *jinn-s*.¹⁰ In addition to literature, archaeology and epigraphy have revealed that the world of *jinn-s* was part of the culture of pre-Islamic societies in the north of the Arabian Peninsula, such as Palmyra.¹¹

The *jinn-s* were already well known at the time of *Jāhiliyya*. Among the stories told about them, testifying that belief in *jinn-s* was an element of pre-Islamic culture, was that each poet of the *Mu‘allaqāt* had their own *jinn*, whose names are mentioned in the verses. Arabic sources report that meetings took place between some of these poets and their *jinn*. In some cases, the *jinn* helped its poet compose his verses, such as ‘Abīd b. al-Abrāṣ. These interactions between poets and *jinn-s* continued after the appearance of Islam, with several cases being reported.¹²

The advent of Islam did not in any way call into question the existence of *jinn-s*; quite the contrary, the Qur’an and the hadiths offer information about them. In the Islamic tradition, *jinn-s* belong to the world of the invisible (*‘ālam al-ghayb*), like the angels, whereas humans live in the visible world.

The Qur’an contains the words *jinn* (twenty-three times), *jānn* (seven times) and *jinna* (five times), all of which refer to an invisible creature created from fire and endowed with supernatural physical strength. Like men, *jinn-s* can be good or bad, have different characters, and believe in different religions. *Jinn-s* are invisible to humans but can manifest

9 Ibn Manẓūr, *Liṣān al-‘Arab* (Dār Ṣādir, 1980), 13:92, 95.

10 For an overview see ‘Abd al-Karīm Nūfān ‘Abīdāt, *‘Ālām al-jinn fī ḍaw’ al-kitāb wa-l-Sunna* (Dār Kunūz Ishbīlyā, 2005), 92-101; Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* (Syracuse University Press, 2009), xii-xv.

11 For more information on *jinn-s* in the *Jāhiliyya*, see ‘Abīdāt, *‘Ālām al-jinn*, 101-108; El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 37-38.

12 El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 125-132.

in human, animal, or other forms. Sūra 72, called Sūrat al-Jinn, relates the conversion of *jinn*-s after hearing the Prophet recite the Qur'an. Still today, a mosque in Mecca is called the Jinn Mosque in reference to the place of the allegiance the *jinn*-s made to the Prophet after hearing his recitation of the Qur'an.¹³

The Sunna also contains various episodes of the *sīra*, in which the Prophet interacts with *jinn*-s, and many hadiths provide unique data not found in the Qur'an, including the characteristics of *jinn*-s. The following quotes are examples of mentions of *jinn*-s:

1. An *ifrīt* among the *jinn*-s suddenly appeared before me last night (or a similar expression) to urge me to interrupt the prayer, but Allah allowed me to master it, and I wanted to tie it to one of the columns of the mosque so you could all see it in the morning. But I remembered my brother Solomon's invocation: "And give me a kingdom such that no one after me will have a like" [Qur'an 38:35]. So I let him go cursed.¹⁴
2. There is not one among you who does not have a companion among the *jinn*-s.¹⁵
3. An excellent delegation of the Nuṣaybīn *jinn*-s came to me to ask for a viaticum, and I prayed to Allah that any poop they find on their way should have food for them.¹⁶ In another version, the Prophet explains to his Companions that the bones are the food of the *jinn*-s and, therefore, should not be used as a means of cleansing after doing their needs.¹⁷

In the Islamic tradition, the *jinn*-s inhabited the Earth before humans. As a result of their disobedience and the disorder they created on Earth,

13 Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka wa-mā jā'a fihā min al-āthār* (Dar al-Thaqāfa, 1965), 2:200–201.

14 For the hadiths, I only cite the author of the collection and the number of the hadith. The reader will find the complete references for the edition of the collection in the bibliography. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, hadith 3423.

15 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, hadith 2814.

16 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, hadith 3860.

17 For more information, see Badr al-Dīn al-Shiblī, *Ākām al-marjān fī aḥkām al-jānn*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Salām (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2012). See also Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam*, 85. According to the Islamic tradition, *jinn*-s usually live in various dirty and abandoned places. See 'Abidāt, *Ālām al-jinn*, 46–49, 54–58; Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam*, 199, 206.

God sent a group of angels to fight and drive them out.¹⁸ This belief is based on an interpretation of the Qur'anic verse "When Your Lord said to the angels, 'I am going to establish a vicar on earth.' They said, 'Will You establish someone there who will spread disorder and blood while we are there to sanctify and glorify You?' He said, 'I know what you do not know' (Qur'an 2:30). This Qur'anic exegesis is attributed to the Companion 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās (d. 68/687), the Prophet's first cousin, who is quoted by the later exegetes.¹⁹ The passage has become established as the mainstream²⁰ version among the ulema and was notably broadcast through al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), although many other versions do not attest to or specify the presence of *jinn*-s before humans on Earth.

The idea of the existence of *jinn*-s on Earth before humans has been refuted by contemporary scholars. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍa (d. 1935) and Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. 'Ashūr (d. 1973) considered the notion contrary to the context of Qur'an 2:30 and the result of the influence of Persian and

18 Amira El-Zein analyzes the elements of the different narratives of this episode, which exist in particular as to the nature of the disorders committed by these *jinn*-s; on the origin of Iblīs, who is presented as a captured *jinn* brought back to the heavens by the angels after having remained on earth; on the fate of *jinn*-s after their defeat against the angels. El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 38-41. On the nature/origin of Iblīs, see 44-47.

19 The interpretation of Rabī' b. Anas follows that of Ibn 'Abbās. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'an*, ed. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Dār Hajr, 2001), 1:478, 482-483, 486, 494, 500. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī reports the version of Ibn 'Abbās, but for him, the term angel mentioned does not refer to the group that fought the *jinn*-s according to the version of Ibn 'Abbās, but rather the angels in general. This last opinion is – according to al-Rāzī – that of the majority of the Companions. However, al-Rāzī does not refute the idea of *jinn*-s present on Earth, or he would have said it. Later, al-Rāzī explains that the term *khalīfa* in connection with Adam was the subject of two interpretations by the ulema. The first is that of Ibn 'Abbās, i.e. that Adam succeeds the *jinn*-s. Al-Rāzī does not refute or challenge this opinion. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 2:180-181. Al-Zamakhsharī does not use the term *jinn*-s in the text of the consulted edition at any point. It refers to a group that would have lived on Earth before the angels and committed *fasād*. He does not use the word *jinn*, and for him, angels lived on Earth before humans. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl wa-'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta'wīl* (Dār al-Ma'rifa, 2009), 70. Al-Qurṭubī reports the version without saying that it was Ibn 'Abbās who reported it and does not question it either. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'an*, ed. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2006), 1:409-410. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-aẓīm*, ed. Sāmī b. Muḥammad Salāma (Dār Ṭayyiba, 1999), 1:218-219.

20 For example, the entire chapter on *jinn* creation in al-Shiblī's *Ākām al-marjān* presents *jinn*-s as having lived on Earth before humans. Badr al-Dīn al-Shiblī, *Ākām al-marjān*, 12-14.

Greek mythology.²¹ Recently, Chauki Lazhar claimed no element in Qur'an 2:30 or even in the prophetic tradition can support the affirmation of the existence of *jinn*-s on Earth before humans. For Lazhar, the idea is probably influenced by the narratives called *al-Isrā'īliyyāt*.²² Far from being settled, this question deserves further investigation and is, therefore, an interesting research topic.

The *Jinn*-s in Ibn Taymiyya

In line with the general Sunni belief, believing in the existence of *jinn*-s is mandatory for Ibn Taymiyya. Whether among the *Salaf* (first three generations of Muslims), in all the different trends of *ahl al-Sunna wa-l-jamā'a* (People of Prophetic tradition and consensus) and even outside of it, there is consensus on the existence of *jinn*-s, and no one questions it.²³ Ibn Taymiyya adds that even the majority of groups among non-Muslims attest to the existence of these beings.²⁴ The only question is whether *jinn*-s can enter the human body, which is a subject of divergence among both Muslims and non-Muslims.²⁵

Numerous accounts of the *Jāhiliyya* and episodes of the prophetic *sīra* confirm the relationships that *jinn*-s and humans can have. In the section titled *al-Furqān bayna awliyā' al-Raḥmān wa-l-shayṭān* (*The Distinction between the Allies of the All-Merciful and those of Satan*), Ibn Taymiyya devotes a chapter to the interactions between *jinn*-s and humans, focusing in particular on the use of the former by the latter.

وَالْمَقْصُودُ هُنَا أَنَّ الْجِنَّ مَعَ الْإِنْسِ عَلَى أَحْوَالٍ: فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنَ الْإِنْسِ يَأْمُرُ الْجِنَّ بِمَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ وَرَسُولُهُ مِنْ عِبَادَةِ اللَّهِ وَخَدِّهِ وَطَاعَةِ نَبِيِّهِ وَيَأْمُرُ الْإِنْسُ بِذَلِكَ فَهَذَا مِنْ أَفْضَلِ أَوْلِيَاءِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى وَهُوَ فِي ذَلِكَ مِنْ

21 Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr* (al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya, 1984), 1:399; Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafṣīr al-manār* (al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya, 1990), 1:215.

22 Chauki Lazhar, *Vicegerency in Islamic Thought and Scripture: Towards a Qur'anic Theory of Human Existential Function* (Routledge, 2023), 47, 73 note 1.

23 As Yahya Michot writes: "Being a realist and a rationalist, the great Damascene Shaykh al-Islam does also remain, essentially, a medieval thinker. How else can one explain why, in the polemical controversy on the identity of the tutelary planet of Islam, he prefers Jupiter to Venus, instead of denouncing the whole debate as nonsense?" Yahya Michot, "Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology: Annotated Translation of Three Fatwas," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2000): 153.

24 Ibn Taymiyya, *Idāḥ al-dalāla*, 9-10, 13.

25 Ibn Taymiyya, *Idāḥ al-dalāla*, 9-10. For Ibn Taymiyya, philosophers do not believe in *jinn*-s or demons. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 13:74.

خُلَفَاءُ الرَّسُولِ وَنَوَابِهِ. وَمَنْ كَانَ يَسْتَعْمِلُ الْجِنَّ فِي أُمُورٍ مُبَاحَةٍ لَهُ فَهُوَ كَمَنْ اسْتَعْمَلَ الْإِنْسَ فِي أُمُورٍ مُبَاحَةٍ لَهُ [...] .

The idea here is that the interactions between *jinn*-s and humans vary: among humans, there are those who order *jinn*-s what God and His Prophet ordered in terms of worship and devotion to God alone, of obedience to His messenger, and He commands this also to humans. This type of person is one of the best friends of God the Most High, and in this way, he is one of the successors and representatives of the Prophet. And whoever uses a *jinn* in authorized acts, then he is in the image of the human who uses another human in authorized acts concerning him [...].²⁶

A few remarks are necessary after reading this passage. First, *jinn*-s are considered equal to humans at the level of responsibility for acts. The founding texts of Islam (Qur'an and Sunna) irrefutably confirm that *jinn*-s are, like humans, recipients of the divine word revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad, who was sent to both species (*al-thaqalān*).²⁷ As with humans, *jinn*-s are responsible for their actions (*al-taklīf*), for which they will be accountable to God on the day of the last judgement.²⁸

In addition to the theological-religious aspect, the fact that Ibn Taymiyya addresses the question of the use of *jinn*-s by humans seems not to be trivial. This inclusion can be considered a reflection of a practice or phenomenon Ibn Taymiyya observed, or at least heard spoken of, in Syrian society of the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries in which he lived. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya reports concrete examples of humans asking for the help of *jinn*-s:

[...] وَإِنْ اسْتَعَانَ بِهِمْ عَلَى الْمَعَاصِي فَهُوَ عَاصٍ: إِمَّا فَاسِقٌ وَإِمَّا مُذْنِبٌ غَيْرُ فَاسِقٍ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ تَامَّ الْعِلْمُ بِالشَّرِيعَةِ فَاسْتَعَانَ بِهِمْ فِيمَا يَظُنُّ أَنَّهُ مِنَ الْكَرَامَاتِ: مِثْلُ أَنْ يَسْتَعِينَ بِهِمْ عَلَى الْحُجِّ أَوْ أَنْ يَطِيرُوا بِهِ عِنْدَ السَّمَاعِ الْبُذْعِيِّ أَوْ أَنْ يَحْمِلُوهُ إِلَى عَرَافَاتٍ وَلَا يَحْجُ الْحُجَّ الشَّرْعِيَّ الَّذِي أَمَرَهُ اللَّهُ بِهِ وَرَسُولُهُ وَأَنْ يَحْمِلُوهُ مِنْ مَدِينَةٍ إِلَى مَدِينَةٍ وَنَحْوِ ذَلِكَ فَهَذَا مَعْرُورٌ قَدْ مَكْرُوا بِهِ

26 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 11:307. On the issue of *taklīf* of *jinn*-s see 'Abidāt, 'Ālām al-*jinn*, 173-250; Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam*, 90-97, 295.

27 In Surāt al-Raḥmān (Qur'an 55), God repeatedly addresses both species, human and *jinn*-s, with the following verse: فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ("Then which of your Lord's favours will you both deny?")

28 Ibn Taymiyya *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 11:303-307.

[...] and if he [the human] seeks their help [*jinn*-s] to commit sins, then he is a sinner, either perverse or sinful without being perverse. And if he is not a good connoisseur of sharia and asks for their help in what he thinks is part of the *karāmāt*, like asking them to help him complete the pilgrimage, to fly it during an innovative *samāʿ* circle, or that they [the *jinn*-s] bring him to Mount ʿArafa without him carrying out the legal pilgrimage that God and His prophet ordered, or to transport him from one city to another, or any other similar action, this is only an illusion, and they [the *jinn*-s] played with him.²⁹

This passage is interesting because it constitutes a historical testimony to the beliefs and stories about the *jinn*-s of the time. Another important element in the passage is worth noting. Ibn Taymiyya evokes the term *karāmāt*, a very common term in Sufi literature. Moreover, he develops the subject in part of his *Furqān*, in which he relates the *karāmāt* of the Companions and the saints, explaining that the reason for their *karāmāt* lies in their piety and faith.³⁰ In addition, in a passage from his famous epistle *al-ʿAqīda al-wāsiṭiyya*, Ibn Taymiyya affirms that, to attest to the truthfulness of the phenomenon of *karāmāt* and, ultimately, to believe it, is part of the foundations of the people of the Sunna:

ومن أصول أهل السنة التصديق بكرامات الأولياء، وما يجري الله على أيديهم من خوارق العادات
.[...]

Among the foundations of the people of the Sunna are belief and the fact of considering as true the miracles (*karāmāt*) of the saints (*awliyāʾ*) and what God creates through them as unusual phenomena.³¹

These accounts of *karāmāt* (miraculous acts), when cross-referenced with other sources related to *taṣawwuf*, contribute to the deconstruction of Ibn Taymiyya's image as the quintessential anti-Sufi figure. Scholars such as Henri Laoust, Georges Makdisi, and Alfred Morabia have challenged these accusations of anti-Sufism, and their arguments have been further supported by more recent scholarship.³² This image of Ibn Taymiyya as

29 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-fatāwā*, 11:308. See also 13:77-78.

30 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-fatāwā*, 11:275-283.

31 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-ʿAqīda al-wāsiṭiyya*, ed. Ṣāliḥ b. Fawzān (Dār al-Fayḥā/Dār al-Salām, 1997), 156.

32 Henri Laoust, *Le hanbalisme sous les Mamelouks Bahrides (658-784/1260-1382)* (Geuthner, 1960), 35; Henri Laoust, "Le réformisme d'Ibn Taymiyya," *Islamic Studies* 1, no. 3 (September 1962):

anti-Sufi was initially perpetuated by the Wahhabi movement, which declared Sufi brotherhoods heretical and waged a relentless struggle against them. In simple terms, this portrayal of Ibn Taymiyya as anti-Sufi stems from the following syllogism: 1) Ibn Taymiyya is one of the most important intellectual sources of Wahhabism; 2) Wahhabism developed a strong hostility toward many Sufi practices, particularly those associated with saint veneration and intercession; 3) therefore, Ibn Taymiyya is perceived as “anti-Sufi” since Wahhabism—strongly critical of Sufi devotional practices—heavily relied on his writings.

A second reason for this perception is the persistence of this image in Western scholarship, which has largely been influenced by viewing Ibn Taymiyya through the Wahhabi-Salafi lens. As a result, he has been interpreted, *a posteriori*, as anti-Sufi.

The final point lies in the lack of nuance in analyzing Ibn Taymiyya’s positions regarding Sufism. He was not opposed to Sufism as such. More specifically, he did not reject Sufism as a spiritual or mystical tradition that adheres to Islamic norms and seeks to bring believers closer to God. His critiques were directed at specific practices and beliefs within Sufism that he deemed to deviate from Islamic principles.³³ It would be more objective to state that Ibn Taymiyya’s unease with Sufism extends beyond mere opposition to certain practices within specific Sufi brotherhoods, which he virulently criticizes and fiercely opposes. For instance, he condemns certain forms of *samāʿ* gatherings, accusing them of fostering

33; Makdisi, “Ibn Taymiyya: A Šūfī of the Qādiriyya Order,” *American Journal of Arabic Studies* 1 (1973): 118-129; Morabia, “Prodiges prophétiques,” 162-164; Thomas Emil Homerin, “Ibn Taymiyya’s al-Šūfiyyah wa-al-Fuqarā’,” *Arabica* 32 (1985): 219-244; Qais Assef, “Le soufisme et les soufis selon Ibn Taymiyya,” *Bulletin d’études orientales*, 60 (2012): 91-121; Yahya Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Commentary on the Creed of al-Ḥallāj,” in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 123; Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation: A Study of Dar’ ta’arūḍ al-ʿaql wa-l-naql* (Brill, 2019), 88 fn. 32.

33 A simple reading of a few passages from his *Kitāb al-istiḳāma* – which is a commentary on al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla* on Sufism – in which he positively evokes the terms of *ʿarīf*, *ahl al-maʿrifah*, *karāmāt*, shows that he speaks highly of illustrious Sufi masters such as Sahl b. ʿAbdallāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298/910), or ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (565/1165) to name a few. Moreover, it is worth noting that Ibn Taymiyya appreciates and adheres to words attributed to al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), who is often presented as the figure of the heretic or apostate par excellence. Although critical of him, Ibn Taymiyya claims that many lies and exaggerations have been said about al-Ḥallāj. Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-Istiḳāma*, 105-107. See also Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Commentary on the Creed of al-Ḥallāj,” 123-136; Kamal Gasimov, “Muslim Saints Contested: Ibn Taymiyya’s Critique of al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla*,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 34, no. 2 (2023): 153–211.

environments conducive to practices that violate Islamic principles. These include the alleged presence of demons, enabling some participants to perform supernatural acts (such as flying, walking into fire, or handling red-hot irons) and others to commit acts of violence, including killing.³⁴ In a recent study, Arjan Post and Sarah Van Eyken have shown that Ibn Taymiyya and his entourage, in their discussion of the status of *samāʿ*, systematically refer to the first great figures of the formative period of *taṣawwuf*, such as al-Junayd (d. 289/910), al-Rūḍhabārī (d. 322/934), or Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945). Ibn Taymiyya and his followers consider the formative period to be the time of “true” and “pure” Sufism. For them, the early Sufi masters neither practised nor approved of the innovative and illegal *samāʿ* as it was practised at the time of Ibn Taymiyya.³⁵ Finally, with regard to the concept of *fanāʿ*, Ibn Taymiyya’s position also differs from that of the Sufis.³⁶

Regarding *jinn*-s, Ibn Taymiyya heard stories about them helping people in their affairs. He believed these accounts and states so explicitly. Ibn Taymiyya reports that, during a *samāʿ* session attended by the shaykh Shabīb al-Shaṭī, an *ifrīt* danced in the air above the shaykh and his companions.³⁷

Personal experiences with *jinn*-s

Ibn Taymiyya not only quotes stories he has heard. A passage from the *Majmūʿ al-fatāwā* highlights that Ibn Taymiyya knows individuals to whom demons, in various forms, delivered certain messages:

34 Jean R. Michot, *Musique et danse selon Ibn Taymiyya: le Livre du samāʿ et de la danse / compilé par le shaykh Muḥammad al-Manbijī; traduit de l’arabe, présentation, notes et lexique par Jean R. Michot* (J. Vrin, 1991), 82-86, 125-129. Ibn Taymiyya claims that, in his youth, he was invited to take part in a *samāʿ* session, but he refused. Nevertheless, he recounts watching from the place where he had stood aside wine-drunk participants and the presence of demons. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-fatāwā*, 10:419. Quoted in Michot, *Musique et danse selon Ibn Taymiyya*, 24-25.

35 Arjan Post and Sarah Van Eyken, “Ibn Taymiyya and His Circle on *Samāʿ*: A Means to Purify Sufism? (with an Arabic Edition of al-Wāsiṭī’s (d. 711/1311) *Bulgha*),” *Islamic Law and Society* 31, no. 1-2 (May 2024): 41-49.

36 For a discussion see Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya* (Oneworld, 2019), 61-63, 70-73. Also, see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 50-54 on Ibn al-ʿArabī.

37 «ولهذا كان مرة في سماع يحضره الشيخ شبيب الشطلي، فبينما هم في [سماع] أحدهم، وإذا بعفريت يرقص في الهواء على رؤوسهم، فتعجبوا منه [...] فوقع هذا. والقصة معروفة. يعرفها أصحاب الشيخ.»

Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-istiḳāma*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Dār al-Faḍīla, 2005), 228.

فَإِنِّي أَعْرِفُ مَنْ يُخَاطِبُهُ النَّبَاتَاتُ بِمَا فِيهَا مِنَ الْمَنَافِعِ وَإِنَّمَا يُخَاطِبُهُ الشَّيْطَانُ الَّذِي دَخَلَ فِيهَا وَأَعْرِفُ مَنْ يُخَاطِبُهُمُ الْحَجَرُ وَالشَّجَرُ وَتَقُولُ: هَنِينًا لَكَ يَا وَلِيَّ اللَّهِ فَيَقْرَأُ آيَةَ الْكُرْسِيِّ فَيَذْهَبُ ذَلِكَ. وَأَعْرِفُ مَنْ يَقْصِدُ صَيْدَ الطَّيْرِ فَتُخَاطِبُهُ الْعَصَافِيرُ وَغَيْرُهَا وَتَقُولُ: خُذْنِي حَتَّى يَأْكُلَنِي الْفُقَرَاءُ وَيَكُونُ الشَّيْطَانُ قَدْ دَخَلَ فِيهَا كَمَا يَدْخُلُ فِي الْإِنْسِ وَيُخَاطِبُهُ بِذَلِكَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَكُونُ فِي الْبَيْتِ وَهُوَ مُغْلَقٌ فَيَرَى نَفْسَهُ خَارِجَهُ وَهُوَ لَمْ يَفْتَحْ وَبِالْعَكْسِ وَكَذَلِكَ فِي أَبْوَابِ الْمَدِينَةِ وَتَكُونُ الْجِنُّ قَدْ أَدْخَلَتْهُ وَأَخْرَجَتْهُ بِسُرْعَةٍ أَوْ تَمُرُ بِهِ أَنْوَارٌ أَوْ تَحْضُرُ عِنْدَهُ مَنْ يَطْلُبُهُ وَيَكُونُ ذَلِكَ مِنَ الشَّيَاطِينِ يَتَصَوَّرُونَ بِصُورَةٍ صَاحِبِهِ فَإِذَا قَرَأَ آيَةَ الْكُرْسِيِّ مَرَّةً بَعْدَ مَرَّةٍ ذَهَبَ ذَلِكَ كُلُّهُ. وَأَعْرِفُ مَنْ يُخَاطِبُهُ مُخَاطَبٌ وَيَقُولُ لَهُ أَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ وَيَعِدُّهُ بِأَنَّهُ الْمَهْدِيُّ الَّذِي بَشَّرَ بِهِ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَيُظْهِرُ لَهُ الْخَوَارِقَ مِثْلَ أَنْ يَخْطُرَ بِقَلْبِهِ تَصَرُّفٌ فِي الطَّيْرِ وَالْجَرَادِ فِي الْهَوَاءِ؛ فَإِذَا خَطَرَ بِقَلْبِهِ ذَهَابَ الطَّيْرُ أَوْ الْجَرَادُ يَمِينًا أَوْ شِمَالًا ذَهَبَ حَيْثُ أَرَادَ وَإِذَا خَطَرَ بِقَلْبِهِ قِيَامُ بَعْضِ الْمَوَاشِي أَوْ نَوْمُهُ أَوْ ذَهَابُهُ حَصَلَ لَهُ مَا أَرَادَ مِنْ غَيْرِ حَرَكَةٍ مِنْهُ فِي الظَّاهِرِ وَتَحْمِلُهُ إِلَى مَكَّةَ وَتَأْتِي بِهِ وَتَأْتِيهِ بِأَشْخَاصٍ فِي صُورَةٍ جَمِيلَةٍ وَتَقُولُ لَهُ هَذِهِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ الْكَرُوبِيُّونَ أَرَادُوا زِيَارَتَكَ فَيَقُولُ فِي نَفْسِهِ: كَيْفَ تَصَوَّرُوا بِصُورَةِ الْمَرْدَانِ فَيَرْفَعُ رَأْسَهُ فَيَجِدُهُمْ بِلَحْيٍ وَيَقُولُ لَهُ عَلَامَةٌ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْمَهْدِيُّ إِنَّكَ تَنْبُتُ فِي جَسَدِكَ شَامَةٌ فَتَنْبُتُ وَيرَاهَا وَغَيْرَ ذَلِكَ وَكُلَّهُ مِنْ مَكْرِ الشَّيْطَانِ.

I personally know people to whom plants have spoken, telling them useful things, but it is Satan, who have entered them [plants], who speaks to them. And I know some to whom stones and trees have said: “Congratulations to you O ally of Allāh!” And when they recite [*āyat al-kursī*] they make them run away. I know a person who went out to hunt birds, and one of them said to him, “Take me in order to feed the poor!” It was Satan who entered that bird as he enters the human being and speaks. Some of them are in their locked houses, and suddenly they find themselves outside without the door being opened, or it may be outside and find itself inside, and it may also be at the gates of a city, and it is a *jinn* who brings him inside and carries him away very quickly. Sometimes the *jinn* shows them the light, brings them the one they ask for, or they are devils who have taken the form of the person they wanted. And when the verse of the throne (*āyat al-kursī*) is recited, all these things disappear at once. I know a person who was told, “I am coming by the command of Allāh.” [And this person] promised him that he was the Mahdī whom the Prophet – peace and blessings of God upon him – had foretold. He made him see prodigies so as to put in his heart [images] of birds and locusts that fly to his right and left, and then they go where the person has sensed [imagined]. He may put in his heart [images of] some animals that rise up before him, lie down, or move, and then it happens as he thought without any movement on his part. He may take it to Mecca and bring it back, or he may show up with some beautiful people and say that they are angels who wanted to visit him. He will ask, “How can angels come in the form of young boys?” And when he lifts his head, he will see that they have beards. And he [the *jinn*] will say to him, “The sign that you are the

Mahdī is a mark that will appear on your body,” then [this mark] appears and he sees it. All these things are part of the devil’s trickery.³⁸

The phenomenon described by Ibn Taymiyya echoes the beliefs of the *Jāhiliyya* period that animals were a place for spiritual entities to hide from humans, to trap them, or to transmit a message to them. In the beliefs and mythologies of various ancient civilizations (Egypt, Mesopotamia, India), wild animals were often thought of as demons or spirits.³⁹ The personal experience of Ibn Taymiyya with *jinn*-s is interesting:

وَتَارَةً يَأْتُونَ إِلَى مَنْ هُوَ خَالٍ فِي الْبَرِّيَّةِ وَقَدْ يَكُونُ مَلَكًا أَوْ أَمِيرًا كَثِيرًا وَيَكُونُ كَافِرًا وَقَدْ انْقَطَعَ عَنْ أَصْحَابِهِ وَعَطِشَ وَخَافَ الْمَوْتَ فَيَأْتِيهِ فِي صُورَةِ إِنْسِيٍّ وَيَسْقِيهِ وَيَدْعُوهُ إِلَى الْإِسْلَامِ وَيَتُوبُهُ فَيُسَلِّمُ عَلَى يَدَيْهِ وَيَتُوبُهُ وَيُطْعِمُهُ وَيُدُلُّهُ عَلَى الطَّرِيقِ وَيَقُولُ مَنْ أَنْتَ؟ فَيَقُولُ: أَنَا فَلَانٌ وَيَكُونُ مِنْ مُؤْمِنِي الْجَنِّ. كَمَا جَرَى مِثْلُ هَذَا لِي. كُنْتُ فِي مِصْرَ فِي قَلْعَتِهَا وَجَرَى مِثْلُ هَذَا إِلَى كَثِيرٍ مِنَ التُّرْكَ مِنَ نَاحِيَةِ الْمَشْرِقِ وَقَالَ لَهُ ذَلِكَ الشَّخْصُ أَنَا ابْنُ تَيْمِيَّةَ فَلَمْ يَشْكُ ذَلِكَ الْأَمِيرَ أَنِّي أَنَا هُوَ وَأَخْبَرَ بِذَلِكَ مَلِكَ مَارِدِينَ وَأَرْسَلَ بِذَلِكَ مَلِكَ مَارِدِينَ إِلَى مَلِكَ مِصْرَ رَسُولًا وَكُنْتُ فِي الْحَبْسِ؛ فَاسْتَعْظَمُوا ذَلِكَ وَأَنَا لَمْ أَخْرُجْ مِنَ الْحَبْسِ وَلَكِنْ كَانَ هَذَا جَنْبًا يَجُنُّا فَيَصْنَعُ بِالتُّرْكَ التَّزَمُّنَ مِثْلَ مَا كُنْتُ أَصْنَعُ بِهِمْ؛ لَمَّا جَاءُوا إِلَى دِمَشْقَ: كُنْتُ أَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَى الْإِسْلَامِ فَإِذَا نَطَقَ أَحَدُهُمْ بِالشَّهَادَتَيْنِ أَطْعَمْتُهُمْ مَا تَيْسَّرَ فَعَمِلَ مَعَهُمْ مِثْلَ مَا كُنْتُ أَعْمَلُ وَأَرَادَ بِذَلِكَ إِكْرَامِي لِيُظَنَّ ذَاكَ أَنِّي أَنَا الَّذِي فَعَلْتُ ذَلِكَ. قَالَ لِي طَائِفَةٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ: فَلِمَ لَا يَجُوزُ أَنْ يَكُونَ مَلَكًا؟ قُلْتُ لَا. إِنَّ الْمَلَكَ لَا يَكْذِبُ وَهَذَا قَدْ قَالَ أَنَا ابْنُ تَيْمِيَّةَ وَهُوَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ كَاذِبٌ فِي ذَلِكَ.

It is possible that a *jinn* meets in a desert land a person who may be an emir, a king, or a thirsty disbeliever and who is threatened with death [due to this thirst]. He [the *jinn*] shows himself to him in human form, calls him to Islam and makes him repent, greets him by shaking his hand, gives him food, and shows him the way. The man asks him, “Who are you?” and he replies, “I am so-and-so,” as happened to me once...While I was in Egypt imprisoned in a fortress, a person came and said to many Turks, and in particular to one of their amirs: “I am Ibn Taymiyya,” and the emir had no doubt that he was me. The emir of Mardin was informed of this and sent someone to Egypt while I was in prison. They were amazed at this while because I was still imprisoned. In fact, he was a *jinn* who loved me, and he acted with the Turks as I used to do when they came to Damascus, calling them to Islam, and after they attested to the faith, I used to give them food from what I had. So, he would do this as I did, out of respect for me. A group of people said to me, “Could he be an angel?”

38 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 11:300-301.

39 El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 89-102.

I replied, “No, because the angel does not lie and this one claimed to be Ibn Taymiyya, and he knew well that he was lying about that!”⁴⁰

This interest in *jinn* and in the wider *‘ālam al-ghayb* (the world of the unseen) may at first appear to contrast with the common image of Ibn Taymiyya as a scholar primarily focused on defending his theological positions on *tawhīd* (the unity of God), the divine names and attributes, *kalām*, and on refuting the principles of Aristotelian philosophers as well as certain Sufi figures and practices that he regarded as heterodox. A closer look, however, shows that his engagement with *jinn* fits coherently within the broader framework of his thought. His knowledge, personal experiences, and numerous anecdotes concerning *jinn* suggest that he was attentive not only to abstract doctrinal questions but also to social and religious phenomena that shaped the everyday life of his contemporaries. It is well known that Ibn Taymiyya maintained close contact with the wider population and sought to make religious knowledge accessible, including complex theological issues.⁴¹ In this respect, he often appears as a more “popular” scholar than many other ulema who held high offices or were closely tied to the Mamluk establishment.⁴² Given the prominence of beliefs about *jinn* in the religious imagination of his time, and the continuing influence of such beliefs in various parts of the Muslim world today, it is not surprising that he addressed this topic in detail.⁴³

40 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 13:92-93. For another account of a demon assuming the appearance of Ibn Taymiyya see Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 35:115-116. On the ability of demons, whose help is sought by humans, to take on a human appearance see Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 11:308-309; Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam*, 154. On demons taking on the appearance of animals see Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam*, 121, 130-132.

41 Caterina Bori, “Theology, Politics, Society: The Missing Link. Studying Religion in the Mamluk Period,” in *Ubi Sumus? Quo Vademus? Mamluk Studies – State of the Art*, ed. Stephan Conermann (V&R unipress/Bonn University Press, 2013), 78–80; Caterina Bori, “Religious Knowledge between Scholarly Conservatism and Commoners’ Agency,” in *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam*, ed. Amando Salvatore (Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 301–306. See also Caterina Bori, “The Collection and Edition of Ibn Taymiyah’s Works: Concerns of a Disciple,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (2009): 55–56.

42 Berriah, “Mobility and Versatility,” 117-120.

43 Fred Leemhuis, “Épouser un djinn? Passé et présent,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 11 (1993): 179-192; Pierre Lory, “Esprits terrestres (djinn) et relations sexuelles en islam traditionnel,” in *De Socrate à Tintin. Anges gardiens et démons familiers de l’Antiquité à nos jours*, ed. Jean-Patrice Boudet, Philippe Faure, and Christian Renoux (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), §16-24; Saâdia Radi, *Surnaturel et société. L’explication magique de la maladie et du malheur à Khénifra, Maroc* (Centre Jacques Berque, 2013), 41-60.

These beliefs could easily give rise to practices associated with *shirk* (associationism), which is considered the gravest sin in Islam and which he repeatedly denounces in his writings. The condemnation of *shirk* and the defence of *tawhīd* are among the most central themes of his work and were the objects of considerable intellectual effort on his part.⁴⁴

Ibn Taymiyya, the Exorcist

Despite the physical inferiority of humans compared with *jinn*, in the Islamic tradition, the former remains superior to the latter on different levels.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, humans are often possessed by a *jinnī* (masculine) or *jinniyya* (feminine). In this case, the person is more often called *maṣrū'* than *majnūn*.⁴⁶ The belief in the ability of *jinn* to possess or harm a human also existed in the pre-Islamic period.⁴⁷

The main reasons for possession include love, passion, and sexual desire, but there are other reasons.⁴⁸ The *Jāhiliyya* contains stories about the sexual desire of a *jinn* for a human and sexual relations between these two types of creatures.⁴⁹ The appearance of Islam confirmed this phenomenon, which became a matter of jurisprudence discussed by the ulema. By extension, the question of marriage between a *jinn* and a human was raised, as was the birth of children from this union between the two races.⁵⁰ For Ibn Taymiyya, this type of marriage and the existence of offspring from this union are well known.⁵¹ A few years after the death

44 Berriah, "Mobility and Versatility," 120-122.

45 El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 24-31.

46 Pierre Larcher, "Maḡnūn et Mabruk: des participes en quête de verbes," *Arabica* 65, no. 4 (2018): 538-541. On *ṣar'* (epilepsy) and its origin, see 'Alī Ḥasan al-Ḥalabī, *Burhān al-shar' fi ithbāt al-mass wa-l-ṣar'* (Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1996); 'Abidāt, *Ālām al-jinn*, 251-309.

47 El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 73-75.

48 Ibn Taymiyya, *Īdāḥ al-dalāla*, 40. In the same paragraph, Ibn Taymiyya says that other reasons exist, such as the revenge of *jinn*-s against the harms they may suffer from humans, which could be unintentional harms not all humans can be aware of, such as spilling hot water, urinating on them, or killing them. Also, the *jinn* can possess a human by way of entertainment/game (*abath*) in the image of the actions that can commit a human against another. See also: Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 13:82-83. Elsewhere, Ibn Taymiyya claims that "in *jinn* one finds ignorance and injustice" (وفي الجن جهل). (Ibn Taymiyya, *Īdāḥ al-dalāla*, 24.

49 Leemhuis, "Épouser un djinn?," 183.

50 Leemhuis, "Épouser un djinn?," 184-185; Lory, "Esprits terrestres (djinn)," §8-10.

51 [...] وقد يتناكح الإنس والجن ويولد بينهما ولدا وهذا كثير معروف وقد ذكر العلماء ذلك وتكلموا عليه وكره أكثر العلماء مناكحة الجن [...] "الجن"

of Ibn Taymiyya, al-Shiblī dedicated a chapter on the subject in *Ākāṁ al-marjān fī aḥkām al-jānn*.⁵² A century later, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), relying largely on the work of al-Shiblī while adding some new elements, also addressed the question.⁵³

Several contemporary works have confirmed that the belief in marriage and sexual relations between humans and *jinn*-s remains alive in Arab-Muslim societies,⁵⁴ and in Muslim communities in the West, where the practice of *ruqya* (Islamic exorcism) has developed strongly in recent years.⁵⁵

Ibn Taymiyya explains the different phenomena that can be observed when a *jinn* possesses a human:

[...] فَإِنَّهُ يَصْرَعُ الرَّجُلَ فَيَتَكَلَّمُ بِلِسَانٍ لَا يَعْرِفُ مَعْنَاهُ وَيُضْرِبُ عَلَى بَدَنِهِ ضَرْبًا عَظِيمًا لَوْ ضُرِبَ بِهِ جَمَلٌ لَأَثَرُ بِهِ أَثَرًا عَظِيمًا. وَالْمَصْرُوعُ مَعَ هَذَا لَا يَحِشُّ بِالضَّرْبِ وَلَا بِالْكَلَامِ الَّذِي يَقُولُهُ وَقَدْ يَجْرُ الْمَصْرُوعُ وَغَيْرُ الْمَصْرُوعِ وَيَجْرُ الْبَسَاطُ الَّذِي يَجْلِسُ عَلَيْهِ وَيَحُولُ آلَتٌ. وَيَنْقُلُ مِنْ مَكَانٍ إِلَى مَكَانٍ وَيُجْرِي غَيْرَ ذَلِكَ مِنَ الْأُمُورِ مَنْ شَاهَدَهَا أَفَادَتْهُ عِلْمًا صَرُورِيًّا بِأَنَّ النَّاطِقَ عَلَى لِسَانِ الْإِنْسَانِيِّ وَالْمُحَرِّكَ لِهَذِهِ الْأَجْسَامِ جِنْسٌ آخَرَ غَيْرَ الْإِنْسَانِ. وَلَيْسَ فِي أَيْمَةِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مَنْ يُنْكِرُ دُخُولَ الْجِنِّيِّ فِي بَدَنِ الْمَصْرُوعِ وَغَيْرِهِ وَمَنْ أَنْكَرَ ذَلِكَ وَادَّعَى أَنَّ الشَّرْعَ يَكْذِبُ ذَلِكَ فَقَدْ كَذَبَ عَلَى الشَّرْعِ وَلَيْسَ فِي الْأَدِلَّةِ الشَّرْعِيَّةِ مَا يَنْفِي ذَلِكَ.

[...] the victim of possession sometimes speaks an unknown language. Sometimes he is hit so hard that the blow would have left a deep impact, even on a camel, without him feeling it or being aware of what he is saying. Sometimes the victim pulls people around him and the carpet he is sitting on; sometimes he moves objects or even moves from one place to another; and other things of this kind. Anyone who observes these facts necessarily deduces that the person who expresses himself through the victim and moves these objects belongs to a non-human species. None of the imams of the Muslims deny the penetration of the *jinn* into the bodies of the possessed and into the bodies of other people. Whoever denies this and maintains that the sharia excludes it has lied about it; there is no religious evidence against it.⁵⁶

Ibn Taymiyya, *Iḍāḥ al-dalāla*, 40. For more information, see 'Abidāt, *Ālām al-jinn*, 325-342; Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam*, 512, 517.

52 al-Shiblī, *Ākāṁ al-marjān*, 64-73.

53 Al-Suyūṭī, *Laqṭ al-marjān fī aḥkām al-jānn* (Maktabat al-Qur'an, s.d.), 30-38.

54 Leemhuis, "Épouser un djinn?," 186-189; Lory, "Esprits terrestres (djinn)," §16-24.

55 Hanifa Touag, "Guérir par l'islam: l'adoption du rite prophétique – roqya – par les salafistes en France et en Belgique," in *Islam belge au pluriel*, ed. Brigitte Maréchal and Farid El Asri (Presses universitaires de Louvain), 2012, 201-217.

56 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 24:277. See also: Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam*, 273.

The end of these remarks is related to another passage, in which Ibn Taymiyya explains that some Mutazilites, such as Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī (d. 916/303) and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 951/370), denied the possibility that a *jinn* could take possession of the human body by penetrating it.⁵⁷

Exorcism performed through reciting Qur’anic verses is still practised today.⁵⁸ However, other methods not based on the Qur’an also exist. These methods consist of a ritual leading the possessed participants to enter a trance state obtained through music. The goal is to seek another *jinn* to heal the possessed.⁵⁹ Although the work of Saâdia Radi concerns a contemporary phenomenon, the practice probably existed in the time of Ibn Taymiyya, as his testimony may suggest.

According to Saâdia Radi, who attended a trance session to analyse it, it is not an exorcism against *jinn*-s but the negotiation of a peaceful cohabitation with them. The intermediary in this negotiation is itself a *jinn*, which addresses the *jinn* possessing the person for whom the ritual was organized. The presence of *jinn*-s is, therefore, not questioned, and the goal is obviously an agreement. In this sense, the trance is a space of peace in which humans and *jinn*-s can communicate, provided that humans take the *jinn*-s seriously and, thus, possess them.⁶⁰ As discussed later in this article, Ibn Taymiyya is not against calling *jinn*-s to heal the *maṣrū’* as long as Islamic principles are respected. However, this type of trance session, like those described by Saâdia Radi, is probably the antipode of the Islamic creed, as certain practices prove, such as animal sacrifices by immolation in the names of *jinn*-s, which is an act of *shirk* in total opposition to *tawhīd*. In addition, the blood of the immolated beast is drunk by the possessed (*jinn*-s like to drink blood), but drinking blood is *ḥarām* (prohibited) in Islam, as explicitly stipulated in Qur’an 5:3.⁶¹

57 However, they did not deny the existence of *jinn*-s. Ibn Taymiyya, *Iḍāḥ al-dalāla*, 12.

58 Fatima-Zohra Cherak, “La *roqya*, une forme d’automédication chez les possédés et les ensorcelés (Algérie, Égypte, France)?,” *Anthropologie & Santé* 18 (2019): §28-30. On the healing power of the Qur’an and divine names, see El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the jinn*, 78-82.

59 Radi, *Surnaturel et société*, §33-34.

60 Radi, *Surnaturel et société*, §38.

61 “Forbidden to you are carrion, blood, and swine; what is slaughtered in the name of any other than Allah; what is killed by strangling, beating, a fall, or by being gored to death; what is partly eaten by a predator unless you slaughter it; and what is sacrificed on altars. You are also forbidden to draw lots for decisions. This is all evil. Today the disbelievers have given up all hope of undermining your faith. So, do not fear them; fear Me! Today I have perfected your faith for you, completed My favour

Reading these passages on *jinn*-s and the experiences of Ibn Taymiyya and his knowledge led me to wonder whether he could have practised *ruqya* and, thus, acted as a *rāqī* (exorcist). My suspicion was confirmed by the following excerpt:

[...] قَدْ يَجْتَاجُ فِي إِبْرَاءِ الْمَضْرُوعِ وَدَفْعِ الْجِنِّ عَنْهُ إِلَى الصَّرْبِ فَيُضْرَبُ ضَرْبًا كَثِيرًا جِدًّا وَالصَّرْبُ إِنَّمَا يَقَعُ عَلَى الْجَنِّيِّ وَلَا يَحْسُ بِهِ الْمَضْرُوعُ حَتَّى يَفِيقَ الْمَضْرُوعُ وَيُخْبِرَ أَنَّهُ لَمْ يَحْسُ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا يُؤْثَرُ فِي بَدَنِهِ وَيَكُونُ قَدْ ضُرِبَ بَعْضًا قَوِيَّةً عَلَى رِجْلَيْهِ نَحْوَ ثَلَاثِمِائَةٍ أَوْ أَرْبَعِمِائَةٍ ضَرْبَةً وَأَكْثَرُ وَأَقَلَّ بِحَيْثُ لَوْ كَانَ عَلَى الْإِنْسِيِّ لَقَتَلَهُ وَإِنَّمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْجَنِّيِّ وَالْجَنِّيُّ يَصِيحُ وَيَصْرُخُ وَيُحَدِّثُ الْحَاضِرِينَ بِأُمُورٍ مُتَعَدِّدَةٍ كَمَا قَدْ فَعَلْنَا نَحْنُ هَذَا وَجَرَّبْنَاهُ مَرَّاتٍ كَثِيرَةً يَطُولُ وَصْفُهَا بِحُضْرَةِ خَلْقٍ كَثِيرِينَ.

[...] He [the *rāqī*] may need to heal the possessed and expel the *jinn* from the latter to strike him. He strikes him many times, and the blows touch [in reality] only the *jinn* and the possessed feel nothing, to the point where, when he returns to him, he explains that he has felt nothing of the blows, which, moreover, leave no trace on his body. It may be that the possessed receive on their legs about three hundred or four hundred blows of a stick or more or so in such a way that if this number of blows were made to a human being, they would have killed him. But these blows are made to the *jinn*, and the *jinn* yells and screams, and discusses with the people present [at the *ruqya* session] multiple issues. And this [the *ruqya*] we have practised and experienced many times – it would be too long to describe – in the presence of many people.⁶²

A valuable testimony by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Ibn Taymiyya's student, confirms the latter's account of his practice of *ruqya*:

وَحَدَّثَنِي أَنَّهُ قَرَأَهَا مَرَّةً فِي أُذُنِ الْمَضْرُوعِ، فَقَالَتِ الرُّوحُ: نَعَمْ، وَمَدَّ بِهَا صَوْتَهُ. قَالَ: فَأَخَذْتُ لَهُ عَصًا، وَضَرَبْتُهُ بِهَا فِي عُرُوقِ عُنُقِهِ حَتَّى كَلَّتْ يَدَايَ مِنَ الصَّرْبِ، وَلَمْ يَشْكُ الْحَاضِرُونَ أَنَّهُ يَمُوتُ لَذَلِكَ الضَّرْبَةِ فِي أَثْنَاءِ الضَّرْبِ قَالَتْ: أَنَا أَحِبُّهُ.

فَقُلْتُ لَهَا: هُوَ لَا يَجُوبُكَ، قَالَتْ: أَنَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَحْجَّ بِهِ، فَقُلْتُ لَهَا هُوَ لَا يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَجَّ مَعَكَ، فَقَالَتْ أَنَا أَدْعُهُ كَرَامَةً لَكَ، قَالَ: قُلْتُ: لَا وَلَكِنْ طَاعَةٌ لِلَّهِ وَلِرَسُولِهِ، قَالَتْ: فَأَنَا أَخْرَجُ مِنْهُ، قَالَ: فَقَعَدَ الْمَضْرُوعُ يَلْتَفِتُ يَمِينًا وَشِمَالًا، وَقَالَ: مَا جَاءَ بِي إِلَى حُضْرَةِ الشَّيْخِ، قَالُوا لَهُ: وَهَذَا الضَّرْبُ كُلُّهُ؟ فَقَالَ وَعَلَى أَيِّ شَيْءٍ يَصْرُخُنِي الشَّيْخُ وَلَمْ أَذِيبْ، وَلَمْ يَشْعُرْ بِأَنَّهُ وَقَعَ بِهِ ضَرْبُ الْبَنَةِ.

upon you, and chosen Islam as your way. But whoever is compelled by extreme hunger – not intending to sin – then surely Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful”

62 Ibn Taymiyya, *Idāḥ al-dalāla*, 60.

وَكَانَ يُعَالِجُ بِآيَةِ الْكَرْسِيِّ، وَكَانَ يَأْمُرُ بِكَثْرَةِ قِرَاءَتِهَا الْمَصْرُوعَ وَمَنْ يُعَالِجُهُ بِهَا، وَيَقْرَأُ الْمُعَوِّذَتَيْنِ.

He [Ibn Taymiyya] related to me that he read it [a formula] into the ear of the *masrū'*; the *jinn* said: yes; he [Ibn Taymiyya] said: I took a stick, and I struck him with it on the veins of his neck, until my hands became weak from the blows. Those present had no doubt that he would die from the blows. During the blows, he [the *jinn*] said: I love him. I said: He does not love you. He said: I want to make a pilgrimage with him. I said: He does not want to make a pilgrimage with you. He said: I leave him in your honour. I said: No, for the obedience of God and His Prophet. He said: I am leaving him. The shaykh said: The *masrū'* looked to the right and to the left, then he said: Who is it that has brought me here in front of the shaykh. They [the attendants] said to him: And all these blows? He [the *masrū'*] said: And why did the shaykh beat me? I have not committed any sins. And he did not feel that he was beaten. He treated the verse of the throne and recommended to the *masrū'* and other people he treated to read it a lot and to read the *mu'awidhatayn*. (Sūra 113 and 114).⁶³

With these two testimonies and many others,⁶⁴ there is no doubt that Ibn Taymiyya was a *rāqī* and had good knowledge of the processes of the *ruqya* based on his experience.⁶⁵

A Supporter of Exorcism via *Jinn*-s?

In a section titled *al-Furqān bayna al-ḥaqq wa-l-bāṭil* of volume 13 of the *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, Ibn Taymiyya explains that humans and *jinn*-s can solicit each other and enjoy each other for various reasons. In most cases, it is humans who solicit *jinn*-s, either for praiseworthy actions in the obedience of God and His prophet or, on the contrary, detestable and illicit actions, such as the practice of *shirk* and other turpitudes. Finally, humans can use *jinn*-s for matters of the temporal field, such as bringing money, food, clothes, and other things from the lower world. Less common is a *jinn* using a human. In the latter case, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the goal is to use the human in what Satan loves and appreciates in terms

63 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṭibb al-nabawī* (Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, 1987), 68.

64 It exists in many reports from Ibn al-Qayyim. See 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jumayzī, *Su'ālāt Ibn al-Qayyim li-Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya wa samā'ātuḥu minhu* (Dār al-Tawḥīd lil-Nashr, 2005), 206-217.

65 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 24:278.

of *kufr* (disbelief), *fusūq* (perversity), and *maʿṣiya* (disobedience).⁶⁶ This passage can be read in conjunction with another that details the practice of invoking *jinn*-s and soliciting their help via talismans and/or specific Qurʾanic verses (*ʿazāʾim*⁶⁷). This solicitation of *jinn*-s by humans can be conducted by people of faith or those of *shirk*.⁶⁸

For Ibn Taymiyya, the use of *jinn*-s by humans is similar to one human using another, no matter the action. If the action is good, both will be rewarded; if it is unlawful, they will commit a sin, both being responsible for their acts.⁶⁹ In no case is Ibn Taymiyya against the use of a *jinn* by a human for the realization of a good action, quite the contrary.

According to Ibn Taymiyya, one is entitled to think that invoking a Muslim *jinn* to heal a possessed Muslim is a meritorious act, equivalent to when a human Muslim helps another to heal. Ibn Taymiyya writes that, if a human calls upon a *jinn* to make someone ill, then both participate in sin.⁷⁰ In contrast, if a human uses a *jinn* to heal a person, then both have a share of the reward. Ibn Taymiyya only counts the honourability of the act by the Muslim toward his coreligionists, even if they are of different races and worlds.

In the absence of data, it would be too risky to speculate on the method of invoking a Muslim *jinn* to heal a possessed person, as conceived by Ibn Taymiyya. However, given the information gathered and analysed in this article, it is certain it must be conducted through the Qurʾan and following the prophetic tradition, and in no case through formulas, talismans, or trance rituals containing *shirk* elements, which he strongly condemns.

The opinion of Ibn Taymiyya regarding the lawfulness of a human using a *jinn* is cited as an argument in the very contemporary debate about

66 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-fatāwa*, 13:81-85.

67 Singular *ʿazīma*: «عزيمة» Almaany, accessed November 22, 2025, <https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A9/>.

68 Ibn Taymiyya, *Idāḥ al-dalāla*, 13. See also Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam*, 341.

69 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-fatāwa*, 11:307-308; 13:81-88.

70 والمَقْصُودُ هُنَا أَنَّ الْجِنَّ مَعَ الْإِنْسِ عَلَى أَحْوَالٍ: فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنَ الْإِنْسِ يَأْمُرُ الْجِنَّ بِمَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ وَرَسُولُهُ مِنْ عِبَادَةِ اللَّهِ وَخُذَهُ وَطَاعَةِ نَبِيِّهِ وَيَأْمُرُ الْإِنْسِ بِذَلِكَ فَهَذَا مِنْ أَفْضَلِ أَوْلِيَاءِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى وَهُوَ فِي ذَلِكَ مِنْ خُلَفَاءِ الرَّسُولِ وَنَوَائِبِهِ. وَمَنْ كَانَ يَسْتَعْمِلُ الْجِنَّ فِي أُمُورٍ مَبَاحَةٍ لَهُ فَهُوَ كَمَنْ اسْتَعْمَلَ الْإِنْسَ فِي أُمُورٍ مَبَاحَةٍ لَهُ وَهَذَا كَأَن يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِمَا يَجِبُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَمَّا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَيَسْتَعْمِلُهُمْ فِي مَبَاحَاتٍ لَهُ فَيَكُونُ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الْمُلُوكِ الَّذِينَ يَفْعَلُونَ مِثْلَ ذَلِكَ وَهَذَا إِذَا قُدِّرَ أَنَّهُ مِنَ أَوْلِيَاءِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى فَغَايَتُهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ فِي غُيُومِ أَوْلِيَاءِ اللَّهِ مِثْلَ النَّبِيِّ الْفَلَكِ مَعَ الْعَبِيدِ الرَّسُولِ: كَسَلِمَاتٍ وَيُوسُفَ مَعَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى وَمُحَمَّدٍ صَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ وَسَلَامُهُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَجْمَعِينَ. وَمَنْ كَانَ يَسْتَعْمِلُ الْجِنَّ فِيمَا يَنْهَى اللَّهُ عَنْهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَإِمَا فِي الشَّرْكِ وَإِمَا فِي قَتْلِ مَعْصُومِ الدِّمِ أَوْ فِي الْعُدْوَانِ عَلَيْهِمْ بِغَيْرِ الْقَتْلِ كَتَمْرِ بِيضِهِ وَإِنْسَائِهِ الْعِلْمَ وَغَيْرَ ذَلِكَ مِنَ الظُّلْمِ وَإِمَا فِي فَاجِشَةٍ كَجَلْبِ مَنْ يَطْلُبُ مِنْهُ الْفَاجِشَةَ فَهَذَا قَدْ اسْتَعَانَ بِهِمْ عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ ثُمَّ إِنْ اسْتَعَانَ بِهِمْ عَلَى الْكُفْرِ فَهُوَ كَافِرٌ وَإِنْ اسْتَعَانَ بِهِمْ عَلَى الْمَعَاصِي فَهُوَ عَاصٍ. وَإِمَا خَاسِقٌ وَإِمَا مُذْنِبٌ غَيْرُ فَاسِقٍ. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-fatāwa*, 11:307-308.

the so-called “capture” method practised by some *rāqī*-s. The authorship of this practice is attributed to the Tunisian Abderraouf Ben Halima. Abderraouf Ben Halima is an engineer in statistics and economics and a mathematician by training. Born to a Tunisian father and an American mother, Abderraouf Ben Halima converted at the age of fifteen. Following his conversion, he dedicated himself to promoting the principles of Islam, particularly through the translation and writing of educational works.

On his official website, Abderraouf Ben Halima explains the so-called “capture” method. I quote verbatim the text as it is on the website:

Capture the Jinn is to bring them into the body of a person called the catcher; the djinn comes instantly and is our prisoner, we can do what we want with him. How is this possible? We discovered through the practice of *ruqya* the fact that all those who were possessed by Jinn and Jinn spoke through their mouth, once the djinn is gone and he is cured by the grace of Allah, an opening remains between him and the world of the Jinn that allows the Jinn to influence him but he can also act on their world through this opening. And how can he act on them and bring them? With the intention, the duaa and reciting *baqara* 148 from “aynama”. But how is it that they are our prisoners and to do what we want them? It is we who him back by the power of Allah and his words, so it will not leave that if we allow them, it is our prisoner. The lead in the world put it in a position of extreme vulnerability to interference. You only need to type his neck – neck of the catcher – your hand to cut off his head, and if you hit his hand, you he cuts the hand, etc. The catcher has no djinn who leads the djinns and we have not Jinn we work with, but the catcher has an opening on the world of the Jinn from its past by Jinn and witchcraft abuses, and this opening allows us to bring the Jinn by his intermediary to discuss with him and the control.⁷¹

The effectiveness of this method has made Ben Halima famous world-wide, as indicated by its website, which is available in English, French, Turkish, and Spanish. Since 2005, he has conducted multiple treatment and training campaigns to establish *ruqya* centres around the world “in 34 countries across 5 continents.” Abderraouf Ben Halima is also the

71 https://www.benhalimaabderraouf.fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=313&lang=en.

author of a manual in French on Muslim exorcism.⁷² Although identified as Muslim and primarily targeting Muslim patients, exorcism by capture also attracts non-Muslims, as documented by Denise Favre-Chatagny in her field investigation concerning this practice in Madagascar. Although described as a global success, the method of capture remains controversial because it is related to *shirk*.⁷³

On the website page regarding the method of capture, Abderraouf Ben Halima refutes the opinions of his opponents and detractors, mainly by highlighting their lack of evidence from the texts that categorically stipulate the prohibition of using a *jinn* to cure a person possessed or sick. Among the arguments of Abderraouf Ben Halima on the legality of his practice, he quotes Ibn Taymiyya, who reports that Companions of the Prophet used to ask questions to a *jinn* through a woman who had a *jinn* related to her. Abderraouf Ben Halima does not cite the reference to the writing of Ibn Taymiyya, but this can nevertheless be confirmed after finding the said narration in the Taymiyyan corpus.⁷⁴ Two other stories highlighting the use of a *jinn* by ‘Umar – and thus constituting additional arguments – have been identified.⁷⁵

The other argument in favour of capture was the possibility for Ibn Taymiyya to use *jinn*-s for *mubāḥāt* (authorized acts), as one would with another human. Ibn Taymiyya explains the following:

72 Abderraouf Ben Halima, *La roqya; traitement de la sorcellerie, djinns et mauvais œil par le Coran et la médecine prophétique* (Le Figuier, 2012). An English translation is available, titled *The Ruqya: Treatment of Sorcery, Jinn, and the Evil Eye through the Qur'an and Prophetic Medicine*.

73 Denise Favre-Chatagny, *Le captage à Madagascar: Guérir par le verbe* (L'Harmattan, 2016).

74 «وَقَدْ رَوَى عَنْ أَبِي مُوسَى الْأَشْعَرِيِّ أَنَّهُ أَبْطَأَ عَلَيْهِ خَبَرُ عُمَرَ وَكَانَ هُنَاكَ امْرَأَةٌ لَهَا قَرِينٌ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَسَأَلَهُ عَنْهُ فَأَخْبَرَهُ أَنَّهُ تَرَكَ عُمَرَ يَسْمُ إِلَهَ الصَّدَقَةِ»

It is reported from Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī that he was seeking ‘Umar but in vain. There was a lady [in Medina] who had a *qarīn* among the *jinn*-s. He [Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī] asked him [the lady’s *jinn*] about ‘Umar and informed him that the latter was busy [in such place] marking camels given in alms.

Ibn Taymiyya, *Iḍāḥ al-dalāla*, 63.

75 «وَعُمَرُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ لَمَّا نَادَى يَا سَارِيَةَ الْجَبَلِ قَالَ: إِنَّ إِلَهَ جُنُودَا يُبَلِّغُونَ صَوْتِي. وَجُنُودُ اللَّهِ هُمْ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَمِنْ صَالِحِي الْجِنِّ فَجَنُودُ اللَّهِ يَلْبَغُوا صَوْتَ عُمَرَ إِلَى سَارِيَةَ وَهُوَ أَنَّهُمْ نَادَوْهُ بِمِثْلِ صَوْتِ عُمَرَ وَالْأَنْفُسُ صَوْتُ عُمَرَ لَا يَصِلُ نَفْسُهُ فِي هَذِهِ الْمَسَافَةِ الْبَعِيدَةِ وَهَذَا كَالرَّجُلِ يَدْعُو آخَرَ وَهُوَ بَعِيدٌ عَنْهُ فَيَقُولُ: يَا فَلَانُ فَيَعَانُ عَلَى ذَلِكَ فَيَقُولُ الْوَاسِطَةُ بَيْنَهُمَا يَا فَلَانُ وَقَدْ يَقُولُ لِمَنْ هُوَ بَعِيدٌ عَنْهُ يَا فَلَانُ اخْبِسِ الْمَاءَ تَعَالَى إِلَهِنَا وَهُوَ لَا يَسْمَعُ صَوْتَهُ فَيُنَادِيهِ الْوَاسِطَةُ بِمِثْلِ ذَلِكَ يَا فَلَانُ اخْبِسِ الْمَاءَ أَرْسِلِ الْمَاءَ: إِمَّا بِمِثْلِ صَوْتِ الْأَوَّلِ إِنْ كَانَ لَا يَقْبَلُ إِلَّا صَوْتَهُ وَلَا فَلَانُ يَضُرُّ بِأَيِّ صَوْتٍ كَانَ إِذَا عَرَفَ أَنَّ صَاحِبَهُ قَدْ نَادَاهُ. وَهَذِهِ جَوَابُهُ: كَانَ عُمَرُ مَرَّةً قَدْ أَرْسَلَ جَيْشًا فَجَاءَ شَخْصٌ وَأَخْبَرَ أَهْلَ الْمَدِينَةِ بِالنِّصَارِ الْجَيْشِ وَشَاعَ الْخَبَرُ فَقَالَ عُمَرُ: مَنْ أَيْنَ لَكُمْ هَذَا؟ قَالُوا شَخْصٌ صِفْتُهُ كَيْتٌ وَكَيْتٌ فَأَخْبَرْنَا فَقَالَ عُمَرُ ذَاكَ أَبُو الْهَيْثُمِ بَرِيدُ الْجِنِّ وَسَيِّجِيءُ بَرِيدُ الْإِنْسَانِ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ بِأَيَّامٍ.»

Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 13:88.

وَالَّذِينَ يَسْتَعْتِدُونَ الْجِنَّ فِي الْمُبَاهَاتِ يُشْبِهُ اسْتِخْدَامَ سُلَيْمَانَ لَكِنْ أُعْطِيَ مُلْكًا لَا يَنْبَغِي لِأَحَدٍ بَعْدَهُ وَسُخِّرَتْ لَهُ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ وَهَذَا لَمْ يَحْصُلْ لغيره وَالتَّيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ [...] فَلَمْ يَسْتَعْتِدِ الْجِنَّ أَصْلًا؛ لَكِنْ دَعَاهُمْ إِلَى الْإِيمَانِ بِاللَّهِ وَقَرَأَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقُرْآنَ وَبَلَّغَهُمُ الرِّسَالَةَ وَبَايَعَهُمْ كَمَا فَعَلَ بِالْإِنْسِ. وَالَّذِي أُوتِيَهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَعْظَمُ مِمَّا أُوتِيَهِ سُلَيْمَانُ؛ فَإِنَّهُ اسْتَعْمَلَ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ فِي عِبَادَةِ اللَّهِ وَحْدَهُ وَسَعَادَتِهِمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ لَا لِيُغْرِضَ بِرَجْعٍ إِلَيْهِ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعًا وَجْهَ اللَّهِ وَطَلَبَ مَرْضَاتِهِ وَاخْتَارَ أَنْ يَكُونَ عَبْدًا رَسُولًا عَلَى أَنْ يَكُونَ نَبِيًّا مُلْكًا فَدَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَيُوسُفَ أَنْبِيَاءَ مُلُوكَ وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى وَمُحَمَّدٌ رُسُلٌ عِبِيدٌ فَهُوَ أَفْضَلُ [...] .

Those who use *jinn*-s in *mubāḥāt* [authorized acts], this is in the image of Solomon, who was given power that cannot exist for anyone after him. Humans and *jinn*-s were made available to him, and this did not happen to anyone other than him. The Prophet [...] therefore did not use *jinn*-s but invited them to faith in God and recited the Qur'an to them, sent them the message, and accepted their allegiance, as he did with humans. What was granted to the Prophet is greater and nobler than what was granted to Solomon. Indeed, the Prophet had recourse to the service of *jinn*-s and humans for the worship of God alone and for their happiness in this lower world and in that of the afterlife, not for personal interest. On the contrary, he did this for the face of God and the search for His approval. He chose and preferred to be a servant and a messenger rather than a prophet-king. David, Solomon, and Joseph are prophets-kings. Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad are messengers and servants; and this is more meritorious [...].⁷⁶

This position enables us to consider that Ibn Taymiyya would not have been against the practice of capture proposed by Abderraouf Ben Halima, which is based on the recitation of the Qur'an and, in all likelihood, respects Islamic principles, unlike the trance rituals mentioned above. It is clear from these excerpts that the assistance of a *jinn* to a human Muslim to bring him a benefit in this world is authorized, in the present case, to heal for a cure, is not forbidden according to Ibn Taymiyya. In the absence of details on the manner of this process, one can affirm that Ibn Taymiyya does not assign it importance as long as it does not oppose Islamic principles, especially the *tawḥīd*. This point Ibn Taymiyya makes clear elsewhere regarding treatments for healing:

⁷⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 13:89. For another similar passage see Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 11:307-308.

وَأَمَّا الْإِسْتِعَانَةُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمَا يُقَالُ وَيُكْتَبُ مِمَّا لَا يَعْرِفُ مَعْنَاهُ فَلَا يُشْرَعُ لَا سِيَّمَا إِنْ كَانَ فِيهِ شِرْكٌ؛ فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ مُحَرَّمٌ. وَعَامَّةُ مَا يَقُولُهُ أَهْلُ الْعَرَائِمِ فِيهِ شِرْكٌ وَقَدْ يَفْرَوْنَ مَعَ ذَلِكَ شَيْئًا مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ وَيُظْهِرُونَهُ وَيَكْتُمُونَ مَا يَقُولُونَهُ مِنَ الشِّرْكِ وَفِي الْإِسْتِشْقَاءِ بِمَا شَرَعَهُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ مَا يُغْنِي عَنِ الشِّرْكِ وَأَهْلِيهِ. وَالْمُسْلِمُونَ وَإِنْ تَنَازَعُوا فِي جَوَازِ التَّدَاوِي بِالْمَحْرَمَاتِ كَالْمَيْتَةِ وَالْخَنَزِيرِ فَلَا يَتَنَازَعُونَ فِي أَنَّ الْكُفْرَ وَالشِّرْكَ لَا يَجُوزُ التَّدَاوِي بِهِ بِحَالٍ؛ لِأَنَّ ذَلِكَ مُحَرَّمٌ فِي كُلِّ حَالٍ وَلَيْسَ هَذَا كَالْتَكْلُمِ بِهِ عِنْدَ الْإِكْرَاهِ. فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا يَجُوزُ إِذَا كَانَ قَلْبُهُ مُظْمِنًا بِالْإِيمَانِ وَالتَّكْلُمِ بِهِ إِنَّمَا يُؤْتَرُ إِذَا كَانَ بِقَلْبِ صَاحِبِهِ وَلَوْ تَكَلَّمَ بِهِ مَعَ طُمَأْنِينَةٍ قَلْبِهِ بِالْإِيمَانِ لَمْ يُؤْتَرِ. وَالشَّيْطَانُ إِذَا عَرَفَ أَنَّ صَاحِبَهُ مُسْتَجِفٌّ بِالْعَرَائِمِ لَمْ يُسَاعِدْهُ وَأَيْضًا فَإِنَّ الْمُكْرَهَ مُضْطَرٌّ إِلَى التَّكْلُمِ بِهِ وَلَا صَرُورَةَ إِلَى إِبْرَاءِ الْمُصَاصِ بِهِ لِوُجْهِينَ: أَحَدُهُمَا: أَنَّهُ قَدْ لَا يُؤْتَرُ أَكْثَرَ مِمَّا يُؤْتَرُ مَنْ يُعَالِجُ بِالْعَرَائِمِ فَلَا يُؤْتَرُ بَلْ يَزِيدُهُ شَرًّا. وَالثَّانِي: أَنَّ فِي الْحَقِّ مَا يُغْنِي عَنِ الْبَاطِلِ.

And when to solicit their help by words or written formulations whose meaning is incomprehensible and indecipherable, then it was not legislated in particular if it includes *shirk*. The latter is prohibited. In general, the formulas pronounced by the exorcists include *shirk*, and it may be that they recite with it some part of the Qur'an, highlighting and hiding [in this way] what is said of *shirk* words. And in the request for healing that God and His prophet legislated, there is enough to do without [the practices] of *shirk* and its followers. Muslims have certainly diverged on the fact of treating themselves with illicit materials such as the dead beast and the pig. Nevertheless, they [Muslims] did not differ on the fact that providing treatment based on *kufr* and *shirk* is prohibited in any case. This cannot be compared with speaking of associationism or disbelief under duress. This last case is allowed when the appeased heart remains acquired by faith. To pronounce a word of associationism or of disbelief as a remedy can only act when it [associationism or disbelief] is in the heart of the one who pronounces it, since if the latter pronounces such a word while his appeased heart is acquired in the faith, it will have no effect.⁷⁷

Conclusion

The analysis revealed Ibn Taymiyya's interest in *jinn*-s and their interactions with humans. In addition to the unsurprising theological-religious perspective, Ibn Taymiyya approaches the issue via an empirical perspective based on the testimonies brought to him and his personal experience. This interest in *jinn*-s is a little against the usual image of Ibn

⁷⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Idāḥ al-dalāla*, 61. This passage echoes another in Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 24:278.

Taymiyya, as commonly perceived, that of an obstinate scholar seeking at all costs to defend his positions on theological questions, particularly *tawḥīd*, divine names and attributes, *kalām* or refuting and criticizing the principles of Aristotelian philosophers, certain Sufi figures, and practices he considers heterodoxical. This examination of Ibn Taymiyya's interest in *jinn*-s reveals a little-known facet of the famous Ḥanbalite theologian, namely his practise of *ruqya* and that he was a *rāqī*. Taken together with other evidence regarding Ibn Taymiyya's social embeddedness and public activities, these data lend further support to the hypothesis that he was closer to the wider population than other ulema holding high office and maintaining close ties with the Mamluk establishment. In this regard, and albeit with due caution, Ibn Taymiyya may be considered a "popular" scholar.⁷⁸

His knowledge and experience with *jinn*-s indicate he paid particular attention to the social phenomena of his time. The strength of popular beliefs surrounding *jinn*-s had some influence on the population, as remains the case today in some parts of the Muslim world. These popular beliefs could result in practices leading to *shirk*, the most serious sin in Islam, against which Ibn Taymiyya repeatedly warns in his writings. The denunciation of *shirk* and the defence of *tawḥīd* are among the most central themes of his written work and to which he devoted the most energy. The data in this article are only preliminary results. Ibn Taymiyya's interest in *jinn*-s is part of the broader question of the author's interest in *ʿālam al-ghayb*. In addition to *jinn*-s, the analysis of the Taymiyyan corpus highlighted Ibn Taymiyya's interest in angels, witchcraft, and magic. This theme, in my opinion, is an interesting research perspective because it illustrates other facets of the thought and figure of Ibn Taymiyya.

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78 Berriah, "Mobility and Versatility," 117-120.

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CHAPTER 2

Debates and Controversies Surrounding an Epistle Attributed to Ibn Taymiyya: *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār*

Farid Bouchiba

Abstract

This article focuses on an epistle attributed to Ibn Taymiyya entitled *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār wa muḥādanatihim wa taḥrīm qatlihim li-mujarrad kufrīhim* (Summary rule relating to the fight of infidels and the peace treaty [concluded with them], as well as the prohibition to kill them on the sole ground of their unbelief), which has been the subject of many debates among scholars since the last century for eminently ideological reasons. The polemical subject of this text is as follows: can we fight the unbelievers (*kuffār*) only because of their unbelief? While several studies have already been devoted to Ibn Taymiyya's conception of jihad, they all have in common to have been interested in his *fatwās* and, to a lesser extent, in his normative writings, such as the *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara*. In our article, the presentation of the manuscript and the various editions of the *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara* is followed by that of its content. In a second part, we dwell more on the debates around the attribution of this text to Ibn Taymiyya. The study of this epistle makes it possible to conclude that at this stage of the investigation, we cannot peremptorily confirm that Ibn Taymiyya would be the author of the *QM*.

Keywords: Ibn Taymiyya; *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara*; jihad; *qitāl*; *kuffār*; *hudna*; *fatwa*; *fiqh*; *Ḥanbalī*; *al-Ṣan'ānī*

Introduction

This article¹ analyzes an epistle attributed to Ibn Taymiyya that has been the subject of much debate among scholars since the last century. The

1 An abridged version of this article was published last year in French: Farid Bouchiba. "Débats et controverses autour d'une épître sur le jihād attribuée à Ibn Taymiyya," In *Au Moyen Âge et par-delà. Hommage à John Tolan*, edited by Philippe Josserand and Annick Peters-Custot: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2025, 43–52.

controversial subject of this epistle is the motive for Muslims to fight unbelievers.

Among the hadiths at the center of these debates is the following tradition, which is considered authentic in Sunni tradition: ‘I was ordered to fight people until they said: there is no god but God’² (*‘umirtu an uqātīla l-nās hattā yaqūlū lā ilaha illā llāh’*). Are we to understand from this statement that all non-Muslims are to be fought until they profess the Muslim faith?

Let us say at the outset that no jurisconsult, exegete, or traditionalist has ever defended this thesis. In Ibn Ḥajar’s (d. 852/1449) commentary on al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, he provides several explanations for this tradition. Among these, he mentions the possibility, for those who refuse to convert to Islam, of paying the *jizya* or the possibility of concluding treaties. He also explains that the verses that stipulate this (i.e., paying the *jizya*) come after verse 5 of Sura 9. Thus, this verse is abrogated (*naskh*) by these new measures. Similarly, this hadith, which is *‘āmm* (general) is actually *khāṣṣ* (has a specific scope).³ Some consider that the term *nās* (people) here refers to the Arab polytheists (*mushrikū l-‘arab*), who fought the Muslims from the birth of Islam, or, again, those who persecuted the Muslims for thirteen years in Mecca and fought the Prophet for nine years in Medina.⁴ For Ibn Ḥajar, in no case is this term to be received in its most general sense.

While several studies have already been devoted to Ibn Taymiyya’s conception of jihad, most have focused on his *fatwas*,⁵ emphasising jihad carried out against a particular enemy (Mongols, Nusayrites) and attaching little importance to his general conception of the act. Let us point out that Volume XXVIII of the *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā* devoted to jihad includes 59 texts directly related or not to this subject and of various lengths. To our

2 Hadith reported by Muḥammad al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2002), 16 (no. 25), and Abū l-Ḥusayn Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Dār al-Salām, 2000), 132 (no. 125).

3 Aḥmad Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Dār Ṭība, 2005), 1:145–146.

4 al-Qaradāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād: Dirāsa muqārana li-aḥkāmīhi wa-falsafatihi fī daw’ al-Qur’an wa-l-Sunna* (Maktabat Wahba, 2009), 1:348. The author offers the explanation of this hadith according to Ibn Taymiyya in the *QM*. See al-Qaradāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:355.

5 For a recent survey of work on the jihad in Ibn Taymiyya, see Mehdi Berriah, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Conception of Jihad: Corpus, General Aspects, and Research Perspectives,” *Teosofi* 12, no. 1 (2022): 43–70. In this article, the author highlights some general aspects of Ibn Taymiyya’s conception of jihad and the research perspectives that would help to understand it further, among which is the analysis of the *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara*.

knowledge, there is no critical study of the *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara* (QM).⁶ Thus, the present article envisages studying this epistle, which has remained rather understudied (particularly its attribution) and has inspired nourished debates for more than half a century and sometimes created heated polemics. For our part, we first came across this writing a little over fifteen years ago (2009), when we were taking a broader interest in legal writings relating to non-Muslims.

After presenting the manuscript and the various editions of this text, we will briefly outline the content of the QM and then dwell at greater length on the debates surrounding the attribution of this text to Ibn Taymiyya.

Manuscript and editions of the *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara*

The text of the QM is known to us from three sources: a manuscript and two printed editions. The only manuscript known to date is in the Central Library (*al-maktaba al-markaziyya*) of King Saud University in Riyadh under the reference no. 1684. The scribe of this manuscript, which contains eighteen folios, was Sulaymān al-Ṣanī,⁷ a fine connoisseur of Arabic manuscripts. This copy, with its legible handwriting, is a copy of the manuscript of this same epistle by the copyist Muḥammad b. Sulaymān Āl Bassām (teacher in the sacred precincts of Mecca) dating from 1363/1944. There is also a printed edition of the QM published in 1949 in Cairo among a *Majmū'* in the library of al-Azhar. The epistle, which occupies pages 116–146, was printed by the shaykh Muḥammad Naṣīf at al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya Publishing. It was Muḥammad 'Abd al-Razzāq Āl Ḥamza who compared the earlier copy with the manuscript copy transcribed by Muṣṭafā al-Fārūqī and the critical edition was carried out by Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiṭī⁸ (d. 1959). Finally, there is a more

6 Except for a brief article in English, cf. Jabir Maihula, "Analysis of *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār wa-muḥādanatihim wa-taḥrīmī qatlihim bi-mujarrad kufrīhim*," *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 9 (2018): 1003–1109. Unfortunately, the author of this article reiterates the editor's conclusions regarding the attribution of this treatise without conducting a genuine critical study.

7 On this scholar, see, Abū Zakariyā al-Ḥijjī, *al-jānīb al-ilmī fī sirat al-shaykh Sulaymān al-Ṣanī* (Obeikan, 2017).

8 Famous Egyptian scholar known for his many critical editions. For example, he edited many works by Ibn Taymiyya and his pupil Ibn al-Qayyim. It was he who founded the Anṣār al-Sunna

modern edition self-published in 2004 by a Saudi scholar named ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Abd Allāh al-Zīr Āl Ḥamd.⁹

While, overall, the 2004 edition of the *QM* is textually satisfactory, it is nevertheless regrettable that the editor did not take the time to discuss the epistle of Sulaymān b. Ḥamdān, written four decades earlier, which rejects the authenticity of the *QM*. The editor also selectively ignored all Ibn Taymiyya’s opinions relating to jihad in order to defend the thesis of the defensive jihad, supposedly at the heart of the *QM*. However, half a century after this text was banned in Saudi Arabia, a Saudi publisher republished it. Indeed, it was the evolution of the theological discourse produced and conveyed by the political power and religious elite of the Saudi kingdom that enabled ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Abd Allāh al-Zīr Āl Ḥamd to republish and disseminate the *QM* in 2004.

According to the editor of the text, who makes no secret of his elective affinities with Ibn Taymiyya and Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, he was prompted to study this text mainly for the following reasons: to dispel the many misconceptions among young people about jihad, to demonstrate the median and moderate (*al-manhaj al-wasaṭī l-mu’tadil*) nature of Ibn Taymiyya’s approach to combat, and to prove that infidelity alone is insufficient grounds for attack.¹⁰

Presentation of the *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara*

While Muslim scholars are unanimous in considering that it is lawful to wage defensive wars (*jihād al-daf’*) against enemies who attack them, there may sometimes have been disagreement about offensive wars (*jihād al-ṭalab*) against infidels who do not fight Muslims or prevent them from preaching Islam. For the canonists, the question is whether disbelievers should be fought on the grounds of their infidelity, their attacks, or because they prevent Muslims from preaching their religion (*da’wa*).

To answer this question, we present the arguments in the order in which they appear in the epistle.

al-Muḥammadiyya group in 1926.

9 Taqī l-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār wa-muhādānatihim wa-tahrīm qatlihim li-mujarrad kufrihim*, self-published by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Abd Allāh al-Zīr Āl Ḥamd in 2004.

10 On the editor’s ten reasons for proposing the edition of this text, see Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara*, 43–45.

First, it is mentioned in the *QM* that, for al-Shāfiʿī, disbelief alone is sufficient reason to fight the infidels.¹¹ Whereas for Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, disbelievers can be fought only if they fight Muslims or else pose a threat to Muslims.¹² The author of the epistle argues that the second opinion, which is that of most scholars, is in accordance with the Qurʾan and the Sunna.¹³

In the first part of the epistle, the author presents eight arguments (*dalīls*) that defend the idea that it is forbidden to fight a disbeliever who does not attack Muslims. He begins his argument with evidence from the Qurʾan, which he also comments on¹⁴ (Quran 2:190–194, etc.). The second evidence¹⁵ is an authentic hadith reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim, which recalls that during one of the Prophet’s *maghāzī* expeditions, he passed by a woman who had been killed and recalled the prohibition against killing women and children.¹⁶ In one version of this hadith, the Prophet is reported to have said, “she was not fighting.”¹⁷ It is explicit here that the Prophet blamed the Companion who had killed this woman, on the grounds that she was not a fighter. The third argument¹⁸ is the verse: “No compulsion in religion” (Qurʾan 2:256). The author explains that this text has a general scope (*naṣṣ ʿāmm*). The fourth argument¹⁹ is that one should stop fighting the infidels who agree to pay the *jizya*. The fifth argument²⁰ is that it is forbidden to force a slave to convert to Islam, as mentioned in a hadith.²¹ The sixth argument²² is that, during the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet did not force the Meccan polytheists to convert to Islam.²³ The seventh argument²⁴ is that the Prophet never fought unbelievers who concluded a truce (*hudna*) with him. Finally, the eighth

11 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 88.

12 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 87.

13 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 90.

14 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 91–118.

15 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 119–120.

16 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 742 (hadith no. 3015); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 772 (no. 1744).

17 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 119.

18 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 121–124.

19 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 125–128.

20 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 129–130.

21 Muḥammad Ibn Mājah, *Sunan* (Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1997), 482 (no. 2842).

22 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 131–133.

23 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1045 (no. 4269).

24 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 134.

argument²⁵ is that the Prophet never fought Christians to make them convert.

All this is followed by two further chapters, one relating to pacts (*mu'āhada*) and truces (*muhādana*) made with disbelievers,²⁶ and the other to the *jizya*.²⁷ The author of the *QM* then presents five arguments²⁸ supporting the idea that it is forbidden to kill infidels solely because of their disbelief. Among these, he points out that if disbelief alone led to death, it would have been permissible to kill infidel women in war. However, doing so was formally forbidden unless the women were actively participating in the fighting. Similarly, if disbelief *de facto* led to death, it would not have been permissible to pardon disbelievers or allow them to buy back their prisoners. Finally, the epistle closes with developments relating to the *jizya*.²⁹

Is Ibn Taymiyya the Author of the *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār*?

Having briefly presented the contents of the *QM*, let us now address the question of the author of this epistle. If we are sure that Ibn Taymiyya wrote a work on the same subject, are we sure that this summary was written from the source work of this scholar? Nothing is less certain.

Some scholars have shown a definite interest in this epistle by copying or editing it. The latter, who have not questioned the attribution of the *QM* to Ibn Taymiyya, have, for some of them, drawn the conclusion that the Shaykh al-Islām maintains that jihad can be only defensive, and in no case is it permissible to fight the infidels solely on the grounds of their unbelief. However, other scholars have rejected this summary outright, accusing it of being an epistle falsely attributed to Ibn Taymiyya. These scholars argue that many texts have been wrongly attributed to him, sometimes deliberately by his enemies (a collection of poems, an

25 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara*, 135–138.

26 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara*, 139–143. This chapter is followed by another on the sacred months, 144–147.

27 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara*, 148–159. This chapter is followed by lengthy developments on the variations of disbelief, 160–183, and a brief chapter on disbelievers who have broken the pact, 184–187.

28 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara*, 188–215.

29 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida mukhtaṣara*, 215–219.

invocation to be recited when closing the reading of the Qur'an, a fatwa on the life of al-Khiḍr, etc.). They add that, in his other works, Ibn Taymiyya defends the offensive jihad.

We will first present the arguments of those who reject Ibn Taymiyya as the author of the work and then the arguments of those who consider him to be the author.

a) Scholars who consider the epistle to be a forgery

The first person to deny the authorship of this text to Ibn Taymiyya was likely the shaykh Sulaymān b. Saḥmān (d. 1931). In fact, he wrote a refutation (*radd*) against this epistle, which is lost.³⁰ Indeed, it was the loss of this text that led his student Sulaymān b. Ḥamdān (d. 1977) to also write a work to reject any connection between Ibn Taymiyya and the *QM*. Saḥmān writes that those who defend the authenticity of this text rely on two hadiths and the following verses, which he says they misinterpret: "Fight in the Way of Allah those who fight you" (Qur'an 2:190), "Whoever has marked hostility against you, mark hostility against him in the same way as he has marked hostility against you!" (Qur'an 2:194), and "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256).³¹ He adds that the content of the *QM* is contrary to what is found in Ibn Taymiyya's other works, where he defends the offensive jihad.

ʿAlī b. Nāfiʿ al-ʿUlyānī (currently professor at King Abdulaziz University and the Mecca Mosque), who has read the *radd* of Sulaymān b. Ḥamdān and whose ideas he shares, argues that the forger ingeniously inserted quotations from Ibn Taymiyya's books into the *Qāʿida Mukhtaṣara*,³² taking care not to mention the thesis of offensive jihad that is, however, defended in *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*³³ or in *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl*.³⁴ Among the arguments presented by al-ʿUlyānī is that Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), Ibn Taymiyya's most famous disciple, did not include the *QM* in the list (about 200 titles) he compiled of his master's books. Let us specify

30 See Sulaymān Ḥamdān, *Dalālat al-nuṣūṣ wa-l-ijmāʿ ʿalā farq al-qitāl lil-kufr wa-l-difāʿ* (n.p., 1962), 3.

31 Ḥamdān, *Dalālat al-nuṣūṣ*, 1.

32 ʿAlī al-ʿUlyānī, *Aḥammiyyat al-jihād fī nashr al-daʿwa al-islāmiyya wa-l-radd ʿalā l-ṭawāʾif al-ḍālla fīhi* (Dār Ṭība, 1985), 342–346. This is based on al-ʿUlyānī's doctoral dissertation, defended at Umm al-Qurā University (Mecca) in 1984.

33 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masṭh* (Maṭāʾibī al-Majd al-Tijāriyya, n.d.), 1:75.

34 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl ʿalā shātīm al-rasūl* (Maktabat al-Tāj, 1960), 220.

that al-ʿUlyānī's book is a defence of the offensive jihad, with a view to propagating the religion and countering those he calls "the misguided sects" (*al-firaq al-ḍālla*). This work, published in 1985 in Saudi Arabia, is a good reflection of the debates that animated the religious scene at the time.³⁵

For his part, the shaykh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh (d. 1969) explains that the scholars of Riyadh rejected its authenticity. In one of his fatwas (no. 1464), he believes that part of the *QM* contains Ibn Taymiyya's words but that there are also deletions and additions that are not his.³⁶ He also argues that what is in *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ* and *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl* is contrary to what is in the *QM*.

Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Qāsim (d. 1973), who collected and edited Ibn Taymiyya's fatwas in 37 volumes under the title *Majmūʿ al-fatāwā*, did not retain the *QM*. In the introduction, he writes, "I have included in this compilation only those [texts] that I consider to be by Ibn Taymiyya. I have rejected a small part that has been attributed to him, such as a poem on belief or a falsified text maintaining that it is forbidden to initiate combat against the infidels."³⁷ It is important here to remember that the lack of scholarly interest in the *QM* is partly because this text was not introduced into the *Majmūʿ al-fatāwā*, as many of the legal consultations have attracted the attention of scholars.

Finally, the former Grand Mufti of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (1992–1999), Ibn Bāz (d. 1999), delivered a lecture in 1988 (or 1989) titled "*Laysa al-jihād lil-difāʾ faqaṭ*"³⁸ (Jihad is Not Defensive Only), after learning that some of his contemporaries were relying on the *QM* to argue that jihad is exclusively defensive. A decade later, he published this paper. In it, he explains that Qur'an 2:190 is not about defensive jihad but rather about fighters who are involved in combat (women, children, etc. are not involved). For him, Qur'an 2:256 applies to those who pay the *jizya*. As for Qur'an 4:90 "Except those who join a group between whom and you there is a treaty (of peace) or those who approach you with hearts

35 Some scholars were arguing for offensive jihad in the mid-1980s, and others were opposing them.

36 Muḥammad Āl al-Shaykh, *Fatāwā wa-rasā'il samāhat al-shaykh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Āl al-Shaykh* (Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥukūma, 1979), 6:200–201.

37 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. Taymiyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. Qāsim al-Najdī al-Ḥanbalī, 37 vols. (Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1961), 8:5.

38 ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ibn Bāz, *Majmūʿ fatāwā wa-maqālāt mutanawwiʿa* (Dār al-Qāsim lil-Nashr, 1999), 3:171–201. A shorter fatwa on the same subject can also easily be found online.

restraining them from fighting you as well as fighting their own people. If God had pleased He could have given them power over you and they would have fought you: therefore if they withdraw from you but fight you not and (instead) send you (guarantees of) peace then God hath opened no way for you (to war against them),” it is abrogated by the verses of the sword (Qur’an 9:5–6). This verse was valid only at the beginning of Islam, when Muslims were weak (i.e., until the beginning of the Hijra). Ibn Bāz writes, “there is no doubt that this epistle is forged; there is no doubt that it is a forgery.” He mentions the names of scholars who criticized the *QM*, among them Sulaymān b. Saḥmān, Sulaymān b. Ḥamdān, and Šāliḥ b. Aḥmad al-Muṣawwaʿī (d.c. 1975). The latter also wrote a book in which he defended the offensive jihad, entitled *Ibādat daʿwa muddaʿī al-difāʿ bi-nuṣuṣ al-ghazw wa-l-jihād li-ʿilāʾ kalimati Allāh*. In this text, he categorically rejects the idea that Ibn Taymiyya is the author of the *QM*.³⁹

All these authors⁴⁰ belong to the same geographical area, the Arabian Peninsula. This is unsurprising given the importance of Ibn Taymiyya in the intellectual tradition of this region since the eighteenth century. It is also worth mentioning the eminent role played by the Saudi rulers in the study of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings. Indeed, it was King Saʿūd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 1969) who instructed the shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim and then his son to search the world over and collect Ibn Taymiyya’s fatwas. A total of 37 volumes of epistles and fatwas were edited and published under the patronage of this king with the title *Majmūʿ fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. Taymiyya*.

b) Scholars attributing the *QM* to Ibn Taymiyya

Those who consider Ibn Taymiyya to be the author of this book rely primarily on the explicit title found on the manuscript: “This is the summarized and transmitted epistle of *The Rule* of the Shaykh al-Islām Taqī l-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm b. Taymiyya relating to fighting the infidels. Is

39 Šāliḥ al-Muṣawwaʿī, *Ibādat daʿwa muddaʿī al-difāʿ bi-nuṣuṣ al-ghazw wa-l-jihād li-ʿilāʾ kalimat Allāh* (al-Maṭbaʿa al-Salafiyya, n.d.), 25. A new edition was published in Bahrain in 2018 by Maktabat al-Imām al-Nasāʿī.

40 Of course, our list does not claim to be exhaustive. Other scholars who have refuted this epistle include, for example, ʿAbd al-Malik al-Barrāk, *Rudūd ʿalā abāṭil wa-shubuhāt ḥawl al-jihād* (al-Nūr lil-ʿilām al-Islāmī, 1997) and Muḥammad Khayr Haykal, *al-jihād wa-l-qitāl fī l-siyāsa al-sharʿiyya* (Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1993), 1:765–769. In his work, the latter refutes the position of Abū Zahra (1:766) and Zuḥayli (1:768), who support the thesis of defensive jihad.

it on the grounds of combat, or is it on the grounds of infidelity?” They also add that the scribe Sulaymān al-Ṣanīʿ (d. 1969) – reputed to be a fine connoisseur of Arabic manuscripts as previously mentioned and of Ibn Taymiyya’s works specifically – did not hesitate to copy this epistle without questioning its authorship.⁴¹ In addition, the 1949 printed edition has a different title than the manuscript: “Rule relating to the combat of the infidels. Is this because of their infidelity or in defence of Islam?”⁴² The title proposed for the 2004 edition is different too: “Summarized rule relating to the combat of infidels and the peace treaty [concluded with them], as well as the prohibition of killing them for the sole reason of their unbelief.”⁴³

They also rely on many passages in the *QM* that are consistent with what Ibn Taymiyya wrote in some of his works. For example, it is written: “We have shown elsewhere that man’s religion depends on himself and not on that of his parents.”⁴⁴ And, in fact, we find this subject developed at length in his fatwas.⁴⁵ It is also mentioned in the *QM* that “this is developed in *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl ‘alā shātim al-rasūl*,”⁴⁶ and it is indeed found in the latter work.⁴⁷

Moreover, many of the opinions upheld in the *QM* are similar to those found in his other works. For example, he argues in *al-Nubuwwāt* that “the infidels can only be fought on the grounds of war (*ḥirāb*) as held by most scholars and suggested by the Qur’an and the Sunna,”⁴⁸ which is also found in the *QM*. In his *Fatāwā*, Ibn Taymiyya maintains that there is “consensus on the killing of the apostate (*murtadd*) even if he is not

41 Sulaymān al-Ṣanīʿ even adds on the first folio of the manuscript that this summary is taken from Ibn Taymiyya’s original.

42 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā’ida fī qitāl al-kuffār: Hal huwa li-ajl kufrihim aw difā’an ‘an al-Islām* (Maṭba’a al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1949).

43 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara fī qitāl al-kuffār wa-muḥādananatihim wa-taḥrīm qatlihim li-mujarrad kufrihim*, self-published by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Abd Allāh al-Zir ‘Al Ḥamd in 2004.

44 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara*, 155.

45 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū’ fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. Taymiyya* (Majma’ al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibā’at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharif, 2004), 35:223 and Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Fatāwā al-kubrā*, 4:619.

46 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara*, 212.

47 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl ‘alā shātim al-rasūl*, 3:696 and 866.

48 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Nubuwwāt* (Maktaba Aqlwā’ al-Salaf, 2000), 1:570. This position is found in *al-Fatāwā*, 20:101–102, 8:534 and *al-Fatāwā al-kubrā*, 4:347.

a fighter,”⁴⁹ which is also supported in the *QM*.⁵⁰ Ibn Taymiyya writes in *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl*⁵¹ that the condition of combat is the attack of the enemy, as is also argued in the *QM*⁵² or again in *al-Siyāsa al-sharʿiyya*.⁵³ He writes in his *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya*: “He [God] does not say: fight them until they convert,”⁵⁴ yet the same thing is found in the *QM*.⁵⁵ In the *Ṣafadiyya*, Ibn Taymiyya argues that disbelievers must be fought until they pay the *jizya* and by no means until they convert.⁵⁶

The aim in the preceding lines is not to be exhaustive, but simply to highlight what has convinced some scholars that this epistle should be attributed to Ibn Taymiyya because of the many concordances between some of his writings and the *QM*.

Among the first scholars who defended the authenticity of the *QM* is the famous Yemeni scholar al-Ṣanʿānī⁵⁷ (d. 1182/1768). Incidentally, he wrote an epistle⁵⁸ which takes up afresh the subject treated in the *QM*. The starting point of this text is the following question, which is posed in the introduction: “Is the fight against the disbelievers motivated by their aggression against the Muslims, or only their disbelief, whether one fears their evil or not?” The author adds straight away that only a minority of scholars maintain that it is possible to fight disbelievers solely because of their disbelief. And for the majority, it is possible to wage war against them only if the disbelievers⁵⁹ are capable of fighting Muslims and show themselves to be a threat.⁶⁰ To defend this last position, they rely on cer-

49 Ibn Taymiyya, *Fatāwā*, 20:100.

50 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 89.

51 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl*, 2:513.

52 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 91.

53 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Siyāsa al-sharʿiyya fī iṣlāḥ al-rāʾi wa-l-raʾiyya* (Dār ʿĀlam lil-Fawāʿid, 2008), 158–160.

54 Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqḍ kalām al-Shīʿa al-Qadariyya* (Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad b. Saʿūd al-Islāmiyya, 1986), 8:509–510.

55 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qāʿida mukhtaṣara*, 94.

56 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Ṣafadiyya* (n.p., 1984), 2:321.

57 Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣanʿānī was a writer, teacher, and muftī of Sanaa. His views and writings are considered to prefigure Islamic modernism in the first half of the twentieth century.

58 Ibn al-Amīr al-Ṣanʿānī, “Baḥṭh fī qitāl al-kuffār lil-Badr al-Amīr raḥimahu Allāh. Mawḍūʿ al-baḥṭh: hal qitāl al-kuffār li-kufrihim am li-daf ʿararihim?” in *Dhakhāʾir ʿulamāʾ al-yaman*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Jarrāfī (Dār Kutub al-Hadīth, 1990): 154–163. This article was republished in 2009 in al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:1417–1431.

59 Excluding children, women, the elderly, and the blind.

60 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:1418.

tain verses of the Qur'an (just over ten in total)⁶¹ and prophetic traditions (verbal tradition and actions of the Prophet drawn from his battles).⁶²

Following this, al-Şan'ānī takes up the four arguments⁶³ of those who defend the first thesis to better refute them. For al-Şan'ānī, Qur'an 2:190 which states, "Fight in the cause of God those who fight you but do not transgress limits; for God loveth not transgressors" is not abrogated by Qur'an 2:191 which says, "And slay them wherever ye catch them and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith)." He adds that the verse of the sword refers to the disbelievers who signed a treaty (*mu'āhadūn*) with the Muslims and broke it. Similarly, this verse does not abrogate Qur'an 2:256, that is, "no compulsion in religion." It is for this reason that disbelievers who pay the *jizya* cannot under any circumstances be fought.⁶⁴ Similarly, if it were necessary to fight all disbelievers, God would not have allowed prisoners to be released free of charge or for ransom, per Qur'an 47:4. Finally, he rejects the literalist interpretation of the hadith "I have been ordered to fight people until they say: there is no god but God." Al-Şan'ānī ends his epistle by recalling that the Yemeni Zaydite scholar al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-Jalāl (d. 1084/1683) is the first (*'lam na'rif la-hu sala-fan'*)⁶⁵ to have mentioned in his gloss (*ḥāshiya*) *Ḍaw' al-nahār al-mushriq 'alā ṣafahāt al-azhār* that it is impossible to fight the infidels on the sole grounds of their disbelief but that, in addition to their disbelief, they must be harmful to Muslims. Nevertheless, he immediately corrects himself by writing that he then discovered Ibn Taymiyya's text, older than that of the scholar al-Jalāl, which examines this question in depth. After al-Şan'ānī, we can likewise point to al-Shawkānī (d. 1265/1839), who mentions the *QM* in his famous work *Nayl al-awṭār*.⁶⁶

Moreover, the polemics surrounding the *QM* relate to certain debates that emerged from the end of the nineteenth century onwards.

61 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:1419–1424.

62 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:1424–1427.

63 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:1427–1429.

64 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:407–410 and 1428–1429.

65 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:1431.

66 Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, *Nayl al-awṭār* (Dār al-Jīl, 1973), 5:373. See also: al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:407.

For example, some reformists, including al-Afghānī (d. 1315/1897), Muḥammad ‘Abduh⁶⁷ (d. 1323/1905) and Rashīd Riḍā⁶⁸ (d. 1353/1935), reconsidered jihad by defending the idea that it could only be defensive. This conception of jihad was taken up throughout the twentieth century by many scholars. Advocates of the defensive jihad thesis include shaykh ‘Abd Allāh b. Zayd Āl Maḥmūd (d. 1997) who was born in Saudi Arabia and held the post of qadi (judge) and president of the religious courts in Qatar following his teacher Muḥammad b. Mānī⁶⁹ (d. 1965). In fact, he devoted a book to this issue, titled *al-jihād al-mashrū‘ fī l-Islām*,⁷⁰ followed by the *QM*,⁷¹ the authenticity of which he defends.

In the introduction to Āl Maḥmūd’s book, he indicates his desire to free himself from the partisan opinions of scholars (*shuyūkh*) and schools of law (*madhāhib*). Then, at the beginning of the first chapter, he recalls that bitter debates occurred among scholars over Ibn Taymiyya’s epistle, in which the latter explains that jihad would have been established solely to defend against attacks by enemies and that Islam would make peace with pacifists.

The author of this book adds that several modern scholars have rejected this view, and two luminaries⁷² among them have written epistles which consider the *QM* to be a forgery. ‘Abd Allāh b. Zayd Āl Maḥmūd adds, “the denial of this epistle threw discredit on all the epistles of the Shaykh al-Islām.”⁷³ He confesses that he had long shared the opinion of scholars and the people that infidels should be fought on the grounds of their infidelity until they convert. However, after further study of the Qur’an, the Sunna, and the lives of the Prophet and his Companions, he concluded that jihad was established solely for self-defence,⁷⁴ and “whoever claims that Shaykh al-Islām says something different from this in

67 Muḥammad ‘Abduh, *Risālat al-tawḥīd* (Dār al-shurūq, 1994), 167, and Muḥammad ‘Abduh, *al-Islām wa-l-naṣrāniyya ma’a al-‘ilm wa-l-madaniyya* (Dār al-Ḥadātha, 1988), 83.

68 Rashīd Riḍā, *Fatāwā Rashīd Riḍā* (Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1970), 892 and 1155.

69 This Hanbalite scholar owned this epistle, which he bequeathed to King Fahd’s library in Riyadh. This is embellished with some of his marginal notes. See al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:407.

70 ‘Abd Allāh Āl Maḥmūd, *al-jihād al-mashrū‘ fī l-Islām*, followed by *Qā’ida fī qitāl al-kuffār li-Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya* (Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1982).

71 Āl Maḥmūd, *al-jihād al-mashrū‘ fī l-Islām*, 99–133.

72 Here he refers to the epistles of Sulaymān b. Saḥmān and his pupil Sulaymān b. Ḥamdān (see *supra*).

73 Āl Maḥmūd, *al-jihād al-mashrū‘ fī l-Islām*, 7.

74 Āl Maḥmūd, *al-jihād al-mashrū‘ fī l-Islām*, 7.

al-Siyāsa al-shar'iyya and *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ* is clearly mistaken.”⁷⁵ For the author, “no one can force a third person to enter his religion, because religion is a matter of voluntary choice.”⁷⁶

As for the authenticity of the *QM*, the author explains that he has analysed it and concludes that the content and form leave no doubt that Ibn Taymiyya is the author, as “his style resembles no other.”⁷⁷ Similarly, he considers that certain concordances can be found between the *QM* and the *Siyāsa shar'iyya*.⁷⁸ For example, in the second chapter, he argues that jihad by the pen must precede armed jihad. In defending this position, he relies on certain Meccan verses (Qur'an 25:52; 4:63; 2:256; 10:99) and certain prophetic traditions.⁷⁹ The work of 'Abd Allāh b. Zayd Āl Maḥmūd, which comprises twelve chapters, is accompanied by a sermon delivered by the author on jihad on Ramadan 11, 1393⁸⁰ (October 7, 1973).⁸¹ Finally, the author thought it appropriate to reproduce the *QM* at the end of his book.

We may also mention the interview given by the Saudi historian Rāshid b. 'Asākir to the newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsat* on July 1, 2003 (number 8981).⁸² In this interview, this historian insists that following heated debates that agitated the Saudi religious establishment in the 1940s, the epistle was banned from publication in Saudi Arabia. He even believes that the editors of Ibn Taymiyya's writings deliberately ignored the epistle on the grounds that it ran counter to Ibn Taymiyya's thought.

For Rāshid b. 'Asākir, “there is no doubt that this epistle is by Ibn Taymiyya.” According to him, there are seven arguments in favour of this conclusion. First, Ibn Taymiyya mentions on page 130 of the 1949 edition that “the religion of a person and not that of his forefathers is considered.” Rāshid b. 'Asākir points out that Ibn Taymiyya has explained this

75 Āl Maḥmūd, *al-Jihād al-mashrū' fī l-Islām*, 8.

76 Āl Maḥmūd, *al-Jihād al-mashrū' fī l-Islām*, 9.

77 Āl Maḥmūd, *al-Jihād al-mashrū' fī l-Islām*, 10.

78 Āl Maḥmūd, *al-Jihād al-mashrū' fī l-Islām*, 11.

79 Āl Maḥmūd, *al-Jihād al-mashrū' fī l-Islām*, 20–21.

80 As a reminder, the Yom Kippur War, or October War, began the day before, on October 6, 1973.

81 Āl Maḥmūd, *al-Jihād al-mashrū' fī l-Islām*, 85–98 (“Khuṭba fī jihād fī sabil Allāh wa-faḍl al-nafaqa fīhi”).

82 “Risāla li-Ibn Taymiyya 'an qitāl al-kuffār athārat dajja fī al-Sa'ūdiyya qabla niṣf qarn wa-tamma man'uḥā wa-muṣādaratuhā wa-l-tashkīk fī nisbatihā li-Shaykh al-Islām,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 1, 2003.

in Volume 35 of his fatwas, in the chapter relating to rebels.⁸³ Second, similarly, on page 144, the author of the *QM* writes, “I have mentioned what corresponds to this in *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl ‘alā shātīm al-rasūl*.” Third, in the volume of his fatwas devoted to jihad, Ibn Taymiyya states that children, women, monks (*ruhbān*), the elderly, and the blind should not be fought in war unless they are fighting Muslims. Thus, it can be deduced that jihad is not conducted against them on the grounds of their unbelief but rather only if they fight.⁸⁴ Fourth, in Volume VIII of his *Fatāwā*, he points out that the punishment of the apostate (*murtadd*) is greater than that of the disbeliever by birth (*aṣlī*). Indeed, even if the apostate does not fight the Muslims, he will face death in all cases. For most scholars (Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, Aḥmad), this penalty is not applicable to the unbeliever by birth.⁸⁵ Fifth, the scriptural style of the epistle is that of Ibn Taymiyya. Sixth, many extracts from this epistle are also found in his fatwas. Finally, seventh, this epistle defends the thesis of defensive jihad, as stated in the following verse: “Fight in the Way of Allah those who fight you” (Qur’an 2:190).

For Rāshid b. ‘Asākir, those who doubt the attribution of this text to Ibn Taymiyya should consult the *Majmū‘ l-fatāwa*. He further rejects the argument that his pupil, Ibn al-Qayyim, did not mention the title of this epistle in the bibliography he compiled of his master, as his master’s books are so numerous that it is almost impossible to be exhaustive. He adds, however, that the Saudi scholar ‘Alī al-Shiblī, who is one of the finest connoisseurs of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings, has mentioned this epistle in Ibn Taymiyya’s bibliography.⁸⁶ Similarly, the two scholars al-Ṣanī‘ and Āl Bassām, who are among the best connoisseurs of the Shaykh al-Islām, have never questioned this attribution, which they have not hesitated to pass on.

Among the most prominent authors defending the thesis of the defensive jihad – and, by the same token, the authenticity of the *QM* – is the shaykh Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (d. 2022). In a chapter⁸⁷ of his voluminous

83 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 35:223.

84 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 354–356 and 414.

85 Ibn Taymiyya, *Fatāwā*, 8:534

86 ‘Alī al-Shiblī, *al-Ithbāt fī makḥṭūṭāt al-a‘imma. Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya wa-l-‘Allāma Ibn al-Qayyim wa-l-Ḥafīẓ Ibn Rajab* (n.p., 2002), 117 (hadith no. 124: *Risāla fī qitāl al-kuffār*). He mentions in this note the two manuscripts we have presented previously.

87 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:393–403.

work devoted to jihad, he questions whether infidelity alone is sufficient cause for fighting. In the introduction to his book, he quotes a passage from Ibn Taymiyya's *QM* to highlight the prohibition on forcing anyone to believe; he later devotes an entire chapter to the *QM*. In the words of the author, the aim of his book is to present in a new light jihad, which is one of the most sensitive and misunderstood subjects, by freeing itself from long centuries of legal exegesis on the subject. This process begins by rejecting the commonly accepted thesis, according to al-Qaraḍāwī, of the communal obligation (*farḍ kifāya*) of the offensive jihad against the infidels at least once every year.⁸⁸ He recalls that Shāfi'ī has two opinions about fighting the infidels because of their infidelity: in one of these opinions, he supports this, following the example of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, and in the other opinion, he maintains that it is forbidden, joining the opinion of Abū Ḥanīfa and Mālik.⁸⁹ For reasons of general interest (*maṣlaḥa*), the author invites the Shāfi'ites to retain the second opinion of al-Shāfi'ī, which aligns with the majority opinion (*jumhūr*).⁹⁰ Following this, he writes that Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya has written an encyclopaedic epistle on the subject of fighting the infidels.⁹¹ He points out that some Saudi scholars have rejected its authenticity and refuse to include it without his *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, "without any reason," except that it does not agree with their view, insofar as they believe that all infidels – warriors or pacifists – should be fought.

He also says that while most jurists (*jumhūr*) believe that offensive jihad (*ṭalab*) is a duty of the community, there are Companions (Ibn 'Umar), *tābi'ūn* (Aṭā', 'Amr b. Dīnār), and later scholars (Ibn Shubruma, Sufyān al-Thawrī) who do not agree. Furthermore, he points out that a majority opinion (*qawl al-jumhūr*) is not binding evidence, unlike a peremptory, unambiguous text (*naṣṣ qaṭ'i*) or a certain consensus (*ijmā' mutayaqqan*).

He also cites the names of contemporary scholars who recognize *QM* as authentic. Among these are the Egyptian shaykh Abū Zahra (d. 1974), who cites passages from it in his work devoted to Ibn Taymiyya⁹²; the Ḥanbalite jurisconsult 'Abd Allāh b. Zayd al-Maḥmūd, Chief Justice in

88 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:11.

89 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:395.

90 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:396.

91 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:396–403.

92 Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya. Ḥayātuhu wa-aṣruhu, ārā'uhū wa-fiqhuhu* (Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1952), 378–383 (chapters 390–394).

Qatar, in his book *al-Jihād al-mashrūʿ fī l-Islām*;⁹³ and the Yemeni scholar ʿAbd Allāh Qādirī al-Ahdal in his work *al-Jihād fī sabīl Allāh*. Al-Qaraḍāwī stresses that he struggled to find the *QM* and that it was the 2004 edition that enabled him to discover it. In his defence, the author points out that Ibn Taymiyya gives his preference (*tarjīh*) to the majority opinion (Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, Aḥmad), who believe that one cannot fight people solely because of their disbelief, and he rejects the opinion of Shāfiʿī, which he considers weak. After this, al-Qaraḍāwī presents Ibn Taymiyya’s main proofs (*adilla*) in his *Qāʿida*: Qurʾān 2:190–193 and 2:256, hadiths (Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, no. 15992; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, no. 2669; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2842, etc.). He highlights how, according to Ibn Taymiyya’s interpretation, the *ʿilla* (justification) for fighting in these two scriptural sources is never infidelity.⁹⁴ He also presents other arguments by Ibn Taymiyya that point in this direction. For example, it is impossible to fight infidels who have signed a truce with Muslims or those who pay the *jizya*. For the author, the ultimate proof that Ibn Taymiyya is indeed the author of the *QM* is that we find his same arguments in his other books, *Minhāj al-sunna*, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, *al-Ṣarīm al-maslūl*, *al-Siyāsa al-sharʿiyya*, and *al-Fatāwā*.⁹⁵

Of course, many other scholars have defended the authenticity of the *QM*, including Muḥammad Abū Zahra⁹⁶ (d. 1394/1974), Jumuʿa Amīn⁹⁷ (d. 1436/2015), and Wahba al-Zuhaylī⁹⁸ (d. 1436/2015).

Conclusion

This epistle primarily questions the validity of killing disbelievers based solely on their disbelief. It is certainly the terse and abstruse nature of certain passages that has led some scholars to conclude that the author rejects the offensive jihad. However, nothing in this epistle contradicts the legality of this type of warfare. It is certainly the seventh argument (in the first part of the epistle) that has misled readers: “It was never he [the

93 ʿAlī Maḥmūd, *al-Jihād al-mashrūʿ fī l-Islām*.

94 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 1:398–399.

95 al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-jihād*, 402–403.

96 Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 378–383 (chapters 390–394).

97 Jumuʿa Amīn, *al-Farīda al-muftarā ʿalayhā. Al-Jihād fī l-Islām* (Dār al-Daʿwa, 1997), 364–368.

98 Wahba Zuhaylī, *Āthār al-ḥarb fī l-fiqh al-Islāmī* (Dār al-Fikr, 1998), 109–110.

Prophet] who started the fight against the disbelievers.”⁹⁹ This sentence could imply that he rejects the offensive jihad. Nevertheless, the phrase that follows contradicts this: “If God had commanded him to kill all the disbelievers, then he would have been the first to engage in their killing and fighting.”¹⁰⁰ And in this passage, he clarifies that the Prophet “never fought the disbelievers who entered into a truce (*hādana*) with him,”¹⁰¹ as it is forbidden to kill people because of their disbelief without having invited them to embrace Islam or else to pay the *jizya*.

Overall, the author of the epistle in no way denies that it was disbelief that caused them to be put to death; instead, he demonstrates that disbelief is not a sufficient reason. To be put to death, disbelief must necessarily be accompanied by a refusal to convert to Islam or to pay the *jizya* after such has been proposed. Further, this disbeliever must not have received any safe-conduct (*amān*) from a Muslim. Ultimately, even if disbelief is the primary cause of the killing, numerous conditions must accompany it.

Although the style of writing, the argumentation, and certain passages of the *QM* are similar to certain passages of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings, we cannot conclude peremptorily that he is the author of the *QM*. Indeed, it is not yet possible to attribute this epistle to Ibn Taymiyya until the original writing on which this summary is based has been found. We believe that it is mainly the summary nature of this epistle and certain missing passages that have led to so much confusion and debate surrounding this text.

Among the aporias we have come up against are the following: the original manuscript is lost, and the copies of it that exist, which are late copies, are not copies of the original but rather summaries of it. Similarly, we do not know the name of the person who summarized the original text or the method used to abbreviate the source work; only the name of the late copyist is known to us; there is a gap of just over six centuries between his life and Ibn Taymiyya’s. Moreover, it is very likely that it is the deletions by the author of the summary (i.e. *QM*) that have led to so much confusion.

While the efforts of the editors of Ibn Taymiyya’s work over the last half-century should be acknowledged, as they have given us easier access

99 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara*, 134.

100 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara*, 134.

101 Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā’ida mukhtaṣara*, 134.

to his writings, we believe that this work deserves to be continued and renewed. For example, it would be useful to embark on a new phase of work on this large corpus by publishing his texts afresh, with more thorough philological and editorial work. Since the publication of his first books, the discovery of new epistles, fatwas, and other texts¹⁰² (the authenticity of which is sometimes questionable) has enabled us to refine our knowledge of this scholar's writings. We hope that this article, which illustrates the debates surrounding one of Ibn Taymiyya's eminently controversial epistles, will shed new light on this topic.

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102 As an example, let us cite the following text: Ibn Taymiyya, *Mas'alat al-murābaṭa bi-l-thughūr aqḍal am al-mujāwara bi-Makka sharrafahā Allāh* (Aqḍā'al-Salaf, 2002). This text on the *ribāṭ* (defence of borders), which is not found in the *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, was edited from a unicum found in a *Majmū'* (collection of texts) of the Shaykh al-Islām preserved in Cairo's Dār al-Kutub (no. 444, fiqh Taymūr). The editor states in his introduction that he has not found any mention of this writing among Ibn Taymiyya's biographers. However, on reading it, he concluded that Ibn Taymiyya was the author because of the similarity of this opusculum to some of his other works (*Majmū' fatāwā*, 18:283; 21:455; 22:91; 27:40, 50, 55, 508, 28:5).

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CHAPTER 3

Omniscience, Causality, and Fatalism: Ibn Taymiyya on the Problem of Petitionary Prayers

Safaruk Zaman Chowdhury

Abstract

This article is a logical examination of the efficacy of petitionary prayer in the theology of the highly polemical polymath Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). Petitionary prayer involves asking God for something. Historically, Muslim scholars identified certain puzzles around this kind of prayer, namely the following strands: if God knows everything then He already knows what a person will ask for. This would imply petitionary prayer makes no difference to God's foreknowledge. If God is immutable then He cannot change; this includes His decrees, decisions and commands. This would imply that praying to God for something cannot affect a change in Him. Finally, if God is absolutely good, then He would already do what is best for everyone whether they pray to Him or not. This makes prayer a redundant act. The focus of this article is on petitionary prayer and God's foreknowledge. After setting up the problem, I outline the axioms and assumptions underpinning Ibn Taymiyya's doctrine of God's omniscience and his idea of causality. Thereafter, I assess in detail some of the responses he offers (and indeed can offer) to diffuse this strand of the problem.

Keywords: Causality; fatalism; immutability; logic; omniscience; petition; prayer

Introduction

Ibn Taymiyya is one of the most prominent but controversial scholars within Islam, with contributions ranging from, but not restricted to law, language, and logic to poetry, polemics, and politics.¹ However, in the

1 For an overview of his life and works, see Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya* (Oneworld Academic, 2019). Hoover has also written a recent entry in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* on Ibn Taymiyya that helpfully outlines the broad contours of his theology available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/ibn-taymiyya>. Also helpful is the neat summary presented by Carl Sharif El-Tobgui and Jamie Turner in "The Ḥanbalī/Atharī Tradition: Ibn Taymiyya" in *Seven Classical*

past few decades, academics working in the Anglo-American and Anglo-European spheres of Islamic studies have given considerable focus to his theology, and more recently, to what can arguably be called his *philosophical theology*. As a result, a different, more complex, intellectual identity is emerging.² There are several ideas, doctrines, and intellectual principles within Ibn Taymiyya's thought that form a highly nuanced constellation of interrelated parts, and in the present time, the overall integrity and coherence of this system of thought continue to be examined and evaluated in more detail. This article embraces the description of philosophical theology as justifiably applying to Ibn Taymiyya and situates itself within that identification. It seems clear that the shaykh uses philosophical methods to analyze theological ideas and precepts and then constructs his theological discourse. I think, insofar as he does this, there is room for philosophical analysis of his thinking. In the present article, I explore how Ibn Taymiyya responds to the problem of the efficacy of petitionary prayer (explained below). Heeding the famous bon mot of polish logician and analytical Thomist Józef Bocheński (1905-1995) that "a philosopher analyses and not moralises,"³ I adopt a largely logical analysis that employs the axiomatization method of theology.⁴ Having first defined what petitionary prayer is, I set out some of the problems it generates for the believer. I then present and logically examine some of Ibn Taymiyya's theological notions and commitments relevant for his response to the problem and conclude with some challenges to his response.

Perspectives for Islam and Science, edited by Shoaib Ahmed Malik (Routledge, 2026). Unless acknowledged or stated otherwise, all translations in this article are mine.

2 Caterina Bori has assessed the contested modes of impact, influence, and reception of Ibn Taymiyya's works in the three centuries following his death in "Ibn Taymiyya (14th to 17th Century): Transregional Spaces of Reading and Reception," *The Muslim World* 108 (2018): 87-123.

3 Józef Maria Bocheński, *Między logiką a wiarą. Rozmowa z Janem Parysem* (Noir sur Blanc, 1988), 98.

4 In theology, the term "axiomatization" typically refers to the process of identifying and formalizing the basic principles or assumptions upon which a religious system is based. This can involve identifying key concepts, doctrines, or tenets, and then developing a set of statements, or "axioms," that capture the essential meaning of these ideas and provide a foundation for reasoning and argumentation within the system. The process of axiomatization can help to clarify the underlying principles of that religious system and make it easier to understand and communicate to others. It can also serve as a basis for further exploration and development of the system, as well as for critique and evaluation. The main tool of analysis of this axiomatisation approach is formal logic. On this method and its problems, refer to Józef Maria Bocheński, *The Logic of Religion* (New York University Press, 1965) and Paul Weingartner, "Problems of Axiomatizing of Religion," *Studies in East European Thought* 74 (2022): 149-163.

1. The Problem of the Efficacy of Petitionary Prayers

In general terms, the Problem of the Efficacy of Petitionary Prayers (PEPP) is whether the religious act of praying to God makes any difference to what He otherwise would have done or decreed, where the type of prayer under consideration is *impetratory* – or asking God for things.⁵ Thus, the philosophically puzzling question generated by PEPP is whether prayer affects God in any way, as in changes His decision or decree.⁶ Stated in a relatively more systematic way, PEPP consists of three interrelated problems, which are:⁷

Problem 1: This is the problem about how petitionary prayer can be religiously beneficial for the one petitioning because it does not appear to result in something immediately good, favorable or advantageous. This must mean petitionary prayers are superfluous.

Problem 2: This is the problem of how we know whether a prayer has been answered by God because we can never have any reasons for believing that He has actually answered one. We can call this the “epistemological problem” of petitionary prayer.

Problem 3: This is the problem of how petitionary prayer can be consistent with a set of God’s attributes like immutability, omniscience,

5 Although the English word “prayer” is more commonly reserved in translation for the Arabic *ṣalāh*, in this article, I use it for the Arabic *du‘ā* in place of its more familiar equivalents like “supplication.” This is to align it with the terms in the philosophy of religion literature. Some of the meanings of the Arabic word *du‘ā*, include: (1) acts of worship (*‘ibāda*), (2) succour (*isti‘āna*), (3) a statement (*qawl*) and (4) asking (*su‘āl*). Refer to Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā* (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2006), 15-16. It is the last type of prayer – *du‘ā al-su‘āl* (prayers of request) – that is the focus of this article.

6 On the philosophical arguments for the problem of petitionary prayer, see Scott A. Davison’s technical arguments elaborated in *Petitionary Prayer: A Philosophical Investigation* (Oxford University Press, 2017) and his summary treatment of the issue in *God and Prayer* (Cambridge University Press, 2022). For an insightful survey of nearly a dozen theological models of divine providence and prayer, refer to Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (InterVarsity Press, 2000).

7 Summarized from Safaruk Chowdhury, “‘Invoke Your Lord in Humility and in Secret’ (Qur’an 7:55): Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the Efficacy of Petitionary Prayers,” *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 13 (2022): 3-49.

omnipotence, and goodness. A formal presentation of the objection is as follows:

1. If God is immutable, then no petitionary prayer can cause a change in Him because He cannot change.
2. If God is omniscient, then no petitionary prayer can change a future outcome because God's knowledge has already determined the future.
3. If God is omnipotent, then no petitionary prayer can change what is divinely decreed and destined because God has fixed them from eternity.
4. If God is perfectly good, then no petitionary prayer can change Him from doing what is optimum because He would not do something sub-optimal anyway.
5. Therefore, petitionary prayers are inefficacious.

The upshot of this third problem is that petitionary prayers are inefficacious as an act because they would have made no difference to God's original decisions, determinations, and decrees of all things before their creation in time. I will call the third problem the "formal problem of the efficacy of petitionary prayer" (henceforth F-PEPP). I have stated F-PEPP in its cumulative form because each premise can constitute a separate argument and be addressed independently.⁸ Although three different problems have been highlighted here about PEPP, this paper will only focus on how Ibn Taymiyya can respond to divine omniscience problematizing petitionary prayer (premise 2 of F-PEPP) and then assess how cogent his responses are. Both Problem 1 and problem 2 will be addressed in a separate, forthcoming study.

2. The Problem of Petitionary Prayer in Islamic Theology

Muslim scholars from the classical period and up until Ibn Taymiyya's own time were aware of PEPP and briefly mention some solutions to it. This was not due necessarily to any particularly philosophical impetus on their part to examine the issues but primarily because of the Prophet

⁸ This separation of the argument can be found in, for example, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and his discussion on petitionary prayers, for which see Chowdhury, "Invoke Your Lord in Humility."

Muḥammad himself, who not only mentioned the great virtues, broad benefits, and strong efficacy of prayer, but made explicit references to a connection between prayer and divine knowledge and decree. Some statements of the Prophet on this include:⁹

Caution will not avail against predestination although prayer (*duʿā*) benefits what has occurred and will occur.

Nothing repels predestination (*qadar*) except prayers.

Nothing increases one's lifespan except good deeds, and nothing repels the divine decree except *duʿā*. Indeed, a person may be deprived of sustenance because of his evil deed.

The broad theological responses to these kinds of statements include the following: (1) Petitionary prayers are ordained causes by God through which the related effects are brought about. Thus, prayers have a functional relation to bringing about what is petitioned.¹⁰ (2) the relation between prayers and God's knowledge and decree are entirely unfathomable and so petitionary prayers are more about ultimately generating attitudes of submission and humble servitude to God.¹¹ (3) petitionary prayers are acts by means of which the petitioner can positively imagine and conceptualize the possibility of God causing states of affairs to be other than they are.¹² (4) petitionary prayers are more about bringing a religiously beneficial change in the person praying and not a change in God. Thus, prayer is for the sake of the petitioner and not for the one petitioned.¹³ In Ibn Taymiyya's writings, we also see representations of these general responses but with a set of arguments underpinned by

9 For these narrations (ḥadīths) and a brief discussion, refer to Yasir Qadhi, *Duʿā: The Weapon of the Believer. A Treatise on the Status and Etiquette of Duʿā in Islam* (Birmingham: Al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution Ltd, 2003), 49-51 and 200-204. Another list of narrations is discussed by Livnat Holzman, "הגדרה הקדומה (אלקצ'אא' ואלקדר) וחופש הבחירה (אלאח'תיאר) בכתבי החנבלים המאוחרים," *בני המאה ה-14* ("Predestination (*al-qadā' wa-l-qadar*) and Free Will (*al-ikhtiyār*) in the Writings of the Neo-Hanbalites of the 14th Century," PhD diss. Bar Ilan University (2004), 67-71.

10 Marion Holmes Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 41.

11 Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought*, 42.

12 Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought*, 42.

13 Qadhi, *Duʿā*, 42-58.

highly interesting metaphysical and theological ideas and claims. As I will demonstrate in section 3, some of Ibn Taymiyya's ideas can form an elaborate defence of petitionary prayers against F-PEPP.

2.1 Ibn Taymiyya's Broadly Stated Response to F-PEPP

In two places in the eighth volume of *Majmū' al-fatāwā*,¹⁴ Ibn Taymiyya sets out the broad framework of his response to those who argue that praying to God for something is a redundant act. In one place, for example, he comments:

Praying to God and having total reliance on Him are two of the greatest means God has placed for a person. If someone says, "what is predestined for me (*qud-dira li*) will occur regardless of whether or not I pray to God or rely on Him," then this is like someone who says, "afterlife felicity and infelicity has been predestined for me regardless of whether or not I have faith or whether or not I obeyed or disobeyed God in this life" and such a statement is misguided and tantamount to disbelief. Although the first statement is not like the second in its level of misguidance in that the relation between prayer and reliance on God regarding specific aims is not the same in severity as the relation between afterlife felicity and belief, nevertheless there is no doubt that God making prayer a cause is the same as God making good actions a cause. In fact, God has power to act (glory be to Him) without these specific causes but through other ones.¹⁵

In another place, he directly addresses the issue of petitionary prayer with the following response:

If it is asked, "if praying to God is something already determined (*kā'in*), then what is the point in God commanding it to be performed when it will inevitably occur?" the reply will be as follows: prayers are something commanded by God and may not necessarily occur. Rather, when God commands His servants to perform prayers to Him, some will obey that command and their prayers will be answered and their requests fulfilled. This indicates that the prayer and

14 Jon Hoover has provided a convenient index of all major writings of Ibn Taymiyya with several titles dubbed by himself in *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 239-243. I follow his titles in this article.

15 Ibn Taymiyya, "Qawl 'Alī" in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, ed. Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim (King Fahad Glorious Qur'ān Printing Complex, 2004), 8:176-77.

its answer is known and determined to occur whereas others will disobey the command and will not pray and as a result whatever was conditional on the prayer will not be fulfilled. This indicates that neither the prayer nor its answer was known and determined to occur. Hence, the prayer that is determined (*al-du'ā' al-kā'in*) is that which is foreknown to occur, whereas the prayer that is not determined is that which is foreknown not to occur.¹⁶

Even more explicit is the following comment that also contains a response:

As for their view that [God] has concluded all affairs, it is similar to what others have held regarding there being no need to offer *al-du'ā'* to God because if whatever is requested has already been determined, then there is no need in praying and if it has not been determined, then there is no benefit in praying. This is one of the most invalid views according to both revelation and reason. Similar to this is the view of those who say that reliance on God and praying to God do not result in any benefit and neither do they avert any harm; they are mere forms of worship (*ibāda maḥḍa*). The reality of reliance on God is absolutely and passively surrendering [all affairs] to God. Such a view, even if held by senior shaykhs, is incorrect. Those who say the same about prayer being a mere form of worship are equally incorrect. All these views and those like them have one principle in common: they think that since matters are determined or decreed, they cannot be predicated on causes – carried out by the servant – that are also determined. Such people fail to recognize that God (glorified is He!) has determined and decreed all matters through causes that He has made conditional on creaturely acts and other than their acts. For this reason, their view necessitates nullifying all acts.¹⁷

Without falling into rehearsing the details of Ibn Taymiyya's response presented in the section below, a preliminary sketch of it will be given to get an overall and initial impression of it. In Ibn Taymiyya's view, God comprehensively governs creation through His knowledge, will, wisdom, and power toward ends that are good and beneficial. His agency works through an ordained system of secondary causes, and although He may have exhaustive foreknowledge, He also has temporal knowledge of everything that happens as and when it does. Given this, Ibn Taymiyya

16 Ibn Taymiyya, "Marātib al-irāda," in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 8:195-96.

17 Ibn Taymiyya, "Tuḥfat al-irāqīyya fī al-a'māl al-qalbiyya," in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 10:22-23.

believes that petitionary prayers do have psychological and spiritual benefits for the person praying and has effects on the ultimate outcomes of events in the world although that might not always be fathomable from a finite creaturely perspective. This is because God has instituted prayers as one of the means (the cause) by which the objects of prayer are attained (the effect) even if the full efficaciousness of the prayer (or otherwise) may not immediately materialize. In addition, God actually hears all prayers and on account of them acts and intervenes to cause changes. Moreover, God's positive answer to each petitionary prayer is factored into His comprehensive plan and purpose for creation from pre-eternity. Thus, prayer is part of God's overall providence. The next section of the article presents the theological and metaphysical details of this sketch of Ibn Taymiyya's response to F-PEPP and their implications followed by section 4, the final section, where the various components of his response is given in a descriptive summation.

3. God, Omniscience, and Causality

In the following analysis, I utilize a broad conception of God taken from Ibn Taymiyya's statements, where he asserts a set of core divine attributes. These will be pertinent for expounding on his responses to F-PEPP. Where necessary, I cite and translate passages from the shaykh's various works that at times establish and explain, and at other times justify these attributes as well as any additional commitments they entail. I judge they will be sufficient to support the relevant points, leaving the reader to follow up on any further details from the references in the footnotes. As already stated in the introduction, my focus will be on how Ibn Taymiyya can address and weaken F-PEPP by specifically attacking premise 2. This involves analyzing two core components of that response: his doctrine of divine omniscience and his doctrine of causality. I will first outline his conception of God (3.1), then more specifically present his doctrine of omniscience (3.2), followed by his model of causality (3.3).

3.1 God as Maximally Perfect

Ibn Taymiyya upholds God's maximal perfection. He says for example that "it must be known that perfection is affirmed of God," but goes further and adds that "in fact, the highest possible perfection is affirmed of God (*bal al-thābit lahu huwa aqṣā mā yumkin min al-akmaliyya*), where the

existence of perfection negates any imperfection.”¹⁸ Secondly, he upholds God’s absolute power and knowledge when he states “all Muslims are in agreement, along with adherents of other faiths that God has power over everything, which is expressed in the Qur’an in many places”¹⁹ and “His knowledge and determination of all things before they are created are found in numerous places in the Qur’an and Hadith and from reports (*āthār*) from the early pious figures.”²⁰ Thirdly, God’s wisdom and goodness is rounded off when he remarks, “as previously explained, the aim behind everything that [God] creates or commands is His self-love and love directed to His creatures; they contain His wise purposes and mercy for His creatures.”²¹ On divine justice, he asserts “this is the foundational principle that enters in all areas of the religion (*jamī’ abwāb al-dīn*) – its roots and branches – whether it is in God’s creation, the sustenance He provides, His giving or withholding, in all of His acts (glory be To Him). It also enters into everything He commands and prohibits as well as the hereafter.”²² We can take this conceptualization of God as one of the axioms (A) of the shaykh’s theology and offer a definition (def):

A1. (God’s maximal perfection): $MP(g)$
(God is maximally perfect)

A definition of God as the most perfect being would then be:

Def. 1 (God’s maximal perfection): $MP(g) \leftrightarrow CR(g) \wedge OP(g) \wedge OM(g) \wedge OW(g) \wedge OB(g) \wedge JU(g)$
(God is maximally perfect if and only if He is the creator, omnipotent, omniscient, omniwise, omnibenevolent and perfectly just).

From this, we can easily derive the axiom of God’s omniscience:

18 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Risāla al-akmalīyya fī mā yajibū lillāh min šifāt al-kamāl* (Maṭba‘at al-Madanī, 1983), 7 = “Tafṣīl al-ijmāl fī mā yajibū lillāh min šifāt al-kamāl” in *Majmū‘at rasā’il wa-l-masā’il*, ed. Rashīd Riḍā (Maṭba‘at al-Manār, 1922-1930), 5:40.

19 Ibn Taymiyya, “Fī qudrat al-rabb ‘azza wa jalla,” in *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 8:7.

20 Ibn Taymiyya, “Risāla fī taḥqīq mas‘alat ‘ilm Allāh,” in *Jāmi‘ al-rasā’il*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālīm (Dār al-Madanī, 1984), 1:183.

21 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 5:30.

22 Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-nubuwwāt*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Šālīḥ al-Ṭūwayyān (Maktabat Aḍwā’ al-Salaf, 2000), 1:467-68.

A2. $OM(g)$

(God is omniscient)

Proof:

- | | | |
|----|--|-------------|
| 1. | $MP(g)$ | (Axiom 1) |
| 2. | $MP(g) \leftrightarrow CR(g) \wedge OP(g) \wedge OM(g) \wedge OW(g) \wedge OB(g) \wedge JU(g)$ | (Def.1) |
| 3. | $OM(g)$ | (Simp.1, 2) |

Due to the attribute of omniscience figuring prominently in the background to the discussion on petitionary prayers, I will now mention it in more detail.

3.2 Divine Omniscience

The Qur'an arguably espouses a "thick" conception of God's knowledge, which has at least three defining features:²³ (1) it is *penetrative*, which is to say infinitesimally detailed with an incomparable reach of depth. The Qur'an in one place (6:59) poetically refers to God's knowledge of a leaf falling and a grain of seed in the darkness of the earth and it mentions too that God knows what His creatures are doing in time because He monitors them, provides for them and guides them to His desired ends (6:59 and 29:60); (2) it is *exhaustive*, meaning fully comprehensive and encompassing that does not exclude anything. God for example knows everything in the land and sea (6:59), everything seen, visible, and open, and everything unseen, invisible, and hidden (6:73, 13:9, 32:6, 34:48, 39:46, 49:18, 59:22; 62:8, 64:18 and 87:7); (3) it is *limitless*, that is, it has no bounds or restrictions. Knowledge of this kind is necessary, not only for God to create everything other than Himself, but for Him to provide for and govern His creation (35:3, 7:54). Thus, He is Lord of both creation and of its history.²⁴ Ibn Taymiyya affirms this Qur'anic characterisation of God's knowledge and it is the primary source, along with numerous references in the Hadith, for various beliefs that constitute his doctrine of divine omniscience.²⁵ A definition to delineate this attribute that the

23 See *Mawsū'at al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*, ed. 'Ādil b. Sa'd and 'Amr b. Maḥrūs (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2006), 1:126-50 and 469-79.

24 For the chapter and verse references to the relevant facets of God's knowledge in the Qur'an, see the Qur'an index under s.v. 'God' in *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Amana Publications, 2004).

25 I have here omitted discussion of whether Ibn Taymiyya would accept the attribute of what Linda Zagzebski has dubbed "omnisubjectivity"; namely whether there is a specific modality of divine

shaykh would generally accept is in terms of God's knowledge being *infallible*, meaning that whatever He knows must be the case:

Def. 2 (God's omniscience): $OM(g) \leftrightarrow \forall x(K(g, x) \rightarrow Tr(x))$

(God is omniscient if and only if given anything, if God knows it, then it is true)

Or dropping the truth predicate "Tr" and universal quantifier:

$K(g, x) \rightarrow x$

(If God knows something, then it is the case)

Divine infallibility entails that it cannot be that God knows something and that thing is false. This would mean He can be mistaken or ignorant, which is an imperfection and hence impossible.²⁶ In his *Sharḥ al-'Aqīda al-Aṣfahāniyya*, in agreement with Muslim *kalām* theologians (*nuzẓār al-muslimīn*) and philosophers (*ḥalāsifa*), he mentions several arguments justifying God's knowledge being a necessary attribute. The first argument is a transitive one and can be presented as follows:

1. Creating something requires having a will.
2. Having a will requires conceptualizing the object of will.
3. Conceptualizing something is a form of knowledge.
4. Therefore, creating something requires knowledge.

phenomenal knowledge. In other words, whether God has perfect accuracy and complete grasp of first-person experiences of every conscious being. The claim by Zagzebski is that omniscience entails omnisubjectivity. At present, with a few scriptural and theological constraints, an argument can be made that Ibn Taymiyya would accept such an attribute. On omnisubjectivity, see Linda Zagzebski's seminal work *Omnisubjectivity: A Defense of a Divine Attribute* (Marquette University Press, 2013) and Linda Zagzebski, "Omnisubjectivity: Why it is a Divine Attribute," *Nous et Vetera* 14, No. 2 (2016): 435-450. For a short survey of discussions around divine passibility and impassibility in philosophy of religion, where omnisubjectivity is situated, refer to Ryan T. Mullins, *God and Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), especially 60-68. On whether there can be omnisubjectivity within an Islamic paradigm, see Kemal Kikanovic and Enis Doko, "Omnisubjectivity as a Divine Attribute from an Islamic Perspective", *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 9 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.14428/thl.v9i2.86823>.

²⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar' ta'arūḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Muḥammad Ibn Saud University and KSA Ministry of Higher Education, 1991), 10:16.

In propositional form:

1. $C \leftrightarrow W$
2. $W \leftrightarrow O$
3. $O \leftrightarrow K$
4. $C \leftrightarrow K$

(Using, C, K, O, W)

To bring something into being, the cause must intend to do it, and this intention involves conceptualizing what is intended to be created (*taṣawwur al-murād*). The conceptualization cannot take place unless there is knowledge from which to generate it.²⁷ The second argument states how it is not possible for any created object that exhibits exquisiteness and precision (*iḥkām wa itqān*) as well as design to be brought into being by a agent-cause (*fāʿil*) who lacks knowledge because both will and knowledge are necessary for consciously selecting and configuring the exacting nature of each created object.²⁸ The third and final argument combines modal notions with ideas about what contemporary philosophers refer to as “great-making properties,” otherwise known as a feature of perfection (*ṣifat al-kamāl*).²⁹ Ibn Taymiyya presents the reasoning behind this argument as follows: if a necessarily existent being is greater than a possibly existent being (because it exists *a se*) and if the latter possesses the property of knowledge, then *a fortiori* the former must possess the property knowledge. Therefore, if God is creator and is more perfect than His creature, and his creature possesses the property of knowledge, which is considered a great-making property, then by greater reasoning, God is more deserving (*aḥaqq*) of possessing the property of knowledge. Otherwise, it would entail the less perfect (the created) being greater than the more perfect (the creator), because the creator in this case would lack something the created possesses and this would be absurd.³⁰ Returning to Ibn Taymiyya’s beliefs about omniscience, in formally setting them out, each of them can be stated as theorems (T) that are deduced from A2 to give

27 Ibn Taymiyya, *Sharḥ al-aṣbahāniyya*, ed. Muḥammad b. ʿAwda al-Saʿawī (Maktabat Dār al-Minhāj lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2009), 396 and *Darʿ taʾarūḍ al-ʿaql*, 10:113-14.

28 Ibn Taymiyya, *Sharḥ al-aṣbahāniyya*, 396.

29 Ibn Taymiyya, *Sharḥ al-aṣbahāniyya*, 397.

30 Ibn Taymiyya, *Sharḥ al-aṣbahāniyya*, 396-397.

us T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5. The shaykh's first belief is that God knows the past, the present, and the future. Hence, God has knowledge of tensed facts.³¹ This is T1. We can formally state this as follows: let e_t be: an event e occurred at t where $t \leq 0$ is the past, $t = 0$ is the present, and $t \geq 0$ is the future:

$$\mathbf{T1.} \forall e(e_t \leq 0) \rightarrow K(g, e_t \leq 0) \wedge \forall e(e_t = 0) \rightarrow K(g, e_t = 0) \wedge \forall e(e_t \geq 0) \rightarrow K(g, e_t \geq 0)$$

(Any event that occurs in the past, present, or future, God knows it)

$$(a) \quad \forall e(e_t \leq 0) \rightarrow K(g, e_t \leq 0)$$

(If any event occurred in the past, then God knows it)

$$(b) \quad \forall e(e_t = 0) \rightarrow K(g, e_t = 0)$$

(If any event occurs in the present, then God knows it)

$$(c) \quad \forall e(e_t \geq 0) \rightarrow K(g, e_t \geq 0)$$

(If any event occurs in the future, then God knows it)

The second belief is that God not only knows the future, but He also knows counterfactuals, namely, how certain states of affairs *would* have, *could* have, or *might* have been if slightly different circumstances prevailed but did not actually happen:

$$\mathbf{T2.} \forall x(x \square \rightarrow (K(g, x)))$$

(If anything were to be the case, God would know it)

On this, the shaykh comments:

31 For general theological discussions on various issues related to the nature and scope of God's knowledge, refer to Ibn Taymiyya's critiques in *Dar' ta'arud al-'aql*, 10:3-196; particularly 98-138. See also Khālīd 'Abd al-Laṭīf Muḥammad Nūr 'Abd Allāh, *Masā'il uṣūl al-dīn al-mabḥūtha fī uṣūl al-fiqh* (Islamic University and KSA Ministry of Higher Education, 2005), 292-322 and Muḥammad al-'Arūsī 'Abd al-Qādir, *al-Masā'il al-mushtaraka bayn uṣūl al-fiqh wa uṣūl al-dīn* (Maktabat al-Rushd, 2009), 172-78. On an analysis of the medieval Islamic controversy over God's knowledge of tensed facts referred to as knowledge of "particulars" (*juz'īyyāt*), see Abdulkadir Taniş, "Omniscience, Immutability and Tensed Facts in Avicenna and al-Ghazālī," *TRAMES* 25, no. 3 (2021): 339-353. For Ibn Taymiyya's extensive criticism of Avicenna's denial of God knowing particulars in the context of al-Ghazālī's critique of Avicenna, see his *Dar' ta'arud al-'aql*, 10:133-96.

God has mentioned His knowledge of things that will happen after they happen in over a dozen places in the Qur'an and in even more places has informed that He knows what will happen before it happens. He has also informed in the Qur'an about future events that have not yet happened according to His will. In fact, He has informed His Prophet and other than him about all this, "and they will not encompass anything of His knowledge except what He wills." He (glory be to Him) knows the past, the future, and what would be if it were to be like in His saying, "if they were to be sent back, they would have certainly reverted to what they were forbidden to do" (Qur'an 6:28). Indeed, he has made known to some of His servants whatever He wills to make known from such and such; "and they will not encompass anything of His knowledge except what He wills."³²

The shaykh's third belief is that God knows everything that occurs in His creation at some specific point in time without Himself necessarily being in time.³³ Therefore, He has temporal knowledge while not being temporal. This is T3:

T3. $\forall x(K(g, x_t))$

(God knows anything that is the case at its respective time)

Related to God's knowledge of chronological events and temporal knowledge is the shaykh's fourth belief in God's mutable knowledge (*'ilm mutajaddid*).³⁴ This is T4 which is derived from T1 and T3:

32 Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-radd 'alā al-manṭiqiyyīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Ṣamad Sharaf al-Dīn al-Kutubī (Mu'assasat al-Rayyān, 2005), 510.

33 My reading of Ibn Taymiyya here would assume him to be an eternalist although it is acknowledged by many modern commentators that he is more akin to a temporalist. See for example the recent article by Jon Hoover, "The Muslim Theologian Ibn Taymiyya on God, Creation and Time," in *Temporality and Eternity: Nine Perspectives on God and Time*, ed. Marcus Schmücker, Michael T. Williams and Florian Fischer (De Gruyter, 2022), 89-104. However, Hoover would insist that Ibn Taymiyya ought to be read as arguing that God is temporal in God's essence and therefore can know all tensed facts without being in time. My reading of Ibn Taymiyya as an eternalist is more by entailment in that for any being to completely know the past, present and future and predestine, predetermine, and decree all things and events in creation such a being would have to be beyond time.

34 Ibn Taymiyya, "Risāla fī taḥqīq mas'alat 'ilm Allāh," in *Jāmi' al-rasā'il*, 1:177-83. See the translation of this section in Abdul Haqq Ansari, *Ibn Taymiyya Expounds on Islam* (Institute of Islam and Arabic Publishing, 2000), 91-95.

T4. $\forall e(e_i \geq 0) \rightarrow K(g, e_i \geq 0)$

(If any event occurs in the future, then God knows it)

The larger theological discussion in which this belief is situated is Ibn Taymiyya's doctrine of God's volitional attributes (*ṣifāt ikhtiyāriyya*) – also commonly referred to as active attributes (*ṣifāt fi'liyya*) – which he defines as those acts of God enacted through an exercise of His will and power like speaking, hearing, seeing, love, pleasure, mercy, anger, coming, arriving, and descending, that is, ones that subsist as uncreated attributes in His essence but involve change (*taghayyur*) or entail passibility.³⁵ The major *kalām* groups like the Ash'arīs denied any possibility of changes related to emotions or feelings in God or His being because it would cause His essence to be a locus for temporal changes (*ḥudūth* or *ḥulūl al-ḥawādith*), which if it is, would make Him temporal and that would contradict Him being eternal. This rejection of divine mutability and passibility is based on their commitment to the metaphysical axiom 'whatever is not devoid of temporal changes is itself temporal' (*mā lā yakhlu min al-ḥawādith fa huwa ḥādith*). Applied to the matter of God's knowledge, if a change in God's knowledge is accepted, like knowing something differently than before, then it would entail a change in His essence, i.e., a real or *intrinsic* change, in that God would have gained something He otherwise did not have, which is impossible. Rather, what is argued instead is that God's knowledge of different temporal facts induces a change in God's relation to these temporal facts as objects of His knowledge, which is an *extrinsic* change. In other words, extrinsic change involves a relational change due to something outside of the subject rather than the subject itself, e.g., God being praised or glorified by a person does not cause any intrinsic change (gain or loss) in Him (like His essence), but it means He has gained a property, namely, the property

35 On this discussion, see Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar' ta'arūḍ al-'aql*, 2:18-115 and "Faṣl fī al-Sifāt al-ikhtiyāriyya," in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 6:217-68. See as well 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Šāliḥ al-Maḥmūd, *Mawqif ibn taymiyya min al-ashā'ira* (Maktabat al-Rushd, 1995), 1199-1223; 'Abd Allāh, *Masā'il uṣūl al-dīn*, 253-278 and Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 95-6 and Hoover, "God Acts by His Will and Power: Ibn Taymiyya's Theology of a Personal God in his Treatise on the Voluntary Attributes," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. by Yosseff Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Oxford University Press, 2010), 55-77.

of “being someone who is praised.”³⁶ The general change-denying argument for God’s knowledge can be stated as follows:³⁷

1. If God is eternal and unchanging, then His essence and knowledge is unchanging.
2. If it is possible that God’s knowledge changes, then His essence changes.
3. It is possible that God’s knowledge changes.
4. Therefore, it is possible that His essence changes.
5. But it is impossible that His essence changes.
6. Therefore, it is impossible that His knowledge changes.

In propositional form:

1. $(T \wedge U) \rightarrow (E \wedge K)$
2. $\Diamond K \rightarrow \neg E$
3. $\Diamond \neg K$
4. $\therefore \Diamond \neg E$
5. $\neg \Diamond \neg E$
6. $\therefore \neg \Diamond \neg K$

(Using, E, K, T, U)

Ibn Taymiyya vehemently attacks this strong account of divine immutability that characterizes God’s knowledge as a qualitatively single, unchanging, undifferentiated, and timeless comprehension or intuition of everything. He equally attacks the metaphysical axiom that God undergoing any changes would make Him a temporal being. I will not reproduce those arguments here due to space,³⁸ but on the issue of God’s changing knowledge, the shaykh states that God knows from eternity that things will occur at a specific time. However, when the foreknown events occur in their respective times, God knows their occurrence as a different object of knowledge. In the former instance, His knowledge is pre-eternal (*azalī*), descriptive, and unchanging whereas in the latter case it is a

36 Ibn Taymiyya, “Faṣl fī al-ṣifāt al-ikhtiyāriyya,” in *Majmū’ al-fatāwā*, 6:219-22 and al-Maḥmūd, *Mawqif Ibn taymiyya*, 1055-57.

37 From Ibn Taymiyya, “Faṣl fī al-ṣifāt al-ikhtiyāriyya,” in *Majmū’ al-fatāwā*, 6:219-22 and his *Kitāb al-radd ‘alā al-manṭiqiyyīn*, 508-10. See as well al-Maḥmūd, *Mawqif ibn taymiyya*, 1055-57.

38 For explanations of these arguments, see Hoover, “God Acts by His Will,” 58-65.

new and changed knowledge.³⁹ One reason he gives is that God's knowledge does not connect to non-existents, meaning if He sees and hears everything, then it is real voices and actions in real time that He sees and hears.⁴⁰ He insists on the scriptural basis of this feature of divine knowledge in such verses as:

20:46: "do not fear (O Moses and Aaron) for I am indeed with you both, hearing and watching,"

2:143: "We assigned your former direction of prayer only to know those who would remain faithful to the Messenger from those who would lose faith."

3:142: "Do you think you will enter Paradise without God knowing which of you sincerely struggled and patiently endured?" and

47:31: 'We will certainly test you until We know those of you who truly struggle (in God's cause) and remain steadfast and reveal how you conduct yourselves.'⁴¹

On this last verse, Ibn Taymiyya explains how God not only has foreknowledge of those who will struggle in His path and remain dutifully firm and unwavering in that, but He also has a different type of knowledge that arises when the actual acts of struggling and remaining steadfast occur in time:

It was narrated from Ibn 'Abbās regarding [God] saying, "until We know" that it means "until we see" and in another narration, "until we ascertain." This is what the generality of the Qur'an commentators have interpreted it to mean. A group of the people of knowledge have explained [the verse] to mean, "until We know it to exist in reality after foreknowing it will occur." The expression according to another [person of knowledge] is that: [God's] knowledge is of two types. The first is knowing something before it exists and the second is knowing something after it exists. The judgment is that it refers to [God's] knowledge of the [acts] after they exist because it necessitates reward and punishment. He said: the meaning of [God] saying "until We know" is "until we have knowledge by virtue of which the agent is deserving of either reward or sanction." There is no doubt that He (glory be to Him) foreknows what will happen, yet the object

39 Ibn Taymiyya, "Risāla fī taḥqīq mas'alat 'ilm Allāh," in *Jāmi' al-rasā'il*, 1:177-181.

40 Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-radd 'alā al-mantiqīyyīn*, 509-510.

41 Ibn Taymiyya, "Risāla fī taḥqīq mas'alat 'ilm Allāh," in *Jāmi' al-rasā'il*, 1:183. Cf. as well Qur'anic commentaries on Qur'an 3:140 about whether God learns temporal facts, for which see Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters: Volume II* (State University of New York Press, 1994), 328-33.

of His knowledge did not yet exist in reality (*lam yakun al-ma'lūm qad wujud*). This is like where [God] says, “are you informing God of something He does not know in the heavens or the earth?” (10:18) meaning “are you informing God of something not yet in existence?” because if it did exist, He would know it. This is because His knowledge that it exists and it existing are conditional on each other; if one is present, so is the other, and if one is not, the other is not. The discussion on this has been taken up extensively elsewhere.⁴²

Ibn Taymiyya's exegesis of the aforementioned Qur'anic verses on God's knowing tensed facts in visual terms relies on a type of perceptual model of divine knowledge. Even though such a model is in keeping with his overall empiricism, his motivation is entirely scriptural and by appeal to religious authority.⁴³ He sees little worry in such a model entailing a potency in God, namely, events in the world causing a different type of knowledge in God. Another way of putting the worry of this model is that God's knowledge is not here determining or providential but reactionary to contingent events in the actual.⁴⁴ The shaykh's fifth belief about omniscience is that God's knowledge does not cause things to be the case, i.e., it is non-causative knowledge; rather it is descriptive. This is T5:

T5. $\forall x(K(g, x) \rightarrow \neg C(g, x))$

(If God knows something, He does not cause that thing)

Ibn Taymiyya states Muslim scholarly consensus to be that “God's knowledge of something does not necessarily cause the object of knowledge to be.”⁴⁵ He argues that the numerous references to God's foreknowledge in both the Qur'an and Hadith are not to be read as necessitating anything in the future in a fatalistic way. Rather, God's informing about his

42 Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-radd 'alā al-manṭiqiyyīn*, 511 and 509 for his comments on Qur'an 9:105, ‘We will see their acts’ meaning God will see the acts when they actually occur in time. See as well *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 8:495-97.

43 For comments about his empiricism, see Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation: A Study of dar' ta'arūḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), fn. 33, 236.

44 On some issues around a perceptual model of divine knowledge, refer to Amirhossein Zadyousefi, “Does God Know that the Flower in My Hand is Red? Avicenna and the Problem of God's Perceptual Knowledge,” *Sophia* 59 (2020): 657-693.

45 Ibn Taymiyya, “An qawm qad khuṣṣū bi-l-sa'āda,” in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 8:280.

foreknowledge of future events – particularly the actions of free creatures – is descriptive or informative and not causative. He says:

When [God] informs of a thing that it will occur in the future, before it actually does occur, at that time His knowledge of it and His informing about it does not affect its occurrence in just the same way that His knowledge of [that very thing] and His informing about it after its occurrence does not affect it. [This is] from three aspects. Firstly, that knowing and informing about something in the future is like knowing and informing about something in the past. Secondly, effective or causative knowledge (*al-'ilm al-mu'aththir*) necessitates a will that brings the object of knowledge into existence that is not the case for informative knowledge about something. We have already explained the difference between active knowledge and informative knowledge. Third, if at all one concedes that knowing and informing have some effect on the object of knowledge, even then it would need a power and a will to bring it into existence. Mere knowledge cannot necessitate its existence without a power and will.⁴⁶

Broadly analogizing God's knowledge with human knowledge for illustrative purposes, the shaykh argues that knowledge can be effectual (active) and non-effectual (passive). In some cases, we may know something, and it influences how we act (there is a causative element), and in other cases, it does not. His two main points here are firstly that God's knowledge need not be a sufficient condition for causing all temporal events and acts, and secondly, God's knowledge does not compel any event or act to occur until those events and acts actually occur in their respective times, with their respective conditions and through their proper causal means.⁴⁷ Another angle from which the shaykh makes his argument, in keeping with his broadly anti-realist metaphysics, is that he differentiates between something being established as an item of knowledge (*thubūt fī al-'ilm*) and something being established in existence and reality (*thubūt fī al-wujūd wa-l-tahqīq*). In the case of the former, merely being an item in someone's knowledge inventory does not mean it has factual existence, i.e.,

46 Ibn Taymiyya, "An qawm qad khuṣṣū bi-l-sa'āda," in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 8:281 and *Dar' ta'arūf al-'aql*, 10:112-13.

47 Ibn Taymiyya, "An qawm qad khuṣṣū bi-l-sa'āda," in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 8:279-81. See the translation of this section in Ansari, *Ibn Taymiyya Expounds on Islam*, 352-60.

an ontology in the external world.⁴⁸ The interesting example he discusses is the hadith of the Prophet Muḥammad's metaphysical primacy, where, on being asked by one of his companions "when were you a Prophet?" the Prophet replied, "when Adam was between his soul and body."⁴⁹ Ibn Taymiyya's criticism is directed at those Muslims who mistakenly interpret this hadith to mean the Prophet's essence and prophethood were ontologically prior to their subsequent temporal appearance (*ḥudūr*) and announcement (*i'lān*) respectively. In other words, they believed (mistakenly for him) that Muḥammad actually existed as a prophet before his temporal appearance. His main point here is that something being an object of God's knowledge does not entail a commitment to its actual existence, namely as a concrete thing (*shay*).⁵⁰ Aside from the ontological point, the moral implications of this non-causative foreknowledge for him are clear. Genuine free will must be preserved because "if God only sends a person to hellfire on account of his sins," then it cannot be the case that "God punishes a person solely on account of His foreknowledge of him doing those acts." Rather, he must be punished "only after he actually does them."⁵¹

3.3 Causality

The second component of Ibn Taymiyya's response is his doctrine of causality.⁵² He is a causal realist and appeals to several arguments for the real

48 For an intricate survey of Ibn Taymiyya's ontology, particularly from his *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql*, see El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, 227-53.

49 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 8:282. On this specific narration, refer to Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī, *al-Asrār al-marfū'a fi al-akhbār al-mawḍū'a*, trans. Gibril Fouad Haddad as *Encyclopaedia of Ḥadīth Forgeries: Sayings Misattributed to the Prophet Muḥammad* (Beacon Books, 2013), 361-62.

50 On Ibn Taymiyya's reism, see Farid Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya und die Attribute Gottes* (Boston and Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2019), 98-102.

51 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 8:69. See as well Ibn Taymiyya's anti-determinist stance on human destiny discussed in Livnat Holtzman, "Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the *Fiṭra* Tradition: The Use of Hadith in Theological Treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, 163-78.

52 On this doctrine according to Ibn Taymiyya, see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 156-65; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya und die Attribute Gottes*, 98-102; Tallal Zeni, *Ibn Taymiyya on Causality and Reliance of God* (Jarir Bookstore, 2021), 6-17 and 143-218. For a very detailed survey of causality in Islamic thought, refer to Özgür Koca, *Islam, Causality and Freedom: From the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2020) and his *Islam, Causality and Science: Perspectives on Reconciliation of Islamic Tradition and Modern Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 2-26. It is debatable whether Ibn Taymiyya can be categorized as a *decretalist*. Decretalism is a term that is used

nexus between a cause and effect, which he takes to be a relation primarily between *things* and *events*. Hence, he also upholds a form of causal connectionism. For the shaykh, Nature is causally operational. Created objects have natures (*ṭabā'ī*), potencies (*quwa*), and attributes (*ṣifāt*) that enable them to affect other objects and to be affected themselves. There is a functioning nexus between a cause(s) and its effect(s). This means that Nature is endowed with activity and power that give it fixity, regularity, and uniformity.⁵³ However, Nature does not operate autonomously, i.e., beyond God's will and power. God acts through objects in Nature as intermediary causes (*asbāb*) to bring about concomitant effects (*musabbabāt*). For example, God grants human provisions through their endeavors and efforts, grants offspring through the acts of sexual reproduction, and decrees salvation or damnation through a person's quality of religious acts. Included in this are objects of petitionary prayers. These are, as will be explained below (4.1-4.2) the ordained means by which God grants what is petitioned. Therefore, created objects are secondary causes whereas God is the primary or efficient cause. The shaykh's view is built on a rejection of what he sees as the libertarian excesses of the Mutazilites and the occasionalist error of the Ash'arites.⁵⁴ On the former,

in the philosophy of religion – familiar due to Alvin Plantinga – referring to the belief that the laws of nature are considered decrees or commands of God, and that these laws are the basis for the regularity and predictability of natural phenomena. Hence, it is a form of nomological realism. According to decretalism, God is understood to be the ultimate cause of all events and processes in the world, and the laws of nature are seen as expressions of God's will. Defined in this way, decretalism is more a mode of understanding the relationship between God's will and the natural world than about a theory of causation. See Alvin Plantinga, "Law, Cause and Occasionalism," in *Reason and Faith: Themes from Richard Swinburne*, ed. Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey E. Brower (Oxford University Press, 2016), 126-44 and Jeffrey Koperski, *Divine Action, Determinism, and the Laws of Nature* (Routledge, 2020), 100-105. On a recent critique of Koperski's decretalism as collapsing into occasionalism, see Nazif Muhtaroglu and Shoaib Ahmed Malik, "Engaging Jeffrey Koperski's Decretalism: Is Occasionalism Really Avoidable?," *Religious Studies* (2024): 1-13. doi:10.1017/S0034412524000635.

⁵³ For a backdrop discussion on natures, the laws of nature and causal necessity relevant for Islamic philosophical and theological views, see Yasin R. Basaran, *Nature, God and Creation: A Necessitarian Case* (PhD diss. Indiana University, 2018), 7-115.

⁵⁴ The standard formulation of the Ash'arite occasionalist thesis (OC_(A)) can be stated as follows: OC_(A): for any effect *e* in the actual world, (i) God is the sole cause of *e* and (ii) there is no created object *x* such that *x* causes *e*.

On the doctrine of occasionalism at various times in Islamic theology and philosophy, refer to Koca, *Islam, Causality and Freedom*, 16-39 (classical view), 60-82 (mature view), 159-182 (late medieval) and 200-230 (modern view). For an assessment of the philosophical critique of Islamic occasionalism

he completely rejects the Mutazalite tenet that humans are real creators of things – such as their own acts – on the basis that this would entail associating created objects with God's sole prerogative of being Creator and sovereign over everything, including human acts. The latter view of the Ash'arites is grounded in a *creatio ex-nihilo* doctrine that renders Nature radically contingent of and impotent, dependent on the continual intervention of God to sustain it at every moment in time, since it has no intrinsic potentiality of change or alteration. This impotency of Nature further means that objects cannot cause other objects because they have no fixed nature and no power to bring about effects. Therefore, there is no real deterministic causality but only occasions for God to freely (or counterfactually) act through a habitual mode of conjoining a cause with its effect. This habitual act (*āda*) is what generates the regularity of experience to the subjective observer. Against this, Ibn Taymiyya argues that it is God's will that permits created objects to have intrinsic potency and receptivity for any change (causal or otherwise). If God should remove His will, or allow any impediments to a cause to bring about its effect, then no cause can bring about its effect; much like *saḥab aw saqaf* (ceilings or clouds) necessarily blocking the rays of the sun.⁵⁵ Therefore, although God alone is the ultimate, efficient, and in fact, the necessary and sufficient cause of everything, His will is actualized through the decreed pattern of secondary causation, thus permitting objects to possess a partially sufficient but dependent power to cause.⁵⁶

Some of Ibn Taymiyya's arguments for upholding genuine causation against those who deny it like the Ash'arite occasionalists include the following: (1) causation is derived from an appeal to common sense experience and rationality as it is something experienced every day without a need to doubt it. (2) the revealed law (*shar'*) assumes and confirms the existence of a genuine cause and effect relation for the commands and prohibitions it contains to be intelligible. Hence, denial of causation is tantamount to denial of revelation. (3) rejection of causation undermines

within the medieval period, see Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958, repr. Routledge, 2008).

55 Ibn Taymiyya, "al-Risāla al-tadmūriyya," in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 3:133. See as well Ibn Taymiyya's discussion of causes in *Bayān talbīs al-jahmiyya fī ta'sīs bida'ihim al-kalāmiyya*, ed. Sulaymān al-Ghafīṣ (King Fahad Glorious Qur'ān Printing Complex, 2005), 5:234–40.

56 Ibn Taymiyya, "Aqwam mā qīla fī l-qadā' wa-l-qadar wa-l-ḥikma wa-l-ta'līl," in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 8:133–41 and Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 156–60.

empirically observable facts like objects having a nature (*ṭabīʿa*) and potencies or powers (*quwa*). (4) rejection of real causation is equivalent to undermining God's wisdom and wise purposes in instituting a system of nature that operates with regularity.⁵⁷ (5) eliminating any real causation means accepting the doctrine of recreation, and this is absurd because the doctrine entails divine frivolity (*ʿabath*), where God is needlessly annihilating and then recreating the atoms and accidents of all things moment to moment (unnoticeable to creatures) to ensure material continuity and coherence of the world.⁵⁸ Given this general account of causality according to Ibn Taymiyya, some definitions and theorems of that account can be stated as follows:

Def. 2 (Divine Cause): $C(g, x) \leftrightarrow (CN(g) \wedge CS(g))$

(God causing something means God is both its necessary and sufficient cause)

Def. 3 (Creaturely Cause): $CSP(x, y) \leftrightarrow CN(g) \wedge CS(g) \wedge W(g, CSP(x, y))$

(a created entity x is a partially sufficient cause of another entity y if and only if God is both necessary and sufficient cause and He wills that x is a partially sufficient cause of y)

From def.2 and def.3, we get theorems T6, T7, and T8:

T6. $\forall x C(g, x) \rightarrow CS(g, x)$

(If God is a cause of anything, He is a sufficient cause of it)

T7. $\forall x C(g, x) \rightarrow CN(g, x)$

(If God is a cause of anything, He is a necessary cause of it)

T8. $\forall y \forall x (CSP(x, y)) \wedge CN(g, y) \rightarrow y$

(If one entity x is a partially sufficient cause of another entity y and God is a necessary cause of y , then y obtains)

Ibn Taymiyya's account of causality falls under his general doctrine of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar* (divine decree and predestination), i.e., God's

⁵⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, "Aqḥam mā qīla fī al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar," in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 8:136-141 and 9:287-288.

⁵⁸ Zeni, *Ibn Taymiyya on Causality*, 16.

providence. This is God's governance of the world and its history through His will, knowledge, power, wisdom, care, love, and mercy. Included under this providence is God's sovereignty over creaturely destiny, their actions, success, and failure. Two definitions on this providence are relevant:

Def. 4 (Divine Providence): $(x \in g\text{-}Pr) \leftrightarrow (x \in g\text{-}D) \wedge (x \in g\text{-}ED)$

(Anything belongs to God's providence if and only if it belongs to God's decree and the execution of God's decree)

Def. 5 (Execution of God's Decree): $(x \in g\text{-}ED) \leftrightarrow (CD(g, x) \vee \exists y(Oy \wedge CSP(y, x)) \wedge CN(g, x))$

(Anything belongs to the execution of God's decree if and only if either God causes it directly or conjointly with some object as a partially sufficient cause and God as a necessary cause)

From the disjuncts of def.5, the following theorems can be derived regarding God's decree and its execution:

T9. $\forall x(x \in g\text{-}Cr) \rightarrow (x \in g\text{-}D) \vee (x \in g\text{-}ED)$

(Anything that is a fact belonging to God's creation is a fact belonging either to His decree or execution of His decree)

T10. $\forall x(x \in g\text{-}ED) \rightarrow (x \in g\text{-}Cr)$

(Anything that is a fact belonging to God's execution of His decree is a fact belonging to His creation)

T11. $\forall x(x \in g\text{-}ED) \rightarrow K(g, x)$

(Anything that is a fact belonging to God's execution of His decree is known by God)

T12. $\forall x(x \in g\text{-}ED) \rightarrow x$

(Anything that is a fact belonging to God's execution of His decree will occur)

T13. $\forall x(x \in g\text{-}ED) \rightarrow CN(g, x)$

(Anything that is a fact belonging to God's execution of His decree, God is a necessary cause of it)

T14. $\forall x(x \in g\text{-}ED) \rightarrow \text{Con}(x)$

(Anything that is a fact belonging to God's execution of His decree is contingent)

As mentioned above, for Ibn Taymiyya, God executes His decree either by directly causing some event or act Himself through His will and power or by using secondary causes, i.e., by leaving the activity of causing to all created entities (whether sentient creatures or otherwise). However, as already noted (see def.2 and def.3 as well as T7 and T8), all created entities are only causes in the sense of partially sufficient causes of their effects with God conjoined as a necessary cause. No created entity "can be a complete cause (*mu'aththir tām*) necessitating its effect" because it has no power to actualize all required conditions and eliminate all the relevant impediments to bring about its effect.⁵⁹ The presence of all required conditions and the elimination of all relevant impediments occur by the will of God and are part of His overall decree.

4. Omniscience, Causality, and Petitionary Prayer

Let us see how the two major components of Ibn Taymiyya's response to premise 2 of F-PEPP applies to the case of petitionary prayers. Here, the claims of each component can be stated separately. I will use a simple example for illustration to concretize the application. Let us take Zayd, a Muslim, who is suffering from severe illness and feels strained and tested by his health condition. He has turned to God and is seeking comfort in Him by praying to Him in humility, sincerity, and submission. Zayd hopes and is confident in the prayer that He makes that God will respond favorably and heal him. The abbreviation of symbols for this section are: "s" is the future contingent proposition "Zayd is praying to God to be healed at time $t \geq t_0$ " and " $(St(p) = s^c)$ " stands for "the status of the proposition that < Zayd is praying to God to be healed at time $t \geq t_0$ > is contingent."

4.1 Component 1: Omniscience

According to T1, T2, and T3, Ibn Taymiyya would argue that God knows that Zayd will earnestly pray to Him for recovery at some time in the future and following from T5 God's foreknowledge of that act neither (1) necessarily determines its ontological status in the external world nor

⁵⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-jahmiyya*, 5:240.

(2) change the modal status of the act from a contingent one to a necessary one. To represent this, another theorem of omniscience needs to be stated:

$$\mathbf{T6.} \forall x(K(g, x) \rightarrow \Box(K(g, x)))$$

(Whatever God knows, He necessarily knows it)

From these theorems, the inference is that Zayd's future act of praying is neither ontologically brought about nor causally determined by God's prior knowledge. Zayd's praying is a not-yet temporally existent, contingent act, and God's knowledge of its contingent status does not alter it to become necessary, meaning unavoidable. The case is that God *necessarily* knows that Zayd praying is a contingent act. This enables Zayd to be psychologically assured that, on the one hand, his act is a free one and not causally determined from eternity, and on the other, God knows his prayer and has the power to answer it. A logical analysis of this understanding is as follows. Firstly, there is contingency to define:

$$\mathbf{Def.6} \text{ (Contingency): } (\text{Con}(x)) \leftrightarrow (\Diamond \neg x) \leftrightarrow (\neg \Box x)$$

(Something is contingent if and only if it is possible not to be or it is not necessary that it be)

Secondly, if God knows that Zayd will pray to Him to be healed at time $t \geq t_0$, then it is true that Zayd will pray to Him to be healed at time $t \geq t_0$. Thirdly, if indeed it is true that Zayd will pray to God to be healed at time $t \geq t_0$, and the status of that proposition is also true, then it follows that the contingent proposition is true. Symbolically:

1. $K(g, s)$
2. $K(g, s) \rightarrow K(g, \text{Tr}(s))$
3. $(\text{Tr}(s) \wedge \text{St}(p) = s^c) \rightarrow \text{Tr}(s^c)$
4. $K(g, (\text{St}(p) = s^c))$
5. $K(g, (\text{Tr}(s)) \wedge K(g, (\text{St}(p) = s^c))$ (from 1, 2, 4, and def.6)
6. $K(g, (\text{Tr}(s)) \wedge \text{St}(p) = s^c)$ (Simp. 5)
7. $K(g, (\text{Tr}(s^c))$ (from 3 and 6 based on the distribution axiom **K**).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ This is the distribution axiom in epistemic logic, traditionally known as **K**, that states that if an agent knows p and p implies q , then the agent must know q : $K(x, p) \wedge K(x, (p \rightarrow q)) \rightarrow K(x, q)$. In

Thus, God knows the contingent status of the proposition as true. Fourthly, if God knows the contingent status of the proposition as true, then His knowledge does not alter its modal status from contingent to necessary; even though He knows the status necessarily. In other words, if God knows Zayd will pray to Him to be healed at time $t \geq t_0$, then He necessarily knows that (it cannot be false) and because that proposition is not itself necessary ($\neg \Box s$) – because it may be that Zayd does not pray at all – it follows that God necessarily knows that it is not necessarily the case that Zayd will pray to Him to be healed at the time that he does: $\Box(K(g, [\neg \Box s]))$. This means that God necessarily knows things according to their modal status; that is, He necessarily knows necessary truths as being necessary and necessarily knows contingent truths as being contingent. One major motivation for why Ibn Taymiyya would deny acts like petitionary prayers having a prior ontology, or that such acts are directly caused by God's foreknowledge, is to avert *theological fatalism*. A doctrine that asserts God's infallible foreknowledge of human acts makes them necessary, and therefore unfree, i.e. unavoidable, no matter what.⁶¹ In addition, given theological fatalism's denial of any genuine creaturely causation, petitionary prayers would be truly pointless, for there would be no way to influence any outcome, seeing as God's decrees and decisions concerning the world would be already fixed. In other words, regardless of what one does, the outcome will be the same. Hence, regardless of whether Zayd prays to God, he will either be healed or not healed. Nothing he does will affect the state of his health. Zayd must then resign to not doing anything, and therefore, he must resign to not praying. Fatalism and its implications are directly linked to the second component of the shaykh's response – causality, which I shall turn to now.

theology, this kind of knowledge ampliation is sometimes discussed under the topic of logical omniscience, where whatever proposition is a truth of logic ($p \in L$), God knows it: $(p \in L) \rightarrow K(g, p)$. On this, see Paul Weingartner, *Omniscience: From a Logical Point of View* (Onto Verlag, 2008), 1-17.

61 On theological fatalism, see Ciro De Florio and Aldo Frigerio, *Divine Omniscience and Human Free Will: A Logical and Metaphysical Analysis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 18-25. For a philosophical account of fatalism in relation to God and theories of time, see Steven M. Cahn, *Fate, Logic and Time* (Yale University Press, 1967, repub. by Resource Publications, 2004). For an overview of fatalism, see Mark Bernstein, "Fatalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford University Press, 2002), 61-85. Finally, for a short survey of Islamic fatalism in the context of how they impact real lives, see the relevant sections in Roland Littlewood and Simon Dein, "Islamic Fatalism": Life and Suffering among Bangladeshi Psychiatric Patients and their Families in London – an Interview Study 2," *Anthropology and Medicine* 20, no. 3 (2013): 266-274.

4.2 Component 2 – Causality

On Ibn Taymiyya's causal account, petitionary prayers are efficacious acts. That is, they are not redundant. He agrees that prayers do generate religious benefits for the one praying but are not restricted to that. Rather, prayers are divinely decreed causes by which the related effects are brought about. He insists that everything in creation falls under God's decree via causes that are either within or beyond human choice, ability, power, or agency.⁶² Prayers are one category of ordained causal means – informed via revelation – by which individuals can attain whatever it is they desire or seek given the proper and appropriate conditions.⁶³ This is why Ibn Taymiyya attacks those who combine varieties of theological fatalism with what are known as “idle arguments.” Idle arguments in philosophy refer to arguments that suggest that because the outcome of a particular situation is predetermined, one should not take any actions or make any decisions. The idea behind idle arguments is that since the outcome is already determined, there is no point in taking any action or making any decisions, as the outcome will remain the same regardless of what one does. For example, an idle argument might suggest that if a person is fated to die at a certain time, then it does not matter whether they lead a healthy lifestyle or a destructive one, as they will inevitably die at that predetermined time. Idle arguments are often criticized for being logically flawed because they overlook the idea of human free will and agency. If the future is predetermined, then all decisions, including the decision not to act, are also predetermined, and therefore not a result of free will.⁶⁴ This creates a paradox in which the decision not to act is both predetermined and freely chosen, which is logically inconsistent. To explain the inconsistency a bit further, idle arguments rely on the notion of free will, as it implies that humans have the ability to make choices and that their decision not to act is a result of free will. This creates a contradiction with the fatalist belief that all events, including human actions, are predetermined and unavoidable, as it suggests that the decision not to act is both predetermined and freely chosen, and both cannot be true at the same time. In the case of petitionary prayers, the combination of

62 Ibn Taymiyya, “Marātib al-irāda,” in *Majmūʿ al-fatāwā*, 8:192-96 and 534.

63 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-fatāwā*, 8:69-70.

64 For more on these arguments in the context of Islamic theology and petitionary prayers, refer to Chowdhury, “Invoke your Lord in Humility.”

theological fatalism and idle arguments would give the following kind of conditional argument: if the outcomes of all future events are predetermined or unavoidable from what they will be because of God's infallible knowledge or prior eternal decree, then praying would be pointless. However, the general flaw in this reasoning is that on the one hand, it assumes that the outcome is unavoidable, while on the other, it assumes that the decision not to pray (or pray) is the result of free will. These two assumptions are contradictory and create a logical inconsistency in the reasoning. Ibn Taymiyya's objection to those who combine God's infallible knowledge or prior decree of all things with idle arguments of the kind just described can be presented in the following way:

1. I know that God has informed us that petitionary prayer is a means of attaining what we pray for.
2. Irrespective of whether I pray to God, He already knows the outcome of what I pray for.
3. Therefore, there is no point in me praying to God to attain what I pray for.

For the shaykh, there is an inconsistency at the heart of this kind of argument. If God has decreed that petitionary prayer is a means of seeking or attaining what one prays for, then by not praying, one is effectively giving up on this means and abandoning the means necessary for its related ends is not only irreligious, but nonsensical.⁶⁵ Petitionary prayers are just as much part of the divine order "as are the winds and the waves and the weather."⁶⁶ One of his many examples includes a person desiring a child without engaging in the required physical act of sexual intercourse.⁶⁷ For the shaykh, the above reasoning, if applied to this example, would go something like:

65 Ibn Taymiyya, "Qawl 'Alī," in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 8:175-78.

66 Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer*, 197.

67 Ibn Taymiyya, "An mā qālahu abū ḥamid al-ghazālī fī kitābihi . . . fī al-tawakkul," in *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 8:531:

If someone were to say, "I will not eat or drink, since if God has determined that I will live, He alone will keep me alive without food or drink", that individual would be considered an idiot. It is like someone who says, "I will not have sexual intercourse with my wife, since if God has determined a child for me, she will become pregnant even in my absence (translation in Zeni, *Ibn Taymiyya on Causality*, 122. Cf. 153-54, 170-71).

1. I know that sexual intercourse with my spouse is a means of attaining a child.
2. Irrespective of whether I have sexual intercourse with my spouse, God already knows the outcome of my having a child.
3. Therefore, there is no point in me having sexual intercourse to attain a child.

He thinks this is ludicrous. For him, no thinking person would expect to attain any effect if the cause required to bring about the effect is absent and in this specific case, the cause takes the form of the human act of reproduction. Thus, in God's entire scheme of providence – His decree and execution of His decree – (see T9, T10, T11, T12, T13, and T14), He has factored into this providence secondary causality of which petitionary prayers is one such causal means. All this He foreknows (T11 and T12) and the reason for His commanding His servants to implore, petition, or ask Him alone is so that they can attain what it is that God has willed and decreed to be fulfilled by their very prayers. Petitionary prayer in this sense does not further divine providence, nor does it augment it due to a lack or incompleteness in it; rather, prayer is founded on, is a recognition of, and a cooperation in this providence.

5. Criticisms of Ibn Taymiyya's Response to F-PEPP

There are identifiable difficulties with this construction of Ibn Taymiyya's defence of the efficacy of petitionary prayers. I will mention a couple very briefly. First, there is his insistence on God's knowledge of temporal facts as they occur in time. This would imply real change in God's knowledge which can be problematic. Knowledge of temporally indexed truths is a requirement for Ibn Taymiyya's doctrine of omniscience (T1, T2 and, T3), but this knowledge would have to change with more frequency as the objects of knowledge in the world become more fine-grained. Second, there is his doctrine of causation. Despite rejecting occasionalism, the shaykh nevertheless assigns an almost maximal degree of causal capacity to God. It seems difficult to substantively differentiate this from the hard determinism he sees in for example the Ash'arite view and which he vehemently rejects. The shaykh's causality perspectivalism, where the experience of causality is bound to the agent's knowledge and experience, still does not help. Although from a creaturely perspective the

world functions with cause and effect, from a divine perspective, it is an “inert world of tools and raw materials” with which God moulds via His will and power all movements and directions of every creature and a world “into which God can intervene at any point.”⁶⁸ This strong sense of divine sovereignty has ramifications on human free will. There are possible responses that can be made to these rational difficulties, but it is beyond the scope of this article to wade into them. Nevertheless, these are just two among other challenges to the types of issues the Taymiyyan account given above may face.

Conclusion

In this article, although I have not presented a comprehensive account of how Ibn Taymiyya can possibly address F-PEPP, nevertheless, I have shown one way he can weaken the argument, namely one of its premises: that omniscience renders petitionary prayer a redundant act. Undoubtedly, there is more to be said on this response (for example discussions about Ibn Taymiyya’s views on time or divine acts) and further research is required to extract other arguments from the axioms and theorems of Ibn Taymiyya’s theology to gain a fuller appreciation of the shaykh’s overall response. What is emerging ever more clearly, however, is how Ibn Taymiyya’s theology offers fresh and exciting opportunities for meaningful philosophical analysis. The prospects in the field of Taymiyyan philosophical theology, for those tentatively seeking it, at least from the current vantage point, looks positively bright on the horizon.

Appendix: Logical Notations

e	= an event
g	= God
$g-D$	= God’s decree
$g-ED$	= execution of God’s decree
p	= a petitionary prayer
s	= a state of affairs
ϕ, ψ	= acts
x, y, z	= anything or any entity

68 Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy*, 164.

C	= is a cause of
CD	= direct cause
Con	= is contingent
CN	= necessary cause
$CR(g)$	= God is Creator
CSP	= sufficient cause
$JU(g)$	= God is just
$MP(g)$	= God is maximally perfect
$OB(g)$	= God is 'omnibenevolent (All-Good)
$OM(g)$	= God is omniscient
$OP(g)$	= God is omnipotent
$OW(g)$	= God is perfectly wise (omniwise)
$St(p)$	= status of a proposition

$\neg$	Not
$\wedge$	And
$\vee$	Or
$\square \rightarrow$	Counterfactual conditional
$\rightarrow$	if-then
$\leftrightarrow$	if and only if
$\leftrightarrow$	All
$\exists$	Some
$\diamond$	Possible
$\forall$	Necessary

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CHAPTER 4

The God of the Philosophers: The Refutation of Thābit b. Qurra's *Talkhīṣ* of the Metaphysics in Ibn Taymiyya's *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql*¹

Adrien Candiard

Abstract

Thābit b. Qurra's *Talkhīṣ*, a concise commentary on Book Lambda of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which Ibn Taymiyya meticulously refutes in his *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql*, represents the Damascene scholar's principal engagement with Aristotelian thought and theology. Criticizing the identification of God as merely a final cause rather than as an efficient and creative cause, Ibn Taymiyya seeks to demonstrate, on issues such as the eternity of the world and divine will, the inadequacy of an autonomous natural theology divorced from the indispensable guidance of Revelation.

Keywords: Ibn Taymiyya; Thābit b. Qurra; First Cause; natural theology; *Talkhīṣ*

Introduction

As a figure who inspired both enthusiasm and fear during his lifetime, Ibn Taymiyya continues to provoke sharply contrasting judgments, even in contemporary scholarship. While some dismiss him as a narrow-minded opponent of all culture,² others marvel at the exceptional philosophical breadth of the scholar from Damascus, albeit sometimes at the risk of overestimating his library.³ It is undeniable that, in the *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql*

1 The present work has its roots in our doctoral research, directed by Christian Jambet, under the title "La notion de vérité dans le *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql*." For a fuller account of this research, see Adrien Candiard, *Le Dieu immédiat. Le concept de vérité dans le *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql* d'Ibn Taymiyya* (Cerf, 2023).

2 Dimitri Gutas, *Greek thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (Routledge & Sons, 1998), 170-71.

3 For instance, see Yahyah Michot, "Vanités intellectuelles... L'impasse des rationalismes selon le Rejet de La Contradiction d'Ibn Taymiyyah," *Oriente Moderno* 19 (80), no. 3 (2000): 597-617. "On reste pantois devant l'ampleur de l'érudition d'Ibn Taymiyya. À vrai dire, la quantité seule de ses références

wa-l-naql,⁴ Ibn Taymiyya refers to an impressive number of philosophers, especially Greeks. However, he does not demonstrate direct familiarity with the works of many of them: for instance, he mentions figures like Alexander of Aphrodisias, Proclus, and Themistius,⁵ but only as “disciples of Aristotle.” His knowledge of Aristotle himself appears mediated, primarily through intermediaries such as the doxographer al-Shahrastānī.

Ibn Taymiyya’s engagement with philosophy nonetheless contains surprises. Among the thirty or so authors he cites and critiques with precision, one finds the unlikely figure of the mathematician and astronomer Thābit b. Qurra (d. 288/901), a native of Ḥarrān like Ibn Taymiyya, though born four centuries earlier, probably in 211/826. Ibn Taymiyya does not reference Thābit’s celebrated work in mathematics or astronomy but focuses instead on a lesser-known philosophical treatise: his *Concise Exposition of Aristotle’s Metaphysics*,⁶ the earliest commentary on the *Metaphysics* that has come down to us. In the ninth volume of the *Dar’ ta’āruḍ*,⁷ Ibn Taymiyya devotes nearly fifty pages to refuting this treatise, which had previously been largely overlooked by Islamic philosophers. For Ibn Taymiyya, Thābit’s work provides an opportunity to distance himself from Aristotle, the philosopher par excellence, whose *Metaphysics* he did not know directly,⁸ as well as from the broader intellectual movement of the “partisans of the intellect” (*ahl al-‘aql*). The focus of this confrontation is particularly significant: through Book Lambda of the *Metaphysics*, the subject of Thābit’s *Talkhiṣ*, Ibn Taymiyya engages with *metaphysica*

autorise déjà à le considérer comme le lecteur le plus important des *falāsifah* après Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī dans le monde sunnite. Quant à la qualité de son traitement des œuvres qu’il étudie, sa virtuosité n’a souvent d’égale que sa pertinence.” (599).

4 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’ ta’āruḍ al-‘aql wa-l-naql aw muwāfaqat ṣaḥiḥ al-manqūl li-ṣarīḥ al-ma’qūl*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, (Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyya, 1979).

5 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, 1:152.

6 David Reisman and Amos Bertolacci, “Thābit Ibn Qurra’s Concise Exposition of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*: Text, Translation and Commentary,” in *Sciences and Philosophy in the 9th Century Baghdad. Thābit Ibn Qurra (826-901)*, ed. Roshdi Rashed (De Gruyter, 2009), 715–76.

7 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, 9:272–321.

8 A little earlier in the book (*Dar’*, 8:216–17), Ibn Taymiyya reports and comments on a quotation presented as from Aristotle, which the editor of the *Dar’* despairs of finding in *Metaphysics* or in Averroes’ *Commentary on Metaphysics*, while noting analogies in substance with the doctrine of Book Lambda (216, note 9). This is in fact an exact quotation from Thābit b. Qurra’s *Talkhiṣ* in paragraph 2, which Ibn Taymiyya would later take up (*Dar’*, 9:273). This seems to indicate that the *Talkhiṣ* is indeed the main, if not the only, source of Ibn Taymiyya’s knowledge of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, and that he regards it as a reliable access to the Stagirate’s thought.

specialis, that is, the natural theology of the philosopher,⁹ critically examining the ability of autonomous human reason to comprehend God independently of Revelation.

1. The *Talkhīṣ* of Thābit b. Qurra

Thābit b. Qurra, a mathematician and astronomer of prime importance in the history of the Arab sciences¹⁰ and leader of the Banū Mūsā school in Baghdad, is also remembered for his philosophical activity, as attested by his contemporaries. Arabic sources mention his *Ikhtīṣār* (summary) of the *Categories* and the *Prior Analytics*, his *Jawāmiʿ* (synopses) of the *De Interpretatione*, a treatise devoted to the *Sophistical Refutations*, and a commentary on the first book of the *Physics*.¹¹ Although the earliest lists do not attribute any texts concerning the *Metaphysics* to him, his contemporaries nevertheless considered him well-versed in Aristotle's work, seeing him as an heir to the tradition of the Sabaeans of Ḥarrān.¹² His work as a translator demonstrates his proficiency in Greek and Arabic, despite Syriac being his mother tongue.

Thābit's treatise on the *Metaphysics* survives in only two early manuscripts (Ayasofia 4832, fol. 60v-62r; Osmania University Library acq. 1408, fol. 4v-7r),¹³ but its authenticity is scarcely in doubt, a view further supported by Ibn Taymiyya's refutation. According to its editors, the title given by the more reliable manuscript reads as follows: *Maqālat Thābit*

9 For a general presentation of the doctrine of book Lambda, see Thomas De Koninck, *Aristote, l'intelligence et Dieu* (PUF, 2008).

10 About his scientific work, see Thābit b. Qurra, *Œuvres d'astronomie*, trans. Régis Morelon (Belles-Lettres, 1987); Mehmet Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums* (Brill, 1971), iii, 260-263; v, 264-72; vi, 163-70; vii, 151-52, 269-70. Also see Régis Morelon, "Thābit B. Qurra and Arab Astronomy in the 9th Century," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (1994): 111-39.

11 Cecilia Martini Bonadeo, "Il maestro Thābit ibn Qurra e la teologia di Metafisica Lambda nella Baghdād del IX secolo," *Doctor Virtualis*, no. 7 (2008): 125-47. The author has published a slightly modified English translation of this article in Cecilia Martini Bonadeo, 'Abd Al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī's *Philosophical Journey. From Aristotle's Metaphysics to the 'Metaphysical Science'* (Brill, 2013), 56-66.

12 Contrary to previous bibliography, which readily made Thābit the introducer of Neoplatonism in Ḥarrān, Michel Tardieu has shown that this influence was much older. See Michel Tardieu, "Ṣābiens coraniques et 'Ṣābiens' de Ḥarrān," *Journal asiatique* 274, no 1-2 (1986): 1-44. See also D. Pingree, "The Ṣābiens of Ḥarrān and the Classical Tradition," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9, no. 1 (2002): 8-35.

13 For a precise description of the two manuscripts, see Reisman and Bertolacci, "Concise Exposition," 725-29.

Ibn Qurra fī talkhīṣ mā atā bihi Aristūṭālīs fī kitābihi fī mā ba'da l-ṭabī'a mimma jarā l-amr fīhi 'alā siyāqat al-burhān siwā mā jarā min dhālika majrā l-iqnā' ("Treatise on the abridgement of what Aristotle presented in his book *The Metaphysics*, among the subjects treated according to the method of demonstration and not according to the method of persuasion"). The use of the term *talkhīṣ* to describe this commentary may appear surprising, as it was rarely employed before the eleventh century.¹⁴ The term would later acquire a technical meaning in philosophy, referring to a type of "middle commentary" that occupies an intermediate position between the *Jāmi'* (Compendium or Epitome) and the *Tafsīr* (Great Commentary). However, Thābit's *Talkhīṣ* bears little resemblance to Averroes' *Talkhīṣ* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, as known through Hebrew translations.¹⁵ In its more common usage, *talkhīṣ* implies a "quintessence, summary, or abridgement," but this work offers much more than a mere summary – alternatively translated by its editors as a "concise exposition" – of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

In fact, the *Talkhīṣ* concentrates on only one part of the *Metaphysics*: chapters 6–9 of Book Lambda, where Aristotle discusses the First Cause. The work is divided into nine sections, following this structure:

The first section serves as a brief introduction, modeled on Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle, and includes a reflection on the supposed harmony between Plato and Aristotle.

The second section presents an Aristotelian thesis: the First Mover is the cause of the existence of corporeal substance.

The third section addresses an objection not explicitly raised by Aristotle.

The fourth section introduces another Aristotelian thesis: the First Mover is the eternal, not the temporal, cause of the existence of the world.

14 "Extremely few works written before 1000 AD were called *talkhīṣ*. The entire *Fihrist* contains only three titles that may have had that word: one by the Alexandrians on *De Anima* and two *talākhīṣ* of Galen by Rāzī. In philosophy, I know of only one other title, missed by Ibn an-Nadīm: Thābit b. Qurra's *Talkhīṣ mā atā bihi Aristūṭālīs fī kitābihi fī mā ba'da ṭ-ṭabī'a mimma jarā l-amr fīhi 'alā siyāqati* [sic in ms] *l-burhān siwā mā jarā min dhālika majrā l-iqnā'*," see: Dimitri Gutas, "Aspects of Literary Form and Genre in Arabic Logical Works," in *Glosses and Commentaries on Aristotelian Logical Texts. The Syriac, Arabic and Medieval Latin Traditions*, ed. Charles Burnett (Warburg Institute, 1993), 40-41, n. 49.

15 Aubert Martin, "Aristote de Stagire. Métaphysique - Tradition syriaque et arabe," in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, Richard Goulet ed. (Editions du CNRS, 1989), 530.

The fifth section clarifies a potential misunderstanding: the eternity of the universe does not imply that it is necessarily uncaused.

The sixth section departs further from Aristotle, asserting that the First Principle is the cause of the world's existence through will.

Sections 7–9 more clearly follow the theses of Book Lambda: the First Principle cannot possess magnitude (*Metaphysics* Λ 7, 1073a 5-11); the First Principle is necessarily one (*Metaphysics* Λ 8, 1074a 31-38); the substance of the First Principle is Intelligence (*Metaphysics* Λ 9). Only the final sections could be considered a straightforward summary of passages from Aristotle's work; the first two-thirds of the treatise reveal a far more original reading by Thābit.

This originality does not mean, however, that the commentator was disconnected from established reading traditions. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* was not unfamiliar in ninth-century Baghdad. It had been the subject of an early Arabic translation in the circle of the philosopher al-Kindī,¹⁶ who demonstrates considerable familiarity with Aristotle's ideas in his *al-Fal-safa al-ūlā*.¹⁷ While it is unlikely that al-Kindī himself was responsible for this translation,¹⁸ two early sources attribute it to a certain Uṣṭāth who may have been part of al-Kindī's intellectual circle.¹⁹ Although al-Kindī rarely quotes directly from Aristotle's text, which he nevertheless closely follows, the essence of this translation is preserved in a later text: it is the version used by Averroes in his *Great Commentary* (*Tafsīr*) of the *Metaphysics*.

Other translations of Book Lambda, as noted in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, may have been accessible to Thābit. These include a translation by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 298/910), the son of the renowned translator, covering "several books" of the *Metaphysics*;²⁰ a ninth-century translation of

16 Gerhard Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindī. Early Arabic Translations from the Greek and the Rise of Islamic Philosophy," in Gerhard Endress and Remke Kruk, *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism: Studies on the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences dedicated to H.J. Drossaart Lulofs on his ninetieth birthday* (Research School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies (CNWS), 1997), 43-76.

17 Rushdī Ḥafnī Rāshid and Jean Jolivet, *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindī : Volume 2 : Métaphysique et cosmologie* (Brill, 1998).

18 Ángel Cortabarria, "A partir de quelles sources étudier al-Kindī?," *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales* 10 (1970): 83-108, 90.

19 On the topic, see Martin, "Aristote de Stagire," 530.

20 Abū l-Faraj Muḥammad Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, Gustav Flügel ed. (Institut für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften, 2005), 251, 26.

Book Lambda by the less prominent translator Shamlī;²¹ and a version rendered by the Nestorian logician Abū Bishr Mattā (d. 328/940), which also included Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentary, likely translated from Syriac.²²

It is difficult to determine with certainty whether Thābit, who could read Greek, relied on any of these translations, as he never quotes Aristotle's text verbatim. A similar uncertainty surrounds the Greek commentaries translated into Arabic and available in Baghdad at the time. While it is recognised that "Thābit's knowledge of Greek, Syriac, and Arabic makes it particularly difficult to identify his possible sources for the *Concise Exposition*," the editors of the text observe²³ that he frequently employs Themistius's paraphrase of Book Lambda as a reading tool. However, Thābit's potential use of other commentaries known in the Arab world at the time – such as Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentary, the *Principles of the Universe* attributed to the same author, the *Epitome* of Nicholas of Damascus, or Theophrastus's *Metaphysics*²⁴ – remains speculative.

The editors of the treatise, which seems to have been considered secondary by Thābit's contemporaries, argue that it is "of considerable importance for our understanding of the development of Graeco-Arabic philosophy and, in particular, the knowledge that Thābit and his scholarly contemporaries had of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and other works."²⁵ The *Talkhīṣ* provides a window into the philosophical debates of its time, set against the reception of the metaphysical project developed by al-Kindī in his work *On First Philosophy*. This project extended beyond translation, relying on numerous Greek texts, including the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*,²⁶ the *Liber de Causis* (a reworking of Proclus's *Elements of Theology*), Plato's *Timaeus* and *Symposium*, and Aristotle's *De Caelo* and

21 al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, 241, 30.

22 This is the opinion of Freudenthal, who published the fragments of Alexander's commentary that have come down to us through the quotations made from this translation by Averroes in his Great Commentary (Jakob Freudenthal, *Die durch Averroes erhaltenen Fragmente Alexanders zur Metaphysik des Aristoteles* (Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1885)).

23 Reisman and Bertolacci, "Concise Exposition," 720-721. Cecilia Martini Bonadeo agrees with this opinion (Martini Bonadeo, "Il maestro Thābit").

24 Martin, "Aristote de Stagire."

25 Reisman and Bertolacci, "Concise Exposition," 716.

26 William F. Ryan, Charles B. Schmitt, and Jill A. Kraye, *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages: The 'Theology' and Other Texts* (The Warburg Institute, 1986).

De Anima (known through a Neoplatonic paraphrase). Al-Kindī aimed to synthesize philosophical theology in a way compatible with the revealed tenets of Islamic faith, identifying the First Cause and the First Intellect of Greek philosophy with the Creator and Sustainer of the Qur'an. His interpretation of Aristotle was selective, drawing heavily on Books α, E, and Λ, and orienting the reading toward an essentially theological understanding. For al-Kindī, the primary object of metaphysics was God.²⁷ In contrast, al-Fārābī, writing in the following century, approached metaphysics as the study of being *qua* being, with God being only a secondary object.

Al-Kindī's ontology, though informed by Aristotle, often diverged significantly from the Stagirite's original doctrine. Drawing on the arguments of the Christian Neoplatonist John Philoponus, he rejected the eternity of the world. Similarly, likely under the influence of Ammonius, he argued that God is both an efficient and a final cause – a departure from Aristotle's depiction of God as an immaterial intellect and unmoved mover. This shift allowed Aristotle's God to align with the emanationist deity of Neoplatonism and the Creator of Islamic revelation.

The dedication of Thābit's *Talkhīṣ* to the vizier al-Qāsim Ibn 'Ubayd Allāh has led the editors to hypothesize a possible rivalry between Thābit's project and that of al-Kindī. Al-Qāsim, who served the Abbasid dynasty, was reportedly responsible for the execution in 286/899 of an important disciple of al-Kindī, Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī, author of a now-lost treatise, *Kitāb fī l-radd 'alā Jālīnūs fī l-muḥarrik al-awwal* (*Refutation of Galen on the First Mover*). While the reasons for this execution remain unclear, it is tempting to imagine that al-Qāsim may have commissioned Thābit to refute the Kindian philosopher's arguments. However, the lack of evidence makes this scenario speculative at best.

More broadly, the *Talkhīṣ* has been described as an "antidote to the Neoplatonic elements in the works of the Kindī circle."²⁸ On essential doctrinal issues such as the eternity of the world and the nature of God as a final or efficient cause, the *Talkhīṣ* preserves Aristotelian doctrine largely free from Neoplatonic influence. Yet, as Cecilia Martini Bonadeo observes, "the theses enunciated by al-Kindī are not entirely absent from

27 "La philosophie la plus noble et du plus haut rang est la philosophie première: je veux dire la science du Vrai premier qui est la cause de tout vrai." Rāshid and Jolivet, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 8.

28 Reisman and Bertolacci, "Concise Exposition," 718.

Thābit's work."²⁹ On several points, the *Talkhīṣ* reflects the influence of the Kindian reading of the *Metaphysics* and the growing significance of its synthesis. Thābit's focus on Book Lambda aligns with this theological reading of the *Metaphysics*, which al-Kindī initiated and which remained dominant in Arab philosophy until al-Fārābī.³⁰ He shares with al-Kindī the aim of reconciling Aristotle's God with the God of Islam, as evidenced by Section 5, which argues that the eternity of the world does not preclude the notion of creation. Whatever his personal beliefs – Thābit's family ties to the "Sabaean" tradition of Ḥarrān are well established³¹ – Thābit appears to have been engaged in a project more parallel than opposed to that of al-Kindī. His goal was to construct, distinct from Neoplatonic orthodoxy, a synthesis of philosophical theology faithful to Aristotle yet acceptable to the adherents of the revealed religions that shaped the Abbasid empire politically and intellectually.

2. The Refutation of the *Talkhīṣ* in *Dar' ta'āruḍ*

If the *Talkhīṣ* was intended to present a rival project to al-Kindī's metaphysical-theological synthesis, it can be said that it failed to achieve the desired success and posed little threat to its competitor's influence. The text survives in only two manuscripts, one from the eleventh century and the other from the eighteenth century, and it appears to have attracted little attention from contemporaries. Nevertheless, its modest transmission into the modern era suggests a relatively sustained, if limited, interest.

The strongest evidence of this interest lies in the extensive presence of the *Talkhīṣ* in Ibn Taymiyya's work, albeit in the form of a refutation. Ibn Taymiyya devotes approximately fifty pages of the *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql* to a focused and detailed polemic against Thābit, quoting the first six sections of the text at length – amounting to two-thirds of the

29 Martini Bonadeo, "Il maestro Thābit," 128.

30 Amos Bertolacci, "From al-Kindī to al-Fārābī: Avicenna's Progressive Knowledge of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* according to his Autobiography," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 11, no. 2, (September 2001): 257-95.

31 Michel Tardieu, "La filiation ascendante de Thābit b. Qurra," in *Perspectives arabes et médiévales sur la tradition scientifique et philosophique grecque. Actes du colloque de la SIHSPAI (Société internationale d'histoire des sciences et de la philosophie arabes et islamiques), Paris, 31 mars-3 avril 1993*, ed. Ahmad Hasnawi, Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal and Maroun Aouad (Peeters, 1997), 265-270.

original work.³² While Ibn Taymiyya frequently refutes passages cited in full, the nearly comprehensive quotation of Thābit's text is relatively rare within *Dar' ta'arūḍ*.

This is particularly notable given that Thābit b. Qurra bears little resemblance to Ibn Taymiyya's usual intellectual adversaries, such as the rationalist Ash'arite theologians of his time (e.g., Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī), or the leading philosopher Avicenna. The prominence of this ancient figure, generally regarded as a minor philosopher, within Ibn Taymiyya's work, calls for a reassessment of Thābit's position in the intellectual hierarchies derived from still-incomplete sources. It is plausible that Thābit's better-documented scientific reputation contributed to Ibn Taymiyya's interest: rather than targeting any single school of philosophy or theology, Ibn Taymiyya aimed to dismantle the broader system of truth advanced by the "partisans of the intellect," of which Thābit, as an astronomer, mathematician, and metaphysician, served as a relatively comprehensive representative.³³ Through Thābit, Ibn Taymiyya also finds an opportunity to engage indirectly with Aristotle himself, whose *Metaphysics* he does not appear to have studied directly.

Ibn Taymiyya was naturally less concerned with the immediate context surrounding the creation of the *Talkhiṣ*. The philosophical debates of ninth-century Baghdad, particularly concerning the role of Neoplatonic elements in interpreting Aristotle, held little relevance for him. Instead, he situates Thābit within his own polemical framework, targeting the rationalist system of truth. The refutation fits into a relatively loose argumentative structure: it forms part of the forty-fourth and final argument of the *Dar' ta'arūḍ*, a section spanning nearly four volumes (most of Volume 7 and the entirety of the last three volumes). These volumes juxtapose refutations of extracts from a wide array of authors, with no clearly discernible organizational scheme. Ibn Taymiyya's argumentative

32 The editors of the *Talkhiṣ* therefore make the *Dar'* text a third witness for the establishment of their text and include it in their stemma, though not without making explicit their reservations about the quality of the text established by Rāshid Sālim: "There is some evidence that M. R. Sālim (...) may have made editorial choices which are inconsistent with the manuscript readings of Ibn Taymiyya's quotations of Thābit's text." (Reisman and Bertolacci, "Concise Exposition," 730).

33 It is noteworthy that Ibn Taymiyya mentions Thābit b. Qurra another time, on the occasion of an exegetical quarrel concerning Abraham's rejection of the worship of the stars (Q 43:26; 26:75): "They wrote books on the invocation of the stars, as did Thābit b. Qurra and others after him among the Sabeen philosophers of Ḥarrān." (Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 1:313).

strategy in this section relies on the exuberant and seemingly endless accumulation of successive refutations.

Ibn Taymiyya does not explain why he confines his critique to the first six sections of the *Talkhīṣ* rather than addressing the entire text. It is uncertain whether this limitation was a deliberate choice or a consequence of the manuscript he used, which may have been incomplete. However, the prioritisation of these sections may not be entirely coincidental. Within these six sections, Ibn Taymiyya's attention is unevenly distributed: Section 2, which outlines an Aristotelian thesis (the First Mover as the cause of the existence of corporeal substance), is dismissed in just a few lines.³⁴ In contrast, Section 6, where Thābit introduces the more personal and contentious issue of divine will, occupies 27 pages – more than half of the rebuttal.

Ibn Taymiyya's primary focus lies in areas where philosophical theses conflict with the Islamic faith – such as the eternity of the world – and in doctrinal elements specific to Thābit. The last three sections of the *Talkhīṣ*, which adhere closely to Aristotelian theses compatible with Islam, hardly align with these criteria of interest.

Within these 49 pages of relentless, and at times repetitive, refutation, Ibn Taymiyya seeks to demonstrate the inadequacy of his “rationalist” opponents in reaching a proper understanding of God through natural reason conceived as autonomous. His critique is particularly pointed to issues where the philosophical theses conflict directly with Muslim theology, such as the eternity of the world or the nature of divine will.

By engaging so extensively with Thābit's *Talkhīṣ*, Ibn Taymiyya aims not only to refute a specific text but to undermine the broader system of natural theology it represents. Thābit, as a figure emblematic of the “partisans of the intellect,” provides Ibn Taymiyya with a means to challenge the foundations of rationalist thought and to reassert the primacy of revealed knowledge. While the *Talkhīṣ* itself may not have achieved significant influence in its own time, Ibn Taymiyya's detailed engagement with the text ensures its lasting importance as a focal point in the debates between rationalism and revelation within Islamic thought.

34 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:273.

3. Definition of the Adversary

While Ibn Taymiyya specifically targets Thābit's *Talkhīṣ*, it is clear from the outset that his critique is aimed at a broader adversary. His first commentary on Section 2 of the *Talkhīṣ* is introduced with the formula, often repeated thereafter, "They will be answered" (*fa-yuqālu lahum*).³⁵ This use of the third-person plural recurs frequently throughout the text, as in references to "their doctrine," occasionally alternating with the second person. The latter usage sometimes appears individual, seemingly directed at Thābit himself, and at other times collective, referring to a broader group.

This collective, for whom Thābit seems to act as a spokesman, is not clearly identified. It is possible that Ibn Taymiyya continues the broader polemic initiated earlier in the *Dar' ta'āruḍ*, where he critiques rationalists in general, often referred to by imprecise, general pronouns. In this framework, Thābit would function merely as a representative, much as al-Rāzī or al-Āmidī often do.

However, this collective occasionally takes on a more specific identity in the course of the polemic. On the question of God as a final cause but not an efficient cause, Ibn Taymiyya directs his critique toward "these philosophers," rather than philosophers in general. He elaborates:

This is a situation that clearly shows the ignorance and misguidance of the members of this group, for anyone who carefully scans (*tadabbara*) the texts of their speech present in their books, which has been reported to us by their companions. We do not know Greek, and it has not been transmitted to us according to a chain of transmission (*isnād*) whose transmitters are known, but those who have transmitted it to us are the most eminent of their companions (*a'immat aṣḥābihim*), whom they praise and defend by all means. They passed this on to us and translated it into Arabic, and they recalled that they made it known, explained it, held it in high esteem, popularised it, until minds accepted it without challenging it. So, what is the true meaning of this statement? It clearly shows their ignorance of God, which is greater than what is revealed by the discourse of true believers.³⁶

³⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:273.

³⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:276.

The group Ibn Taymiyya refers to comprises Arab philosophers who were familiar with Greek and who made Greek-language philosophical texts their primary source of knowledge, particularly in theology and metaphysics. Ibn Taymiyya's vocabulary when describing them is significant: they have "companions" (*aṣḥāb*) who "transmit" (*naqala*) their teachings through a chain (*isnād*), mirroring the terminology used by the *ahl al-sunna* in reference to Hadith. Ibn Taymiyya portrays them as adherents of a competing "religion," purportedly revealed, which fundamentally opposes Islam and precludes any meaningful conciliation. In this context, Thābit represents not rationalism in general, but a claim to know God through natural theology of Greek origin, bypassing both Qur'anic Revelation and the rational pathways it opens for human understanding.

The rest of the text confirms this perspective, albeit with some nuances:

It is certain that the philosophers who came after Aristotle have less ignorance and more knowledge, because of what agreed with them among the reasons that their intellect and reasoning confirmed. The more someone knows the prophecies and is close to them, the more his intellect and reasoning are in the right. That is why we find in Avicenna a better discourse than that of Thābit b. Qurra, and we find in Abū al-Barakāt,³⁷ the author of the *Mu'tabar*, a discourse better than that of Avicenna. And Aristotle's own discourse is inferior to that of all these on theological matters.³⁸

Ibn Taymiyya acknowledges that later philosophers, such as Avicenna and especially Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, were able to incorporate elements of Revelation into their systems. Their natural theology, therefore, was less autonomous and consequently less flawed. However, Ibn Taymiyya continues to establish hierarchies even among these philosophers, ranking them based on the quality of their access to revealed truths. Avicenna, accused of drawing on Shiite and Mutazilite sources, is deemed more

37 Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. in 560/1165), doctor, physicist and philosopher of Jewish origin who converted to Islam, author of the *Kitāb al-mu'tabar*, which offers a critical alternative to the metaphysics of Aristotle and Avicenna. On him, see Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Abu'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī Physics and Metaphysics*, reprint., (The Hebrew University, 2000).

38 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:276.

erroneous than those who utilise sources from the “people of the hadith,” such as Abū l-Barakāt or, more surprisingly, Averroes.³⁹

Thus, Ibn Taymiyya identifies hierarchies of error among philosophers, with the proximity of their intellectual systems to Muḥammadian Revelation as the criterion. For Ibn Taymiyya, only the rationality revealed by God Himself can adequately speak about Him; the more thinkers align with this, the less erroneous their conclusions. However, Ibn Taymiyya also expresses doubts about the sincerity of philosophers who claim to be Muslim, especially on the issue of recognizing God as both an efficient and final cause. Autonomous natural theology, he argues, is a pernicious influence that struggles to genuinely integrate the elements of true theology.

By refuting Thābit rather than Avicenna – despite the latter’s far greater influence on the theology of Ibn Taymiyya’s time – Ibn Taymiyya chooses to attack the concept of natural theology in its purest form. Thābit’s open claim to know God outside the pathways of Revelation represents, for Ibn Taymiyya, the unadulterated essence of this “poison,” free of the mitigating Islamic elements found in the systems of later philosophers.

4. The Method of Refutation

In attacking the *Talkhīṣ*, Ibn Taymiyya does not primarily aim to highlight the incompatibility of the God of the philosophers with the God of Revelation. Indeed, he does not cite the Qur’an or the Hadith at any point in these 49 pages of refutation. His objective, rather, is to demonstrate the

39 “And if the discourses of their ancients (*qudamā*) about one’s knowledge of God were rare and full of errors, the discourses of modern [philosophers], on the contrary, multiplied when they became believers in the various religions (*min ahl al-milal*). They entered into the religion of the Muslims, Jews and Christians (*dīn al-muslimīn wa-l-yahūd wa-l-naṣārā*), and they heard what the prophets had revealed about the names of God, His attributes, the angels, and so on. They liked to deduce from the principles of their elders (*min uṣūl salāfihim*) and from their discourses what agreed with the revelations of the prophets, when they saw in them the great truth that cannot be denied, which is the most honourable and highest of knowledge. So everyone began to speak according to his own interpretation (*bi-ḥasab ijtihādihi*): al-Fārābī said white, Avicenna said black, Abū al-Barakāt (the author of the *Muṭabar*) said blue, Averroes said red, Suhrawardī said green, and everyone went with his own colour. They followed their whim, according to what they liked to retain in the doctrine of religions. Some, like Avicenna and his disciples, stick to the doctrine of the Muṭazilites and Shiites: his discourse will be of a certain colour. Others, like Abū l-Barakāt or Averroes, mix Sunni and ḥadīth scholars, and their discourse will have a different colour, closer to pure reason and authentic revelation than Avicenna’s discourse.” See: Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar*, 6:247-48.

incoherence of autonomous natural theology on its own terms, much like Ghazālī in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. For Ibn Taymiyya, Thābit's failure lies not in his distance from revealed texts but in his lack of rational coherence, which paradoxically stems from an overestimation of the capacities of autonomous reason. To this end, Ibn Taymiyya endeavours to expose the contradictions and impasses inherent in any attempt at autonomous natural theology, relying on what he terms "pure reason" (*ṣarīḥ al-'aql*)⁴⁰ and other similar formulations. Furthermore, he frequently criticizes his opponents for failing to provide apodictic proof (*burhān*) for the positions they merely assert.⁴¹

This objective shapes Ibn Taymiyya's choice of argumentation, which he deploys after quoting extensively from Thābit's text. He breaks these quotations into short lemmas, which he then comments on in a manner largely inspired by the dialectical methods of Islamic *kalām*. This approach reproduces the dialogical form of *kalām*, anticipating potential objections and responding to them in advance ("If one says that...", "It will be answered that...").⁴² To reveal the incoherence of philosophical positions, Ibn Taymiyya favors a classical procedure of this dialectic, rooted in Greek logic but particularly prominent in the works of al-Bāqillānī,⁴³ Juwaynī, and Ghazālī: the disjunctive syllogism, or *sabr wa-taqṣīm* (a translation of the Greek διαίρεσις) – also known as *dalāla bi-l-muḍādda*.⁴⁴ This logical method plays a central role in both legal reasoning among the *fuqahā*⁴⁵ and Avicenna's famous proof for the existence of God

40 Ibn Taymiyya explicitly refers to authentic rationality on Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:276-78, 283, 290, 297, 300-1, 306, 312-13, 316.

41 Among the many examples of this reproach, let us quote this example which seems to contain an allusion to the criticism formulated by Ghazālī against the philosophers, incapable of applying the apodictic method which they nevertheless judge to be unsurpassable: "You say: 'But this is by no means appropriate to the First Principle', without the slightest demonstration (*burhān*), whereas you claim to practise demonstration and argumentation – as someone else has already reminded us." See: Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:319.

42 Josef van Ess, "The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology," in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, ed. Gustave E. von Grunebaum (Harrassowitz Verlag, 1970), 21–50, 23.

43 See in particular Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, ed. Richard Joseph McCarthy (Al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, 1957), 11-12.

44 Ess, "The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology," 40-41.

45 Wael B. Hallaq, "Logic, Formal Arguments and Formalization of Arguments in Sunni Jurisprudence," *Arabica* 37, no. 3 (1990): 315-358, esp. 320-27.

(*burhān al-ṣiddiqīn*).⁴⁶ It begins with a disjunctive premise – an exhaustive enumeration of possibilities, often divided into two exclusive groups (e.g., “x is either eternal or temporal”). By systematically examining the implications of each possibility, one can rule out those that are logically impossible (“If x did not exist at one time, it cannot be eternal”) and deduce the correct option by elimination (“Therefore, x must be temporal”).

In his refutation of Thābit, Ibn Taymiyya employs this method extensively to highlight the logical pitfalls into which his opponent has fallen. While the *taqṣīm* procedure is generally more suited to demonstration than refutation, Ibn Taymiyya transforms it into a powerful tool against his adversary. For example, when Thābit defends the eternity of the world by arguing that no external cause could prompt the First Cause to create it at a specific moment in time, Ibn Taymiyya counters:

We must reply: All this shows the falsity of what you are saying. It is said: either the world is a being necessary in itself, or it is possible. If it is necessary per se, then what is the cause which necessarily brings into existence or calling into temporal existence (*al-iḥdāth*) that which in the world appears in time, and its specific motion, and its impulse when it sets itself in motion?⁴⁷

He then multiplies the questions to show that Thābit’s and Aristotle’s position raises more problems than it resolves. However, the alternative is no more satisfactory:

And if he says that the world is possible (*mumkin*), then the answer will be that it must therefore have a Necessary One who created it. And so he created it as it is, with this delay in the appearance of temporal creations. So, what is the reason that obliged the Creator to wait before bringing them into existence? And what prompted Him to bring these temporal creations into existence after a time when they did not exist? What was the cause that prompted the Creator to do this?⁴⁸

Neither possibility is satisfactory, yet the principle of excluded middle dictates that the world must be either possible or necessary. Thus, Ibn

⁴⁶ Ibn Sinā, *Kitāb al-najāt* (Ilāhiyyāt section II, 12).

⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, 9:284.

⁴⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, 9:285.

Taymiyya argues, Thābit's initial claim collapses, as it excludes both possibilities, one of which must necessarily be true.

Here, Ibn Taymiyya makes extended use of the classical *taq̣sīm* procedure, not only to eliminate one of the options in the disjunction but also to construct a *reductio ad absurdum*, which becomes a key element of his refutational arsenal. Reflecting on his argumentative strategy, Ibn Taymiyya compares this type of reasoning to an *argumentum ad consequentiam*:

About some Christians, because they had said to some Muslims, "You say of a shepherd that he is Prophet of God," [ʿAbdallah Ibn ʿUmar] said, "And you say of a fetus in its mother's womb that it is God!" There are many equivalents of these examples, where man refuses something because its implications deserve to be dismissed.⁴⁹

In this example, the consequences of the Muslim and Christian doctrines are compared, and the Christians' attempt to undermine the Muslims' beliefs backfires, as their own doctrine entails far more unacceptable consequences. Similarly, Ibn Taymiyya exposes the logical consequences of Thābit's theses, which, he argues, are even more untenable than the difficulties they were intended to resolve.

5. The Impasses of Autonomous Natural Theology

Without analyzing the entirety of Ibn Taymiyya's refutation, three key aspects of his polemical approach merit attention.

a. Proof of the Existence of God Through Motion

In his commentary on the *Talkhīṣ*, Ibn Taymiyya distinguishes the argumentation employed by the "ancient Peripatetics" to prove the existence of God – the Being necessary by His essence – from that of the Muslim philosophers, whom he refers to as the "moderns":

⁴⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʿ*, 9:281.

As for the method in use among the moderns, it is deduction by *muṭlaq al-wujūd ‘alā l-wājib*, and it is the one employed by Avicenna and those who follow him.⁵⁰

Here we find, more broadly outlined, the hierarchy that Ibn Taymiyya establishes among philosophers. For him, the terms “ancient” and “modern” do not refer to precise historical periods. For instance, Thābit, writing in the ninth century, is chronologically much closer to Avicenna than to Aristotle, yet Ibn Taymiyya classifies him among the “ancients.” Similarly, Averroes, who lived after Avicenna, supports the Aristotelian proof by motion,⁵¹ which Ibn Taymiyya considers the only fully convincing argument used by the “ancients.”⁵² These classifications are assessed instead by the philosophers’ proximity to Qur’anic Revelation. Avicenna’s argument, although not without flaws, is less problematic than the Aristotelian approach, which Ibn Taymiyya summarises briefly:

Its tenor is that every body subsists only by its nature, and its nature subsists only by its voluntary motion, and the latter subsists only by an object of love (*maḥbūb*) and desire which is itself motionless.⁵³

Ibn Taymiyya seems to rely exclusively on Thābit’s summary in Section 2 of the *Talkhīṣ* for his understanding of Aristotle’s argument, without reference to more sophisticated reconstructions by later commentators such as Maimonides or Averroes.⁵⁴ His account reflects Aristotle’s *Physics*, particularly Book VIII, which argues for the necessity of an immovable First Mover to explain the origin of motion. However, Ibn Taymiyya does not engage with Aristotle’s concept of the “First Heaven,” the intermediary between the First Mover and the world of generation and corruption.⁵⁵ Rather than delving into the foundational elements of Aristotle’s

50 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, 9:275.

51 Averroes, *Epitome on Metaphysics*, IV, § 3.

52 About the argument “through movement” and its posterity in the Islamic world, see Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity. Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 237-280.

53 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, 9:275.

54 In Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’* 8, 163-215, Ibn Taymiyya had, however, demonstrated his knowledge of the argument developed by Averroes.

55 It should be noted in this respect that the text of the *Talkhīsh* quoted by Ibn Taymiyya (*Dar’* 9, 295) simplifies the text received by Reisman and Bertolacci by doing away with the intermediary of

argument – such as the principle of causality or the impossibility of infinite regress⁵⁶ – Ibn Taymiyya concentrates on a secondary issue: how the immobile First Mover can set things in motion without itself being in motion. In Book Lambda of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle explains that immobile objects can initiate motion:

This is how the desirable (*τὸ ὁρεκτόν*) and the intelligible (*τὸ νοητόν*) move: they move without being moved. These two notions, taken in their supreme degree, are identical. [...] The final cause moves as the object of love (*ἐρώμενον*), and all other things move because they are themselves moved.⁵⁷

As the supreme Good – and therefore the ultimate object of love – the First Mover sets all things into motion by inspiring desire in beings that are subject to change and improvement. However, Ibn Taymiyya appears to be aware of only one part of Aristotle’s dual analogy: the immobile First Mover moves in the same way that the beloved object inspires motion in the lover, but also as the intelligible inspires thought in the intellect. The concept of the First Cause as the “First Intelligible” and the “Thought of thought” is absent from the sections of the *Talkhīṣ* Ibn Taymiyya comments on and may also be missing from the material he had access to. This likely explains the overemphasis on the qualifiers “object of love” (*maḥbūb*) and “object of desire” (*ma’shūq*) in his presentation of Aristotle’s doctrine. While it is true that, for Aristotle, God moves all beings *ὡς ἐρώμενον* (as the ultimate object of love and desire), the omission of the intelligible aspect of the First Cause amplifies the role of love and desire in Ibn Taymiyya’s critique. Against this absolutized dimension of final causality, Ibn Taymiyya unleashes the full force of his polemical argument.

In Thābit’s account, the First Principle is the cause of forms, which grant substances their subsistence; it is, therefore, the cause of all that exists. However, it acts as a final cause, as the object of their desire for

the First Heaven in the description of the process of setting the world in motion. But it is impossible to know whether this simplification was made by Ibn Taymiyya, the manuscript in his possession or a later copyist.

56 In this, his refutation differs greatly from the much more elaborate one produced by Ḥasdaï Crescas (d. in 1410) against the Maimonides version of the argument by motion. See Harry A. Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle: Problems of Aristotle’s Physics in Jewish and Arabic Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 1929).

57 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book Lambda, 7, 1072a-b.

perfection, which, in turn, drives their motion.⁵⁸ This concept of final causality is the primary target of Ibn Taymiyya's critique. While he does not reject the notion as inherently impossible or unworthy of God, he considers it fundamentally inadequate:

Let us admit that voluntary movement is conceived only in terms of a beloved object distinct from itself (*maḥbūb munfaṣil 'anhu*). But if the thing in motion is not necessary of itself, neither it nor its motion, then what is its necessary cause and that of its motion? You see in the First Mover a mover only insofar as he is an object of love and desire, and by no means insofar as he has created (*fa'ala*) anything.⁵⁹

To identify the First Principle merely as the cause of things in their final purpose, without recognizing it as the cause of their actual existence – their creator and agent – is, for Ibn Taymiyya, to overlook its most essential role. He insists that the First Principle must also be the efficient cause of all things. Throughout his refutation, Ibn Taymiyya equates this efficient causality with God's creative action, using the terms *fā'il* (Agent) and *mubdi'* (Creator) interchangeably. Yet, according to him, this creative and explanatory action is entirely absent in Thābit's *Talkhīṣ*:

If we accept his [Aristotle's] point of view, then the essential thing in all this is that the body in voluntary motion needs a desired object, which is its end (*ghāya*): its existence can only be realised by the existence of this desired object. The existence of the latter [the desired object] is a condition of the existence of the former [the body in motion]. So, we say: the body subsists only by its nature, its nature subsists only by its motion, and its motion subsists only by the distinct mover [of the body] (*munfaṣil*), which is [for it] an object of love and desire (*maḥbūb ma'shūq*). The essential thing in all this is the necessity

58 For Aristotle himself, this function of final cause does not exclude a role as efficient cause (on the coherence of Aristotle's theses between the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics*, see De Koninck, *Aristote*, 65-94). The complex cosmological-metaphysical constructions of chapter 8 of Book Lambda are to be read as a way of honoring the need for efficient causality, although the causality of the Good remains pre-eminent in his eyes. Ancient commentators on Aristotle, beginning with Themistius whom Thābit reads and knows, rightly understand the First Cause as both form, end and agent.

59 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:273.

of the existence of the object loved and desired: the existence of the body in motion is impossible without it.⁶⁰

For Ibn Taymiyya, this reasoning is insufficient because:

However, the mere distinct object of love is not enough to [allow] the existence of the possible body, which is not [a being] necessary in itself (*wājib bi-dhātihī*), nor the existence of its nature, nor the existence of the movement proper to it; something is needed that is its creator (*mubdi'*), and the creator of its movement and nature. These philosophers did not mention the necessity of this creator, nor that of the proof of the existence of the creator of all this but contented themselves with the existence of the distinct desired object.⁶¹

The need for the creature to have a creator is, according to Ibn Taymiyya, “an obvious fact for any rational mind,” one that even Avicenna could not overlook.⁶² Avicenna’s proof of the existence of God surpasses Aristotle’s by recognizing in the Being necessary in itself the efficient cause of the world, rather than merely the object of its desire that sets it in motion. For Ibn Taymiyya, this recognition of efficient causality is infinitely more fundamental and essential than the notion of a final cause. He emphasizes this point repeatedly:

As for the idea that that which is only the object of love (*maḥbūb*) is its creator, the necessary cause of its essence, attributes, and acts – without necessity, response, or creation on the part of the beloved object, but merely because it is a beloved object – this is something that they know, by rational intuition, to be false. And they, like all rational minds, distinguish between final and efficient causes: the beloved object implies the existence of the final cause, but it also requires an efficient cause. If they consider the beloved object to be the efficient cause, then it must also be its creator – *quod erat demonstrandum*. They then admit this position, which demonstrates the falsity of what they have argued elsewhere. And if they do not consider it to be the creator, then they lack any proof of the existence of an efficient cause that enables the existence of the world. So, they will be told: the fact that the possible depends

60 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:275-76.

61 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:277.

62 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:277.

on a creator for itself, its attributes, and its motion is more evident than its dependence on a beloved object.⁶³

The rationality Ibn Taymiyya employs here to reject the primacy of the final cause and affirm the necessity of an efficient cause relies on the concept of *badihat al-'aql* (rationally self-evident),⁶⁴ which he borrows from the Ash'arite *kalām*.⁶⁵ Against the philosophers' complex and, in his view, ultimately unconvincing reasoning, Ibn Taymiyya contrasts intuitive evidence that is more straightforward yet irrefutable: what is created must have a creator; what is made must have an agent.

While Ibn Taymiyya does not deny that the First Principle may also function as a final cause, he rejects its status as a comprehensive or explanatory cause. At best, it is a partial cause, since without an efficient cause, the being that could direct its desire and love toward a final cause would not exist in the first place. Such a being cannot be a subject of desire or love without first being brought into existence. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya criticizes Aristotle for failing to demonstrate even the final causality of the First Principle. Instead, he argues, Aristotle merely asserts it:

Aristotle did not assert (*lam yuthbit*) that the First Cause is the creator of the world, nor that it is its agent (*fā'ila lahu*), nor the efficient cause (*'illa fā'ila*). He asserted that it was the final cause, but he produced no proof (*dalil*) for this. [Aristotle], although he speaks only of a partial cause [the final cause, not the efficient cause], does not even provide evidence for what he claims.⁶⁶

To these shortcomings of an approach claiming to be grounded in autonomous reason, Ibn Taymiyya counters with the comprehensiveness of the Muslim faith. In alignment with intuitive reason, this faith recognizes a

63 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:283. But Ibn Taymiyya keeps coming back to this idea. See in particular Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:293, 297, 302, 318 *et passim*.

64 The term intuition, in English, was also used to translate the Arabic word *ḥads*, an essential notion in Avicenna's noetics. See on this topic Meryem Sebti, *Avicenne: l'âme humaine* (Presses universitaires de France, 2000), 93; Christian Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie islamique?* (Gallimard, 2011), 181. The intuition we are talking about here, referring to primary knowledge, is of a very different nature.

65 "[Al-Ash'arī] said, regarding the meaning of the expression *rational intuition*, that it refers to the principles of the sciences: it is among the kinds of necessary [knowledge] that come to the scholar without the means of speculation, reflection or vision." Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad maqālāt al-shaykh Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī* (Dar el-Mashreq, 1987), 15.

66 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:293.

dual status in God, the First Principle: He is both the efficient cause (and thus the Creator) and the final cause of all that He has brought into existence through creation. Ibn Taymiyya explains:

Muslims do not deny that God is the Lord and God of all things: as Lord, He is creator, institutor, and agent; as God, He is the object of adoration, confession of faith, and love (*al-ma'būd al-ma'lūh al-maḥbūb*).⁶⁷

The autonomous natural theology articulated in Book Lambda of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and pursued by Thābit, in Ibn Taymiyya's view, is fundamentally incapable of achieving its intended goal. By contrast, the Islamic faith, consistent with intuitive rationality, immediately apprehends its object: the true God. For Ibn Taymiyya, the First Cause described by the "ancient philosophers" is not the true God, but merely an inadequate and truncated image, ultimately misleading and deceptive to the human mind.

b. The Eternity of the World

If the ancient philosophers manage, despite their intelligence, to evade the rational evidence of the necessity of an agent and creator for the world – something that should be self-evident to any rational mind – it is because their reasoning is obscured by another thesis inherited from Aristotle. This thesis, which Thābit explores in Sections 4 and 5 of his *Talkhīṣ*, concerns the eternity of the world. Positioned at the intersection of cosmology and metaphysics, it is explicitly articulated by Aristotle, particularly in the *Physics*:

If something such as this always exists, a mover itself immobile and eternal, it is necessary that the first thing moved by it should also be eternal.⁶⁸

Thābit elaborates on this necessity by highlighting the impossibility of the First Cause being influenced by an external factor to explain any delay between the existence of the eternal First Principle and its effect, the world:

⁶⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:279-80.

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Physics*, viii, 6, 259b-60a.

[Aristotle] says: this would indeed require that the things that exist did not first have the slightest existence and then came into existence. This would imply, then, that the existence of the world had another cause, which would participate in the First Cause or be superior to the First Cause. Indeed, if the First Cause did not have something [else] to bring the world into existence, and if there were no cause other than its own essence to help or push the First Cause to bring the world into existence, nor any cause to prevent or hold it back, there would be no possible delay between the existence of the world and the existence of the essence of the First Cause. How could [the world's] existence be delayed for an infinite length of time, and then be brought into existence, like a sleeper who is then awakened?⁶⁹

Ibn Taymiyya succinctly summarizes this argument a few lines later: for the philosophers, “what happens in time must depend on a temporal cause” (*kawn al-ḥādith yaftaqiru ilā sabab ḥādith*). Consequently, they argue, the First Cause, being eternal, cannot bring a temporal world into existence (*muḥdith*). Ibn Taymiyya, however, immediately sets out to refute this position, which he deems riddled with “contradictions,” employing the *taqṣīm* procedure. Considering the moving bodies of the world, particularly the stars, Ibn Taymiyya posits two possibilities: either they are necessary beings – in which case, a necessary being can be in motion, undermining the philosophers’ proof of the First Principle as a motionless First Mover; or they are possible beings, whether eternal or not. In this case, they require a necessary cause (*mūjib*), a necessary being who serves as their cause and agent.⁷⁰ In this dichotomy between necessity and possibility, and in the assertion that a necessary being is required to explain the existence of the possible, Ibn Taymiyya echoes Avicenna’s famous argument. Although Ibn Taymiyya distrusts Avicenna’s framework, he does not hesitate to utilize its logical strength in this instance.

At this stage, however, Ibn Taymiyya presents only part of his reasoning. Reaffirming the need for a creator who serves as the efficient cause of the world is insufficient to prove the temporality of the world, as opposed to its eternity. As is sometimes the case, Ibn Taymiyya appears carried away by his critique, and in his focus on the role of the efficient cause, he loses sight of his initial argument. This may be due to the close

69 Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʿ*, 9:280-81, see: Reisman and Bertolacci, “Concise Exposition,” 739-742.

70 Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʿ*, 9:282.

association, for many participants in the debate on the world's eternity, between the notions of temporality and creation.

A few pages later, Ibn Taymiyya revisits the point he had left unresolved, once again applying the same *taqṣīm* (division) between necessary and possible beings:

It will be said: either the world is a being necessary per se, or it is possible. If it is necessary per se, then what is the cause that necessarily brings into existence or calls into temporal existence (*al-iḥdāth*) that which in the world appears in time, its specific motion, and its impulse when it sets itself in motion? And what is the cause that prompts the inherently necessary to do this? And what would be its organizing cause for the appearance in time of delayed temporal creations? For things never cease to come into existence in the world, one after another. What, then, is the necessary cause of the delay in the appearance of these temporal creations that did not yet exist?⁷¹

The core of Ibn Taymiyya's argument lies in a simple, common-sense observation: things keep coming into existence in the world, one after the other. We constantly witness the emergence of things that did not previously exist. To declare, as the ancient philosophers did, that the world is eternal because its cause is eternal – and that cause and effect must therefore be simultaneous – merely shifts the problem. How can we explain the emergence of the temporal? How is it possible for something new to arise when its First Cause remains eternally unchanged? For Ibn Taymiyya, the philosophers' solution only displaces the issue. Once the existence of anything temporal is admitted, the delay (*ta'akhkhur*) between cause and effect becomes unavoidable.⁷² Any attempt to resolve this ultimately makes the First Principle depend on something external to itself, a conclusion that Ibn Taymiyya finds unacceptable.

Ibn Taymiyya systematically explores all the possibilities available to his opponent, confident in the unassailability of his own position. The introduction of Aristotelian concepts such as act and potency in the *Talkhīṣ* does not, in his view, undermine his reasoning. While it is inadmissible

⁷¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:284-85.

⁷² Ibn Taymiyya later returned to this simple shift in the philosophers' argument, without resolving the question they were asking. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:293: "If [we] are asked: 'What then is the cause of the delay which delayed the creation of things?', we shall reply that the question applies to both positions, without distinction."

for the First Cause, being pure act, to have remained infinitely in potential before actualizing this power to create the world, it is equally absurd to suggest that the First Principle is eternally the actual creator of all that appears in time:

If the First is an Agent and a creator of the world, for what there are in it of different elements and appeared in time, it is impossible that it is in act the creator in eternity, because that would imply the existence of each of these elements in eternity. That would be manifest stubbornness. It would imply that he is first the creator in power, and then that he becomes the creator in act, without any cause external to him, because according to this position, everything that is external to him is possible and produced by him. If the action [of the First on what is external to him] depends on the effect of the latter on him, we arrive at circular reasoning.⁷³

For Ibn Taymiyya, the only position truly consistent with the assertion of the world's eternity is the claim that all possible objects also exist eternally:

If indeed possibility alone necessarily entailed the existence of the possible, as if it were necessary, then it would necessarily follow that everything possible would exist from all eternity. To say such a thing is to show a senseless and unreasonable obstinacy.⁷⁴

To Ibn Taymiyya, the constant impasses of autonomous natural theology point to only one viable solution:

In any case, then, the delay after which certain things were done is the fact of [Being] necessary in itself.⁷⁵

This conclusion requires acknowledging that the First Principle is not merely a mechanical cause, operating by its very existence or by the force of desire and love for the world as its desirable and final cause. Instead, it

⁷³ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:289.

⁷⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:294.

⁷⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:294.

must be a being endowed with will, capable of freely deciding the appearance of something new at a time of its choosing.

c. *The Will in God*

On this subject, Thābit explicitly distinguishes himself from Aristotle's thought. In the sixth section of the *Talkhīs*,⁷⁶ he addresses an opinion with which he disagrees: the claim that "the necessity of the simultaneous existence of the world and the First Cause necessarily implies that the First Cause has no voluntary action in bringing the world into existence." Thābit provides two arguments to support this thesis, which he ultimately rejects. First, simultaneity implies that the production of the world is a necessary action for the First Principle and, therefore, cannot be voluntary. Second, Aristotle posits that the First Principle moves the world by being its object of desire; it provokes desire by its nature, not by its will.

Thābit, however, contends that it is incompatible with the supreme perfection of the First Principle for any of its actions to be "contrary to its intention or will, or without its will." His reasoning, though succinct, rests on the impossibility of attributing imperfection – or even something less than the highest perfection – to God. To ascribe actions to God that are performed against or without His will would, for Thābit, be such an imperfection. The implicit presupposition here is that the First Cause possesses will: not exercising that will would be less appropriate and less perfect than using it to accomplish actions, such as creating the world.

It is worth noting, however, that Aristotle does not present divine causality as involuntary, in the sense of the First Principle possessing will but not employing it in its causal role. Instead, Aristotle conceives the First Principle as *a-voluntary* – it is not the subject of will at all. In a philosophical context influenced by Biblical and Qur'anic revelations, the idea of a God who acts not only against or without His will but is entirely devoid of will as humans understand it becomes increasingly inconceivable.

Ibn Taymiyya pays little attention to Thābit's disagreement with Aristotle, namely his effort to correct Aristotle by allowing the First Principle to be a final cause through the effect of its will. Instead, Ibn Taymiyya continues to argue as though he were confronting a unified Peripatetic school that uniformly denies the possibility of attributing will

⁷⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:294-96, see: Reisman and Bertolacci, "Concise Exposition," 744-47.

to the First Principle.⁷⁷ It is this perceived position that Ibn Taymiyya seeks to dismantle, dedicating half of his refutation of the *Talkhīṣ* to this issue. To underscore the weight of his critique, Ibn Taymiyya even numbers his arguments, presenting them as an imposing accumulation.

In this expansive argumentation, Ibn Taymiyya draws on a range of approaches. Some of his arguments are more rhetorical. For example, using the *taqṣīm* procedure, he highlights the contradictions in Aristotle's position: How can one deny will to the First Principle, on the pretext that an eternal being cannot possess it, and at the same time affirm the eternity of the world, which is in voluntary motion toward the First?⁷⁸ Ibn Taymiyya forces a choice: either the First Principle can possess will, or the world cannot be eternal. Aristotle, however, does not reject the idea of a creative will because of the First Principle's eternity but rather because of its independence from everything else – a quality that, Ibn Taymiyya notes, does not apply to the stars or the world, which depend closely on the First Cause for their existence.

Beyond rhetorical strategies, Ibn Taymiyya seriously engages with Aristotle's position and acknowledges its coherence: if the First Principle is merely an object of love (*maḥbūb*), there is no need to attribute will to it.⁷⁹ For Ibn Taymiyya, however, this limited conception of divine action is precisely why it must be rejected. Such a narrow view, which overlooks the direct efficient causality of God, is unworthy of the First Principle. Without explicitly acknowledging it, Ibn Taymiyya adopts the core

77 Ibn Taymiyya begins his response to section 6 with these words: "This speech reveals his thinking and that of his school, and clearly demonstrates its incoherence and corruption, which it would take a long time to describe and enumerate." See: Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:296.

78 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:301.

79 "The First, according to you, produces no effect and does not act, either voluntarily or involuntarily. And the fact that it is an object of love does not imply that it acts for nothing to add to the one who loves it. For what creates love in the object loved and sets it in motion toward the object loved is not the same object loved. Thus, every being endowed with reason knows that even if the hungry person loves the bread, the bread has made no movement for him and has no intention toward him. The same is true of the object of desire, which knows nothing about the person who desires it: neither action nor movement comes from it and adds nothing to its lover. We lend him an action as we lend it to inanimate objects. Thus it is said: 'the dirham and the dinar destroy people', or again: Gold is called a murderer, or the world arrogant, deceitful and weak, and other such things are attributed to that whose souls feel no love, which has no action or intention; but it is attributed an action because it is the cause of it, and not because it is the author of that action or its agent, or its creator. Rational thinkers agree on this." See: Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:312-13.

argument developed by Thābit in favour of the First Principle's will: it is more fitting for its perfection to assume its actions are voluntary.

Ibn Taymiyya sharpens this argument further, presenting it in negative terms: By denying will to God, the Peripatetics espouse a view unworthy of Him. He points out their inconsistency, noting that philosophers attribute will to the stars while denying it to God, whereas believers naturally adopt the opposite view.⁸⁰

Ibn Taymiyya examines the reasons behind the philosophers' refusal to attribute will to the First Principle and expands on them beyond what is explicitly stated in Thābit's *Talkhīṣ*. At its core, this refusal aims to preserve God's absolute independence. Philosophers argue that if the First Principle willed something, this would imply dependence on the desired object (*al-murād*), which is external to itself, contradicting the very definition of the First Principle.⁸¹ Ibn Taymiyya frames this argument using the technical vocabulary of Islamic theology, though these terms are foreign to the Peripatetic tradition. The philosophers, he suggests, seek to uphold divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) and avoid assimilating (*tashbīh*) God to creatures by denying Him a dependence characteristic of created beings.⁸² The use of theological language demonstrates that Ibn Taymiyya takes this concern seriously.⁸³ Indeed, this issue is not foreign to a Muslim intellectual striving to describe God appropriately.

Ibn Taymiyya counters this argument not only with theological reasoning but also with familiar Muslim expressions, which frequently

80 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:301: "If, however, you affirm the existence of a will in the eternal First, but deny it in the stars, as some Jews or Christians (*ahl al-milal*) say, you would then be closer to reason than when you affirm that the stars have a will and that the First Cause has none. Pure reason shows that it is more appropriate to attribute the will to the First Cause and the First Principle than to its secondary effect. If action (*fi'l*) does not necessarily imply will, then the movement of the stars does not necessarily imply their will; and if it does imply will, then it is more appropriate to attribute will to the efficient cause (*al-'illa al-fā'ila*) than to the effect created [by it] (*al-ma'lūl al-mafūl*). Do you not see that effects are immobile, like particles or plants that have no will?"

81 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:309.

82 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:305.

83 This seriousness does not, however, prevent Ibn Taymiyya from sometimes giving free rein to a polemical vein that willingly caricatures the thought he is attacking, with a certain sophistical effectiveness. Thus, Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:307: "If we consider that he has no knowledge, no power, no life, no will, that he acts neither voluntarily nor involuntarily, and that he has not the slightest effect on anything, and that nothing has any effect on him, then whatever exists is more perfect than he. It is the flaw par excellence!"

emphasize God's will: "What God wills happens, and what God does not will does not happen" (*mā shā'a Allāh kāna wa-mā lam yasha' lam yakun*).⁸⁴ While his polemical style prioritises rhetorical impact over systematic clarity, his critique unfolds in three main stages.

1. The philosophers claim to avoid attributing to the First Principle "even one defect (*naqṣ*)," yet Ibn Taymiyya argues that they ultimately ascribe to it "the most absolute defect that can be found in a being":⁸⁵ non-existence. In their effort to avoid any assimilation of God to creatures (*tashbīh*), they commit, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the worst *tashbīh* imaginable. Thābit had compared the First Principle to a sleeping man, who can provoke desire without even being aware of it. Ibn Taymiyya counters that this analogy is far less problematic than the philosophers' conception of God, for the sleeper can at least wake up, whereas their First Principle remains entirely inert.⁸⁶

Ibn Taymiyya expands on this critique by categorizing all beings into three groups:

The highest category is that of beings that produce something other than themselves but are not produced by anything else. This is the category to which the First Principle must belong. **The second category** is that of beings that both produce and are produced, such as human beings. **The third category** is that of beings that are produced but do not produce, like stones.⁸⁷

Philosophical discourse about God, Ibn Taymiyya argues, takes great care to distinguish Him from these three categories. However, in doing so, it inadvertently assimilates Him to a fourth category: "that which does not produce and is not produced," which corresponds to non-being (*ma'dūm*). The result is a catastrophic failure of autonomous reason in its attempt to approach God:

84 Ibn Taymiyya quotes this expression used several times in the hadiths, Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:320.

85 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:307.

86 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:305.

87 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:304.

If then, as you say, the First has neither feeling, nor will, nor voluntary action, and can have none of these, then that which moves voluntarily to seek its perfection is more perfect than this defective [being], deprived of attributes of perfection. The blind, the crippled, the deaf, the dumb, and the partially sighted are more perfect than this First that you imagine. The stars are far more perfect than it. God alone could count the contradictions and errors in what you say.⁸⁸

2. To speak of God adequately, Ibn Taymiyya insists on returning to the method he outlines at the beginning of the *Dar' ta'arūḍ*, in a digression addressing the legitimacy of theology.⁸⁹ The only appropriate path, revealed by God Himself, is the analogy of eminence (*qiyās al-awlā*). This method involves attributing to God, in an eminent manner, all the attributes of perfection (*ṣifāt al-kamāl*) observable in creatures. Among these attributes, Ibn Taymiyya argues, will (*irāda*) is undeniably one of perfection, and its absence constitutes a defect:

Let us suppose an essence endowed with voluntary action and effect, and another essence which cannot act or produce effect, voluntarily or involuntarily. Pure reason then testifies that the former is more perfect than the latter. This is why the animal is superior to the mineral.⁹⁰

Ibn Taymiyya rejects the perilous negative theology often pursued by philosophers, which at best leads to apophaticism and at worst equates God with non-being. Instead, he attributes to God the perfections of will, knowledge, and life. At the same time, he acknowledges that these concepts, when applied to God, must be understood analogically (*tariq al-tashkik*): speaking of God's will is not identical to speaking of a creature's will but reflects a superior and incomprehensible reality appropriate to His divine essence.

88 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:306.

89 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'* 1, 25-78. About it, see Jon Hoover, "Theology as Translation: Ibn Taymiyya's Fatwa Permitting Theology and Its Reception into His Averting the Conflict between Reason and Revealed Tradition (*Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'Aql wa-l-Naql*)," *The Muslim World* 108, no. 1 (2018): 40-86; Candiard, *Le Dieu immédiat*, 86-120.

90 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:306.

3. Ibn Taymiyya addresses the transcendence objection raised by Aristotle by detailing the unique nature of God's will. He argues that will implies dependence on the desired object (*murād*) only when that object is distinct from the subject of the will, as is the case with creatures. In the case of God, however, He can will two kinds of objects: Himself – being both *murīd* (willing subject) and *murād* (desired object) – and the beings He has created, of which He is the source and the principle. How, then, can God be seen as dependent on anything other than Himself, since He brings into existence whatever He wills?

So you will be asked: why can He not be the object of His will and love (*al-murād al-maḥbūb*), love Himself (*yakūnu muḥibban li-nafsihi*), and at the same time be the lover and the beloved (*huwa al-muḥibb wa-huwa al-maḥbūb*)? Or can He not both want what He has created and need it, and at the same time be the creative Agent of what He wants, without needing anything other than Himself?⁹¹

Ibn Taymiyya's emphasis on the active and creative nature of the First Principle is central to resolving this issue. The will does not create dependence in God precisely because He is also the Creator and Agent:

He who loves and wills things that are distinct from Himself, if He has the power to do so, creates them because of His love and will, provided there is no obstacle in the way. Why, then do you say that this is a defect? Or that the one to whom such a thing is attributed is no more perfect than the one who loves nothing, wills nothing, and can do nothing? If the first [of these two beings] is similar to the animal, the second is similar to the mineral; and the mineral is more defective.⁹²

This reasoning reverses the philosophical perspective entirely:

In loving something and wanting it in this way, there is no defect, but on the contrary a form of perfection. If someone wills what they have done and caused, and is powerful over what they will and love, this represents the summit of perfection – unlike someone who does nothing distinct from themselves, wills nothing, has no power, and is incapable of any action, resembling

⁹¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:310.

⁹² Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:316.

an inanimate object devoid of all attributes of perfection, even resembling non-being.⁹³

Ibn Taymiyya concludes by highlighting the coherence of the Muslim profession of faith. By affirming God's creative power, Islam resolves the contradictions that autonomous rationality struggles to address, demonstrating the superiority of revealed theology over purely philosophical approaches.⁹⁴

Conclusion

At the end of these fifty pages of vigorous rebuttal, we are struck by Ibn Taymiyya's writing, which is the antithesis of a systematic exposition or a rigorously structured conceptual analysis. The polemicist often seems carried away by his own discourse, occasionally losing sight of the central object of the discussion. For instance, he pays little attention to Thābit's disagreement with Aristotle regarding the will in God, as it does not align directly with his broader aims. The dialectical method of the *kalām* is pushed to its limits here. Ibn Taymiyya counters Thābit's often concise and synthetic reasoning with clear yet exhaustive arguments, marked by repetitions and relentless variations on the same points. These repetitions are not without purpose: they serve a pedagogical function by clarifying complex and abstract issues. Moreover, their sheer number reinforces the polemical and persuasive force of his argument.

As a perceptive and well-read critic, Ibn Taymiyya does little justice to Thābit b. Qurra. He disregards the historical and intellectual context of the *Talkhīṣ* and the specific aims of the work. Furthermore, his reading lacks the benevolence necessary for a deeper appreciation of Thābit's approach. Yet this lack of generosity is not an oversight but a deliberate choice. Ibn Taymiyya's objective is not to understand Thābit's project on its own terms. Instead, he uses it – and Book Lambda of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, to which it grants him access – as a springboard to critique

93 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:319.

94 "The Muslims, as well as other people among the Jews and Christians (*min ahl al-milal*), although they reject from God any need with regard to anything other than himself, at the same time affirm that he is the Lord of anything other than himself, and his possessor, and his creator. But you do not affirm that he is the Lord of everything that is not himself, nor his possessor, nor his creator" See: Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 9:317.

the broader enterprise of autonomous natural theology and its inherent limitations. In this, he achieves his purpose with remarkable effectiveness.

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CHAPTER 5

Ḥanbalī Theology after Ibn Taymiyya: Positioning Ibn al-Mabrid (d. 909/1503) in the Debate on God's Attributes

Arjan Post

Abstract

This article examines the theological position of Yūsuf Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī Ibn al-Mabrid (d. 909/1503) on the divine attributes (*al-ṣifāt*) within the broader spectrum of Ḥanbalī theology. It considers whether his approach aligns more closely with the *tafwīd* (relegation) of Ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223) or the *ithbāt* (affirmation) of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). The study begins with an analysis of the theological vocabulary employed by both Ibn Qudāma and Ibn Taymiyya on the issue of the *ṣifāt*, which serves as a framework for examining Ibn al-Mabrid's own formulations in his theological writings. In addition, this inquiry thereby aims to further the assessment of the extent to which Ibn Taymiyya's thought may have influenced later Mamluk-era Hanbalite scholars.

Keywords: Ibn Taymiyya; Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī Ibn al-Mabrid; Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī; *ṣifāt*; *tafwīd*; *ithbāt*; *ta'wīl*; *imrār*

Introduction¹

The most divisive issue within Sunni theology may very well be the debate regarding the attributes (*ṣifāt*) of God. More specifically this concerns opposing opinions on how to understand those descriptions of God from the Qur'an and the hadiths transmitted from the Prophet whose literal connotation may be taken to attribute physicality or spatiality to God. In the Qur'an, for instance, we find God being described as having a face

1 I am indebted to Jon Hoover and Jeffa van der Rande for being sparring partners in discussing the different positions within Ḥanbalīte theology. Jon Hoover especially helped me refine my conclusions, for which I am very grateful. Needless to say that any mistakes and inaccuracies in this article are completely my own, *fa-l-kamālu li'llāh*.

(*wajh*),² (two) hands (*yad(ayn)*),³ shin (*sāq*),⁴ and settling over the throne (*istiwā*).⁵ Sunni theologians have developed different hermeneutical approaches to interpret such descriptions in a manner they deemed most suitable for God. Because some of the positions taken in this regard were irreconcilable, the issue of the *ṣifāt* has become a dividing line between Sunni theologians. This naturally gave rise to heated polemics since the very systematization of Sunni theology in the early Abbasid Caliphate and resulted in a schism between groups of Sunni theologians that remains visible to this day. Roughly speaking, Sunnis are theologically divided into two groups: those who have embraced the language and tools of the science of speculative theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*), and those who have preferred to adhere to the language of the texts of revelation and let human rational inquiry interfere with them as little as possible. The former group is mostly represented by the Ashʿarites and the Māturīdites; the latter is mostly referred to as the Ahl al-Hadith – often translated as “traditionalists” – who are mostly, though not exclusively, represented by the Hanbalites.⁶

While such a categorization facilitates a global understanding of the theological split within Sunni Islam, the reality of its historical development is quite a bit more complicated. Indeed, the heterogeneous nature of Sunni theology is not merely a matter of disputes between schools, but also emerges within each respective school itself. For instance, if we take a closer look at Hanbalite scholarship, as we shall do in this article, Farid Suleiman and Jon Hoover have identified three principal approaches to the issue of the *ṣifāt*. One of these is to rely on *taʿwīl*, a metaphorical interpretation that attaches an alternative meaning to attributes that may otherwise be taken to attribute physicality or spatiality to God. This approach was utilized by only a very small minority of Hanbalites, of whom Ibn ʿAqīl (d. 513/1119) and Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) are the best-known examples. In spite of its existence as a Hanbalite approach, *taʿwīl*

2 Qurʾan 2:115, 2:272, 6:52, 28:88, 55:27.

3 Qurʾan 5:64, 36:71, 38:75, 48:10, and 51:47.

4 Qurʾan 68:42

5 Qurʾan 7:54, 10:3, 13:2, 20:5, 25:59, 32:4, and 57:4.

6 The distinction between the *mutakallimūn* and the traditionalists has been treated extensively in secondary literature, and thus I will not elaborate on it further here. For a helpful critical discussion on this matter, I refer the reader to the excellent monograph of Farid Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya and the Attributes of God*, trans. Carl Sharif El-Tobgui (Brill, 2024), 58–60.

will not be further discussed in this article, because Hanbalite scholars in the Mamluk era seem to have renounced it as a legitimate solution to the issue.⁷ The remaining two approaches represent the predominant spectrum within the school, at least until the Ottoman period.

The first of the two is identified by Suleiman as *tafwīd*, which he defines as consigning to God the meaning of attributes that, if taken literally, imply corporeality or spatiality for God. This method thus means to exclude the possibility of knowing anything about this category of attributes. Jon Hoover rather calls this approach “non-interventionism”⁸ or “non-cognitivism”⁹ to highlight that it disregards any discussion on the matter outside the word of revelation itself. In that sense it must be differentiated from the Ash‘arite understanding of *tafwīd* which, as opposed to its Hanbalite counterpart, is built on the premise that the plain sense (*al-zāhir*) of texts from revelation suggesting the physicality or spatiality of God must be outright denied. Thus, the Ash‘arite *mutakallim* would leave knowledge of the meaning of the category of attributes under discussion up to God, but with the conviction that the literal meaning is certainly not intended.¹⁰ As we shall see later on, the Hanbalite form of *tafwīd* generally takes no such premise into account and truly refrains from any discussion or rational interference when it comes to the *ṣifāt*.

The other dominant approach to the issue of the *ṣifāt* within Hanbalite theology is identified by Suleiman as *ithbāt*, which he defines as the affirmation of all descriptions of God from the revelation with their Arabic *meaning*. To evade being labeled assimilationists (*mushabbiha*), Hanbalites would usually couple this act of affirmation with the statement ‘without how’ (*bi-lā kayfa*), a formula known as *balkafa*, which means to recognize that the modality (*kayfiyya*) of these attributes cannot be known.¹¹ For Ibn Taymiyya, who was perhaps the most infamous proponent of *ithbāt*, this was the most sound position because it keeps the words of revelation whole as opposed to the methods of *ta’wīl* and *tafwīd*, both of which would ultimately drain these words of meaning.

7 Jon Hoover, “Hanbali Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016), 631-3; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 78.

8 Hoover, “Hanbali Theology,” 637.

9 Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya* (Oneworld Publications, 2019), 111.

10 Jon Hoover, “God Spatially Above and Spatially Extended: The Rationality of Ibn Taymiyya’s Refutation of Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Aṣ‘arī Incorporalism,” *Arabica* 69 (2022): 634.

11 Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 67-8.

Jon Hoover calls Ibn Taymiyya's approach "apologetic interpretativism" because it takes as one of its main premises that the meanings of the attributes of God were a given for the Salaf, the first three generations of Muslims, who supposedly did not delve into discussions regarding the meanings as these were obvious to them. For Ibn Taymiyya it is crucial to follow in their footsteps, as Hoover points out, because knowing God as He wants to be known evokes love and praise for God. Thus, if one is to deny meaning to God's descriptions, this would cause one to fall short in giving God sufficient praise.¹²

While Suleiman occasionally states in his monograph that more research is needed to pinpoint exactly how traditionalism and Hanbalite theology developed and which position dominated at which point in time, he does demonstrate that the *tafwīd-ithbāt* split within this school of thought actually has a long history. He specifically names the Shafi'ite Aḥmad b. 'Umar Ibn Surayj (d. 306/918) and the Hanbalite Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī (d. 620/1223) as proponents of *tafwīd*, and the early exegete Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Ibn Taymiyya as proponents of *ithbāt*, thereby showing that both currents had existed since the formative period of traditionalism roughly up until around the start of the Mamluk sultanate.¹³ I agree that there would be much merit in a critical inquiry into which of the two approaches was more deeply imbedded within the ranks of Ḥanbalism at which point in time. Suleiman does suggest that Ibn Taymiyya's position regarding the *ṣifāt* was possibly closer to early traditionalism than that of his contemporary traditionalist colleagues: "As much as Ibn Taymiyya differs from the early *ahl al-ḥadīth* in method and technique of argumentation, he nevertheless remains close to them in concrete questions concerning the divine attributes – closer, at any rate, than many other traditionalist theologians of his time."¹⁴ If his theological positions were indeed closer to early traditionalism, then could this mean that his treatment of the divine attributes in that vein did not find a strong backing amongst his fellow-Hanbalites because they were already well on their way to follow a different course? This is certainly a question that deserves a detailed answer, especially in consideration of Ibn Taymiyya's supposed limited impact on Hanbalite

12 Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 111-2; Hoover, "Ḥanbali Theology," 637.

13 Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 68-9.

14 Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 334-5.

scholarship in the centuries directly following his passing – a contention that is likewise in dire need of further assessment.¹⁵ Determining whether post-Taymiyyan Hanbalites of the Mamluk period tended to align more closely with *tafwīd* or *ithbāt* may serve as a useful indicator of the extent to which Ibn Taymiyya's forceful advocacy of the latter gained traction within his own *madhhab*.

This takes us to this article's case study: the Hanbalite scholar Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī Ibn al-Mabrid al-Maqdisī (840-909/1437-1503), henceforth referred to as Ibn al-Mabrid,¹⁶ is of interest to us, not because he was a particularly celebrated theologian, but rather because he is one of the few Hanbalites in the post-Ibn Taymiyya Mamluk era who wrote works in the field of theology proper. As such, he provides a rare insight into the further development of Hanbalite theological thought within an era that has become predominantly overshadowed by the towering figure of Ibn Taymiyya. While arguably no Hanbalite has had a louder voice in the debate regarding the *ṣifāt* than Ibn Taymiyya, there has been little academic attention for the continuation of this debate within Hanbalite circles after him – a fact Jon Hoover also noted in his article on Hanbalite theology, which thence contains no mention of Hanbalite theologians who lived between Ibn Taymiyya's most famous student, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), and the founder of the so-called Wahhābī movement, Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792).¹⁷

15 Hoover, "Hanbalī Theology," 642.

16 Although Hirschler correctly states that Ibn al-Mabrid almost exclusively uses his family name Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī in his writings, and thus prefers that scholarship would consistently refer to him as Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, most of the Arabic editions of the shaykh's works state that he was known as "Ibn al-Mibrad". See: Konrad Hirschler, *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture: The Library of Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 1n1. I myself rely on what is related from Ibn al-Mabrid's closest disciple, Ibn Ṭūlūn, who is cited as having stated that the name carries a *fatḥa* on the *mīm* and a *sukūn* on the *bā'*, and who provides a line of poetry from Ibn al-Mabrid himself to make his case:

Whoever seeks to know about me has been guided,

For my name is Yūsuf, the son of al-Mabrid's son.

See: Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ghazzī, *Al-Na't al-akmal li-aṣḥāb al-imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, ed. Muḥammad Muṭī' al-Ḥāfiẓ & Nizār Abāza (Dār al-Fikr, 1982), 67 and Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Najdī, *al-Suḥub al-wābila 'alā qarā'ih al-Ḥanābila*, ed. Bakr b. 'Abd Allāh Abū Zayd and 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Sulaymān al-Uthaymīn (Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1996), 3:1167.

17 Hoover, "Hanbalī Theology," 642, where Hoover refers to Henri Laoust's brief surveys of Hanbalite scholarship following Ibn Taymiyya's passing, which I reproduce here so the reader is aware of the existing academic material on the topic: Henri Laoust, "Hanābila," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1960–2004). New edn., iii. 158–162, and by the same author, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de*

Our aim here will be to determine Ibn al-Mabrid's position within the Hanbalite spectrum between *tafwīd* and *ithbāt*, as reflected in his theological writings. In doing so, we further seek to assess the extent to which his stance may shed light on the influence of Ibn Taymiyya's thought on Hanbalite theology in the Mamluk period. However, before we can evaluate Ibn al-Mabrid's writings properly, we must first be aware that the technical vocabulary that is utilized within the field of theology does not always bear the same meaning for different theologians. For this reason, particular attention will be given in this article to the semantics of the theological terminology employed by Hanbalite scholars in discussions of the *ṣifāt*, and how this terminology informs or obscures their actual doctrinal positions. To that end, it is necessary to briefly examine the language used by Ibn Qudāma and Ibn Taymiyya – broadly representative of *tafwīd* and *ithbāt*, respectively – in order to clarify the key terms and concepts that will guide our analysis of Ibn al-Mabrid's theological views. As will become evident, the distinction between these two approaches is not always straightforward. Numerous examples can be found of prominent Muslim scholars whose precise stance on the *ṣifāt* is difficult to ascertain due to the ambiguity, or even apparent contradiction, of theological statements attributed to them. As a result, such figures are often claimed by proponents of opposing theological camps.¹⁸ Thus, this article also seeks

Taqī-d-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taimiyya, canoniste ḥanbalite né à Ḥarrān en 661/1262, mort à Damas en 728/1328 (Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1939), 493–540.

18 Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, who will be discussed extensively in this article, is a typical example of a scholar whose exact theological position is under debate within Muslim circles; he is sometimes claimed as an proponent of *tafwīd* and sometimes of *ithbāt*, see for instance: 'Alā' Ḥasan Ismā'īl, "Tafwīd al-Imām Ibn Qudāma: Bayna al-mu'ayyidin wa-l-mu'aṣirīn," Salaf Center, accessed March 14, 2024, <https://salafcenter.org/7382/>. Another example within the Ḥanbalite school is the aforementioned Ibn al-Jawzī, who attacks three of his Ḥanbalite colleagues, claiming that their supposed anthropomorphic interpretation of the *ṣifāt* does not represent the creed of the school's eponym, Ibn Ḥanbal, cf. Merlin L. Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn Al-Jawzī's Kitāb Akhbār Aṣ-Ṣifāt: A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with Translation Introduction and Notes* (Brill, 2002), 122-3. Noteworthy in regard to debates regarding scholars' theological affiliation is also the so-called "conversion narratives," according to which a theologian of a certain school supposedly repented from adhering to that school before his passing. This is the case, for instance, with the Ash'arite theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who according to the traditionalist Shāfi'ī Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) would have written a *waṣīya* (testament) before his passing wherein he rejects the science of *kalām* and regrets having partaken in it; see: Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, ed. 'Alī Shīrī (Ḍar iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1988), 13:67. Many more examples can be found of such narratives, which are still to this day used in theological debates between opposing factions.

to underscore the importance of attentiveness to linguistic nuance in the field of theology.

The Two Sides of the Hanbalite Spectrum

We will start with Ibn Qudāma, whose *tafwīḍ* position seems to be articulated very explicitly in several theological treatises. While I am aware that several of these same treatises do contain quotations from traditionalist authorities whose position either directly or indirectly inclines toward *ithbāt*, our analysis will focus solely on statements by his own hand, assuming that these most accurately reflect his own position on the matter. In his *Lum'at al-i'tiqād* (*The Illuminated Creed*), he starts his section on God's attributes stating that God is described as He has described Himself in the Qur'an and through the words transmitted from the Prophet. According to the formula he then proceeds to advance, all descriptions found in these sources must be believed in with total assent (*taslīm*) and acceptance (*qubūl*), while refraining from rejecting them (*radd*), interpreting them metaphorically (*ta'wīl*), and assimilating (*tashbīh*) or likening (*tamthīl*) them to the attributes of creatures.¹⁹ While his *Taḥrīm al-naẓar fī kutub Ahl al-Kalām* (*Prohibiting the Study of the Books of Speculative Theology*) and his *Dhamm al-ta'wīl* (*The Censure of Metaphorical Interpretation*) express his formula for how to believe in the *ṣifāt* somewhat differently, the consistent factor in all three of his works is the rejection of *ta'wīl* and *tashbīh/tamthīl*.²⁰ Interestingly, he makes no mention of explicitly negating corporeality (*tajsīm*) for God's attributes in

19 Muwaffaq al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *Lum'at al-i'tiqād* (Wizārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 2000), 5-6.

20 Muwaffaq al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *Taḥrīm al-naẓar fī kutub Ahl al-Kalām*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad Sa'īd Dimashqiyya (Ālam al-Kutub, 1990), 50, where he states that one ought to believe in the verses and reports on the attributes with confirmation (*iqrār*) and assent (*taslīm*), and reject metaphorical interpretation of them (*ta'wīl*) and stripping them away (*ta'ṭīl*), as well as assimilating them (*tashbīh*) and likening (*tamthīl*) them to the attributes of creatures. In *Dhamm al-ta'wīl*, ed. Badr b. 'Abd Allāh al-Badr (Al-Dār al-salafiyya, 1986), 11, he states that one ought to believe in the attributes without adding or omitting anything from them, without figurative interpretation (*tajāwuz/ta'wīl*) or an explanation (*tafsīr*) that would contradict their obvious sense (*zāhirahā*), or assimilating them to the attributes of creatures (*tashbīh*).

the main formulas expressed in these treatises, a fact we will come back to later in this article.²¹

The *Lum'at al-i'tiqād* then moves on to the most important part for us, stating that "...those [descriptions of God] that are ambiguous (*mā ashkala min dhalika*) are to be affirmed in word (*ithbātahu lafẓan*) while refraining from delving into their meaning (*ma'nāhu*), leaving knowledge of them up to [God], the One who spoke them (*wa-naruddu 'ilmahu ilā qā'ilīhi*)."²² For Ibn Qudāma, this position is anchored in the Qur'anic maxims from Sūrat Āl 'Imrān:

It is He [God] who sent down upon you the Book, wherein are verses clear that are the Essence of the Book, and others ambiguous. As for those in whose hearts is deviation (*zaygh*), they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation; and none knows its interpretation, save only God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī l-'ilm*) say, "We believe in it; all is from our Lord"; yet none remembers, but men possessed of minds (Qur'an 3:7).²³

Those attributes that could be taken to attribute physicality and spatiality to God are automatically regarded as belonging to the category of ambiguous verses. In such cases, the above verse thus provides the solution: human beings should leave all responsibility with God, which Ibn Qudāma subsequently connects to the verse as the way of those described by God as "firmly rooted in knowledge" (*al-rāsikhūn fī l-'ilm*).²⁴

It is simultaneously on the basis of this verse that he believes the desire to rather interpret the ambiguous descriptions of God from the Qur'an metaphorically, *ta'wīl*, to be an indication of "deviation" (*zaygh*). After all, as the verse states according to his reading of it, only God knows their interpretation.²⁵ It is important to note for our later analysis of Ibn al-Mabrid, that Ibn Qudāma does affirm that any form of *ta'wīl*-interpretation

21 It is worth noting that Ibn Qudāma does discuss *tajsīm* in *Taḥrīm al-naẓar*, but within the framework of his theological opponents who rely on *kalām* reasoning, on which basis they accuse the traditionalists of ascribing corporeality to God, cf. *Taḥrīm al-naẓar*, 48, 56-9 & 64.

22 al-Maqdisī, *Lum'at al-i'tiqād*, 6.

23 I base myself on Arberry's translation, though with slight modifications.

24 al-Maqdisī, *Lum'at al-i'tiqād*, 5-6.

25 al-Maqdisī, *Lum'at al-i'tiqād*. Note that he similarly dissects the verse in *Taḥrīm al-naẓar*, 50, as well as in *Dhamm al-ta'wīl*, 37-8.

would diverge from the obvious sense (*al-zāhir*) of the attributes.²⁶ While his refusal to deny the obvious sense may be taken to imply that he indirectly affirms the meanings of the *ṣifāt*, such deduction would be false in this case. For the Hanbalite jurist, this position is simply part of his “non-interventionism,” as we have seen Hoover call it, which means to avoid interfering in any way with the ambiguous texts of revelation. This also means that one neither affirms nor negates the *zāhir*, which naturally sets the Hanbalite style of *tafwīd* apart from that of the Ash‘arites, as previously mentioned in the introduction of this article.

The *Lum‘at al-i‘tiqād* concludes that there is agreement among the Salaf and the Khalaf (the generations of scholars after the Salaf) that the most sound solution to the issue of the *ṣifāt* is found in confirming them (*iqrār*), reading over them (*imrār*), and affirming them (*ithbāt*).²⁷ But what does this mean? Although a definition of *iqrār* does not appear explicitly in the extant works of Ibn Qudāma, it may be interpreted in a manner akin to *ithbāt* – that is, the affirmation of the lexical terms employed in the revelatory texts to describe God, while refraining from affirming their specific meaning, the ultimate reality of which is consigned to God alone. This is also what *imrār* effectively means to Ibn Qudāma: to read over the attributes as they have come in the Qur‘an and the Hadith, while leaving knowledge (*‘ilm*) of them and their meaning (*ma‘nā*) up to God.²⁸ So, while the Hanbalite master does use the term *ithbāt* in his approach to the *ṣifāt*, this is automatically coupled with a specific form of *tafwīd*, namely to relegate knowledge of their meaning to God. In *Dhamm al-ta‘wīl* we find a verbatim confirmation of this observation where he cites the Qur‘anic maxim uttered by “those firmly rooted in knowledge,” the *rāsikhūn fī l-‘ilm*: “We believe in it [the ambiguous part of the Qur‘an]; all is from our Lord.” Ibn Qudāma reads this as a proof that those identified by the Qur‘an as scholars ought to practice *tafwīd* and *taslīm* regarding all statements in the revelation whose knowledge belongs to God alone.²⁹

As we have already seen, Ibn Taymiyya adheres to what we identified as the *ithbāt* position, though in a way that produces a significantly different set of definitions for the theological terminology also adopted

26 al-Maqdisī, *Dhamm al-ta‘wīl*, 11; *Lum‘at al-i‘tiqād*, 11-2.

27 al-Maqdisī, *Lum‘at al-i‘tiqād*, 7-8.

28 al-Maqdisī, *Dhamm al-ta‘wīl*, 11.

29 al-Maqdisī, *Dhamm al-ta‘wīl*, 38.

by Ibn Qudāma. First off, Ibn Taymiyya's definition of *ithbāt* means to affirm not only the words by which God is described, but also their meaning. The formula to which he consistently adheres throughout his works asserts that one must affirm all the attributes by which God has described Himself, without alteration or stripping them of their meaning (*min ghayri taḥrīf wa-lā ta'ṭīl*), and without inquiring into their modality or likening them to the attributes of created beings (*wa-min ghayri takyīf wa-lā tamthīl*). This he presents as the middle way between stripping God of His attributes (*ta'ṭīl*), which he considers the methods of the Jahmiyya, among whom he counts many of the Ash'arites, and likening God to the attributes to creatures (*tamthīl*), which he considers the method of those whom he labels *mushabbīha*, assimilationists.³⁰

Like Ibn Qudāma, his formula of belief in the *ṣifāt* never contains a rejection of *tajsim*, ascribing corporeality to God. Unlike Ibn Qudāma, however, Ibn Taymiyya articulates the reasoning behind this evidently deliberate choice – one grounded in a hermeneutical framework that seeks to adhere as closely as possible to the wording of revelation. The Qur'an categorically rejects the notion that God has but the slightest likeness to created beings in the verse "There is nothing like unto Him [God]" (Qur'an 42:1), which indeed serves as the main proof within Sunni theology in general against the possibility of assimilating (*tashbīh*) or likening (*tamthīl*) God's attributes to those of creatures. But there is no text (*naṣṣ*), neither from the Qur'an nor the Hadith, explicitly teaching that God does not have a body. Thus, in sticking to the texts, Ibn Taymiyya holds that corporeality should neither be affirmed nor denied. He is well aware that the *mutakallimūn* accuse those affirming the divine attributes along with their meanings (*al-muthbita*) of innovation, on the grounds that such *ithbāt* entails theological implications – namely, physicality and spatiality – that are deemed inapplicable to God. However, he turns the accusation

30 Ibn Taymiyya often repeats this formula in his writings. See for instance: Taqī l-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar' ta'arūḍ al-aql wa-l-naql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad b. Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyya, 1991), 1:284, and countless times in the books and treatises collected in the *Majma' al-fatāwā*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim (Wizārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya wa-l-Awqāf wa-l-Da'wat wa-l-Irshād, 1995), 3:3, 130, 141, 162, 165, 168, 194, 196, 217, 373; 5:26, 195, 257, 263; 6:38, 355, 515, 518; 8:432; 11:250; 12:73, 466; 13:160; and: *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya fī ta'sīs bida'iḥim al-kalāmiyya*, ed. Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad al-Hunaydī et al. (Majma' al-malik Fahd, 2005), 1:5; and *Minḥāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqḍ kalām al-shī'a al-qadariyya*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad b. Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyya, 1986), 2:111 & 523; 3:129.

around, arguing that denying what the texts of revelation (*al-nuṣūṣ*) explicitly state is a much greater innovation than affirming them according to their concrete meanings. Though he is careful in how he phrases his argument, it seems that he does mean to stay open to the possibility that God is corporeal, since there is no text (*naṣṣ*) denying that, a position that is obviously inherently problematic from the viewpoint of his opponents from the *mutakallimūn*.³¹

Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of correct *ithbāt* naturally leads him to define correct *tafwīḍ* differently from Ibn Qudāma as well. He strongly opposes the notion prevalent amongst the *mutakallimūn* that relegating knowledge of the meaning of God's attributes, '*tafwīḍ al-ma'nā*,' was the way of the Salaf, and that interpreting them metaphorically is the way of the Khalaf – as if this constitutes the consensus within Sunni Islam.³² In *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, he counters this argument, explaining that the *tafwīḍ* of the Salaf was not meant to relegate knowledge of the *meaning* of the *ṣifāt* to God, but rather to relegate knowledge of their *modality*: "the Salaf relegated knowledge of the modality [of the *ṣifāt*] to the Lord (*al-Salaf fawwaḍū ilā l-Rabb 'ilm kayfiyyatihā*)."³³ Thus, the affirmation of their meanings as advocated by Ibn Taymiyya is coupled with relegating knowledge of their modality to God, whereas Ibn Qudāma would affirm the terms by which God is described and relegate knowledge of their meaning, and thus simultaneously their modality, to God (for a schematic overview of the difference in semantics, see figure 1 below).³⁴

31 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 1:248-9. For a more detailed analysis of Ibn Taymiyya's argumentation regarding corporeality, see for instance: Jon Hoover, "Ibn Taymiyya's Use of Ibn Rushd to Refute the Incorporalism of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *Islamic Philosophy from the 12th to the 14th Century*, ed. Abdelkader al-Ghouz (Bonn University Press/V&R unipress, 2018), 469-491.

32 Ibn Taymiyya, "al-Fatwā l-Ḥamawiyya al-kubrā," *MF*, 5:9.

33 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, 8:545.

34 It could be argued that if the meaning itself of an attribute is not affirmed in the first place, there is no direct need to explicitly negate inquiry into its modality as well. This may be why the formulas by Ibn Qudāma we have analyzed above do not mention anything resembling Ibn Taymiyya's "*min ghayri takyīf*." In Ibn Qudāma's *Dhamm al-ta'wīl* (41-2), however, we do find him stating somewhat later on in the treatise that the divine attributes ought to be transmitted without modality (*kayfiyya*) or explanation (*tafsīr*), as one should not inquire into things only God has knowledge of.

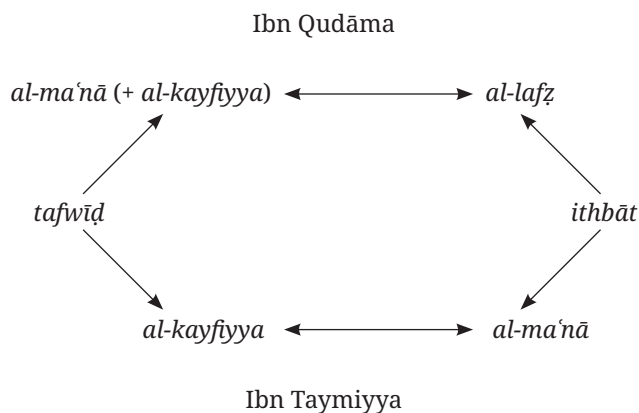


Figure 1. The two forms of *ithbāt/tafwīḍ*

Ibn Taymiyya defines *imrār* along the same lines as his understanding of *tafwīḍ* by going back to what he claims to be its original usage by the foundational scholars of Sunni theology. To avoid assimilating or likening the attributes of God to those of creatures, he relates that early Sunni theologians relied on the formula that “[the *ṣifāt*] are to be read over as they have come [in the texts of revelation] (*amirrū kamā jā’at*),” and that some of them would couple this statement with the *balkafa*, “without how (*bi-lā kayfa*).”³⁵ According to Ibn Taymiyya, the act of reading over the texts refutes those who strip God of His attributes (*al-mu’aṭṭila*), while professing the *balkafa* refutes those who liken God’s attributes to those of creatures (*al-mumaththila*).³⁶ The combination of these two statements proves that *imrār* in itself was not meant to deny meaning to the attributes. For indeed, if one claims the meaning of an attribute cannot be known in the first place, then why utter the *balkafa*?

If [the meanings of the *ṣifāt*] were meant to be denied, then it would have been required to say: “their wording is read over with the belief that what is thereby understood is not what is [actually] meant,” or “their wording is read over with the belief that God is not described by what this actually means.” But in that case, they could not be read over as they have come and nor could “*bi-lā kayfa*”

³⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, “al-Fatwā l-Ḥamawīyya al-kubrā,” *MF*, 5:39.

³⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, “al-Fatwā l-Ḥamawīyya al-kubrā,” *MF*, 5:39.

be uttered, since negating the “how” of something [whose meaning] is not even established [in the first place] is a nonsensical statement.³⁷

Put succinctly, debate over modality becomes irrelevant if a given term is understood to lack meaning altogether. For Ibn Taymiyya, therefore, the principle of *imrār* logically presupposes the retention of the intended meanings of the attributes. In other words, to assert that the attributes are to be accepted “as they have come” implies that they have, in fact, come in the form of Arabic expressions that convey meaning to those proficient in the language.³⁸

Finally, like Ibn Qudāma, Ibn Taymiyya is also strongly opposed to the kind of *taʿwīl* that is practiced by those *mutakallimūn* who end up altering the concrete meaning of words from the revelation that they deem ambiguous, thereby seeking to avoid compromising God’s absolute transcendence (*tanzīh*). For Ibn Taymiyya, the verse “There is nothing like unto Him,” frequently cited by the scholars of *kalām* as a scriptural basis for the practice of *taʿwīl*, does not constitute a license for unwarranted intervention in the *nuṣūṣ*. In his view, the methodological approach adopted by such *mutakallimūn* not only results in the negation of the very attributes they seek to reinterpret, but also represents a departure from the original understanding of *taʿwīl* as practiced by the Salaf. Ibn Taymiyya asserts that the Salaf did not disapprove of *taʿwīl* as a method to explain the meanings of the Qur’an. In that sense, he argues, the act of explaining the Qur’an, *tafsīr*, and the act of *taʿwīl*, were not really different from the perspective of the Salaf. *Taʿwīl* becomes erroneous, according to Ibn Taymiyya, when it involves the intentional distortion of a term away from its authentic meaning. Proper *taʿwīl*, by contrast, entails returning to the linguistic origin or intended referent of a term (*mā yaʿūlu ilayhi al-lafẓ*), even when this corresponds to its apparent or surface meaning (*wa-in wāfaqa ḡāhirahu*).³⁹ In this sense, *taʿwīl* may simply consist of providing a synonymous expression that affirms the established and commonly understood meaning of a word in the Arabic language.

37 Ibn Taymiyya, “al-Fatwā l-Ḥamawīyya al-kubrā,” *MF*, 5:41-2.

38 Ibn Taymiyya, “al-Fatwā l-Ḥamawīyya al-kubrā,” *MF*, 5:41-2.

39 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, 8:545-6.

Ibn al-Mabrid, the Scholar and Theologian

While much more could be said of Ibn Qudāma and Ibn Taymiyya and their respective doctrine regarding the *ṣifāt*, our foregoing overview has primarily sought to clarify two of the key terminological frameworks operative within Hanbalite theology. With this foundation in place, we are now prepared to turn to Ibn al-Mabrid and examine his position on the matter. Before doing so, however, a brief account of his life and an overview of the theological works upon which this analysis is based will be provided.

If one desires to learn more of the shaykh's biography, his entries in the relevant biographical dictionaries are rather scant and do not provide much detail. Our best source would undoubtedly have been the biography penned by his own student, Ibn Ṭulūn (d. 955/1548), titled *al-Hādī ilā tarjamāt Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī* (*The Guide to the Biography of Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī*), but unfortunately this work appears to be lost.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, there is a great deal to say about Ibn al-Mabrid's life thanks to the work of Conrad Hirschler and Said Aljoumani.⁴¹ Here we will mainly rely on Hirschler's meticulous study of Ibn al-Mabrid, which is nothing short of impressive.

Ibn al-Mabrid was born in 840/1437 in the Ṣālihiyya, a small suburb outside of Damascus on the slopes of Mount Qāsyūn, particularly known for housing the Hanbalite Maqdisīs. A few centuries earlier, the ancestors of the Maqdisīs had fled to Damascus from Palestine under the pressure of invading Crusaders. Ibn al-Mabrid himself came from the Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī line of Maqdisīs, which today is above all known for producing one of the more notable students of Ibn Taymiyya, the jurist Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343), who wrote a lengthy biography of his shaykh.⁴² Besides the latter ancestor, the family-line has

40 Hirschler's *A Monument*, 27, where Hirschler refers to al-Ghazzī, *al-Na't al-akmal*, 68, and notes that Ghazzī himself already could not find Ibn Ṭulūn's book in the twelfth/eighteenth century.

41 Hirschler's *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture* has an extensive introduction on Ibn al-Mabrid and studies the latter's book collection. The joint effort of Said Aljoumani and Konrad Hirschler, *Mu'allafāt Yūsuf b. Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Hādī wa-musāhamatuhu fī ḥifẓ al-turāth al-fikrī* (Brill, 2021), provides an overview of the shaykh's extensive oeuvre.

42 Shams al-Dīn Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's biography of Ibn Taymiyya has been published in several editions and provides one of the most detailed accounts of the shaykh by a student. See for instance: Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *al-'Uqūd al-durriyya min manāqib shaykh al-islām Aḥmad b. Taymiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamid al-Fiḳī (Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 2010).

also become known for the object of our study, Ibn al-Mabrid himself. However, as Hirschler has convincingly shown, his relative fame today probably does not reflect the scholarly station he reached in his own day.⁴³ He has been somewhat rediscovered since the twentieth century, in part due to the influence of Hanbalite scholarship from the Arabian Peninsula, which over the past century has been a powerful drive in the publishing of pre-modern Hanbalite works, even by Hanbalites who never attracted much attention during their own lifetime. In the case of Ibn al-Mabrid, what makes him interesting is above all his gigantic output as an author. According to Hirschler's calculation, the Hanbalite scholar must have completed a new book or treatise every three weeks for about forty years. But, as Hirschler also rightfully notes, output should not automatically be regarded as a sign of fame.⁴⁴

When it comes to Ibn al-Mabrid's position within the scholarly scene of ninth/fifteenth century Damascus, Hirschler concludes that we find in him a "middling scholar."⁴⁵ Hirschler presents several arguments for this conclusion, two of which I will reiterate here for the purpose of clarification. First, Ibn al-Mabrid does not appear to have acquired a professorship at any of the Damascene madrasas. While he was clearly connected to the 'Umariyya madrasa in the Ṣāliḥiyya, where he would sometimes teach and write his books, there is no clear-cut proof that he ever had a steady salaried position there.⁴⁶ Second, the vast majority of his impressive oeuvre was never copied, which indicates that there appears to have been no interest in his output, not during his lifetime nor over the course of the following centuries. In fact, the majority of the editions of his published books are based solely on manuscripts by Ibn al-Mabrid's own hand.⁴⁷

When it comes to theology, we have the good fortune that his few contributions to this field have been preserved and published. For the purpose of this article, we will rely on the following three titles:

- *Mughnī dhawī l-afḥām 'an al-kutub al-kathīra fī l-aḥkām*
(Sufficiency for Those of Understanding in the Face of the Many)

43 Hirschler, *A Monument*, 10-11, 47. This was already noted by Stefan Leder as well, see the lemma "Yūsuf b. 'Abd al-Hādī," EI² xi, 354.

44 Hirschler, *A Monument*, 44.

45 Hirschler, *A Monument*, 28.

46 Hirschler, *A Monument*, 40.

47 Hirschler, *A Monument*, 45.

Books on Legal Rulings). This book is written as a manual on the basics of several religious sciences, containing chapters on Arabic grammar (*naḥw*), Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and *fiqh*-rulings according to the Hanbalite school. Of interest to us is the very brief creed with which the *Mughnī dhawī l-aḥfām* starts, which not surprisingly also contains a section on the attributes of God.

- *Zubad al-ʿulūm wa-ṣāḥib al-manṭūq wa-l-maḥmūd* (The Cream of the Sciences and the Companion to the Explicit and the Implied [in the Revelation]). Much more comprehensive than the previous work, the *Zubad al-ʿulūm* contains 42 chapters devoted to topics ranging from jurisprudence to medicine (*ṭibb*), grammar, Hadith and Qurʾanic sciences, Sufism, and, for our current purpose, creed. Besides *al-Ghunya* of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166), the *Mughnī* and the *Zubad* are, to my knowledge, two of the earliest examples of Hanbalite primers that attempt to epitomize the main branches of the religious sciences in one book.
- *Jamʿ al-juyūsh wa-l-dasākīr ʿalā Ibn ʿAsākīr* (Uniting the Armies and Fortresses Against Ibn ʿAsākīr). This book was written as a refutation of the Ashʿarite theologian ʿAlī b. Ḥasan Ibn ʿAsākīr's (d. 571/1176) *Tabyīn kadhīb al-muftarī fīmā nasaba ilā l-shaykh Abī l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī* (Exposing the Slanderer's Lies in Regard to What He Attributed to Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī). The latter book was in its turn written to refute al-Ḥasan al-Ahwāzī's (d. 447/1055) *Mathālib Ibn Abī Bishr* (The Shortcomings of the Son of Abū Bishr), which is a particularly harsh attack on the person of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936), the eponym of the Ashʿarite school.

While Ibn al-Mabrid authored at least two other works in the field of theology, the three titles discussed above are, to my knowledge, the only ones in which he articulates his own theological position rather than merely citing or paraphrasing earlier authorities. His refutation of al-Ashʿarī, *Kashf al-ghaṭā ʿan maḥḍ al-khaṭā* (Removing the Cover from Clear Error), consists almost solely of alternately cited passages from either the abovementioned *Mathālib Ibn Abī Bishr* by al-Ahwāzī or from *Dhamm al-kalām wa-ahlihi* (The Censure of Speculative Theology and its

Practitioners) by the Hanbalite Sufi ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089). Another theological work is Ibn al-Mabrid’s *Tuḥfat al-wuṣūl ilā ‘ilm al-uṣūl ‘alā madhhab Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-jamā’a* (The Gift of Attaining the Science of the Principles [of Theology] According to the Doctrine of the Sunnites), written as a study of Ḥanbalite theology. It treats the usual set of Sunni traditionalist articles of beliefs, among which the *ṣifāt* are also discussed, and relates different opinions from the most important authorities in the Hanbalite school. As with the *Kashf al-ghaṭā*, Ibn al-Mabrid hardly ever interferes with the words of his predecessors, providing very little commentary and mostly shying away from explicitly sharing which opinion he himself prefers. Thus, if we want to be sure that our analysis reflects the opinions that were really Ibn al-Mabrid’s, the safest road to take is to base ourselves on his *Mughnī dhawī l-afḥām*, *Zubad al-‘ulūm*, and *Jam’ al-juyūsh*. Now that we have established the sources upon which we will rely, let us take a closer look at what he expounds therein regarding God’s attributes.

In general, Ibn al-Mabrid appears to be very careful in formulating his position regarding the *ṣifāt*, to the extent that it is becomes difficult to ascertain whether he leans more toward Ibn Qudāma’s or Ibn Taymiyya’s approach. In the section on the Muslim creed from *Mughnī dhawī l-afḥām*, Ibn al-Mabrid summarizes his position as follows:

We believe in what has been authenticated [by transmission] of [God’s] attributes. We believe in how he has described Himself according to the way intended by Him (*‘alā murādihī*), and how His Messenger described Him according to the way intended by His Messenger. We neither interpret these [attributes] metaphorically or strip them away, nor do we assimilate them to [the attributes] of things created by Him or attribute likeness to Him: “There is nothing like unto Him, He is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing” (Qur’an 42:11).⁴⁸

In the above formula, we see right away that, like Ibn Qudāma and Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Mabrid does not add any direct negation of corporeality (*tajsīm*) for God’s attributes. And also in line with both predecessors, he rejects *ta’wīl* and *ta’ṭīl* of the attributes, which would negate them, as well as *tashbīh* and *tamthīl*, which would liken them to the attributes of

48 Yūsuf Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī Ibn al-Mabrid, *Mughnī dhawī l-afḥām ‘an al-kutub al-kathīra fī l-aḥkām*, ed. Abū Muḥammad Ashraf b. ‘Abd al-Maqsūd (al-Maktaba al-Ṭabariyya, 1995), 22.

creatures. What remains unclear, however, is what he means when he states that one ought to believe in the attributes *as intended* (*‘alā murād*) by God and the Prophet. The central question that remains, then, is whether the meaning intended by God in His self-descriptions is accessible to human understanding, or whether such knowledge is to be consigned exclusively to Him. The ambiguity here becomes all the more obvious if we compare Ibn al-Mabrid’s statement with the theological writings of Ibn Qudāma and Ibn Taymiyya.

Both Hanbalite scholars have adopted the phrase “*alā murād Allāh*” in the context of the divine attributes, which actually comes from a saying attributed to al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820). Ibn Qudāma cites this saying in full in two of his works, where it reads as follows: “[Al-Shāfi‘ī said:] I believe in God and in all that has been brought forth from God according to the way intended by God, and I believe in the Messenger of God and all that has been brought forth from the Messenger of God according to the way intended by the Messenger of God.”⁴⁹ In *Dhamm al-ta’wīl*, Ibn Qudāma comments on these words, stating that the Salaf knew that the Prophet was truthful in all he related of the *ṣifāt* and thus believed in all of them even though they did not know the reality of their meaning (*ḥaqīqat ma’nāhā*). They therefore remained silent in regard to those things they had no knowledge of and, by doing so, set the path for all later generations.⁵⁰ Ibn Qudāma thus evidently views that what is “intended by God” (*murād Allāh*) regarding the ambiguous descriptions from the *nuṣūṣ* is known by God alone and should be relegated to Him.

From Ibn Taymiyya’s perspective, an early Sunni authority such as al-Shāfi‘ī surely adhered to the soundest theological position. It is thus not surprising that the Hanbalite Shaykh al-Islam interprets the same words as an expression of *ithbāt* and, as such, representative of the creed of the Ahl al-Sunna as he perceives it.⁵¹ He argues that it would be false to say that the *murād* is not in fact the obvious sense of the words by which God is described (*al-zāhir*), since a term either has a meaning or it does not. When it comes to the Arabic attribute called “*yad*,” for instance, he explains that the *zāhir* meaning for God is indeed hand, though not

49 al-Maqdisī, *Dhamm al-ta’wīl*, 11; *Lum’at al-i’tiqād*, 7.

50 al-Maqdisī, *Dhamm al-ta’wīl*, 11.

51 Ibn Taymiyya, “Madhhab al-Salaf fī l-i’tiqād wa-madhhab ghayrihim min al-muta’akhhirīn,” *MF*, 4:2 and “al-Risāla al-madaniyya fī l-ḥaqīqa wa-l-majāz,” *MF*, 6:354.

like the hand of creatures – since God has no likeness, as the Qur'an very clearly states. In fact, Ibn Taymiyya confirms that most Sunnis accuse the actual assimilationists (*al-mushabbihā*) and corporealists (*al-mujassima*) of unbelief because these two groups fail to differentiate between the attribute of hand in the context of God and the attribute of hand in the context of human beings.⁵² After all, affirming the *zāhir* of *yad* for God does not automatically mean that there is any comparison between the reality of the *yad* as an attribute of God and the *yad* as it exists as a limb in the human body. To prove his point, Ibn Taymiyya goes on to address the *mutakallimūn* who interpret *yad* as God's creative power (*qudra*). He argues that if their logic holds that affirming the obvious sense of the term hand would certainly lead to likening God to creatures, then this principle should go for all attributes whose obvious sense can also be applied to creatures. According to this line of reasoning, it should not matter whether the word in question concerns the attribute of a physical limb or an "accident of the body" (*araḍ lil-jism*). Ibn Taymiyya identifies this as a major flaw and an inconsistency in the reasoning of *kalām* theology. The Salaf, he argues, never considered that the obvious sense of God's knowledge, power, hearing, or seeing – attributes whose meanings are affirmed by the *mutakallimūn* – is not what is intended by God (*ghayr murād*) in His revelation, since the Salaf did not understand these as analogous to our own human attributes bearing the same names. For Ibn Taymiyya, the same principle applies to corporeal attributes: while such terms denote physical limbs in the human context, when ascribed to God they retain only the lexical meaning conveyed by the Arabic language, without implying knowledge of their modality. All these attributes from the *nuṣūṣ* should therefore be affirmed according to their obvious sense, their *zāhir*, in a way that befits God's majesty.⁵³

Seemingly in line with Ibn Taymiyya's reasoning above, Ibn al-Mabrid attacks the Ash'arite *mutakallim* Ibn 'Asākir in the *Jam' al-juyūsh*:

Now, if you would assert that [the attribute of] hand [actually means God's] creative power (*al-qudra*), then this begs the question why you would say that. [The Ash'arite] will reply: "That is because we do not profess assimilation

52 This is clearly rooted in Ibn Taymiyya's rejection of the literal-figurative dichotomy, *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*, which is explained in much detail in Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 141-72.

53 Ibn Taymiyya, "al-Risāla al-madaniyya fī l-ḥaqīqa wa-l-majāz," *MF*, 6:354-7.

(*tashbīh*) and it necessarily follows from [the word] hand that this is like the hand of a human being, and [in the absence of a metaphorical interpretation] assimilation would thus be established.” To this we say: this [term] ‘creative power’ that you mention is also possessed by human beings. It thus necessarily follows that [God’s creative power] is like that of a human being. Now, if you would say: “No, [we believe in God’s] creative power [in a way that] befits His majesty,” then we would reply that you should [likewise] renounce this *ta’wīl* [of hand as creative power] for which there is no [textual] proof, and say [instead]: [we believe in God’s] hand [in a way that] befits His majesty!⁵⁴

While this formulation closely parallels the arguments advanced by Ibn Taymiyya, the wording employed by Ibn al-Mabrid does not provide sufficient evidence to conclusively identify him with his predecessor’s *ithbāt* position. Unlike Ibn Taymiyya, his rejection of *ta’wīl* is not accompanied by an explicit affirmation of the meanings of the divine attributes.

The same goes for the few instances in *Jam’ al-juyūsh* where Ibn al-Mabrid touches upon the term *ithbāt*, for the most part in the context of his attempt to refute Ibn ‘Asakir’s claim that the Ash‘arites are, like the Hanbalites, essentially affirmationists of the attributes (*muthbita*). While he clearly rejects Ibn ‘Asakir’s depiction of Ash‘arism as such, especially due to what he claims to be their inevitable reliance on *ta’wīl*, he never provides a definition of what the correct form of *ithbāt* actually denotes for him. For instance, consider his statement that “...affirming (*ithbāt*) how God has described Himself or through His Prophet without metaphorical interpretation (*ta’wīl*) contains no assimilation (*tashbīh*).”⁵⁵ This is naturally meant to reject the accusation from the *mutakallimūn* that Hanbalite-style affirmation will lead to assimilating God’s attributes to those of creatures. But is he only speaking of affirming the terms by which God is described or also their meanings? The same goes for the following example:

The reality of [al-Ash‘arī’s] doctrine is negation, because he [claims to] affirm the divine attributes but then goes on to interpret them metaphorically. He thereby deflects most of them [the attributes] from their obvious

54 Ibn al-Mabrid, *Jam’ al-juyūsh*, 429.

55 Ibn al-Mabrid, *Jam’ al-juyūsh*, 427

sense (*wa-radda ghālibahā ilā ghayr al-zāhir minhu*) on the basis of his rational arguments and rejects what has been transmitted of revelation (*al-umūr al-naqliyya*).⁵⁶

While the last sentence may allow us to deduce that Ibn al-Mabrid means to affirm the *zāhir* of the attributes, we have already seen with Ibn Qudāma that rejecting a *ta'wīl*-interpretation of an attribute's *zāhir*-meaning does not in fact constitute its affirmation. For Ibn Qudāma, proper *tafwīḍ* does not inherently entail a rejection of the apparent meaning.

The only example that may be read as leaning more toward Ibn Taymiyya's style of *ithbāt* is found in Ibn al-Mabrid's *Zubad al-'ulūm*, where he phrases his position regarding the attributes as follows:

God is the Creator of the universe, [He is described as] one, sole, singular, sustainer, living, almighty, hearing, seeing, settled over His throne, encompassing His kingdom, speaking with eternal speech; we believe in how He has described Himself or how His Prophet described Him as He intended (*'alā mā arāda*) or according to the meaning He intended (*aw bi-l-ma'nā alladhī arāda*), without inquiring into the modality [of His descriptions] (*min ghayri takyīf*), assimilating or likening them to the attributes of creatures (*wa-lā tashbīh wa-lā tamthīl*), or stripping them away (*wa-lā ta'īl*).⁵⁷

The choice of words in this passage comes a bit closer to Ibn Taymiyya's formula on how to believe in the divine attributes. If we recall, the latter systematically held that one is to affirm the attributes without altering them or stripping them away, and without inquiring into their modality or likening them. Especially Ibn al-Mabrid's inclusion of rejecting inquiry into the modality of the attributes (*takyīf*) is noteworthy here, since we have previously argued that such a statement is not necessarily required if one does not affirm their meanings in the first place. As we have observed, Ibn Qudāma does not appear to have considered it necessary to include a rejection of modality for the divine attributes in the formulas related to belief in God's descriptions that we have examined. However, in what seems to be an anomaly within his broader treatment

⁵⁶ Ibn al-Mabrid, *Jam' al-juyūsh*, 318.

⁵⁷ Yūsuf Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī Ibn al-Mabrid, *Zubad al-'ulūm wa-ṣāḥib al-manṭāq wa-l-mafhūm*, ed. 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥusayn al-Mawjān (Markaz al-Kawn, 2010), 1:131.

of the subject, there is at least one isolated passage in his *Dhamm al-ta'wīl* where he does explicitly reject inquiry into the modality of the attributes. This suggests that the argument based on whether or not the rejection of modality is found cannot serve as conclusive proof of Taymiyyan *ithbāt* in the case of Ibn al-Mabrid.

What is also particularly striking in Ibn al-Mabrid's statement cited above is his specific mention of God's settlement over the throne as an attribute of God, followed by the statement "we believe in how He has described Himself or how His Prophet described Him as He intended or according to the meaning He intended." This is the only instance I have encountered in which the attributes are explicitly implied to possess a *ma'nā* (meaning). However, it remains unclear whether this meaning is understood to be known solely to God or whether human beings may also have access to it. More broadly, my reading of Ibn al-Mabrid suggests a persistent difficulty: unlike Ibn Taymiyya, he consistently refrains from articulating his theological position on the *ṣifāt* in a clear and unequivocal manner. Although Ibn al-Mabrid is consistently clear in his rejection of *ta'wīl*, he remains noncommittal when it comes to explicitly aligning himself with either the form of *tafwīd* articulated by Ibn Qudāma or the *ithbāt* position advanced by Ibn Taymiyya.

Conclusion

This study serves as a reminder that, however unsatisfying it may seem, the inability to definitively situate Ibn al-Mabrid within the established spectrum of Hanbalite theological positions is, in itself, a valid and meaningful conclusion. We have examined the key distinctions between the *tafwīd* of Ibn Qudāma and the *ithbāt* of Ibn Taymiyya, with particular attention to the specific terminologies each employed in articulating their respective positions. This comparison provided the framework for a close reading of Ibn al-Mabrid's theological statements concerning the divine attributes, with the aim of determining whether his views align more closely with either approach. Our analysis has revealed certain shared elements across all three figures: a collective refusal to negate the divine attributes (especially insofar as such negation results from *ta'wīl* or *ta'ṭīl*), an explicit rejection of assimilationism (*tashbīh*) and likening (*tamthīl*), and an overall reluctance to resolve the question of divine corporeality. Yet, despite the clarity with which both Ibn Qudāma and Ibn Taymiyya

articulate their respective theological frameworks, Ibn al-Mabrid remains markedly noncommittal. His writings do not furnish sufficient evidence to conclusively determine his position within the broader Hanbalite discourse on the *ṣifāt*.

One might be tempted to interpret Ibn al-Mabrid's ambiguity as indicative of an inclination toward *tafwīd*, especially given that *tafwīd* is marked by a comparatively more passive engagement with the revelatory texts than the more assertive *ithbāt* of Ibn Taymiyya. However, such a conclusion would be premature. The textual evidence examined in this article, especially the section on creed from *Zubad al-ʿulūm*, suggests that Ibn al-Mabrid may just as well have been more inclined toward Taymiyyan *ithbāt*. Why did he not formulate his position in more concrete terms, then? It is possible that he assumed his intended stance to be self-evident to his contemporaries, particularly among traditionalist circles within the Ṣālihiyya community of Mamluk Damascus. It is also conceivable that the precise articulation of his theological commitments was reserved for more private settings, shared only within the ranks of those who already adhered to similar doctrinal views – perhaps due to the potential for controversy with their Ashʿarite counterparts, who clearly exerted more power within the Mamluk realm than the Hanbalites.

When it comes to the broader question of whether Ibn Taymiyya's theological legacy exerted any discernible influence on subsequent Hanbalite thought regarding the divine attributes, the present study, based on the available evidence from Ibn al-Mabrid alone, cannot offer a definitive answer. However, since Ibn al-Mabrid does not take an explicitly non-cognitivist stance, it may be that Ibn Taymiyya's influence contributed to a heightened caution regarding the *ṣifāt* within later Hanbalite theology. As a result, scholars like Ibn al-Mabrid, perhaps lacking the theological finesse to fully engage with Taymiyyan theology, may have opted for a deliberate ambiguity on these matters, seeking to avoid alienating either side of the ongoing debate. The question of Ibn Taymiyya's impact must be addressed through a more comprehensive analysis of additional sources within the wider landscape of post-Taymiyyan Hanbalite scholarship. To do so effectively, it will be helpful to explore whether analytical criteria can be established to more clearly distinguish between non-cognitivism and Taymiyyan *ithbāt* in cases where Hanbalite theological authors do not explicitly indicate which of the two positions they intend

to endorse. When it comes to Ibn al-Mabrid, for now, we are left to relegate knowledge of this matter to God.

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CHAPTER 6

Between Ibn Taymiyya and the *Mutakallimūn*: Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Saffārīnī (d. 1188/1774) on the Attributes of God

Sarah Van Eyken

Abstract

In this article, I examine the writings of the eighteenth-century Hanbalite scholar Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Saffārīnī (d. 1188/1774) on the subject of the attributes of God. I specifically pay attention to the influence of Ibn Taymiyya, who was clearly an authority to al-Saffārīnī, in his examination of the attributes. In addition, I consider al-Saffārīnī's stance vis-à-vis the late Ash'arite theology that was dominant in his time. The primary source of my analysis is al-Saffārīnī's commentary on his own creedal poem, titled *Lawāmi' al-anwār al-baḥiyya wa-sawāṭi' al-asrār al-athariyya*. My analysis of this work shows that the foundation of al-Saffārīnī's understanding of the attributes of God is the Hanbalite principle of *ithbāt*, affirming all of the attributes without distinction. Although al-Saffārīnī's *Lawāmi' al-anwār* contains some statements that lend themselves to different interpretations, this article concludes that the work, read as a whole, strongly indicates that its author advocated for a plain-sense understanding of the descriptions of God "without how," which he believed was the position of the Salaf, and that he renounced both figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and the method of relegating the meaning of these texts to God (*tafwīḍ al-ma'nā*).

Keywords: Islamic theology; Hanbalite theology; divine attributes; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Saffārīnī; Ibn Taymiyya

Introduction

Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Saffārīnī (d. 1188/1774) was a Hanbalite jurist, traditionist,¹ and theologian of the eighteenth century, who became one

1 In Arabic, a *muḥaddith* is one who specializes in the science of Hadith. This term is not to be confused with the term "traditionalist."

of the most prolific writers of his time.² He was born in Saffārīn, a village in the vicinity of Nablus, into a distinguished family of Hanbalite scholars and received his education primarily in Nablus and Damascus. Especially in Damascus, which had become a cosmopolitan intellectual center at this time, al-Saffārīnī benefitted from the company and mentorship of both local and visiting scholars from greater Syria (*al-Shām*), Egypt, the Ḥijāz, and other regions. He also studied with scholars in other regions during his own travels, notably to the Ḥijāz. Al-Saffārīnī lists 25 of his most notable teachers in his *Thabat*.³ This list includes the Qādirī Sufi and Ḥanbalite mufti of Damascus ‘Abd al-Qādir b. ‘Umar al-Taghlabī (d. 1135/1723) and the esteemed Naqshbandi Sufi scholar ‘Abd al-Ghanī

2 The biographical information about al-Saffārīnī in this section is based on the *ṭabaqāt* (biographical) literature. See Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh Abū Zayd, *al-Madkhal al-mufaṣṣil li-madhhab al-imām Aḥmad*, ed. Muḥammad al-Jayb b. al-Khawja (Dār al-‘Āṣima, 1998/1999), 2:1008; Muḥammad b. Nāṣir al-Ajmi, *Ṣafahāt min tarjamat al-imām al-Saffārīnī* (Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 1992); Ismā’īl Bāshā al-Baghdādī, *Hidāyat al-‘arīfīn asma’ al-mu’allifīn wa-āthār al-muṣannifīn* (Mu’assasat al-Tārīkh al-‘Arabī), 2:340; Ismā’īl Bāshā al-Baghdādī, *Idāḥ al-maknūn fī l-dhayl ‘alā kashf al-zunūn* (Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī), 1:29; Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Sālim b. Ḍawyan, *Manār al-sabil fī sharḥ al-dalīl*, ed. Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh (al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1982), introduction; idem, *Raf’ al-niqāb ‘an tarājim al-aṣḥāb* (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1935), 361; Muḥammad Kamāl al-Dīn al-Ghazzī, *al-Na’t al-akmal li-aṣḥāb al-imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (min sana 901-1207 hijriyya)*, ed. Muḥammad Muṭī’ al-Ḥāfiẓ and Nizār Abāza (Dār al-Fikr al-Mu’āsir, 1982), 301-306; ‘Abd al-Qādir b. Badrān, *al-Madkhal ilā madhhab al-imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Mu’assasat al-Risāla), 443; Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥumayd, *al-Suḥub al-wābila ‘alā ḍarā’iḥ al-Ḥanābila*, ed. Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh Abū Zayd and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Sulaymān al-‘Uthaymīn (Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1996), 2:839-846; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *‘Ajā’ib al-āthār fī al-tarājim wa-l-akhbār*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Abd al-Raḥīm (Maktabat Madbūlī, 1992); ‘Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Mu’jam al-mu’allifīn* (Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1993), 591; ‘Abd al-Ḥayy b. ‘Abd al-Kabīr al-Kattānī, *Fihris al-fahāris wa-l-ithbāt wa-mu’jam al-ma’a-jim wa-l-masyakhāt wa-l-musalsalāt* (Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1982), 2:1002; Muḥammad Khalīl b. ‘Alī al-Murādī, *Silk al-durar fī a’jān al-qarn al-thānī ‘ashar* (Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 1988), 4:31; Muḥammad Jamīl b. Shaṭṭī, *Mukhtaṣar ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* (Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1986), 127; ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ṭarīqī, *Mu’jam muṣannafāt al-Ḥanābila min wafayāt 241-1420 hijriyya* (King Fahad National Library, 2001); Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *al-Mu’jam al-mukhtaṣṣ*, ed. Nizām Muḥammad Ya’qūbī & Muḥammad b. Nāṣir al-Ajmi (Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 2006), 642-647; idem, *Tāj al-arūs min jawāhir al-qāmūs*, ed. ‘Abd al-Sattār Aḥmad Farāj (al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1965), 12:47; Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-A’lām* (Dār al-‘Ilm lil-Malāyīn, 2002), 6:14.

3 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Saffārīnī, *Thabat al-imām al-Saffārīnī al-Ḥanbalī wa-ijazātuh li-ṭā’ifa min a’yān ‘ulamā’ ‘aṣrih*, ed. Muḥammad b. Nāṣir al-Ajmi (Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya), 171-194. The *thabat* is a type of work in which a scholar lists the teachers with whom he studied and the books he read with them with the purpose of proving that he has acquired specific knowledge (see Naser Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life in the Ḥijāz Before Wahhabism: Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī’s (d. 1101/1690) Theology of Sufism* (Brill, 2021), 77-78).

al-Nābulṣī (d. 1143/1731).⁴ His *Thabat* also contains *ijāzāt*⁵ to five of his students, among whom was the well-known lexicographer and theologian, Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1790).⁶

Al-Saffārīnī is described in the biographical literature as a socially conscious and politically active scholar who did not hesitate to use his family's status with the land's rulers to advocate for the well-being of the people.⁷ He wrote about his day and age in rather bleak terms, deploring the religious, social, and moral decline he perceived in his society. He believed that his people had lost sight of the foundations of the religion and had drifted away from the example of the Prophet due to the influence of popular religious practices that he considered to be innovations (*bida'*, sg. *bid'a*).⁸

In al-Saffārīnī's lifetime, Ash'arite *kalām*⁹ was the dominant theological framework and the belief system endorsed by political authorities.

4 The question of al-Saffārīnī's stance vis-à-vis the doctrine of the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), for which 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulṣī was a strong advocate, lies beyond the scope of this article. It can be noted here that, in spite of the Sufi metaphysical beliefs held by some of his teachers, al-Saffārīnī rejected the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and was critical of certain Sufi practices that were common in his society (see al-Saffārīnī, *Ghidhā' al-albāb fī sharḥ Manẓūmat al-ādāb* (Mu'assasat Qurṭuba, 2009), 2:315).

5 Sg. *ijāza*, a kind of scholarly certification by which a teacher certifies his student to transmit one or more texts.

6 al-Saffārīnī, *Thabat*, 197-334.

7 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawā'ih al-anwār al-saniyya wa-lawāqih al-afkār al-sunniyya li-sharḥ qaṣīdat Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-ḥā'iyya fī 'aqīdat ahl al-āthār al-salafiyya*, ed. 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Buṣayrī (Dār al-Rushd, 1994), 1:17. In his introduction, the editor relates an anecdote that demonstrates al-Saffārīnī's bold character and concern with the people's welfare. He describes how al-Saffārīnī started and cleverly won an argument with the emir of Nablus in an attempt to convince him to ease additional taxes.

8 In his *Ghidhā' al-albāb*, al-Saffārīnī deplores the spiritual state of his society. He writes that "the Sunna has become innovation, the innovation has been made law, worship has become a custom, and customs have become worship. The [people's] scholar is enslaved to his desires, their ruler has transgressed in his heedlessness, their emir has neither compassion nor religiosity, their rich have no mercy for the poor; their poor are arrogant and their rich are tyrannic." Further along, he writes critically about "the Sufis of our times and the reprehensible acts they commit" (*mutaṣawwifāt zamāninā wa-mā yafālūnah min al-munkarāt*). See al-Saffārīnī, *Ghidhā' al-albāb*, 2:314-315.

9 The term "*kalām*" refers to "a rationalist school of thought that employed a dialectical technique in investigating the meaning of the foundational Islamic texts, with particular focus on the meaning of God's attributes" (see Cole Bunzel, "Manifest Enmity: The Origins, Development, and Persistence of Classical Wahhābism (1153-1351/1741-1932)" (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2018), 124). Cole Bunzel's dissertation has now been published in book form. See Cole Bunzel, *Wahhābism: The*

The relative scarcity of works of creed authored by Hanbalite scholars in this period is likely a result of this intellectual climate. Nevertheless, some Hanbalite scholars appear on the radar who did write extensively on theological matters; al-Saffārīnī is one of them. Al-Saffārīnī's two most comprehensive theological works are both commentaries on creedal poems. His *Lawāmi' al-anwār al-bahiyya* (The Splendidly Illustrious Lights)¹⁰ is a commentary on his own creedal treatise, *al-Durra al-muḍiyya fi 'aqd ahl al-firqa al-marḍiyya* (The Trenchant Pearl on the Belief of the Gratified Sect), which he composed in 1173/1759 and in which he summarized the most significant theological positions of the Athariyya,¹¹ the theological denomination to which he considered himself to belong. A few years later, in 1176/1762, he wrote *Lawā'ih al-anwār al-saniyya* (Lists of Glistening Lights), which is a commentary on a creedal poem by the famous traditionist Abū Bakr b. Abī Dāwūd (d. 316/929).

Both works clearly display the author's concern with the erosion of religious foundations in his society. The solution that he offers is a return to the fundamental sources of the religion, i.e., the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the reports of the pious ancestors (the Salaf).¹² In both *Lawāmi' al-anwār*

History of a Militant Islamic Movement (Princeton University Press, 2023). This theological framework became dominant in Sunni Islam from about the eleventh century onward. See Oliver Leaman, "The Developed Kalām Tradition (Part I)," in *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 81.

10 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār al-bahiyya wa-sawāṭi' al-asrār al-athariyya li-sharḥ al-durra al-muḍiyya fi 'aqd al-firqa al-marḍiyya*, 2 vols. (Mu'assasat al-Khāfiqīn, 1982).

11 The term "Athariyya", or Ahl al-Athar, is used synonymously with the term Ahl al-Hadith (literally "people of the Hadith," often translated as "traditionalists"). The term Ahl al-Hadith is used to refer to some of the early (eighth-century) Muslim scholars who emphasized the primacy of the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the precedent of the Salaf as legitimate carriers of religious knowledge, as opposed to non-scriptural sources of knowledge based in human reason. See Pavel Pavlovitch, "Ḥadīth," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson (Brill, 2018). On the appellation Ahl al-Hadith, see also: Arjan Post, "A Glimpse of Sufism from the Circle of Ibn Taymiyya," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 5 (2016): 160-161; Arjan Post, *The Journeys of a Taymiyyan Sufi: Sufism through the Eyes of 'Imād al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī* (d. 711/1311) (Brill, 2020), 6; Bunzel, "Manifest Enmity," 124-125.

12 The Salaf were the Muslims who constituted roughly the first three generations of Islam; they were the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) of the Prophet, the Successors (*ṭābi'ūn*), and the generation that followed them. They are considered to have been – in the words of the Prophet – "the best of my community (*khayr ummati*)" and are believed to have embodied the purest and most authentic form of Islam. See Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

and *Lawā'ih al-anwār*, al-Saffārīnī reads the respective poems line by line, using them as guidelines to touch on central issues in Islamic theology, such as the names and attributes of God, the nature of the Qur'an, and the question of divine predestination. For each of these issues he clarifies what he considers to have been the position of the Salaf, as opposed to the position of the rational theologians (*mutakallimūn*). The main slogan that resounds in both works is that when matters of belief (the *i'tiqādiyyāt*) are concerned, the correct approach is to refer to the Qur'an and Sunna, as the Salaf did, without falling into innovations by relying on reason.¹³

Al-Saffārīnī was a widely read and much respected scholar whose works were well received both during his lifetime and after.¹⁴ Some of his theological works, particularly his *Lawāmi' al-anwār* and the creedal poem upon which it is based, remain standard textbooks for Hanbalite students until today,¹⁵ and many commentaries have been written on them.¹⁶ Present-day Muslim scholars and students have much to say about al-Saffārīnī and his works. Interestingly, his works are read by both Ash'arite, *kalām*-inclined scholars as well as self-proclaimed Salafi or textualist scholars, who contend with one another about the true intent of some of al-Saffārīnī's statements and the essence of his creedal affiliation.¹⁷

13 This idea is mentioned throughout al-Saffārīnī's *Lawāmi' al-anwār*. See, for example, al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 8-13, 25-27, 104-107.

14 See, for example, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Sallūm, *Mukhtaṣar Lawāmi' al-anwār al-bahiyya wa-sawāṭi' al-asrār al-athariyya*, ed. Muḥammad Zahrī al-Najjār (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1983), introduction; Ibn Ḥumayd, *al-Suḥub al-wābila*, 2:841.

15 Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 264.

16 See, for example, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-'Uthaymīn, *Sharḥ al-'aqīda al-Saffārīniyya* (Dār al-Waṭan lil-Nashr, 1426 AH), and Sulaymān b. Ṣāliḥ al-Kharrāshī (ed.), *Ta'aqqubāt al-'ulamā' – 'Abd Allāh Abā Buṭayn, Ibn Sa'dī, Sulaymān b. Siḥmān – 'alā Lawāmi' al-anwār al-bahiyya lil-imām al-Saffārīnī* (Dār al-Ilāf al-Dawliyya, 2017), which is a collection of comments from three scholars: 'Abd Allāh Abā Buṭayn (d. 1281/1865), Ibn Sa'dī (d. 1376/1957), and Sulaymān b. Siḥmān (d. 1349/1931), on al-Saffārīnī's *Lawāmi'*.

17 This discussion can be found in Arabic-language studies. See, for example, Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd Āl Khuḍayr, *Maqālat al-tafwīḍ bayn al-salaf wa-l-mutakallimūn* (Takween, 2016) and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Sa'īdī, *I'lām al-khalaf 'an barā'at al-Ḥanābila min mukhālāfat al-Salaf* (Dār Salaf lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2019), and in the footnotes of al-Saffārīnī's works, written by Salafi editors. It is also discussed on Islamic online fora and social media networks.

Ibn Taymiyya's Thought in the Works of al-Saffārīnī

Ibn Taymiyya appears as an important authority in al-Saffārīnī's theological works. He is cited frequently and with much praise throughout *Lawāmi' al-anwār* and *Lawā'ih al-anwār*, and his opinion is consistently included in al-Saffārīnī's discussion of the major theological issues. In *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, al-Saffārīnī echoes Ibn Taymiyya's profound concern, in Jon Hoover's words, "that God was no longer worshipped and spoken of correctly."¹⁸

Using the text reuse detection and visualization tools developed by KITAB,¹⁹ I have found that al-Saffārīnī frequently reuses (often relatively large) portions of a number of Ibn Taymiyya's theological treatises in *Lawāmi' al-anwār* and *Lawā'ih al-anwār*, most notably *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql*, *al-Fatwā l-Ḥamawiyya al-kubrā*, *al-Risāla al-Tadmuriyya*, and *Sharḥ al-'Aqida al-Iṣfahāniyya*. Unsurprisingly, then, the *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, which comprises some of these treatises in addition to Ibn Taymiyya's fatwas, is the second most reused text in *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, after al-Saffārīnī's own *al-Buḥūr al-zākhira*.²⁰

Apart from the sheer number of times al-Saffārīnī cites him, Ibn Taymiyya is distinguished from the other authorities al-Saffārīnī relies upon by the fact that he is consistently referred to as "*Shaykh al-Islām*" or simply "*al-Shaykh*." Al-Saffārīnī also regularly cites Ibn Taymiyya's foremost student, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), whom he refers to as "*al-Muḥaqqiq*," and other members of his intellectual circle (*jamā'a*),²¹ such as 'Imād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī (d. 711/1311), whom he refers to as "the Junayd of his time,"²² Shams al-Dīn b. Mufliḥ (d. 763/1362), and Najm al-Dīn

18 Jon Hoover, "Ḥanbali Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke, (Oxford University Press, 2016), 634.

19 The researchers associated with the KITAB project, led by Sarah Bowen Savant, have developed an algorithm (called Passim) that detects instances of shared text between two texts. Text reuse analysis enables researchers to study relationships between corpora and solve various kinds of research questions, such as how extensively a certain text has traveled across space and time. See www.kitab-project.org.

20 al-Saffārīnī, *al-Buḥūr al-zākhira fī 'ulūm al-ākhira*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Muḥayyiq (Dār al-'Aṣima, 2009).

21 About Ibn Taymiyya's scholarly circle, see Caterina Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya wa-Jama'atuhu. Authority, Conflict and Consensus in Ibn Taymiyya's circle," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Muḥammad Shahab Ahmed (Oxford University Press, 2010), 23-52.

22 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:210. This is a reference to Abū al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad al-Junayd (d. 298/910), the famous mystic from Baghdad.

al-Ṭūfī (d. 716/1316). This indicates that al-Saffārīnī had direct or indirect access to Ibn Taymiyya's works and the works of at least some of his most prominent students. It is unclear how al-Saffārīnī became inspired to read Ibn Taymiyya's works. He does not mention Ibn Taymiyya or the titles of any of his works in his *Thabat*. It is likely that al-Saffārīnī encountered Ibn Taymiyya's works while studying in Damascus, and it is possible that he was inspired by other Hanbalite scholars to study these works, such as the Palestinian scholar Mar'ī b. Yūsuf al-Karmī (d. 1033/1624), who wrote a lengthy biography of Ibn Taymiyya in which he praises him and defends him from various accusations.²³ Al-Saffārīnī frequently cites al-Karmī's major work of theology, titled *Aqāwīl al-thiqāt*.²⁴

Research Objectives and Method

The development of Hanbalite theology in the centuries after Ibn Taymiyya and his immediate associates is poorly studied in western language scholarship. This period is usually described as one of stagnation and decline, and sometimes even in terms of the "hibernation" of the Hanbalite theological tradition.²⁵ Current-day scholarship still largely contends that Ibn Taymiyya's thought was not highly influential in the centuries after his death, even within his own school, and that he was mostly "forgotten," to be "rediscovered" by later, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reformers.²⁶ Recently, however, more attention is being drawn to the thought of the Hanbalite scholars in the centuries after Ibn Taymiyya who seem to have been avid readers of his works, such as al-Saffārīnī and Mar'ī al-Karmī, among others.

23 Mar'ī b. Yūsuf al-Karmī, *al-Kawākib al-durriyya fī manāqib al-mujtahid Ibn Taymiyya*, ed. Najm 'Abd al-Rahmān Khalaf (Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986).

24 al-Karmī, *Aqāwīl al-thiqāt fī ta'wīl al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt wa-l-āyāt al-muḥkamāt wa-l-mutashābihāt*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arnā'ūt (Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1986).

25 Hoover, "Hanbalī Theology," 643; Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, trans. Ethan Rundell (Yale University Press, 2014), 41.

26 Hoover, "Hanbalī Theology," 643; Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 41; Khaled El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 1566) to Khayr al-Dīn al-Alūsī (d. 1899): Changing Views of Ibn Taymiyya amongst Sunni Islamic Scholars," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Shahab Ahmed and Yossef Rapoport, (Oxford University Press, 2010), 299. Some aspects of the legacy of Ibn Taymiyya are discussed in recent studies by Caterina Bori (Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya (14th to 17th Century): Transregional Spaces of Reading and Reception," *The Muslim World* 108: 87-123) and Cole Bunzel (Bunzel, "Manifest Enmity," 145-150).

While studies on the life and works of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim abound in western academia,²⁷ al-Saffārīnī is mentioned in only a handful such studies and is usually glossed over as one of the many Hanbalite scholars who was to some extent influenced by Ibn Taymiyya's works but never acceded to a similar level of brilliance and originality. To my knowledge, there is no western language study that focusses on al-Saffārīnī's thought specifically. In his study on Muḥammad b. al-ʿUthaymīn (d. 1422/2001), Mohammad Gharaibeh mentions al-Saffārīnī, along with a number of other Hanbalite scholars, as a source of Ibn ʿUthaymīn's theology.²⁸ Cole Bunzel also mentions al-Saffārīnī in his doctoral thesis on what he terms "classical Wahhābism." He describes al-Saffārīnī as "an admirer of the exclusivist theology of Ibn Taymiyya" and "in many ways a natural ally of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's,"²⁹ although he later elucidates that al-Saffārīnī seems to have had much criticism for Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and his movement.³⁰ Khaled El-Rouayheb names al-Saffārīnī, along with Marʿī al-Karmī, Muḥammad b. Balbān (d. 1083/1672), and Ibrāhīm al-Kurānī (d. 1101/1690), as a scholar who "rehabilitated" the thought of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim. El-Rouayheb uses the term "neo-Ḥanbalī traditionalism" to describe the innovative stance of these scholars.³¹

The primary objective of the current article is to examine al-Saffārīnī's understanding of the divine attributes. The question of the attributes is explored as a case study because it is one of the central – if not the most profound – issues in Islamic theology and is reflective of a

27 Valuable recent studies devoted to Ibn Taymiyya's theology include Ahmed Shahab and Yossef Rapoport (eds.), *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theology of Perpetual Optimism* (Brill, 2017); Farid Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya und die Attribute Gottes* (De Gruyter, 2019); Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation: A Study of Dar' ta'arūḍ al-aql wa-l-naql* (Brill, 2019). The extensive contributions to the Ḥanbalī intellectual tradition of Ibn Taymiyya's foremost disciple, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), have likewise been analyzed in various studies, such as those by Ovamir Anjum ("Sufism Without Mysticism? Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's Objectives in *Madāriġ al-Sālikīn*," *Oriente Moderno*, XC 1 (2010): 153-180) and Caterina Bori and Livnat Holtzman (eds.) "A Scholar in the Shadow: Essays in the Legal and Theological Thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah." *Oriente Moderno Monograph Series* 90:1 (2010). Mention should also be made of the recent monograph by Post (*The Journeys of a Taymiyyan Sufi*), which focuses on ʿImād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī (d. 1311), the Sufi master and close companion of Ibn Taymiyya.

28 Mohammad Gharaibeh, *Zur Attributenlehre der Wahhābiya unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schriften Ibn ʿUṭaimīns (1929-2001)* (EB-Verlag, 2012), 301.

29 Bunzel, "Manifest Enmity," 64.

30 Bunzel, "Manifest Enmity," 64-65.

31 El Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 310.

scholar's broader theological epistemology. I will explore which role Ibn Taymiyya's ideas played in al-Saffārīnī's understanding of the attributes and his theological framework in general. In addition, I will consider how al-Saffārīnī asserted his theological beliefs in an intellectual climate that was dominated by Ash'arite *kalām* and how he interacted with this framework.

The analysis contained in this article is based on both al-Saffārīnī's *Lawāmi' al-anwār* and his *Lawā'ih al-anwār*, his two major works of theology. It should be noted that the two works are very similar and that the *Lawā'ih* contains a considerable amount of text reuse from the *Lawāmi'*, which is the most comprehensive work of the two. This explains why the majority of citations from al-Saffārīnī in this article will come from *Lawāmi' al-anwār*.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Firstly, I will contextualize my discussion of al-Saffārīnī's understanding of the divine attributes by discussing the Ash'arite, *kalām* approach to the attributes that was common in al-Saffārīnī's time, juxtaposing this to Ibn Taymiyya's unique approach. In the second section, I explore al-Saffārīnī's understanding of God's attributes and how this fits within his broader theological framework. This is followed by a concluding discussion.

The Question of the Divine Attributes: Ibn Taymiyya and the Ash'arites

Carl Sharif El-Tobgui notes that "the Qur'an affirms not merely that God exists but that He exists as a particular entity with certain intrinsic and irreducible qualities, or attributes."³² Revelation affirms that God speaks and otherwise acts according to His will: He called upon the Prophet Moses as he approached the fire,³³ He rises over the Throne,³⁴ He descends to the lower heavens in the last part of the night,³⁵ and so forth. These descriptions suggest that God acts "in the world" in a spatial and temporal sense. Furthermore, God describes Himself in revelation with

32 El Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, 6.

33 Qur'an 27:8.

34 Qur'an 27:7-8.

35 For example, Qur'an 20:5.

sensible attributes such as hand,³⁶ eye,³⁷ face,³⁸ and so on. Scholars over the course of Islamic history have been puzzled by the question of how to reconcile between these descriptions of God and the Qur'anic affirmation that "there is nothing like Him."³⁹

Some groups, particularly the philosophers, the Mu'tazilites, and the later Ash'arites, have objected to affirming the obvious (*ẓāhir*) sense of such descriptions on the grounds that doing so would amount to *tashbīh*, describing God with sensible and material characteristics that resemble those of humans or other creatures in a way that compromises His unique divinity.⁴⁰ They have argued that these descriptions are not intended to mean what their apparent sense suggests and must be interpreted nonliterally in order to safeguard the rationality of revelation.⁴¹ These groups of scholars have proposed different rational solutions in an attempt to reconcile between God's radical dissimilarity to anything created (*tanzīh*), on the one hand, and the imperative to preserve the integrity of revelation and the reality of God's attributes as described therein, on the other.⁴² They all give their own rationale as to why their particular method represents, according to them, the implicit belief of the Salaf.

The controversy surrounding the divine attributes mainly revolves around the question of whether the texts of revelation in which God is described in ways that suggest corporeal or spatial characteristics should be taken "literally" or not. However, the discussion is much broader than this and involves questions such as where God is located (if He can be said to be in any location or direction to begin with), if it is possible for God to act in the world in a temporal way, and to what extent (if at all) God's descriptions of Himself lie within human understanding.

Understanding the Verses and Hadiths about the Divine Attributes

The Ash'arite *kalām* approach to the divine attributes which was dominant in al-Saffārīnī's time departs from the idea that any meaning (*ma'nā*)

36 Qur'an, 48:10.

37 Qur'an, 20:39.

38 Qur'an, 55:27.

39 Qur'an, 24:11.

40 Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life*, 186, 188; El Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, 102-103, 137; El Rouayheb, "From Ibn Hajar," 275-276.

41 El Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, 185.

42 El Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, 102-103.

in the revealed texts suggesting that God's attributes in any way involve corporeal or spatial qualities cannot reasonably be taken at face value but must be reinterpreted to accord with God's majesty.⁴³ According to this approach, only the seven so-called "essential" attributes (*ṣifāt dhātiyya*; these are knowledge, power, life, hearing, sight, will, and speech) can be affirmed as intrinsic attributes of the divine essence.⁴⁴ The Ash'arites posit a God Who is strictly beyond space and time and Who does not act except pre-eternally.⁴⁵ Accordingly, God is totally unintelligible to humans and has no reality in the extramental world.⁴⁶ They firmly deny that He has attributes of action that temporally originate, that temporal processes (*ḥawādith*) may subsist in God, or that He may experience any internal changes (*taghayyurāt dhātiyya*). In this way, they assert that God's every will was shaped from eternity and that His ability to act has always been inherent in Him. They interpret metaphorically the descriptions of individual acts, such as rising over the Throne.⁴⁷

Most Hanbalite theologians took a traditionalist approach toward the attributes and rejected the Ash'arite premise that certain meanings contained in revelation should be rejected as incongruent with what is rationally known about God. Their theological doctrine generally consisted of a non-cognitive approach that affirms the plain sense of all of God's attributes equally without inquiring into their meaning or modality (*bi-lā kayf*).⁴⁸ The preferred method is to let these text "pass by" (*imrār*) without, on the one hand, inquiring into their modality (*takyīf*) or likening them to the attributes of creatures (*tashbīh*), or, on the other hand, stripping away their meanings (*ta'īl*) by means of metaphorical interpretation.⁴⁹

43 Jon Hoover, "Early Mamlūk Ash'arism against Ibn Taymiyya on the Nonliteral Reinterpretation (*ta'wīl*) of God's Attributes," in *Philosophical Theology in Islam: Later Ash'arism East and West*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh and Jan Thiele (Brill, 2020), 196-197.

44 El Rouayheb, "From Ibn Hajar," 275-276, Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 215; El Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, 105.

45 Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 331.

46 Jon Hoover, "God Spatially Above and Spatially Extended: The Rationality of Ibn Taymiyya's Refutation of Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Aṣ'arī Incorporealism," *Arabica* 69 (2022), 647-648.

47 Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 331.

48 Jon Hoover, "Hanbali Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016), 627-630.

49 Jon Hoover, "Hanbali Theology," 633-641.

Although Ibn Taymiyya's position regarding God's names and attributes is rooted in the traditionalist Hanbalite doctrine of non-cognitivism, he expanded it to arrive at a unique approach that sets him apart from the preceding Hanbalite tradition. Instead of merely passing over the texts (*imrār*) without comment, and believing in them "without how," Ibn Taymiyya argues that knowledge of the attributes' meaning is crucial.⁵⁰ The primary aim of Ibn Taymiyya's theological endeavor is thus to make sense of God's attributes, through linguistic inquiry, in a way that evokes praise for God.⁵¹ Ibn Taymiyya has no problem affirming that God's attributes of action" (*ṣifāt fi'līyya*),⁵² such as His rising over the Throne, subsist in God's essence, and that they are enacted temporally when God wills.⁵³ He draws a distinction between the two categories of "temporal origination" (something is "*muḥdath*") and "uncreatedness" (something is "*ghayr makhlūq*"); he affirms that when God acts, this action originates temporally by God's will, but this does not mean that any attribute of God is created.⁵⁴ Ibn Taymiyya thus paints the picture of a God Who has been acting dynamically for all eternity and Who has been actively involved in the creation from the moment He created it.⁵⁵ This is a God Who is accessible in the real world through the human senses.⁵⁶

One of the most notable examples of God seemingly acting "in the world", which has caused heated discussions among Muslim scholars, concerns God's attribute of speech (*kalām*). Both Hanbalite and Ash'arite theologians consider the attribute of speech to be an eternally pre-existing (*qadīm*) attribute of God, but they disagree about the specifics.⁵⁷ According to the later Ash'arite tradition, the speech of God is an unuttered speech, also referred to as "internal" or "spiritual" speech (*kalām nafsī*) that has always been inherent in God from eternity.⁵⁸ God's act of speaking does not take place dynamically within Him,⁵⁹ and His speech

50 Jon Hoover, "Hanbali Theology," 633-641.

51 Jon Hoover, "Hanbali Theology," 633-641.

52 Also called "volitional attributes" (*ṣifāt ikhtiyāriyya*), since they are enacted in accordance with God's will.

53 Hoover, "Hanbali Theology," 633-641; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 286-288.

54 Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 286-288.

55 Hoover, "Hanbali Theology," 633-641; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 331.

56 Hoover, "God Spatially Above," 647-648.

57 Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life*, 294.

58 Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 301, 331.

59 Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 300.

does not consist of sounds and letters (*ṣawt wa-ḥarf*) that are spatially and temporally arranged, as this would imply that God has speech organs, such as a tongue, throat, and a mouth, which are required to make those sounds.⁶⁰ According to this view, the Arabic sounds that are recited and the Arabic words that are written and memorized are merely created, temporal expressions of God's eternal, spiritual speech that is itself beyond space and time.⁶¹ The passages in revelation that portray God as speaking in the sense of uttering speech, such as when He addresses the prophet Moses, are interpreted metaphorically.⁶²

The idea of internal speech is not found in the Hanbalite tradition. The Hanbalites state that, although God's speech is *qadīm*, it is uttered (*lafẓī*) and consists of Arabic sounds and letters that are spatially arranged, precisely as in the Qur'an that is recited, memorized, and written down.⁶³ This belief is based on, firstly, the fact that God explicitly says in the Qur'an that He speaks and that others heard Him, and, secondly, the idea that the unuttered meaning that exists within the mind before it is uttered cannot be considered speech.⁶⁴

Ibn Taymiyya takes a unique stance within the Hanbalite tradition by stating that God's attribute of speech is both an essential and a volitional attribute.⁶⁵ According to him, God has eternally had the attribute of speech, yet He speaks when He wills temporally and sequentially.⁶⁶ Thus, God's speech is eternal in kind (*qadīm al-naw'*) but the individual instances of speech originate temporally (i.e., they are *muḥdath*), without, however, being created (i.e., they are uncreated, *ghayr makhlūq*, subsisting in God's essence, not outside of God).⁶⁷ This distinction between temporal origination and uncreatedness is not one all Hanbalite scholars make, yet it is an essential part of Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of God's speech. Ibn Taymiyya's idea of God's unlimited, dynamic speech, is, according to

60 Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life*, 296-297; El Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 272, 283-284; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 301-302.

61 Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life*, 296-297; El Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 272, 283-284; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 301-302.

62 Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life*, 296; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 301-302.

63 El Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 272, 284.

64 Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life*, 296-297.

65 Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 331.

66 Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 302-303.

67 Hoover, "Hanbali Theology," 639; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 302-303, 331.

him, entirely congruent with God's perfection; he considers the One Who speaks dynamically when He wills for all eternity to be more perfect than one whose speech is necessarily inherent in him.⁶⁸

The Dual Approach of Ta'wīl and Tafwīd

From at least the fifth/eleventh century onwards, the mainstream Ash'arite approach toward those texts in revelation that suggest spatial or corporeal characteristics for God has been to reject the idea that their apparent (*ẓāhir*) sense is their intended meaning, and to apply one of two methods: either to interpret them allegorically (*ta'wīl*) or to refrain from interpreting them and instead relegate their meaning to God (*tafwīd*).⁶⁹ This approach was deemed necessary to safeguard the rationality of scripture and to uphold the imperative of God's transcendence (*tanzīh*) and unique divinity.⁷⁰ The dual position of *ta'wīl* and *tafwīd* was propounded in standard handbooks of Ash'arite and Māturīdī theology such as those by Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 793/1390), al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sānūsī (d. 895/1490), and Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī (d. 1040/1631).⁷¹

The method of *tafwīd* entails denying that the meaning of the text is that which its obvious sense suggests, freeing God from any spatial or corporeal qualities that it implies, and refraining from interpreting it further, instead entrusting knowledge of the "real" meaning to God.⁷² Scholars who defend this approach often claim that this was the implicit position of the Salaf and the early scholars (*al-mutaqaddimūn*). The method of *ta'wīl* departs from the same premise, namely, that the meaning of the text is different from its apparent sense, but instead of relegating the meaning to God, one assigns, on the basis of rational, theological, and linguistic considerations, the most plausible alternative meaning to the text.⁷³ For example, God's rising over the Throne (*istiwā*) is interpreted as

68 Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 304.

69 Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life*, 186, 188, 200; El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Ḥajar," 275-276; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 275-277.

70 Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life*, 186, 188; El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Ḥajar," 275-276; El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 137.

71 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 275-277.

72 El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Ḥajar," 275-276; El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 135; Hoover, "Early Mamlūk Ash'arism," 196-197.

73 El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Ḥajar," 275-276; El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 135.

a reference to His dominion (*istilāʾ*), His hand (*yad*) is interpreted as His power (*qudra*), His face (*wajh*) is interpreted as His essence (*nafs*) or existence, and so on.⁷⁴ This is considered to have been the position of some later scholars (*al-mutaʾakhhirūn*).

It should be noted that both *tafwīd* and *taʾwīl* have the rejection of the plain (*ẓāhir*) sense of the text at their core; both approaches contain the belief that the plain sense of the text is not the meaning intended (*murād*) by God. In this way, *tafwīd* can be considered a “general” or “non-specific” type of *taʾwīl* (*taʾwīl ijmālī*), since no alternative interpretation is posited. This is contrasted to “specific” *taʾwīl* (*taʾwīl tafṣilī/muʾayyan*), in which one alternative interpretation is put forth as the most plausible intended meaning.⁷⁵

To complicate matters, the term *tafwīd* is not exclusively used to refer to the Ashʿarite *tafwīd* described in the previous paragraphs. The *tafwīd* described thus far can be called “*tafwīd al-maʾnā*” (*tafwīd* of the meaning): one refrains from interpreting the text further, while freeing God from any corporeal or spatial characteristics that are implied, and one relegates knowledge of the further meaning of the text to God. However, the term *tafwīd* is also used to refer to a more subtle type of relegating, in which one affirms that the obvious sense of the texts is the one intended and its lexical meaning is known, but one denies having knowledge of the *modality* (the “how”) of the attribute and relegates knowledge of it to God (*tafwīd al-kayfiyya*).⁷⁶ It is not always clear from an isolated sentence or paragraph which of the two kinds of *tafwīd* an author is referring to; context is key in determining this.

Some Hanbalite scholars, notably Abū Yaʿlā b. al-Farrāʾ (d. 458/1066), Abū l-Wafāʾ b. ʿAqīl (d. 513/1119), ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), Muwaffaq al-Dīn b. Qudāma (d. 620/1233), and Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī are known to have adopted parts of the rational theology of the Ashʿarite *mutakallimūn*, with some endorsing the position of *tafwīd al-maʾnā*.⁷⁷ Others, such as Ibn Taymiyya and his followers, rejected the entire enterprise of *kalām*, including such methods as *tafwīd*. Ibn Taymiyya contends

74 El-Rouayheb, “From Ibn Hajar,” 276.

75 El-Rouayheb, “From Ibn Hajar,” 276-277.

76 Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (Columbia University Press), 248.

77 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 277; El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 97; Hoover, “Hanbali Theology,” 643.

that the Salaf unanimously affirmed all of the attributes of God found in the Qur'an and Sunna in their plain sense without denying them in any way (neither through *ta'wīl* nor through *tafwīd*).⁷⁸ He goes even further, claiming that the Salaf contemplated and deeply understood the meaning of these texts.⁷⁹ In El-Tobgui's words, Ibn Taymiyya believed that the Salaf "resolutely affirmed the obvious sense of the texts, while nonetheless conceding that the modality, or the "how" (*kayf/kayfiyya*), of certain unseen realities – most prominently the divine attributes – lay beyond the full ken of human intelligibility."⁸⁰ Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the Salaf engaged in *tafwīd* only with regard to the modality (*kayfiyya*) of certain matters asserted in revelation, but never with regard to their lexical meaning (*ma'nā*).⁸¹ The approach which Ibn Taymiyya advocates for consists of affirming the apparent (*ẓāhir*) sense of the attributes without inquiring into their modality (*kayfiyya*). According to him, the meaning of the attributes is known to us, but their modality is not; we know the meaning of words such as *yad* or *wajh*, but we do not know what it is like for God to have hands or a face.⁸²

According to Ibn Taymiyya's reasoning, there is no issue in affirming that God and humans (or other creatures) share certain notional categories (such as hand or face) because our knowledge of the essential nature of God safeguards His being from any deficiency that might come to mind on account of these shared categories.⁸³ Ibn Taymiyya thus asserts that one can affirm a common meaning (*ma'nā*) of *shāhid* ("seen," temporal, outer worldly) and *ghā'ib* ("hidden," transcendental) entities while nevertheless admitting a substantive difference in their ontological reality (*ḥaqīqa*) or the modality (*kayfiyya*) in which this meaning applies to each entity.⁸⁴ Thus, the ontological reality of God's attributes is commensurate with His essential reality, which is perfect, necessary, and unlimited, and,

78 Bunzel, "Manifest Enmity," 131; El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Ḥajar," 275-283; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 275-277; El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 103, 180; Hoover, "God Spatially Above," 667; Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 248.

79 El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 209.

80 El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 185, 209.

81 El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 185; Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 248.

82 Bunzel, "Manifest Enmity," 131; El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Ḥajar," 275-283; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 275-277; Hoover, "God Spatially Above," 634-636; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 331-332.

83 El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 290.

84 El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 281.

likewise, the ontological reality of human attributes is commensurate with human nature, which is deficient, contingent, and temporal.⁸⁵

Al-Saffārīnī on the Question of the Divine Attributes

Al-Saffārīnī's Religious Epistemology

Al-Saffārīnī asserts that *tawḥīd* – which he defines as devoting worship to God alone to the exclusion of others, while believing in the unity of His essence, His attributes, and His acts⁸⁶ – is the most paramount act of worship, and that it is a prerequisite for the soundness and acceptance of all other acts of worship or obedience to God. He writes: “the actions of one who does not know his Lord and does not affirm His unity are all rejected (*mardūd*).”⁸⁷ That is to say, the realm of belief (*al-i'tiqādiyyāt*) is the basis upon which the realm of actions (*al-'amaliyyāt*) rests and relies. If pious actions have no reward except when they are supported by the correct beliefs, having the correct understanding of God's essential nature and attributes becomes an incredibly consequential matter.

On the first pages of *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, al-Saffārīnī explains how one should approach attaining this understanding. He states that knowledge of matters of belief, which entails the knowledge of God and His attributes, cannot be obtained through rational inquiry (*kalām*), but should be acquired through the Qur'an and Sunna alone.⁸⁸ Al-Saffārīnī's criticism of *kalām* and his rejection of reliance on the intellect for knowledge about the *i'tiqādiyyāt* spring from his belief that knowledge of these matters lies beyond the limitations intentionally set by God for the human mind. He writes:

God – exalted is He – created the intellect, bestowed upon it the capacity to think, and imposed upon it limits at which [its ability] to think ends – [its ability] to receive divine inspiration, [however,] does not end. If the intellect uses its ideas, [keeping] within its limits, and does justice to reasoning (*naẓar*), it will [reach] sound [conclusions], God willing. However, if the intellect is applied to [matters that] are beyond the limit that God has imposed upon it, [it is as if

85 El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 286-287.

86 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:57.

87 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:57.

88 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:57.

one is] riding a blind animal, trampling around haphazardly, without its feet firmly on the ground; you cannot rely on it with a calm heart. The knowledge of God is beyond our [minds'] limits, and it is among the things that the intellect is incapable of grasping by way of thinking and devising propositions. It can only be understood with the guidance of prophecy and the guardianship of succession (*wilāyat al-mutāba'a*); [this knowledge] is the divine favor bestowed exclusively upon the prophets and those who succeed them in righteousness, and whose hearts are purified from the dirt of innovation and the satanic inspirations of philosophy.⁸⁹

According to al-Saffārīnī, the source of disagreements about theological matters between different groups is the refusal to rely on the Sunna and instead giving free reign to the intellect with its inclination toward philosophical constructions and logical propositions.⁹⁰ The result of this is the science of *kalām*, which, he writes, is the ultimate source of innovation in the religion, and was condemned and warned against by the Salaf.⁹¹ He invokes the authority of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), and other great Sunni scholars to support his argument that *kalām* is an innovation to be avoided. Interestingly, he also claims that some well-known Ash'arite scholars rejected *kalām* at some point in their life, including Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935) himself, and he relates the well-known story of Ḍiyā' al-Dīn b. Yūsuf al-Juwaynī's (d. 478/1085), the famous Ash'arite *mutakallim*, repentance from *kalām* on his death bed.⁹²

Although al-Saffārīnī strongly condemns *kalām*, he was clearly well-versed in its methods and concepts. Al-Saffārīnī regularly uses rational argumentation, involving *kalām* concepts and arguments, to support his case for what he considers to have been the position of the Salaf regarding the theological issues he discusses. Although al-Saffārīnī clearly states on the first pages of *Lawāmi' al-anwār* that "the reason for mentioning *kalām* [arguments] is merely to counter the destructive doubts [sown by our]

89 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:105.

90 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:135.

91 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:135.

92 It is notable that al-Saffārīnī is favorably inclined toward the early Ash'arite *mutakallimūn*, such as al-Ash'arī himself, al-Juwaynī, Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), and Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), all of whom he often claims to have held beliefs similar to those of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.

opponents and the misguided groups [in defence of] the true path,”⁹³ later (Salafī) commentators on his works have reprimanded him for including such arguments without, in their opinion, sufficiently stressing the faulty premises on which they are built.⁹⁴

Al-Saffārīnī's Understanding of the Attributes

Al-Saffārīnī writes that the names of God consist of names (*asmā*) and characteristics (*nuʿūt*) that point to the attributes of His perfection (*ṣifāt kamālih*). In other words, all of God's names are indicants (*adilla*; *aʿlām*) of His attributes (*ṣifāt*). The name *al-Raḥmān*, for example, indicates His attribute of mercy (*raḥma*), and His name *Allāh* indicates His attribute of divinity (*ulūhiyya*).⁹⁵ The names of God thus serve the practical function of informing humans about God's perfect being. Al-Saffārīnī asserts that God's essential nature (*ḥaqīqa*) is totally unlike that of all creatures, and that His attributes are totally unlike those of creatures.⁹⁶ He states that the foundational principle regarding God's attributes is *tawqīf*: to restrict oneself to the Qur'an and authentic hadiths to gain knowledge of God's attributes. This principle corresponds to the idea of knowing God in the way He wants us to know Him by describing Him using those expressions that He revealed in the Qur'an and that the Prophet used to describe Him.⁹⁷

In line with the Hanbalite tradition, al-Saffārīnī affirms all of the descriptions of God in revelation as distinct attributes of His essence. For example, he affirms that God's two hands are additional attributes that cannot be subsumed under His grace or power,⁹⁸ and that His face, likewise, is a distinct attribute that cannot be reduced to His self or essence.⁹⁹ Al-Saffārīnī states that God's essence as well as all of His attributes are eternally pre-existent (*qadīm*) according to the Salaf, and that it is impossible for any of God's attributes to temporally originate. In other words,

93 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:5.

94 Many examples of such criticisms from al-Saffārīnī's commentators can be found in al-Kharrāshī, *Ta'aqqubāt*.

95 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:32, 119 (where he cites Ibn al-Qayyim's *Badā'i' al-fawā'id* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya), 1:124).

96 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:116.

97 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:23-25, 93-101, 107-108, 128-130, passim.

98 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:231-232.

99 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:226-227.

it is impossible for any aspect of God to be temporal (*ḥādīth, muḥdath*).¹⁰⁰ Al-Saffārīnī's opinion in this regard differs from that of Ibn Taymiyya. Although he affirms, like Ibn Taymiyya, that the voluntary attributes are distinct attributes of God, he follows the *kalām* argument that all of God's attributes are necessarily *qadīm* because of the impossibility of temporal processes taking place in God (*ḥudūth*). This contrasts with Ibn Taymiyya's view that God acts temporally although all of His attributes are *qadīm*. When examined closely, it appears that al-Saffārīnī, when he stresses that all of God's attributes are *qadīm*, is mostly concerned with disproving the belief that any aspect of God can be created.

Regarding God's speech,¹⁰¹ for example, al-Saffārīnī states, in contrast to Ibn Taymiyya's position that God speaks the Qur'an at the time of revelation,¹⁰² that God's speech is eternally pre-existent (*qadīm*).¹⁰³ He cites Abū l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik al-Karkhī's (d. 390/1000) *al-Fuṣūl fī l-uṣūl*, in which the author cited Abū Ḥāmid al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027), who is reported to have said:

My method and the method of al-Shāfi'ī and the scholars of the cities (*amṣār*) is that the Qur'an is the uncreated speech of God and that the one who claims that it is created is a disbeliever. The Qur'an was brought down to us by Jibrīl – peace be upon him – who heard it from God – exalted is He, and the Prophet – peace be upon him – heard it from Jibrīl, and the Companions – may God be pleased with them – heard it from the Prophet – peace be upon him. It is that which we utter with our tongues and that which is between the covers [of the *muṣḥaf*]. It is that which is in our chests and that which is heard, written down, memorized, and recited. Every letter of it, such as the “b” or the “t,” is the uncreated speech of God. Whoever says it is created is a disbeliever and is cursed by God and the angels and the whole of mankind.¹⁰⁴

Al-Saffārīnī, with this citation, stresses that the Qur'an is uncreated, and the word *qadīm* here seems to be used to convey this meaning. Al-Saffārīnī further explains that the Qur'an clearly shows that the speech of God is uttered speech (*kalām lafẓī*) that can be heard by others, in contrast to

100 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:97, 116, 139, 249, 257-258.

101 See, on God's speech, al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:157, 161-162.

102 Gharaibeh, *Zur Attributenlehre*, 230; Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 298-312.

103 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:157, 1:161-162.

104 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:161-162.

the Ash'arite claim that God's speech is inner speech (*kalām nafsī*) that exists only within the Self (*nafs*) and cannot be known through the senses.¹⁰⁵ According to al-Saffārīnī, the Salaf unanimously affirmed that God speaks with letters and sounds.¹⁰⁶ By affirming that God's speech consists of sounds which are audible to humans, al-Saffārīnī implicitly acknowledges that there is a temporal, sensorial dimension to God's attribute of speech, while simultaneously stating that God's speech is *qadīm*. This appears to be similar to Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of God's speech, namely that the attribute itself is *qadīm*, yet its individual manifestations originate temporally.

Al-Saffārīnī affirms that the Salaf did not deny any of God's attributes and that they affirmed them in their obvious sense (*ithbāt al-ẓāhir*).¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, he states that one should believe that the apparent of the verses and hadiths about the attributes does not contain *tashbīh* or *tajsīm* (corporeality).¹⁰⁸ He stresses that the Salaf did not liken the attributes of God to the attributes of creatures, nor did they liken God's essential nature to that of creatures.¹⁰⁹ Thus, he states that the attributes of God should not be understood in an anthropomorphic way: God's hand is as unlike a human hand as God's knowledge is unlike the knowledge humans have, and there is no reason to treat these attributes differently.¹¹⁰ On this topic, al-Saffārīnī cites Ibn al-Qayyim, who writes that any given attribute can be considered in three ways: (1) as it is, *sui generis* ("*min haythu hiya hiya*"), (2) in view of its subsisting in God and being one of His attributes, and (3) in view of its subsisting in other than God and being an attribute of other than God, i.e., of a created being.¹¹¹ Al-Saffārīnī adds that, based on the Qur'anic verse "There is nothing like Him, for He [alone] is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing,"¹¹² these three ways of considering the attribute cannot be identical. This is the reason why, al-Saffārīnī argues, there is no

105 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:162. See also al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:140, where al-Saffārīnī states that God spoke to the prophet Moses and that Moses heard God speaking.

106 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:138.

107 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:116, 194.

108 Al-Saffārīnī does not define *tajsīm*, but it appears from his discussions that what he means by it is to consider God to be a physical body (*jism*) that is spatial and has limitations (*ḥadd*). See, for example, al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:198-199.

109 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:116.

110 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:231-232.

111 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawā'ih al-anwār*, 1:161, citing Ibn al-Qayyim's *Badā'i' al-fawā'id*, 1:33.

112 Qur'an, 26:11.

objection to taking the texts in their plain sense (*‘alā ḡāhiriḡā*), and this is, in fact, the only correct approach. God’s absolute transcendence (*tanzīḡ*) is known both scripturally and rationally, and when one does not confuse the meaning of an attribute in relation to God with its meaning in relation to created beings, there is no objection to affirming any of the attributes without impinging on God’s transcendence or suggesting bodily existence.¹¹³ According to al-Saffārīnī, the mistake of the *mutakallimūn* is that they refuse to take the essential ontological difference between God and humans as a sufficient safeguard against *tashbīḡ*.¹¹⁴

Al-Saffārīnī’s Rejection of Ta’wīl and Tafwīḡ

Al-Saffārīnī explicitly rejects the Ash‘arite method of figurative interpretation (*ta’wīl*), calling it an innovation (*bid‘a*) that was not practiced by the Salaf. In *Lawāmi‘ al-anwār*, he gives three main reasons why he considers it to be an incorrect approach. Firstly, the method involves human reasoning and therefore generates only probability (*ḡann*) and no certainty (*yaqīn*) about the knowledge obtained.¹¹⁵ As mentioned above, al-Saffārīnī rejects relying on reason in matters of belief and basing one’s belief on probable knowledge. The second problem with *ta’wīl* is that the essential nature of the attribute that one is interpreting is necessarily different from the essential nature of the metaphor (*majāz*) that is chosen to replace it with, and thus *ta’wīl* inevitably entails a denial or at least a weakening of the intended meaning of the attribute, which is impermissible.¹¹⁶ Thirdly, the method of *ta’wīl* implies, according to al-Saffārīnī, that God was inconsistent in His revelation, sometimes using expressions that should be taken literally and at other times ones that should be interpreted figuratively, leaving it up to human judgement to make the distinction. In contrast, al-Saffārīnī argues, God described Himself in revelation using precisely those expressions that He wants us to know Him by, and with this knowledge, we can confidently affirm all of them without differentiation and without needing to rationalize their meanings.¹¹⁷

113 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawā‘īḡ al-anwār*, 1:128 (citing from Ibn Taymiyya’s *Sharḡ al-‘Aqīda al-Isfahāniyya*, ed. Muḡammad b. Riyāḡ al-Aḡmad (al-Maktaba al-‘Asriyya), 42); 1:245-246, *passim*.

114 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawā‘īḡ al-anwār*, 1:161, citing Ibn al-Qayyim’s *Badā‘ī‘ al-fawā‘īd*, 1:33.

115 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi‘ al-anwār*, 1:225-226; al-Saffārīnī, *Lawā‘īḡ al-anwār*, 1:124-127.

116 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawā‘īḡ al-anwār*, 1:161.

117 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi‘ al-anwār*, 1:211, 223.

Al-Saffārīnī's position vis-à-vis the method of *tafwīd* has generated and continues to generate controversy and lively debates between Salafī and Ash'arite scholars and students.¹¹⁸ This is because his statements regarding the meanings of God's attributes and the extent to which humans are capable of comprehending them are often sufficiently ambiguous to allow different interpretations. According to Gharaibeh's reading of *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, al-Saffārīnī encourages *tafwīd* across the board.¹¹⁹ He asserts that, according to al-Saffārīnī, the position of the Salaf with regard to the attributes is "acceptance of the wording [of the text] without comment," based on their belief that the meaning of these texts cannot be understood by humans but is known by God alone.¹²⁰ I argue that, although some passages of *Lawāmi' al-anwār* indeed imply such an understanding, al-Saffārīnī's position regarding *tafwīd* is more nuanced than this.

On several occasions in *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, al-Saffārīnī mentions the idea of relegating knowledge (of a certain attribute) to God, implying that its meaning is unknown. An example of this is when he writes: "The method of the Salaf is not to dive into matters such as these, to be silent about them, to delegate their knowledge (*tafwīd* 'ilmuhu) to God, exalted is He."¹²¹ Al-Saffārīnī also states on several occasions in *Lawāmi' al-anwār* that the verses and hadiths about the attributes belong to the *mutashābihāt* (indeterminate verses)¹²² and that one should "pass over" (*imrār*, *murūr*) these texts as they are found in revelation.¹²³ Passages such as these, however, are not clear-cut. Al-Saffārīnī writes that one should relegate "knowledge" (*ilm*) of the attributes to God, but the question remains whether this knowledge refers to the notional meaning (*ma'nā*) of the attribute or to its deeper meaning, its "how" (*kayfiyya*). Furthermore, he nowhere explains that by saying that some texts are indeterminate, he means that their meaning is entirely unknown, nor does he clarify that "passing over" the text means believing merely in an outer wording (*lafz*)

118 See fn 17, p. 163.

119 Gharaibeh, *Zur Attributenlehre*, 302.

120 Gharaibeh, *Zur Attributenlehre*, 232.

121 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:97.

122 See, for example, al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:95, 97-98.

123 See, for example, al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:95, 261.

devoid of comprehensible content.¹²⁴ All of this is implied but cannot be ascertained on the basis of these citations alone.

Furthermore, al-Saffārīnī sometimes cites Ash'arite scholars who, in general, recommend the dual approach of *ta'wīl* and *tafwīḍ*, without commenting on these citations.¹²⁵ For example, al-Saffārīnī cites Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), who writes, regarding God's speech, that "since the mention of the sound (*ṣawt*) in these sound hadiths has been established, it is obligatory to believe in it, and then either to relegate it to God (*tafwīḍ*) or to interpret it metaphorically (*ta'wīl*)."¹²⁶ Al-Saffārīnī does not comment on this citation and continues to cite another portion of Ibn Ḥajar's work. The fact that al-Saffārīnī seems unbothered by Ibn Ḥajar's recommendation of *ta'wīl* and *tafwīḍ* does not necessarily mean he endorses these methods. On the contrary, as I have explained above, al-Saffārīnī unequivocally rejects at least the method of *ta'wīl*. When read in context, it becomes clear that al-Saffārīnī includes this statement in his discussion for the sake of supporting the argument that God's speech consists of audible sounds (*ṣawt*); the issue of the permissibility of *tafwīḍ* and *ta'wīl* was simply beside the point here, and hence, he does not bother commenting on it. However, passages such as these, when read in isolation, understandably cause confusion about al-Saffārīnī's stance vis-à-vis *tafwīḍ*. I argue that passages such as the ones cited above are not sufficient to claim with certainty that al-Saffārīnī endorsed *tafwīḍ al-ma'nā*. On the contrary, I argue that al-Saffārīnī's *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, when considered as a whole, contains many indications to suggest that its author, like Ibn Taymiyya, rejected *tafwīḍ* of the meaning and only considered the modality of the attributes to be unknown.

In general terms, it can be noted that al-Saffārīnī explicitly advocates affirming (*ithbāt*) and believing in the plain sense (*ẓāhir*) of the text.¹²⁷ Since the method of *tafwīḍ* entails the belief that the plain sense of the text is not the meaning intended by God, al-Saffārīnī's emphasis on belief in the apparent sense of the text is incongruent with the position of *tafwīḍ al-ma'nā*. Some specific examples are necessary to substantiate this

124 In contrast, "letting the text pass by" can also be understood in the Taymiyyan fashion as an encouragement to keep the attributes intact without stripping away their meanings (by way of *tafwīḍ* or *ta'wīl*). See Hoover, "Early Mamlūk Ash'arism," 200-201.

125 See, for example, al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:242-243, where he cites al-Bayhaqī.

126 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:140-141.

127 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:6-8, 23-25, 93-101, 102, 107, 128-130.

argument. I will discuss seven examples from *Lawāmi' al-anwār* in the remainder of this section.

1 Firstly, al-Saffārīnī cites a portion of Ibn Taymiyya's *Sharḥ al-'Aqida al-Isfahāniyya* in which Ibn Taymiyya criticizes the method of *tafwīd*, claiming that it undermines the authority of revelation and makes revelation subservient to human reason.¹²⁸ He writes:

Shaykh al-Islām [Ibn Taymiyya] – may God make his grave filled with goodness – said: “By way of clarification, the obligation of every Muslim to attest to the truth (*taṣdīq*) of that which God has revealed and that which the Prophet has reported about His attributes – exalted is He – is not dependent on whether there exists a rational proof for each individual attribute. It is known by necessity in the religion that we are obliged to attest to the truth of that which the Prophet has reported concerning the attributes of God – exalted is He – even if we cannot affirm it with our intellect. The one who does not affirm [the reports of] the Prophet except after having verified them rationally, resembles those about whom God says: “[...] They say: ‘We will not believe until we have received what God’s messengers have received.’” God knows best where to place His message.”¹²⁹ The one who walks this path is not truly a believer in the Prophet. [...] [Such a person] will not believe in something that the Prophet reported if he cannot rationally verify it, but rather interprets it metaphorically (*yata’awwaluh*) or relegates it to God (*yufawwiḍuh*), yet he will believe in something that the Prophet did not report but that he can verify with his mind. For the one who follows this path, there is no distinction between the presence or absence of the Prophet, nor between the Prophet reporting something or not reporting it. For him, what is mentioned in the Qur’an and the Hadith and [what is known by] consensus (*ijmā’*) is void of authority.”¹³⁰

In this citation, Ibn Taymiyya remarks that the one who applies *ta’wīl* or *tafwīd* to the texts about God’s attributes has not truly believed in them. According to Ibn Taymiyya, believing in the text means affirming it in its apparent sense and believing in the attribute according to its obvious

128 Ibn Taymiyya, *Sharḥ al-'Aqida al-Isfahāniyya*, 44.

129 Qur’an, 6:124.

130 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:224.

sense, with the knowledge that this is in accordance with God's essential nature.

2 Secondly, al-Saffārīnī cites a portion of Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyya al-kubrā* regarding those who, in Ibn Taymiyya's view, falsify the revelation. Ibn Taymiyya divides them into three groups. Firstly, he names the philosophers, who claim that the parts of revelation regarding matters of belief are untrue and that they contain merely a deception that is meant to benefit the masses. Secondly, he names the *mutakallimūn*, who claim that certain parts of the revelation are not meant to be taken at face value, and that the Prophet intended for humans to use their intellect to draw conclusions from them. Thirdly, he mentions those who claim that neither the Prophet, nor Jibrīl, knew the meaning of the verses that were revealed, but that the text should be taken at face value with the belief that it has a meaning that only God knows.¹³¹ Al-Saffārīnī then continues to cite Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of this third approach, which is essentially the approach of *tafwīd*, explaining that

the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) that only God knows¹³² refers to the essential nature (*ḥaqīqa*) that belongs to the speech. Thus, the interpretation of the attributes refers to the essential nature which God alone has knowledge of. This is the hidden "how" (*al-kayf al-majhūl*) about which the Salaf, such as Mālik [b. Anas] and others, have said: "[God's] rising over the Throne is known, but the "how" is unknown."¹³³ And so, the modality (*kayfiyya*) of God's rising over the Throne, for example, is the interpretation that is only known to God – exalted is He.¹³⁴

Al-Saffārīnī further explains this citation, stating that the correct approach – that of the Salaf – is to affirm all the attributes of God without any form of negation, in contrast to the approach of the *mutakallimūn*, which is to

131 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:116-117, where he cites Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyya al-kubrā*, 277-287.

132 This is a reference to Qur'an, 3:7.

133 "*Al-istiwā' ma'lūm wa-l-kayf majhūl*." See also al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:199, where he cites different narrations of this maxim.

134 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:117, citing Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyya al-kubrā*, 277-287.

affirm only some attributes and dismiss the rest of them as temporally created (*ḥādith*).¹³⁵

3 A third example concerns God's attribute of rising over the Throne (*isti-wā'*). Al-Saffārīnī cites a series of reports from the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) and the Successors (*tābi'ūn*), including Umm Salama (d. 62/682), Rabī' b. Abī 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d. ca. 136/753),¹³⁶ Mālik b. Anas, 'Āmir al-Sha'bī (d. 723/103) (hijri/gregorian), and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, in which all of them affirm (in slightly different wordings) that God's rising over the Throne is known, but its modality is unknown (*al-istiwā' ma'lūm wa-l-kayf majhūl*).¹³⁷ Al-Sha'bī's statement requires further comment. He states: "This [verse, regarding God's rising over the Throne,] is from the indeterminate verses of the Qur'an. We believe in it and do not attempt to expose its meaning (*nu'minu bihi wa-lā nata'arraḍu li-ma'nāhu*)." When read in isolation, this statement, which suggests that al-Sha'bī believed the meaning of *istiwā'* was unknown (i.e., *tafwīḍ al-ma'nā*), could be taken as indication that al-Saffārīnī endorsed *tafwīḍ* of the meaning. However, I argue that the fact that al-Saffārīnī included this statement in a series of reports that, one by one, clearly affirm the meaning of *istiwā'*, is proof that the word "meaning," here, is not a reference to the lexical meaning, but rather to the deeper meaning, the *kayfiyya*. This adds to my argument that statements such as "this verse belongs to the *mutashābihāt*" or "we believe in it without investigating its meaning" should not be read in isolation but should be considered within their larger context, and that such statements do not always imply *tafwīḍ* across the board. In some instances, such as in this statement by al-Sha'bī, the speaker uses the word "meaning" (*ma'nā*), but the larger context and other statements suggest that what is meant is the modality (*kayfiyya*). If this was not the case in this example, it would make no sense for al-Saffārīnī to include al-Sha'bī's report in a series of reports that all stress that the *kayfiyya* (and not the lexical meaning) of God's rising over the Throne is unknown. Al-Saffārīnī goes on to explain, following this series of reports, that "[our] ignorance of the hidden modality means that there is no way for us to attain knowledge of the modality because it

135 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:117.

136 He was one of Mālik b. Anas' teachers.

137 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:199-200.

is related to the quiddity (*māhiyya*) [of God].”¹³⁸ This is the essence of the message al-Saffārīnī is trying to convey.

4 Similarly, al-Saffārīnī cites al-Bayhaqī, who writes, regarding God’s descent (*nuzūl*):

The safest [option] is belief without [wondering] “how” and to be silent about what is intended [...]. The proof for this is the agreement [among the Salaf] that specific reinterpretation (*ta’wīl mu’ayyan*) is not obligatory and that, in this case, *tafwīd* is safer.¹³⁹

This citation, once again, suggests that al-Saffārīnī endorses *tafwīd* of the meaning. However, in what follows, al-Saffārīnī cites Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī, who states that the position of the Salaf with regard to the attributes that suggest movement, such as descending and coming, is to affirm the contested meaning (*ithbāt al-mānā l-mutanāzi’ fīh*), i.e., the plain sense (*ẓāhir*).¹⁴⁰ Al-Saffārīnī claims that this was also the approach of al-Ash’arī, and he then cites a series of statements by different scholars, all of whom assert (in different wordings) that the fact of God’s descending is known (*al-nuzūl ma’lūm*) but its modality is unknown (*al-kayf majhūl*).¹⁴¹ In this way, it is made clear that al-Saffārīnī’s intention is to discourage the reader from questioning the modality of God’s attributes, not to deny knowledge of their meaning.

5 Furthermore, al-Saffārīnī plainly rejects the idea that the Salaf implicitly endorsed *tafwīd*. He writes, reprimanding the *mutakallimūn*:

[...] it is impossible that the later [scholars] should be more knowledgeable than the earlier [scholars], as some of the ignorant say, [...] [claiming] that the method of the Salaf is safer, but the way of the later scholars is more knowledgeable and wiser. They claim this based on their belief that the method of the Salaf is mere belief in the outer wordings of the Qur’an and the Hadith without understanding (*mujarrad al-īmān bi-alfāz al-Qur’ān wa-l-Ḥadīth bi-ghayr fīqh*)

¹³⁸ al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi’ al-anwār*, 1:200.

¹³⁹ al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi’ al-anwār*, 1:242-243.

¹⁴⁰ al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi’ al-anwār*, 1:233.

¹⁴¹ al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi’ al-anwār*, 1:233.

– this is the level of the illiterate! – and that the method of the later scholars consists of extracting meaning from the texts, distorting them by way of metaphors and linguistic oddities. This false supposition has produced a statement that contains an abandonment of Islam, as they tell lies about the method of the Salaf and err in their rectification of the method of the later scholars. In this way, they combine two falsehoods: ignorance about the way of the Salaf, by telling lies about them, and ignorance and misguidance in [their attempt to] rectify a different approach.¹⁴²

Al-Saffārīnī thus denies that the Salaf were ignorant about the meanings of revelation and that what they affirmed was merely the outer wording of revelation.

6 Another example deals with God’s attributes of descending (*nuzūl*), rising over the Throne (*istiwā*), and the idea that God is “above” (*fawqīyya*). Al-Saffārīnī affirms that these characteristics are established (*thābit*) and known (*ma’lūm*), that they are not conditioned by a modality (*ghayr mukayyaf bi-kayfiyya*), and that they do not entail moving from one location to another (*intiqāl*), as creatures do. Rather, he claims that these attributes exist in a way that befits God’s eminence. This is so, he writes, because “His essence and His attributes are known (*ma’lūma*) in their generality. They are established, and their existence is known without [specifying their] modality and without imposing limitations (*taḥdīd*).”¹⁴³

7 Furthermore, al-Saffārīnī argues that the fact that the Qur’an states that the Prophet is a clear messenger means that he would have explicitly indicated that some of the meanings contained in God’s descriptions of Himself were not intended to be understood in their obvious sense, had this been the case. Al-Saffārīnī states that the fact that none of the Salaf are reported to have taken any approach other than affirming the meanings of these descriptions, is proof that this is the only correct way of believing in them.¹⁴⁴ He, once more, cites Ibn Taymiyya, who simulates the following dialogue:

142 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi’ al-anwār*, 1:25.

143 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi’ al-anwār*, 1:247.

144 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi’ al-anwār*, 1:193-194, citing Ibn Taymiyya, see *Majmū’ al-fatāwā*, ed. ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim (Majma’ al-Malik Fahd, 2004), 5:166-168.

The speaker says: “These texts are intended to have a meaning that is contrary to what is understood from them or contrary to what they indicate,” or [he says that] affirming God’s loftiness (*uluww*) over His creation is not [the] intended [meaning], but rather what is intended is [to affirm] the loftiness [of God’s] status and the like, as we have elaborated elsewhere.

It is said to him [in response]: It was incumbent upon [the Prophet] to clarify the truth to the people, which must be believed inwardly and outwardly. So, [if the speaker’s claim was true,] [the Prophet] should have clearly indicated to them that these words were not intended to have the meaning and implication that they convey. The utmost that can be supposed is that [the Prophet] spoke metaphorically, contrary to the literal meaning, and allusively, contrary to the apparent meaning. [However,] it is known by consensus among the rational beings that the clear speaker, when he speaks metaphorically, must accompany his speech with something indicating that he intends [his words to be understood] metaphorically. So, had the Messenger, the conveyor and clarifier who explained to the people what was revealed to them, known that the intended meaning of [God’s] speech was contrary to its apparent import, it would have been incumbent upon him to qualify his address with that which would divert the minds of the people from understanding a meaning he did not intend, particularly if [this unintended meaning] comprises a false belief that is impermissible to hold about God. [If this was the case,] it would have been incumbent upon [the Prophet] to prevent them from holding an impermissible belief about God, if he feared they might. Even if [God’s] speech did not [actually] indicate [an impermissible belief about God], [it would be] even more [strongly incumbent upon him to disambiguate his speech] because it [would then be] his own address which indicates to them a belief that the negators claim is false.

So, [given that] there is nothing in the Book, nor in the Sunna, nor in the statements of any of the Salaf and the [early] scholars that agrees with the view of the negators in the first place – on the contrary, they speak exclusively of affirming [the attributes] – it is inconceivable that what they intended was not affirmation and that they actually believed in and relied upon [the method of] negating [the attributes], without ever having mentioned it or displayed it in any way. On the contrary, they displayed that which contradicts and negates [this approach]. This is clear speech; none have any room to escape from it.

These and other, similar examples show that what al-Saffārīnī is most concerned with is, on the one hand, rejecting the rational methods that dismiss the plain sense of the text and strip God of His attributes, and, on the other hand, stressing the impermissibility of speculating about the modality of the attributes. In my estimation, the statements cited in this section strongly suggest that al-Saffārīnī, like Ibn Taymiyya, affirmed the texts in revelation that attest to God's attributes in their obvious sense and rejected the method of relegating knowledge of the meaning to God.

God's Relation to Space

Al-Saffārīnī affirms that God rises over His Throne (*istiwā*'), which is located above the heavens, and that He descends from it (*nuzūl*).¹⁴⁵ He affirms that God may be described as being in the direction (*jīha*) of "above" (*fawqīyya*) and "up high" (*'uluww*).¹⁴⁶ He does not go into detail, as Ibn Taymiyya does, about what these descriptions imply regarding God's "location" vis-à-vis the world. Al-Saffārīnī is mainly concerned with asserting that these descriptions are known (*ma'lūm*) and that they should be affirmed "without how" (*bi-lā kayf*), i.e., without specifying their modality. He fills many pages with citations from the Qur'an, Sunna, reports of the Salaf, and statements from later scholars in support of this.¹⁴⁷

Regarding God's rising over the Throne (*istiwā*'), His being above (the heavens) (*fawqīyya*, *'uluww*), and His descending (*nuzūl*), he cites Ibn Taymiyya, who states that the reports from the Salaf that affirm these attributes abound and that none of them is reported to have negated any of these attributes.¹⁴⁸ He adds that the method of the Salaf regarding *al-istiwā'* is to affirm that God rises over His Throne in a manner that befits His essence and that He remains over the Throne, clearly distinct from His creation (*bā'in min khalqih*).¹⁴⁹ Al-Saffārīnī also claims that al-Ash'arī affirmed that God rises over the Throne (*istiwā*') in His essence and that He is above (it) (*fawqīyya*), in contrast to the view of most later Ash'arite scholars, who interpret these descriptions metaphorically.¹⁵⁰

145 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:190, 198-201, 242-246.

146 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:210-211.

147 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:190-211.

148 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:193-194, citing Ibn Taymiyya, see *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 5:166-167.

149 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:190.

150 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:191. This is where he cites Ibn al-Qayyim's *Ijtīmā' al-juyūsh al-Islāmiyya*, ed. 'Awwād 'Abd Allāh al-Mu'taq (Maṭābi' al-Farazdaq al-Tijariyya, 1988), 197-198. Here, he

Al-Saffārīnī states that God is not a body (*jism*), substance (*jawhar*), or contingent (*ʿaraḍ*), that He is not limited by any boundary (*ḥadd*), and that He cannot be said to be in physical space (*mutaḥayyiz*).¹⁵¹ In contrast to Ibn Taymiyya, who refrains from both affirming and negating that God is a body, al-Saffārīnī clearly states that it is impossible for God to be described as a body. He stresses that affirming attributes that imply spatiality, such as rising over the Throne or descending, does not warrant thinking about God in a corporeal way, and he rejects the claim that affirming these descriptions in their obvious sense leads to *tajsīm*.¹⁵² Once again, al-Saffārīnī's main concern is to convince the reader that the "how" of any of God's attributes or actions is totally inconceivable to the human mind and that speculating about it is impermissible. He explains that many people are under the impression that the one who ascribes a direction (*jīha*) to God, or describes Him as rising over the Throne, commits *tajsīm*. He refutes this claim as false, and states that the correct approach is to say that God rises over His Throne "without how."¹⁵³ Al-Saffārīnī cites Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Fatwā l-Ḥamawīyya al-kubrā*:

The definitive approach is that of the community of the middle ground (*al-umma al-waṣaṭ*), and it is [to believe] that God is over His Throne in a manner that befits His eminence. In the same way as God is described with knowledge, sight, and power, without qualifying [these attributes] with the specifications of contingents (*khaṣāʾiṣ al-aʿrāḍ*) which belong to creatures, He – exalted is He – is above His Throne, without applying to His being above [the Throne] (*fawqīyya*) the specifications of that of creatures; God is exalted over [such creaturely descriptions].¹⁵⁴

In short, it is clear that al-Saffārīnī, like Ibn Taymiyya, affirms all of the descriptions of God, including those that imply spatiality, in their plain sense while stressing that their modality is unknown. In contrast to Ibn Taymiyya, however, al-Saffārīnī excludes the possibility that God is a body and does not articulate Ibn Taymiyya's view that God is an indivisible spatial existent that is above the created world and surrounds it in

references al-Ash'arī's *al-Ībāna ʿan ūṣūl al-diyāna* and his *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*.

151 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmiʿ al-anwār*, 1:182, 201, 211.

152 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmiʿ al-anwār*, 1:199.

153 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmiʿ al-anwār*, 1:198-199.

154 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmiʿ al-anwār*, 1:206, citing Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyya al-kubrā*, 270.

a spatial sense.¹⁵⁵ It is possible that al-Saffārīnī was not fully convinced by Ibn Taymiyya's elaborate argumentation regarding God's spatiality or that he deemed it wiser not to include this view and instead opt for the more widely accepted stance that God cannot have anything to do with body or space. Although he is concerned with safeguarding those descriptions of God which imply spatiality, such as His attribute of descending and His rising over the Throne, al-Saffārīnī seems uninterested in discussing God's relation to space in more abstract terms. In this matter, it seems that al-Saffārīnī is hesitant to follow Ibn Taymiyya further than the traditionalist Hanbalite position of affirming the attributes that imply spatiality in their obvious sense without inquiring into their modality.

Concluding Discussion

This article has explored al-Saffārīnī's understanding of the divine attributes, situating it within his broader epistemological framework. At its core, al-Saffārīnī's creed seems to be a traditionalist Hanbalite one: large parts of *Lawāmi' al-anwār* and *Lawā'ih al-anwār* consist of plain citations from the Qur'an, the Sunna, reports of the Salaf, and works by early authorities without comment from the author. I have shown that, in addition to these sources, al-Saffārīnī draws extensively upon the works of Ibn Taymiyya and those of his foremost students. It is clear that al-Saffārīnī considered Ibn Taymiyya to be a great authority in matters of theology. This shows that at least some of Ibn Taymiyya's theological treatises were circulating within the intellectual circles of the early eighteenth-century Hanbalites. It is plausible that al-Saffārīnī gained interest in Ibn Taymiyya's thought via the works of the Hanbalite scholar Mar'ī al-Karmī, who was a staunch defender of Ibn Taymiyya. Further research may confirm this.

In line with the Hanbalite theological tradition, al-Saffārīnī affirms all of God's attributes on par and states that all of them are eternally pre-existent (*qadīm*). He advocates affirming (*ithbāt*) and believing in the apparent (*ẓāhir*) sense of the texts regarding the divine attributes. Although some statements in *Lawāmi' al-anwār* lend themselves to different interpretations, the article concludes that the work, read as a whole, strongly indicates that its author advocated for a plain-sense understanding of the

155 Hoover, "God Spatially Above."

descriptions of God “without how,” which he believed was the position of the Salaf, and that he renounced both figurative interpretation (*ta’wīl*) and the method of relegating the meaning of these texts to God (*tafwīd al-ma’nā*). In line with Ibn Taymiyya’s understanding of the attributes, belief in the plain sense of the divine attributes as they are revealed appears to be an essential part of worshipping God and affirming His unicity (*tawḥīd*) according to al-Saffārīnī.

Al-Saffārīnī’s theological works display his worry about false suppositions regarding God’s nature and attributes that could jeopardize his community’s belief in God’s unicity. The analysis in this article has shown that al-Saffārīnī is primarily concerned with, on the one hand, upholding the integrity of the text and banishing all methods that negate the attributes in any way, and, on the other hand, stressing the fact that the modality of God’s attributes is incomprehensible to humans. His key point in this regard is that attributes are qualified by the essential nature of that to which they are attributed, which means that our knowledge of God’s essential nature safeguards us from *tashbīh* even while affirming the plain sense of the texts, since one is assured that the attribute is congruent with God’s essential nature. However, in contrast to Ibn Taymiyya, al-Saffārīnī asserts that affirming the plain sense must happen “without *tajsīm*,” that God is not a body (*jism*), and that He is not limited by any boundary (*ḥadd*).

In *Lawāmi’ al-anwār*, al-Saffārīnī claims to describe the implicit beliefs of the Salaf, which, in his view, correspond to the method of the early traditionalist scholars, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in particular. However, it is clear that later theologians, such as Ibn Taymiyya and al-Saffārīnī, have considerably expanded on the concise statements recorded from Ibn Ḥanbal. Al-Saffārīnī was well-versed in *kalām* and, although he rejected rational argumentation as a source of knowledge in matters of belief, he did not shy away from using rational arguments to support his positions and refute those of the *mutakallimūn*.

In spite of his strong criticism of *kalām*, al-Saffārīnī seems to have taken a pragmatic stance vis-à-vis the dominant theological framework in his time. In numerous places in *Lawāmi’ al-anwār*, he refers to the well-known idea in Islamic theology of the splintering of the Muslim community

into different factions on the basis of creedal differences.¹⁵⁶ This idea is a central point of departure in his treatise and reflects his conceptualization of Sunni theology. According to al-Saffārīnī, the one Muslim sect that attains Paradise, the *jamā'a* (majority), comprises the Ahl al-Sunna or the Ahl al-Hadith, who follow the creed of the Prophet and his Companions. In more concrete terms, al-Saffārīnī states, the Ahl al-Sunna are made up of three groups: the Athariyya, the Ash'arites, and the Māturīdiyya.¹⁵⁷ Saffārīnī thus maintains a rather inclusive view of the *jamā'a*; although they do not hold the "right" beliefs, the Ash'arites and Māturīdiyya are identified as "people of the Sunna" and are therefore considered part of the one sect that attains God's mercy. However, not much further along in *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, he admits that the wording of the hadith, namely the Prophet's saying that only one sect achieves Paradise, precludes the possibility that he meant multiple groups, and he clarifies that the only sect the Prophet intended is the Ahl al-Athar (or Athariyya), to the exclusion of all other sects.¹⁵⁸ It seems that al-Saffārīnī did not want to go so far as to explicitly state that the Ash'arites and Māturīdiyya are in the same category as the other misguided sects, but that he nevertheless wanted to stress that the only correct belief is that of the Athariyya.

This article constitutes a beginning to studying al-Saffārīnī's theology and fits within a larger project investigating the thought of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Hanbalites. Further research questions remain unexplored, such as how the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya were transmitted to reach scholars such as al-Saffārīnī, and how scholars like him, who engaged with Ibn Taymiyya's theological treatises, stand in relation to their "reformist" contemporaries, such as Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792).

156 See, for example, al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:8-13, 74-76. The most common narration of this hadith is the following: "It is narrated from 'Awf b. Mālik that the Prophet is reported to have said: 'The Jews split into seventy-one sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy in Hell. The Christians split into seventy-two sects, seventy-one of which will be in Hell and one in Paradise. By the One whose hand holds my soul, my nation will split into seventy-three sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy-two in Hell.' It was said: 'O Messenger of God, who are [the ones who will be in Paradise]?' He said: 'The majority (*al-jamā'a*).'" See Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Mājāh, *Sunan Ibn Mājāh*, Book 36, hadith 67.

157 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:74-77.

158 al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār*, 1:76.

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The Taymiyyan Turn in Early Twentieth-Century Islamic Reform and the Controversy over Cursing Mu'āwiya

Pieter Coppens

Abstract

In the early twentieth century, a debate arose among reform-oriented Islamic scholars on whether the first Umayyad Caliph Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān deserved to be cursed (*la'n*). The debate started with a fatwa from Rashīd Riḍā in his journal *al-Manār* in 1905, but in subsequent years spread to Southeast Asia, where reform-oriented Ḥaḍramī-'Alawī scholars wrote several treatises on the issue. It was urgent to them, because the issue was closely related to their claimed special social status as descendants of the Prophet. The arguments of Ibn Taymiyya in favor of Mu'āwiya from his recently published *Minhāj al-Sunna* would play a key role as the controversy unfolded and became a touchstone for the legitimacy of the arguments made by the different camps. This debate proves that it was not yet clear to Islamic reformers globally in this age which method to follow in source criticism, legal reasoning, and proper disputation. This was actively negotiated with each other in an increasingly connected as well as diverse international network of reform-minded scholars, in which the works of Ibn Taymiyya slowly but steadily became a touchstone of correct method. In that process, they did not shy away from re-assessing seemingly long-settled disputes within Sunni Islam.

Keywords: Mu'āwiya; cursing (*la'n*); Rashīd Riḍā; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī; Ḥaḍramī-'Alawīs

“I know no-one in these realms who knows Ibn Taymiyya. Those who propagate the merit of Ibn Taymiyya are the first to throw his sayings over the fence when they do not conform with their desires.”

—Ḥasan b. 'Alawī b. Shihāb (1268-1333/1852-1914),
writing from Singapore, 1910.¹

1 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, “al-Tafarruq wa-l-khilāf bayn al-muslimīn fi Singhāfūra,” *al-Manār* 12, no. 12 (1327/1910): 953.

Introduction

In 1905, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's (1282-1354/1865-1935) famous journal *al-Manār* received a question from an anonymous reader from Singapore on cursing the first Umayyad Caliph Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680). The concerned reader had heard a religious scholar declare that it was less dangerous for one's faith to curse (*la'n*) Mu'āwiya than to supplicate for God's contentment with him (*al-taraḍḍī*). This left the reader confused, and he hoped Riḍā could clarify the matter.² Riḍā's answer in the form of a fatwa set in motion a debate among religious scholars in different regions of the Islamic world, that would continue for several years.³ This controversy laid bare the beginnings of a religious rift among a group of scholars residing in India, Singapore, and the Indonesian archipelago. They were in conflict about the socially privileged position among their midst of those who could trace their lineage back to the Prophet Muḥammad (the so-called *sayyid*, pl. *sāda*, or *sharīf*, pl. *ashrāf*). These scholars belonged to the prominent 'Alawī clan, originally from Ḥaḍramawt, but scattered throughout Southeast Asia, India, and East Africa, that indeed claimed to be *sāda*.⁴ It led to several long treatises on the issue of Mu'āwiya, sometimes polemical, from scholars with different outlooks on the issue. The legacy of Ibn Taymiyya played a growing role as this controversy unfolded, especially his work *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqḍ kalām al-shī'a wa-l-qadariyya* (The Way of the Prophetic Sunna in Invalidating

2 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, "La'n Mu'āwiya wa-l-taraḍḍī 'anhu – wa-fīhi ḥukm al-la'n muṭlaqan," *Majallat al-Manār* 8, no. 16 (1323/1905): 625-31.

3 For a comprehensive overview of larger and smaller treatises and journal articles related to this controversy, see Werner Ende, "Schiitische Tendenzen bei Sunnitischen Sayyids aus Ḥaḍramaut: Muḥammad b. 'Aqīl al-'Alawī (1863-1931)," *Der Islam* 50, no. 1 (1973): 82-97.

4 On 'Alawī scholars (generally addressed as "Āl Bā 'Alawī") from Ḥaḍramawt and their links to Southeast Asia and other regions of the Indian Ocean, see Ulrike Freitag and William Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrāmī Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s* (Brill, 1997); Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900-1942* (Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1999); Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhrāmawt* (Brill, 2003); Anne Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860-1925* (Routledge, 2003); R.S. O' Fahey, "'Small World': Neo-Sufi Interconnexions Between the Maghrib, the Hijaz and Southeast Asia," in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott C. Reese (Brill, 2004), 274-88; Anne Bang, *Islamic Sufi Networks in the Western Indian Ocean (c. 1880-1940)* (Brill, 2014); Nico J.G. Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age in the Netherlands East Indies: A Biography of Sayyid Uthmān (1822-1914)* (Brill, 2014).

the Speech of the Shia and the Qadariyya).⁵ This work had just been published for the first time in a modern four-volume print in Cairo between 1321/1903 and 1323/1905. It presents Ibn Taymiyya's views on the status of Mu'āwiya in the context of his sharp scholarly polemics against the Twelver Shia.⁶

Mu'āwiya is a controversial figure in Islamic historiography, mainly due to his late conversion at the Muslim conquest of Mecca, his challenge to the power of the fourth "Rightly Guided" Caliph 'Alī b. 'Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), culminating in the battle of Ṣiffīn (36/657) and his claim to the Caliphate after the demise of 'Alī. He thus allegedly changed the nature of the Caliphate into an oppressive kingship (*mulk 'aḍuḍ*) in favor of his son Yazīd (r. 60-64/680-683), under whose leadership the murder on Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (d. 61/680) at the Battle of Karbala took place. The status of Mu'āwiya as a trustworthy Companion would play a significant role in later Sunni-Shia polemics, leading to a gradual embrace of his religious and political legacy in the mainstream Sunni narrative. This Sunni narrative upheld the doctrine of the uprightness of all Companions of the Prophet (*ʿadālat al-ṣaḥāba*) – i.e. that they would not lie about the Prophet and are thus reliable as transmitters of Hadith – including those who participated in the early infighting (*fitna*) over the leadership of the Muslim community after the demise of the Prophet. Sunni discourse over the centuries therefore polished away problematic aspects of Mu'āwiya's legacy that were more common to problematize among earlier generations of Sunni scholars. This led to a dogmatic approval of Mu'āwiya or, at least,

5 On the function of this treatise in Ibn Taymiyya's polemics with his Shiite contemporaries, see Tariq al-Jamil, "Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī: Shi'i Polemics and the Struggle for Religious Authority in Medieval Islam," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, eds. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Oxford University Press, 2010), 229-46; Yahya M. Michot, "Ibn Taymiyya's Critique of Shī'ī Imāmology," *The Muslim World* 104, no. 1-2 (2014): 109-149; Roy Vilozy, "Some Remarks on Ibn Taymiyya's Acquaintance with Imāmī Shī'ism in Light of His *Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*," *Der Islam* 97, no. 2 (2020): 456-75. For an English synopsis of this treatise and a cursory discussion of its contents in relation to the pro- and anti-'Alid's, see Nebil Husayn, *Opposing the Imam: The Legacy of the Nawāṣib in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 112-60, 205-11.

6 Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fi naqḍ kalām al-shī'a wa-l-qadariyya*, 4 vols. (Al-Maṭba'a al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya, 1321-23/1903-05); Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 184-85. The standard critical edition for reference has become Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fi naqḍ kalām al-Shī'a al-Qadariyya*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 9 vols. (Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad b. Su'ūd al-Islāmiyya, 1406/1986).

an undecided silence about him among later generations of Sunni scholars.⁷ As this question to Riḍā shows, discussions on Mu'āwiya's status resurfaced in the reform-oriented debates of the early twentieth century, that re-appreciated religious scholarship of the earlier generations (*salaf*) and devalued the positions of later generations that were considered the product of emulation (*taqlīd*). The old controversy thus gained new relevance in the twentieth century.⁸

Rashīd Riḍā's initial answer in *al-Manār* was relatively straight forward: cursing Mu'āwiya went too far, and supplicating for God's contentment with him was definitely the safer option. Cursing individual people could only be done when one had absolute certainty that someone passed away as an unbeliever without repentance and that God was angry with that person, a certainty one could only get through revelation. Instead, a pious believer should supplicate for good things only, as confirmed by several narrations attributed to the Prophet. Furthermore, cursing Mu'āwiya and other Companions (*ṣaḥāba*), as some of the *khawārij* and Shiites used to do, would lead to unnecessary sectarian strife that Muslims should avoid in these precarious times for the global Muslim community. Riḍā based his position on a long quote from Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), who wrote on the issue of cursing in *Kitāb āfāt al-lisān* in his *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*.⁹ The positions of Ibn Taymiyya did not play a role in

7 Charles Pellat, "Le culte de Mu'āwiya au III^e siècle de l'hégire," *Studia Islamica* 6 (1956): 53-66; Erling L. Petersen, *Alī and Mu'āwiya in Early Arabic Tradition: Studies on the Genesis and Growth of Islamic Historical Writing until the End of the Ninth Century* (Munksgaard, 1964); James A. Bellamy, "The Pro-Umayyad Propaganda in Ninth-Century Baghdad in the Works of Ibn Abī'l-Dunyā," in *Prédication et propagande au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, eds. G. Makdisi, D. Sourdel and J. Sourdel-Thomine (Presses universitaires de France, 1983), 71-86; Tayeb El-Hibri, "The Redemption of Umayyad Memory by the 'Abbāsids," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 61, no. 4 (2002): 241-65; R. Stephen Humphreys, *Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan: From Arabia to Empire* (Oneworld, 2006), 1-19; Khaled Keshk, *The Historians' Mu'āwiya: The Depiction of Mu'āwiya in the Early Islamic Sources* (VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008); Tayeb El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History: The Rashidun Caliphs* (Columbia University Press, 2010), 285-94; Aram A. Shahin, "In Defense of Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān: Treatises and Monographs on Mu'āwiya from the Eighth to the Nineteenth Centuries," in *The Lineaments of Islam: Studies in Honor of Fred McGraw Donner*, ed. Paul M Cobb (Brill, 2012), 177-208; Han Hsien Liew, "Ibn al-Jawzī and the Cursing of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya: A Debate on Rebellion and Legitimate Rulership," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139, no. 3 (2019): 631-45; Husayn, *Opposing the Imam*.

8 Werner Ende, *Arabische Nation und islamische Geschichte: Die Umayyaden im Urteil arabischer Autoren des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977).

9 Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Dār al-minḥāj, 2013), 5:443-52.

Riḍā's fatwa. These were yet virtually unknown to him, while the *Ihyā'* had played a crucial role in his religious training.¹⁰ Most of Ibn Taymiyya's works were not yet available in print in 1905. Reform-oriented scholars and publishers in Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad were just in the process of rediscovering and publishing these works after centuries of relative obscurity.¹¹ *Minhāj al-Sunna* was the first major work of Ibn Taymiyya to independently appear in print in the Arab world in 1903, only preceded by some small treatises in 1900.¹² A collection of his treatises (*Majmū' l-rasā'il*) was only first published in 1323/1905, the same year as Riḍā's fatwa.¹³ A five-volume collection of his fatwas (*Kitāb majmū'at fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya*) – including a fatwa on the status of Mu'āwiya – would only be published in phases from 1908 to 1911.¹⁴ Ibn Taymiyya was thus still a relative outsider in religious discourse, even among reformers, and only a very recent rediscovery. This would change drastically in just a few years, as this discussion on Mu'āwiya shows. From being a relatively marginal figure from the past, his ideas took center stage in this controversy, mainly his *Minhāj al-Sunna*. This makes this controversy a good example of the direct impact of print on the religious discourse of reform and an ideal case to understand what made the thought of Ibn Taymiyya so attractive for these early twentieth-century reformers.

One of the responses to Rashīd Riḍā's position came from Muḥammad b. 'Aqīl (1279-1311/1863-1931), a well-traveled Ḥaḍramī-'Alawī scholar from Tarim in Yemen, at the time of writing residing in Singapore.¹⁵ He

10 Despite Riḍā's mild objections against the *Ihyā'*, he did have intimate knowledge of this work through his traditional schooling. See: Ahmed El Shamsy, "Sufism, Ethics, and the Muslim Modernist Project," in *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam*, eds. Bilal Orfali, Atif Khalil, and Mohammed Rustom (American University of Beirut Press, 2022), 389-406; Pieter Coppens, "Narrations on Virtuous Acts in Epitomes of al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā'*: From Ibn al-Jawzī's *Minhāj al-qāsidīn* to Its Reception in Modernity," in *Ḥadīth and Ethics through the Lens of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Mutaz al-Khatib (Brill, 2023), 120-46.

11 Khaled El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 1566) to Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1899): Changing Views of Ibn Taymiyya among non-Ḥanbalī Sunni Scholars," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, eds. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Oxford University Press, 2010), 269-318; El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 182-91.

12 El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 184-85.

13 Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' rasā'il*, ed. Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn al-Na'sānī (al-Maṭba'a al-Ḥusayniyya al-Miṣriyya, 1323/1905).

14 Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb majmū'at fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya*, ed. Ismā'il b. al-Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Khaṭīb al-Ḥasanī, 5 vols. (Maṭba'at Kurdistān al-'Ilmiyya, 1326-29/1908-11).

15 Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām: Qāmūs tarājim li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-l-nisā' min al-'arab wa-l-mustaribin wa-l-mustashriqīn* (Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyīn, 2002), 7:269-70.

was a good friend of Riḍā, who described Ibn ‘Aqīl as a supporter of *al-Manār*’s reform agenda. In 1908, he published a work of more than 200 pages with the title *al-Naṣā’ih al-kāfiya li-man yatawallā Mu’āwiya* (The Sufficient Advices to Those Who Are Loyal to Mu’āwiya).¹⁶ In this treatise he argued that hatred for Mu’āwiya was not something that would put the believer in danger. It was even a significant part of faith, without which one’s faith would not be complete. To Ibn ‘Aqīl, it was no less than a matter of loving and hating for the sake of God (*al-ḥubb fī l-lāh wa-l-bughḍ fī l-lāh*), a central creedal tenet.

This treatise of Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl caused social unrest among the Ḥaḍramī-‘Alawī communities residing in Singapore and the Indonesian archipelago. It provoked three other significant responses from fellow scholars.¹⁷ The first was from another Ḥaḍramī-‘Alawī scholar residing in Singapore, Ḥasan b. ‘Alawī b. Shihāb (1268-1333/1852-1914), like Ibn ‘Aqīl a regular contributor to *al-Manār*.¹⁸ He wrote a treatise named *Al-Ruqya al-shāfiya min nafathāt sumūm al-naṣā’ih al-kāfiya li-man yatawallā Mu’āwiya* (The Curing Incantation from the Spit of the Poisons of “The Sufficient Advices to Those Who Take Mu’āwiya as a Guardian”), published in 1328/1907.¹⁹ This led to a fierce response from another fellow Ḥaḍramī-‘Alawī scholar in the same year. Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Shihāb al-Dīn al-‘Alawī (1262-1341/1846-1922), the teacher of Ibn ‘Aqīl to whom the latter dedicated his treatise, wrote *Wujūb al-ḥimya ‘an maḍārr al-Ruqya* (The Obligation of Protection from the Harm of “The Incantation”), published with Ibn ‘Aqīl’s publishing house *al-Imām* in Singapore.²⁰ Two years later, the Damascene Salafi scholar Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (1283-1332/1866-1914), like Ibn ‘Aqīl a close friend of Riḍā and contributor to *al-Manār*, and a regular letter correspondent of Ibn

16 Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl b. ‘Abdallāh ‘Umar b. Yaḥyā al-‘Alawī al-Ḥusaynī, *al-Naṣā’ih al-kāfiya li-man yatawallā Mu’āwiya* (published by the author, 1908).

17 Several smaller journal articles and treatises appeared as well, provoking other refutations. For a full overview, see Ende, “Schiitische Tendenzen.”

18 Zirikli, *A‘lām*, 2:199.

19 I could not locate the original publication. In this chapter, all references are therefore to a recent reprint. Ḥasan b. ‘Alawī b. Shihāb, *al-Ruqya al-shāfiya min nafathāt sumūm al-naṣā’ih al-kāfiya li-man yatawallā Mu’āwiya* (Rawāfid lil-Ṭabā’a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī’, 2008).

20 Zirikli, *A‘lām*, 2:65.

'Aqīl, wrote a treatise titled *Naqd al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya* (Criticism of "The Sufficient Advices"), published in 1910.²¹

This work, *al-Naṣā'ih al-kāfiya*, and the responses it provoked from Ibn Shihāb, Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn, and al-Qāsimī, merit a closer look here. This contribution tries to answer the question why this issue of cursing Mu'āwiya gained new urgency for these reformers, why they differed so vehemently on it, and what role the first publication of the works of Ibn Taymiyya played in this controversy.

The Position of Ibn Taymiyya on Mu'āwiya and on Cursing Him

Ibn Taymiyya discussed the status of Mu'āwiya and the issue whether it is allowed to curse him in *Minhāj al-Sunna*, authored somewhere between 713/1313 and 716/1317, and in an undated fatwa published in 1911 as part of the *Kitāb majmū'at al-fatāwā*. It appears that the text of the fatwa, yet unpublished during the controversy under discussion here (1905-1910), was not yet known to the authors who participated in the debate on Mu'āwiya in the early twentieth century. In his fatwa, Ibn Taymiyya upholds that cursing any Companion of the Prophet is categorically forbidden and deserves severe punishment by consensus but takes note of the difference of opinion whether it should be punished by death or not. He argues that Mu'āwiya's conversion after the conquest of Mecca was sincere, that the Prophet considered him to be a true believer and even promoted him to the position of official scribe. Being a believer, he argues, does not mean being free from sins and mistakes, however. The battle of Ṣiffīn was a matter of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) for its leaders: who was wrong would be rewarded for one's sincere attempt, who was right would be rewarded for both one's sincere attempt and for doing the right thing, as stated in a well-known Hadith on the reward for *ijtihād*. The participants in the battle of Ṣiffīn, even if they were on the wrong side, should thus still be considered believers, emphatically including Mu'āwiya, and supplicating for God's mercy (*tarahḥum*) is allowed for the deceased participants on both sides. Because of their

21 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Kitāb naqd al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya* (Maṭba'at al-Fayḥā', 1328/1910). The Salafi book collector, trader, and scholar Muḥammad Naṣīf financed this publication together with his fellow Jeddian trader 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Muḥammad al-Bassām. On Naṣīf, see El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 180-81, 187, 188, 190. For the correspondence between al-Qāsimī and Ibn 'Aqīl see Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 158.

acceptance of arbitration as proposed by al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī (d. 49/669-70), which the Prophet had foreseen in a prophecy and approved of, they are not comparable to the status of the Kharijites, for whom the Prophet explicitly warned in his prophecies. Moreover, when Mu‘āwiya combated ‘Alī, he did not claim the Caliphate for himself, that was not at stake at that moment. He can thus not be blamed with wanting to take the Caliphal position from ‘Alī at Ṣiffīn.²²

In his *Minhāj al-Sunna*, Ibn Taymiyya’s main points concerning Mu‘āwiya are more or less the same and mainly amount to a defense of his political legacy. Mu‘āwiya is rewarded for his sincere effort in his *ijtihād* in combating ‘Alī, even if he had erred.²³ His later political success may actually be interpreted as God’s support for him.²⁴

Ibn ‘Aqīl’s *al-Naṣā’ih al-kāfiya li-man yatawallā Mu‘āwiya*

Judging from what Riḍā wrote in his obituary for Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl b. Yaḥyā, Ibn ‘Aqīl was closely acquainted with Riḍā, who considered him a friend.²⁵ He was born into a family that belonged to the bloodline of the Prophet Muḥammad, who therefore had a special position in the social fabric of Ḥaḍramī migrants worldwide. He grew up in a village near Tarim in the region of Ḥaḍramawt in Yemen, but relocated to Java after his youth, made a fortune as a trader, and became a person of high standing among the Ḥaḍramīs in Southeast Asia. Riḍā described him as a reformer (*muṣliḥ*) who contributed to the Nahḍa in Yemen. He further described Ibn ‘Aqīl as well-traveled, having sojourned in the Hijaz, Java, Egypt, the Levant, Iraq, Persia, India, China, Japan, and both Eastern and Western Europe, and as one of the first followers and main proponents of the thought of his journal *al-Manār* in the Indonesian archipelago.²⁶ He

22 Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb majmū‘at al-fatāwā*, 4:216-27; Shahin, “In Defense of Mu‘āwiya,” 194-97.

23 Husayn, *Opposing the Imam*, 208.

24 Husayn, *Opposing the Imam*, 124, 144-47, 149-50. According to Nebil Husayn’s recent interpretation of *Minhāj al-Sunna*, Ibn Taymiyya even seems to play with the idea that Mu‘āwiya was not necessarily in the wrong at Ṣiffīn, that he surely did not act out of hate toward ‘Alī as a righteous Companion, but had a just cause in mobilizing his troops. Whether that interpretation is indeed justified is not within the scope of this chapter.

25 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, “Na’y al-sayyid al-jalīl al-sayyid Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl taghammadahu Allāh bi-rahmatihī,” *al-Manār* 32, no. 1 (1311/1931): 80.

26 Riḍā, “Na’y Ibn ‘Aqīl”; idem, “Al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl b. Yaḥyā,” *al-Manār* 32, no. 3 (1350/1932): 238-40; ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Alawī, “Min sirat al-marḥūm al-sayyid Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl,”

even started his own printing press and journal in Singapore, *al-Imām*, to spread the reformist thought associated with the journal *al-Manār* in the Malay language.²⁷ His biographical details show that he met many influential reformers across the Muslim world, even was in touch with orientalist in Europe, and worked actively to spread anti-colonial and pan-Islamic ideas.²⁸ He would later contribute to the Egyptian journal *al-Fatḥ*, the follow-up of *al-Manār*, edited by the Salafi publisher Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1969).²⁹

Riḍā's fatwa on cursing Mu'āwiya in 1905 gave rise to the first deep difference of opinion between the two men.³⁰ Ibn 'Aqīl wrote his treatise *al-Naṣā'ih al-kāfiya* in response to that fatwa.³¹ In his review of the book in *al-Manār*, Riḍā recalled how he had tried to dissuade his friend from writing the book to avoid the social unrest (*fitna*) it could create. He did stress that to him it ultimately was a legitimate difference of opinion between two scholars that should not lead to mutual enmity. Enmity between Muslims would be a greater sin than the "impugning and approving" (*al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl*) of Mu'āwiya according to Riḍā.³²

Let us have a closer look at Ibn 'Aqīl's treatise and his argumentation. Ibn 'Aqīl starts with a self-confident statement that he bases his argumentation on the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet. When one goes through all the evidence from these sources, he declares, one cannot but conclude that cursing Mu'āwiya is the correct position. This rhetorical tool of claiming to base oneself only on the Qur'an and the Sunna shows his principal allegiance to the trends of reform of his era, in which this claim was commonplace.

Al-Ma'rifa 2, no. 8 (1350/1931): 999-1001.

27 Kaptein, *Sayyid 'Uthman*, 163; W.R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Yale University Press, 1967), 56-67.

28 Ende, "Schiitische Tendenzen," 87-9; Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 191-92, 220-22; Mobini Keskeh, *Hadrami Awakening*, 30.

29 According to al-Zirikli, he published in *al-Fatḥ* under the pen name Muḥammad al-Bāqir al-Yamani. Zirikli, *A'lām*, 6:269-70. On *al-Fatḥ* as a follow-up of *al-Manār* see Mehdi Sajid, "A Reappraisal of the Role of Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb and the YMMA in the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 29, no. 2 (2018): 193-213.

30 Riḍā, "La'n Mu'āwiya."

31 Ibn 'Aqīl, *Naṣā'ih*, 2.

32 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, "Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih al-kāfiya li-man yatawallā Mu'āwiya," *al-Manār* 13, no. 2 (1328/1910): 152.

He distinguishes three groups among Muslims in their attitudes toward Mu'āwiya. The first group judges him to be iniquitous, they consider it obligatory to hate him for the sake of God and allow cursing him. Ibn 'Aqīl considers this the group that is correct in its judgment and considers this to have been the position of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and several other prominent Companions.

The second group is aware of the tyrannical behavior of Mu'āwiya, but they refuse to call him iniquitous, refuse to publicly announce their hatred toward him, and do not allow cursing him. This group believes that this was the position that their predecessors also took and therefore, see conciliation as the safest position. They believe that their salvation lies in being careful with these matters, and do not want to further delve into these matters through deeper research and *ijtihād*. Ibn 'Aqīl considers his own 'Alawī scholarly tradition to follow this position. Ibn 'Aqīl expresses his hope that this group will rectify its position through honest investigation of the issue and will no longer hold back from publicly announcing their aversion to Mu'āwiya.

The third group is fanatically in favor of Mu'āwiya, paints a too flattering picture of him, and manipulates textual evidence to support its incorrect position. Ibn 'Aqīl says that he does not concern himself with the third group in this treatise. He confines himself to the first and second group. He shares the abundant textual evidence from the Qur'an and the Sunna that the first group builds its position on, further supported by the acts of the Companions, members of the Prophetic household (*ahl al-bayt*), and the generation after the Companions (*tābi'in*). Concerning the second group, he intends to show why they are wrong in withholding their judgment publicly.³³

In a general introduction on the concept of cursing, Ibn 'Aqīl does not accept the judgment of al-Ghazālī that cursing can only be of a general nature, and may never be applied to a specific person, which is even dangerous according to al-Ghazālī. This was what Riḍā conveyed from al-Ghazālī in his fatwa in *al-Manār* that started this controversy. Ibn 'Aqīl mentions a score of sayings from other scholars who do allow cursing specific persons, to show that there is no consensus on al-Ghazālī's position as quoted by Riḍā, and that the positions of other scholars are closer to the evidence texts from the Qur'an and the Sunna and the acts of the

33 Ibn 'Aqīl, *Naṣā'ih*, 3-5.

Companions. This textual evidence matters in the end, he states, not sayings of later scholars. These can help to further elucidate the textual evidence, but do not have the final say on the matter. One can legitimately disagree with their interpretation. The Qur'an and the Sunna are filled with texts where God and the Prophet curse people who possess certain negative qualities, Ibn 'Aqīl argues, and almost all these qualities are applicable to Mu'āwiya. Cursing people with these general qualities thus equals cursing the specific case of Mu'āwiya according to Ibn 'Aqīl.³⁴

The part of the treatise that is supposed to demonstrate that the first group is correct in allowing the cursing of Mu'āwiya mainly consists of letters to Mu'āwiya attributed to Companions of the Prophet in which they address him as an insincere transgressor, as well as sayings and testimonies of the generation after the Companions and later religious scholars.³⁵ These are all supposed to prove Mu'āwiya's morally problematic behavior toward Companions, his vile political maneuvers, his involvement in the killing of sincere Companions, his hatred for 'Alī, doubt about the sincerity of his Islam and even outright denial of him being a Muslim, and how those quoted subsequently thought ill of Mu'āwiya. The early Imams of *fiqh* are even said to have considered him a tyrant by consensus, and to have not incorporated his sayings in their *fiqh*.³⁶

In the part of the treatise in which he intends to refute the second group, that claims judgment on Mu'āwiya should be withheld, Ibn 'Aqīl discusses five "specious arguments" (*shubuhāt*, sing. *shubha*;). The first *shubha* that he turns against is the idea that Mu'āwiya should not be cursed because he was one of the Companions and thus, according to Sunni doctrine, upright (*'ādil*) by definition. Ibn 'Aqīl does not agree with the idea that even major sins (*kabā'ir*) do not harm this status of uprightness of the Companions. He points to differences of opinion among Sunni scholars on the uprightness of all Companions of the Prophet and stresses that the Companions themselves certainly did not attribute this lofty status to themselves collectively. He even disagrees that the term *ṣāḥib* only applies to Muslim contemporaries of the Prophet: the unbelievers and hypocrites that lived with the Prophet also fall under the linguistic definition according to him, as becomes clear from several Qur'anic verses and

34 Ibn 'Aqīl, *Naṣā'ih*, 9-15.

35 Ibn 'Aqīl, *Naṣā'ih*, 6-124.

36 Ibn 'Aqīl, *Naṣā'ih*, 36-38.

Prophetic reports. He thus disagrees with the narrow conceptual definition of the scholars of Hadith and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, opting for the broader linguistic definition instead. This would explain why Mu'āwiya was regularly addressed as a *ṣāḥib* of the Prophet, despite his possible disbelief or hypocrisy.³⁷

The second *shubha* that Ibn 'Aqīl aims to refute is the claim that al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī (d. ca. 49/670) reconciled with Mu'āwiya. According to Ibn 'Aqīl this was only done under the threat of violence and to avoid worse, citing evidence from Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's (d. 852/1449) *Fatḥ al-bārī bi-sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) *Tārīkh*. The claim that after this "reconciliation" there was a consensus (*ijmā'*) in the legal sense on the reign of Mu'āwiya is equally false according to him.³⁸ The third *shubha* concerns Prophetic reports on the merits of Mu'āwiya. Ibn 'Aqīl cites several authorities in the field of Hadith, like Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) and earlier mentioned Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, to prove that all these reports are forged (*mawḍū'*).³⁹ The fourth *shubha* is the fact that the second Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23 or 24/644) appointed Mu'āwiya as the governor of Damascus. This fact has no weight in the eyes of Ibn 'Aqīl as a proof of the merit of Mu'āwiya, because 'Umar did not have knowledge of the unseen (*ilm al-ghayb*) that would prevent him from appointing a bad person. Even the prophet Moses, who was without a doubt a better person than 'Umar, hand-picked 70 people to join him for a meeting with God, who all proved to be unworthy. Would 'Umar have known about all the atrocities Mu'āwiya would commit, he would have never appointed him.⁴⁰

The fifth and final *shubha* is the claim of the Ash'arites and the Māturīdīs that Mu'āwiya was *'ādil*, that his political mistakes were a matter of *ijtihād* and thus not sinful, and that one should therefore remain silent on this issue. In this section, it becomes most emphatically clear how deeply rooted Ibn 'Aqīl's style of argumentation in the trend of reform of his age, that claimed *ijtihād* based on the Qur'an and the Sunna and the original positions of the earliest generations of scholars (*salaf*) and a renunciation of *taqlīd* of later generations of scholars. For Ibn 'Aqīl,

37 Ibn 'Aqīl, *Naṣā'ih*, 126-52.

38 Ibn 'Aqīl, *Naṣā'ih*, 154-61.

39 Ibn 'Aqīl, *Naṣā'ih*, 162-69.

40 Ibn 'Aqīl, *Naṣā'ih*, 171-72.

this standpoint of the major Sunni theological schools symbolizes the problem of blind emulation (*al-taqlīd al-a'mā*) among Sunnis. This dogma has become so strong among them, he explains, that they are not open to listening to serious arguments and discussing textual proofs for the opposite position. They persistently favor their grand imams of theology who, according to them, have sufficiently investigated the matter and have already drawn a definitive conclusion. For Ibn 'Aqīl, the primary texts of the Qur'an and the Sunna and the sayings of the *salaf* speak for themselves, while the positions of scholars from later generations are not conclusive and binding in any way. There should be freedom of thought to be able to extract the truth in matters like these from the primary sources oneself, he argues, and freedom of speech to make one's position public. It is true that these later grand theological authorities were aware of all the sources that he also has investigated, Ibn 'Aqīl says, but they were in the end afraid to draw the right conclusions, preferring their deeply rooted dogmatic stances. If not, they would have surely drawn the same conclusion based on the textual evidence as he did.

In this context of condemning blind emulation of later scholars, Ibn 'Aqīl cites Ibn Taymiyya for the first of very few times in the whole treatise. He cites from Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl fī kufr shātim al-rasūl* that it was said to Imam Aḥmad that a group of people were making up prophetic reports and took them as a basis of their religion, which led to God's condemnation of them. He also takes a longer quote from Ibn Taymiyya's most prominent student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's (d. 751/1350) *I'lām al-muwaqqi'īn 'an rabb al-'ālamīn* to emphasize the importance of following the *salaf* in their opinions, not later scholars.⁴¹ According to Ibn 'Aqīl it is clear from the textual sources that the *salaf* unanimously sided with 'Alī and that one will search in vain for scholars among the *salaf* who supported Mu'āwiya. The position of the Ash'arites and the Māturīdis are therefore baseless according to him.

In the responses of Ḥasan b. 'Alawī b. Shihāb and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī to Ibn 'Aqīl's treatise, they both accuse him of propagating a Shiite point of view. Werner Ende also claimed that Ibn 'Aqīl had "Shi'i

41 Both these works from Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim had just been published in print for the first time a few years before Ibn 'Aqīl wrote this treatise. Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl 'alā shatm al-rasūl* (Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Nizāmiyya, 1322/1905); Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Kitāb ḥādī al-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrāḥ ma'a kitāb i'lām al-muwaqqi'īn 'an rabb al-'ālamīn*, ed. Faraj Allāh al-Kurdi (Maṭba'at al-Nīl, 1325/1907).

tendencies” based on this treatise.⁴² The authorities that Ibn ‘Aqīl cites and his form of arguing show a different picture, however. All sources he cites and authorities he quotes to prove his point are without exception reputable Sunni scholars. Also, his rhetorical strategy of “returning to the Qur’an and the Sunna” and devaluation of *taqlīd* is very much in sync with the rhetoric and method of his contemporary Sunni reformers. His treatise does not betray Shiite influence at all. It appears he genuinely believed that, also within the Sunni tradition, the cursing of Mu‘āwiya should be the correct position that one would inevitably discover when strictly following a method of reform that claims a return to the primary sources of the *salaf* and strict application of Hadith criticism and *uṣūl al-fiqh* to these primary sources. The later Sunni tradition had simply erred on this issue, and then uncritically emulated that error.

As noted, Ibn ‘Aqīl does refer to Ibn Taymiyya directly twice in his treatise, but only very lightly and out of context. He does not refer to his *Minhāj al-Sunna*, which was most likely not yet available to him in Singapore. His only reference is *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl fī kufr shātim al-rasūl*, that was published in Hyderabad in 1905. Based on that treatise, he makes the basic point that Mu‘āwiya did bad things and the Prophet despised him for it. He conveniently leaves out that within the framework of Ibn Taymiyya’s position this would have been before Mu‘āwiya’s sincere conversion. That Ibn Taymiyya actually belongs to the third group of defenders of Mu‘āwiya appears something that Ibn ‘Aqīl was not aware of, due to lack of knowledge of those specific works. In a work from 1924 on more or less the same topic, his *Taqwiyat al-īmān bi-radd tazkiyat Ibn Abī Sufyān* (The Strengthening of Faith by Refuting the Claim of the Integrity of Ibn Abī Sufyān), Ibn ‘Aqīl does appear conscious of Ibn Taymiyya’s position on Mu‘āwiya and shows himself critical of his earlier usage of the title Shaykh al-Islam for him.⁴³

Ḥasan b. ‘Alawī b. Shihāb’s *al-Ruqya al-Shāfiya*

Like Ibn ‘Aqīl, Ḥasan b. ‘Alawī b. ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad Shihāb al-Dīn (better known as Ibn Shihāb; we will also address him by that name here, to avoid confusion with Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn) was born, raised and educated

42 Ende, “Schīitische Tendenzen.”

43 Ende, “Schīitische Tendenzen,” 90.

in Tarim and later moved to Singapore after having resided in Jakarta for some time. Also like Ibn 'Aqīl, he mainly worked as a trader – they even worked together for some time – but was also active in the reform movement of his age, contributing to Rashīd Riḍā's *al-Manar* on the need for societal and educational reform, and to Ibn 'Aqīl's journal *al-Imām*.⁴⁴ Ibn 'Aqīl and Ibn Shihāb thus moved in the same intellectual circles and were active in the same city of Singapore, sharing a wish for reform within the Ḥaḍramī-'Alawī scholarly tradition. Despite their shared call for societal and educational reform and their initial close religious and commercial cooperation, they eventually had a fallout, allegedly because of Ibn 'Aqīl's "Shiite" treatise.⁴⁵ After that fallout, Ibn Shihāb actively worked against Ibn 'Aqīl and his master Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn through publications in his own Singapore-based journal *al-Waṭan*.⁴⁶

Ibn 'Aqīl's selective usage of Ibn Taymiyya angered Ibn Shihāb greatly and motivated him to integrate Ibn Taymiyya in his refutation, stressing how easy it was to find sayings from Ibn Taymiyya that would actually radically undermine Ibn 'Aqīl's narrative. His annoyance was so big that he complained that:

his sayings on Ibn Taymiyya have one of two characteristics: either his saying about Ibn Taymiyya that he is Shaykh al-Islām agrees with his creedal conviction, thus subscribing to him, which means that he should retract his nonsense; or his sayings are not in agreement with his creedal conviction about Ibn Taymiyya that he is Shaykh al-Islām, which would mean that the author says something that does not correspond with his conviction. If the author himself does not believe in the soundness of what he says, then others are more entitled to not believe in the soundness of what the author says.⁴⁷

Ibn Shihāb thus makes Ibn Taymiyya's ideas, especially as expressed in his *Minhāj al-Sunna*, the touchstone for the credibility of Ibn 'Aqīl's positions. He explains that he explicitly refers to Ibn Taymiyya, because Ibn

44 Ibn Shihāb, *Ruqya*, 59-60; Zirikli, *A'lām*, 2:199; Engseng Ho, "Hadhrāmīs Abroad in Hadhrāmūt: The Muwalladīn," in *Hadhrāmī Traders*, ed. Ulrike Freitag and William Clarence-Smith (Brill, 1997), 139.

45 Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 286-87. As to whether other, more mundane motives were behind the fallout, remains a matter of conjecture.

46 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 93.

47 Ibn Shihāb, *Ruqya*, 109.

‘Aqīl normally considers himself to be working in his tradition, while on this specific issue Ibn Taymiyya is completely in accordance with what Ibn Shihāb considers to be the correct Sunni position. Given Ibn ‘Aqīl’s affinity as a reformer with the ideas and methods of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Shihāb believed referring to him would make his argument against Ibn ‘Aqīl stronger.⁴⁸

Ibn Shihāb opens his treatise polemically with the accusation toward Ibn ‘Aqīl that he aims to bring Shiite ideas to the common Sunni Muslims, who do not have enough religious knowledge to see through their treacherous and false claims. He further accuses Ibn ‘Aqīl of using unreliable proof texts from deviant historians, of not applying decent source criticism to his proof texts, of being selective and manipulative in the sources that he picked, and of slandering religious scholars who do not allow the cursing of Mu‘āwiya.⁴⁹ Referring to Ibn Taymiyya’s recently published *Minhāj al-Sunna*, Ibn Shihāb reiterates the well-known positions of the pro-Mu‘āwiya camp that Mu‘āwiya joined the Prophet on several military expeditions, that he was present at the Prophet’s farewell Hajj, and that the Prophet entrusted him with writing down the revelation.⁵⁰

Polemics against Shia Islam remain prominent throughout the larger part of the treatise. Ibn Shihāb keeps reiterating that Shiites cannot be trusted in their manipulative claims, that it is overly clear that Ibn ‘Aqīl is a covert Imāmī-Shiite, and that anyone who knows the dangers of Shia Islam immediately recognizes that the agenda of *al-Naṣā’ih al-kāfiya* goes much further than only discussing the troubled political relationship of Mu‘āwiya with ‘Alī.⁵¹ Ibn Shihāb regularly uses Ibn Taymiyya’s *Minhāj al-Sunna* for that polemical purpose, sometimes citing this work explicitly, sometimes quoting from it anonymously.⁵²

Ultimately, Ibn Shihāb himself takes the position that judgment on Mu‘āwiya should be withheld, as on any of the Companions who were

48 Ibn Shihāb, *Ruqya*, 74.

49 Ibn Shihāb, *Ruqya*, 63-5.

50 Ibn Shihāb, *Ruqya*, 74.

51 Ibn Shihāb, *Ruqya*, 75-78. Although there are no serious indications that Ibn ‘Aqīl indeed was a crypto-Shiite, his treatise did indeed have a positive reception among Twelver-Shiites over the course of the twentieth century, with many considering him one of them. Ende, “Schiitische Tendenzen,” 82-3, 96-7.

52 Ibn Shihāb, *Ruqya*, 79-82, 86, 90, 93-4, 108-09, 148-49, 164, 166-67, 173-74, 185-86, 188, 198, 204-05, 214, 247-53, 265-67, 269, 278-79, 283, 295.

involved in infighting among Muslims. He considers this the mainstream Sunni position. To make this case against Ibn 'Aqīl, he mainly quotes the grand scholars from the 'Alawī tradition in which they were both raised and educated, like Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Shillī (d. 1093/1682), 'Abdallāh b. 'Alawī al-Ḥaddād (d. 1132/1720), and Abū Bakr b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Shihāb al-Dīn –the author of *Wujūb al-ḥimya* discussed below.⁵³ Ibn Shihāb thus intends to refute Ibn 'Aqīl's claim that the position among 'Alawī scholars has always been in concordance with his own position, and that the 'Alawī scholarly tradition has always gone against the Ash'arite and Māturīdī dogma on this particular issue – albeit privately.⁵⁴

Ibn Shihāb approvingly cites the complete original fatwa of Riḍā that opened this controversy. He agrees with Riḍā's position that cursing should only be in common terms, never aimed at specific persons, certainly if one is not sure that this person died as an unbeliever while God was angry with that person and provides some extra arguments for that position. Ibn 'Aqīl according to him even falsely claims knowledge of the unseen by asserting that Mu'āwiya died as an unbeliever.⁵⁵ Withholding judgment or even praying for God's contentment is thus definitely the safer option in the case of Mu'āwiya, and the clearest position as reflected in the Qur'an and the Sunna "that the author (i.e. Ibn 'Aqīl) claims to adhere to."⁵⁶

Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn's *Wujūb al-ḥimya 'an maḍārr al-Ruqya*

In *al-Ruqya al-shāfiya*, Ibn Shihāb alluded to the alleged position of Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn on the issue of Mu'āwiya several times, using him as a grand authority within the Ḥaḍramī-'Alawī scholarly class to refute Ibn 'Aqīl's claim that the mainstream 'Alawī position has always been against Mu'āwiya. Given his fierce response to Ibn Shihāb in a separate treatise, Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn was clearly not satisfied with this appropriation of his alleged position.

Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn was from Tarim, where he received his education under the tutelage of the most prestigious scholars in the

53 On Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Shillī, see Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea*, 211n5. On 'Abdallāh b. 'Alawī al-Ḥaddād, see Bang, *Islamic Sufi Networks*, 144-46.

54 Ibn Shihāb, *Ruqya*, 95-106.

55 Ibn Shihāb, *Ruqya*, 116-24.

56 Ibn Shihāb, *Ruqya*, 127.

city at that time. He rose to fame as a poet first and foremost but was also regarded as a serious religious scholar of high standing among the Ḥaḍramīs globally. After sojourning in Eastern Java for trade, he spent most of his adult life in Hyderabad, where he ran a modern school for Ḥaḍramī pupils. Like his student Ibn ‘Aqīl he was well-traveled and had visited most of the Muslim world. He had also visited Damascus and it is likely that he met with Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and other members of his circle of reformers there.⁵⁷ Ibn ‘Aqīl’s publishing house al-Imām was responsible for the distribution of his commentary on Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī’s (d. 771/1370) popular work on legal hermeneutics *Jam’ al-jawāmi’ fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, to which Ibn Shihāb referred several times in *al-Ruqya al-shāfiya* for his alleged position on Mu‘āwiya.⁵⁸

In the beginning of his treatise Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn explains his motivation for his refutation of *al-Ruqya al-shāfiya*. Normally he would not be bothered with refuting such dubious works, he says, of which there are many, but now he did feel the need because the author is a serious scholar of high standing among the ‘Alawīs. Leaving this unrebutted could tarnish the reputation of the whole ‘Alawī tradition and of their family name according to him. He praises the courage of Ibn ‘Aqīl in authoring his treatise *al-Naṣā’ih al-kāfiya* and considers his position on the issue to be correct, despite the great opposition against it.⁵⁹

Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn vehemently disagrees with Ibn Shihāb’s accusation toward Ibn ‘Aqīl that his treatise calls toward a Shi’i position. According to him it becomes clear from his treatise that on many other issues he disagrees with Shi’ism, such as the status of the first three Caliphs, and whether Imam ‘Alī had knowledge of the unseen. That his position on this particular issue, that he bases on the Qur’an and the Sunna, happens to be in concordance with the Shia position, does not mean he is one of them: many Sunni scholars in the past have held this position on Mu‘āwiya after all, he argues, even among the Companions of

57 Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 187-91, 213-20.

58 Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Shihāb al-Dīn al-‘Alawī al-Ḥusaynī al-Shāfi‘ī, *Kitāb al-tiryāq al-nāfi’ bi-ṭāh wa-takmil masā’il jam’ al-jawāmi’*, 2 vols. (Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif al-Nizāmiyya, 1317/1900). That al-Imām distributed this text in Singapore is mentioned in the front matter of *Wujūb al-ḥimya*. On the role of *Jam’ al-jawāmi’* in curricula of higher learning and its status among reformers see Pieter Coppens, “A Silent uṣūl Revolution? Al-Qāsimī, iğtihād, and the Fundamentals of *tafsīr*,” *MIDEO* 36 (2021): 26, 28.

59 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 2-3.

the Prophet. This becomes clear from Ibn 'Aqīl's treatise. Ibn 'Aqīl is also correct in his judgment that cursing individuals is allowed in the Sunni tradition according to him – or there is at least a reasonable difference of opinion on it among the *salaf*. Ibn Shihāb is thus wrong in attacking him on that as part of his alleged hidden Shiite agenda. Furthermore, he defends Ibn 'Aqīl's selection of sources from eminent Sunni historians and defends his choice of Hadith and sayings from Companions as upright and reliable.⁶⁰ The larger part of his response consists of citations of accusations from Ibn Shihāb to Ibn 'Aqīl, and Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn's argumentation why these are unjust and even manipulative.

Ibn Taymiyya and his *Minhāj al-Sunna* appear in Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn's argumentation on several occasions. His main concern in all cases appears to be that Ibn Shihāb first unjustly frames Ibn 'Aqīl's positions as Shiite, and then uses Ibn Taymiyya's *Minhāj al-Sunna* to refute that caricature of his actual position.⁶¹ To him, Ibn Taymiyya was undoubtedly one of the so-called *nawāṣīb*, those who disliked 'Alī and his descendants, and he clearly has a distaste for Ibn Taymiyya's controversial positions.⁶² His view on *Minhāj al-Sunna* and its author is outright negative: Ibn Taymiyya insults the Shiites in that work, he claims, and even charges sections of the Prophetic household who subscribe to the Shiite creed with disbelief. Ibn Shihāb should realize that his own forefathers may be among those that Ibn Taymiyya targets.⁶³ Ibn Taymiyya should not be trusted when he claims that most Hadiths on the merits of 'Alī are forged, that he has not found a single trustworthy evidence for a higher position of 'Alī among the Companions, and that there are even more proofs for the loftiness of the first three Caliphs. He blames Ibn Shihāb for taking these positions from *Minhāj al-Sunna*.⁶⁴ He also rebukes Ibn Shihāb for uncritically accepting Ibn Taymiyya's claim in *Minhāj al-Sunna* that al-Bukhārī did not narrate from any of the early Shiites. Ibn 'Aqīl actually pointed out in his treatise that other early corrupt political figures are excluded by scholars of Hadith, like some Umayyad Caliphs and the Kharijites. The criterion of exclusion was not Shia Islam, but corruption.⁶⁵ In one case, he mocks Ibn

60 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 4, 70-1, 82-3.

61 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 15-6, 30.

62 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 28, 68-9. On the *nawāṣīb*, see Husayn, *Opposing the Imam*.

63 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 10.

64 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 11.

65 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 13.

Shihāb for misrepresenting a position of Ibn ‘Aqīl that he poorly refutes in his own words. He sarcastically remarks that he probably could not find a befitting passage from *Minhāj al-Sunna* to refute him and thus resorted to this manipulation.⁶⁶ Also on other occasions, he accuses Ibn Shihāb of attacking Ibn ‘Aqīl on futile points that only Ibn Taymiyya holds in *Minhāj al-Sunna*, and even of misunderstanding Ibn Taymiyya’s arguments on certain occasions, where Ibn Taymiyya is actually closer to their point of view than his.⁶⁷

Case in point is Ibn Shihāb’s usage against Ibn ‘Aqīl of Ibn Taymiyya’s criticism on al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī’s (d. 406/1016) *Nahj al-balāgha* (Pinnacle of Eloquence), a collection of sermons attributed to Imam ‘Alī.⁶⁸ Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn discusses this in the context of his refutation of Ibn Shihāb’s allegation that Ibn ‘Aqīl has used dubious historical sources as proof texts.⁶⁹ In *Minhāj al-Sunna*, states Ibn Shihāb, Ibn Taymiyya made the claim that the author of *Nahj al-balāgha* falsely attributed sermons to ‘Alī, and that ‘Alī was actually too lofty to speak most of the problematic words found in that work. The sayings found in it that are true in its meaning and of which it is likely that he could have said them, are simply perennial wisdoms attributed to ‘Alī, and many of them are found in the work of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. ca. 254/868) as well. Were they really ‘Alī’s sayings, then we would have known them with a complete chain of transmission (*isnād*). Anyone with knowledge of the discipline of Hadith criticism understands that these are false attributions to ‘Alī, according to Ibn Taymiyya. Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn defends Ibn ‘Aqīl by firstly emphasizing that his main proof texts were all from the Qur’an and the Sunna, and that he only cited Companions and the generation after them (*tābi‘īn*) to interpret and explain those primary sources. Allegedly dubious historical sources like *Nahj al-balāgha* are not the core of his argument at all. Secondly, Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn disagrees with Ibn Taymiyya’s harsh judgment on the authenticity of *Nahj al-balāgha* as the words of ‘Alī. He notes how scholars specialized in source criticism (*muḥaqqiqūn*) have always accepted it as authentic and used it in their own works. Only someone “burning with a dislike for ‘Alī (*naṣab*) and fanaticism in his heart” would

66 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 17.

67 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 25, 31, 35-6.

68 al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha: The Wisdom and Eloquence of ‘Alī*, ed./trans. Tahera Qutbuddin (Brill, 2024).

69 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 37-44.

deny this according to him. Had scholars engaged with source criticism really denied its authenticity, then Ibn Taymiyya would surely have been able to mention them by name, as he, himself was a specialist in the knowledge discipline of “impugning and approving” (*al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl*). The fact that he had to resort to some obscure lines of poetry to make his point, proves that Ibn Taymiyya knew his claim was not true and that he was insincere in his method due to his dislike for 'Alī (*naṣab*). To Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn this does not come as a surprise, as according to him Ibn Taymiyya is well-known for playing manipulative games with the classification of Hadiths to support his problematic claims. According to him, *Minhāj al-Sunna* is full of this type of manipulation, clear to see for everyone who takes the effort to read the work. Furthermore, Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn refers to the positive judgment of Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) of the authenticity and high quality of *Nahj al-balāgha* as superior to Ibn Taymiyya's.⁷⁰

On Ibn Shihāb's contention that the grand authorities among the 'Alawīs all considered defending Mu'āwiya the correct position, Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn comments that Ibn 'Aqīl was right in his claim that the grand 'Alawī scholars always refrained from discussing this issue in public, fearing discord (*fitna*), but that they did show their discontent with Mu'āwiya in private scholarly meetings. What Ibn 'Aqīl has now pronounced openly, he claims, has always been the privately held 'Alawī belief. Ibn Shihāb is not properly aware of this according to Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn, because he moved from Tarim at a young age and was not as deeply immersed in its scholarly circles during his upbringing as they were. Close reading of the sayings on the Companions of Imam al-Ḥaddād shows that he always remained ambiguous on Mu'āwiya and his followers, never supplicated for God's content with them (*al-taraqqī*) in his writings as he did do with other Companions like 'Ā'isha and Zubayr, who also participated in Muslim in-fighting, and withheld his judgment on Mu'āwiya publicly. Ibn Shihāb has obviously misread Imam al-Ḥaddād, he adds, whose words according to him are clearly in line with Ibn 'Aqīl's position that cursing individuals is allowed.⁷¹

70 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 40-2. Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) had a keen interest in *Nahj al-balāgha*, mainly for teaching students Arabic rhetoric. He edited and published the text in 1885. El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 151.

71 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 47-51, 57-9.

Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn is not charmed by Ibn Shihāb's sarcastic remark toward Ibn 'Aqīl discussed above, that if he really considers Ibn Taymiyya to be Shaykh al-Islam he should also adopt his positions on this particular matter. Even when a scholar makes such grave mistakes, he can still be addressed as Shaykh al-Islam due to his exceptional scholarship on other issues, as is clear in the case of Ibn Taymiyya, "a deeply immersed scholar, who is erudite and has a lot of knowledge." Above that, Ibn 'Aqīl was probably not yet aware of Ibn Taymiyya's positions on this issue – which is likely since *Minhāj al-Sunna* was still fresh in the book market – he argues, so one cannot blame him for not explicitly distancing himself from him in this case.⁷²

The political sensitivity of the controversy appears from a fact that Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn mentions only casually in the conclusion of his treatise. He addresses the irony that the pro-Mu'āwiya stance has always only existed with the aid of "the sword of oppression." He compares the tyrannical behavior and unjust mingling in religious affairs of the Umayyad dynasty to that of the Ottoman Empire, who forbade Ibn 'Aqīl's *al-Naṣā'ih al-kāfiya* on their territory. The heads of religion in the Ottoman Empire are all partisans for Mu'āwiya, he claims, with as their leader "the former so-called Shaykh al-Islam." When these religious scholars loyal to the Ottoman regime failed to match the level of Ibn 'Aqīl in his argumentation, they took their refuge in slandering his work to the ignorant Ottomans so that the work would be forbidden. The Shaykh al-Islam in charge was removed from his office shortly after that, as a form of humiliation by God for his behavior in this question, the author claims.⁷³ Instead of such vile behavior of seeking censorship through oppressive political authorities, Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn would much rather see a mature

72 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 69.

73 Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 92. The Shaykh al-Islam in question was most likely Mehmet Ziyaettin Efendi (d. 1918), who was in function for only a few months in 1909, when he had to leave during the political struggles around the deposition of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (r. 1876-1909). For an example of the tense relationship between the Ottoman authorities during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the religious scholars in the Arab cities of the Empire, see Pieter Coppens, "The 'Muḡtahids' Incident According to al-Qāsimī's Memoirs: Introduction and Translation," *MIDEO* 36 (2021): 63-97.

debate among scholars on issues as these, through close investigation of the relevant proof texts in the Qur'an and the Sunna.⁷⁴

Al-Qāsimī's *al-Radd 'alā l-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya*

Until now this controversy appeared to be an infight between reform-minded 'Alawī scholars living in India and Southeast Asia. The intervention of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī in the controversy shows that it gained wider attention among Islamic reformers, however. Al-Qāsimī was the most prominent author from a circle of reformers from late-Ottoman Damascus that self-defined as "*salafī*." He had a wide network of fellow reformers in other regions of the Muslim world, with whom he corresponded through letters, and whom he often addressed as "*salafī*" as well.⁷⁵ Al-Qāsimī played a crucial role in the popularization of the works of Ibn Taymiyya among his fellow reformers, by consulting his manuscripts in the libraries of Damascus and Aleppo, copying them, sharing them, and having them published for the first time in history through his network in other cities.⁷⁶

Al-Qāsimī first brought up the recent controversy over cursing Mu'āwiya in 1909, in a letter to his friend and fellow bibliophile in Jeddah, Muḥammad Naṣīf (d. 1971), who would later finance the publication of al-Qāsimī's treatise.⁷⁷ He related to Naṣīf how he received a treatise from a Ḥaḍramī 'Alawī on the issue by mail, printed in India – meaning Ibn 'Aqīl's *al-Naṣā'ih al-kāfiya* – and that the author requested him to have a fair look at it. He said to stand in awe of the author's capability of reasoning based on source texts, despite his criticism on his points of view. When al-Qāsimī wrote down his opinion as a response to the author, he noticed he just could not stop writing, and suddenly had two notebooks filled. Al-Qāsimī expressed to Naṣīf how he was impressed by the treatise, and

74 In a footnote the author describes *al-Waṭan* as "the journal of the adversary that he established in Singapore to resist reform and to oppose the reformers, like the man behind *al-Manār* (i.e. Rashīd Riḍā), the author of *al-Naṣā'ih* (i.e. Ibn 'Aqīl), and to promote and praise himself as correcting them." Shihāb al-Dīn, *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, 93.

75 For an overview of the undecided academic discussion on the meaning of "*salafī*" in this age of reform, started by Henri Lauzière, see Pieter Coppens, "Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī's Treatise on Wiping over Socks and the Rise of a Distinct Salafī Method," *Die Welt des Islams* 62, no. 2 (2022): 156n7, 168-74.

76 El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 177-91.

77 On Muḥammad Naṣīf see El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 180-81.

that it is hard not to feel some sympathy for the position of Ibn 'Aqīl when reading the history of the injustices done to the Prophetic household and how the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs ended. However, one becomes confused when one reads how even for the Companions the issue had its complexities, and how some of them even refused to pledge allegiance to 'Alī. Still, al-Qāsimī considered it errant to go against the attitude the *salaf* took toward this issue by making it an issue of cursing and offending. He saw this as non-beneficial for the Ummah and as an affront toward the first generations and even Companions who unproblematically transmitted knowledge from Mu'āwiya. By writing on this issue, he told Naṣīf, he hoped to bring moderation to the issue, and to connect the hearts of the later generations with those of the earlier generations, by open engagement with everything that is transmitted on the issue and accepting what is the soundest after serious analysis.⁷⁸

Al-Qāsimī followed the developments of the controversy closely, through his correspondence with Ibn 'Aqīl, who first sent him his own treatise, but later also shared the responses of Ibn Shihāb and his teacher Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn.⁷⁹ Al-Qāsimī was not particularly impressed by these responses and had more trust in what he himself had already written before these, waiting for his friends to review it before publication. He wrote to his friend Naṣīf that “there is nothing wrong with a man expressing his thought, as long as the intention is sound and the purpose is aiming for the truth. However, what I wrote, praise be to God, is the decisive argument for the fair-minded. Obstinacy is not useful.”⁸⁰

To al-Qāsimī it was crystal clear that Ibn 'Aqīl followed the position of the Shiites of Yemen (the Zaydiyya), the Imāmīs, and the Mutazilites on the question of cursing Mu'āwiya. Despite disagreeing with his position

78 Zāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa-aṣruhu* (al-Maṭba'a al-Hāshimiyya, 1965), 602-03.

79 The Damascene reformist journal *al-Muqtabas* also briefly discussed the treatises in its regular section on newly published books, proof that this 'Alawī controversy in Singapore and Hyderabad did not escape the attention of the local circle of reformers that al-Qāsimī was part of. In his short review of *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, the editor of *al-Muqtabas* Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī (d. 1953) expressed his hope that this would be the last treatise on this issue, because the worldwide Muslim community needed its intellectual energies for other more urgent things to reach its revival, and this matter had no value anymore. Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, “Makhṭūṭāt wa-maṭbū'āt: al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya li-man yatawallā Mu'āwiya,” *al-Muqtabas* 5, no. 2 (1328/1910): 158-59; Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, “Makhṭūṭāt wa-maṭbū'āt: naqd al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya,” *al-Muqtabas* 5, no. 6 (1328/1910): 524-25; Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, “Makhṭūṭāt wa-maṭbū'āt: wujūb al-ḥimya 'an maḍārr al-ruqya,” *al-Muqtabas* 6, no. 2 (1329/1911): 175.

80 Z. al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn*, 615, 617.

vehemently, al-Qāsimī took a significantly different approach in refuting him than the polemical style of *al-Ruqya al-shāfiya* and *Wujūb al-ḥimya*. Al-Qāsimī expressed in the introduction of his treatise that he stood in awe for how thorough Ibn 'Aqīl was in addressing the issue, his intellectual freedom, and the high level he had reached in his *ijtihād* on the matter. He claimed to seek a fair and thorough scholarly discussion based on mutual respect between scholars, not based on emotional arguments, but only on proper analysis of proof texts. He declared that he was looking for unity and cooperation and that he hoped to guide Ibn 'Aqīl to the correct position, the way of the first generations (*madhhab al-salaf*) on the issue. He showed himself surprised that many of Ibn 'Aqīl's opponents thought he opened an issue that was never discussed before, while so many earlier authorities had addressed the issue in a variety of ways, in texts that were by then printed and widespread. Even al-Subkī's *Jam' al-jawāmi'*, the earlier mentioned, relatively late text on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, widely studied all over the Muslim world, noted the difference of opinion on the issue. The scholars among the *salaf* always had a free and open-minded approach in truth-seeking, being willing to learn from anyone, honestly scrutinizing all available sources, whatever the conviction of the author or transmitter was. This was the approach that al-Qāsimī hoped to re-instill in this treatise, bringing people to a fair and balanced position on this matter.⁸¹

In the response of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, the positions of Ibn Taymiyya on the issue took center stage, together with the positions of most notably the Andalusian Ṣāhirī scholar 'Alī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, and to a lesser extent Ibn Taymiyya's most prominent student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and the Yemeni scholar Muḥammad b. Murtaḍā al-Yamānī (better known as Ibn al-Wazīr, d. 840/1436), a former Zaydī who worked in more or less the same Hadith-oriented tradition as Ibn Taymiyya.⁸² Al-Qāsimī praised the positions of Ibn Ḥazm and al-Ghazālī in particular, and Ibn Ḥazm is the most

81 Qāsimī, *Naqd al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya*, 2-8.

82 al-Qāsimī is known for hardly writing in his own original composition, but mainly citing earlier authorities to make his point, something for which he would later be criticized by other reformers. See Coppens, "Silent *uṣūl* Revolution," 52. On the link between Ibn al-Wazīr and Ibn Taymiyya, see Jon Hoover, "Withholding Judgment on Islamic Universalism: Ibn al-Wazīr (d. 840/1436) on the Duration and Purpose of Hell-Fire," in *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, ed. Christian Lange (Brill, 2016), 208-237.

dominant voice throughout the treatise, even more than Ibn Taymiyya.⁸³ Al-Qāsimī's most important source from Ibn Taymiyya's oeuvre on this particular issue appears to have been his *Minhāj al-Sunna*.

Al-Qāsimī draws upon Ibn Taymiyya in answering seven of the fourteen issues addressed in his treatise. On whether one is allowed to curse individuals (issue 3), al-Qāsimī prefers the position that it is disliked and should be shunned. He quotes Ibn Taymiyya to have said in *Minhāj al-Sunna* that the Prophetic way of cursing was always of groups with specific characteristics (i.e. "may God curse thieves"), not specific persons. One should be careful in cursing individuals, because once this becomes normal, most dead Muslims would be cursed. God has ordered us to pray for dead Muslims, not curse them.⁸⁴ He further quotes Ibn Taymiyya on the point that one cannot use weak (*ḍaʿīf*) narrations as proof texts for creed or law, only for virtuous acts (*faḍā'il al-a'māl*) (issue 4); and that one cannot declare people sinners and deviants without consensus: consensus cannot be claimed on this issue according to Ibn Taymiyya, since only half the Ummah pledged allegiance to 'Alī (issue 6).⁸⁵ Al-Qāsimī uses a long quote from *Minhāj al-Sunna* to argue that religious brotherhood is not dismissed because of major sins (issue 7). In this quote, Ibn Taymiyya states that from prophetic narrations, it becomes clear it would have been better if both parties had not fought each other. Although 'Alī was in the right, he should not have mobilized, that would have made him even better and more correct. The way of the people of the Sunna is to pray for the mercy of all deceased Muslims. There is no other solution, since both the partisans for 'Alī and the partisans for Mu'āwiya can claim about the other party that they drew their swords unjustly against their fellow Muslims.⁸⁶ On the issue of whether Mu'āwiya had the status of *mujtahid* and his battle with 'Alī was thus legitimate even if it was a mistake in his *ijtihād* (issue 9), he quotes *Minhāj al-Sunna* as proof that Mu'āwiya indeed was a *mujtahid* and a proper *faqīh* who also transmitted Hadiths. Even if he was wrong in his *ijtihād*, this would not make him an infidel, and

83 On al-Qāsimī's engagement with Ibn Ḥazm, whose works were a novel phenomenon for the reformers in this age, as were the works of Ibn Taymiyya, see Coppens, "Silent *uṣūl* Revolution," 34; Coppens, "Wiping over Socks," 158, 175.

84 Qāsimī, *Naqd al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya*, 10-11.

85 Qāsimī, *Naqd al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya*, 12-13, 18. See Jonathan A.C. Brown, "Even if It's Not True It's True: Using Unreliable Ḥadīths in Sunni Islam," *Islamic Law and Society* 18 (2011): 1-52.

86 Qāsimī, *Naqd al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya*, 19-20.

forgiveness and reconciliation would still be required per Qur'anic command. As believers, their transgression can be undone in many ways, like repentance, virtuous acts, intercession of the Prophet, and supplication from the believers.⁸⁷ On the very late conversion of Mu'āwiya at the conquest of Mecca, doubt about his intentions and the nature of his caliphate as the installation of an oppressive kingship (issue 10), al-Qāsimī repeats the same position on Mu'āwiya as a *mujtahid* with mistakes and even with great sins (*kabā'ir*) for which forgiveness is possible, and that does not place him outside the boundaries of Islam.⁸⁸ On Mu'āwiya's success in his expeditions against the Roman Empire as wiping out his other mistakes (issue 11), he quotes Ibn Taymiyya to stress that all individuals participating in these wars are forgiven for their past mistakes. Mu'āwiya's army was the first to attack Constantinople, which is a guarantee for forgiveness according to a Hadith in al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*. This forgiveness of the individuals partaking in these wars has precedence over a collective cursing of all who chose the side of Mu'āwiya in the infight against 'Alī.⁸⁹

It has recently been proposed that al-Qāsimī's embrace of the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya was an attempt to push for an "egalitarian religious epistemology," and that the interest in Ibn Taymiyya among early twentieth-century reformers like al-Qāsimī was mainly because they saw him as a model of broad erudition. What mattered to al-Qāsimī and his scholarly peers was "not what to think, but how to argue."⁹⁰ This particular treatise from al-Qāsimī may prove that to be true for his case. The recurring theme throughout the treatise of al-Qāsimī is the value of open academic debate on religious issues, and defense of the right of Ibn 'Aqīl to investigate controversial matters of religion with full intellectual freedom. Al-Qāsimī repeatedly presents that attitude as predominant among the scholars of the *salaf*. In this treatise, he used Ibn Taymiyya for exactly that – laying the groundwork for the rules of argumentation for a multifaceted, plural, and transregional movement of Islamic reformers. Islamic debate now had an international public sphere due to the rise of print, which needed new rules of engagement with each other, a shared hermeneutical framework. To al-Qāsimī, I would argue, it made sense to make

87 Qāsimī, *Naqd al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya*, 29, 31.

88 Qāsimī, *Naqd al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya*, 32-3.

89 Qāsimī, *Naqd al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya*, 35.

90 El Shamsy, *Islamic Classics*, 198; Coppens, "Silent *uṣūl* Revolution," 35-6, 45-9.

this framework as egalitarian as possible: a purely philological approach from the likes of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Ḥazm ruled out dubious authority claims by taking allegedly clearly understandable texts as the only referee for truth and falsehood, equally accessible to all who showed the proper dedication to acquire knowledge of the corpus of source texts and the rules of engagement with them. Religious authority would then no longer depend on unverifiable things like mystical insight, on rational faculties that were unequally divided over people and created their own hierarchies, or a bloodline that went back to the Prophet as the 'Alawī *sāda* wished to maintain.

The political implications of al-Qāsimī's appropriation of Ibn Taymiyya were thus different from the political goals of Ibn Taymiyya himself in his age. Where for Ibn Taymiyya in his treatment of the issue of Mu'āwiya loyalty to the Mamluks was at stake and discouragement of rebellion, al-Qāsimī rather sought to create space for open intellectual debate in an oppressive climate due to Ottoman curtailment of the public sphere. He did not seek rebellion per se but did seek a sphere of independence for scholars and a more egalitarian society, in which one's status as a religious scholar was based on one's knowledge and argumentation, and where Prophetic lineage did not guarantee a special religious and social status, as was the case among the 'Alawīs. As expressed by Rashīd Riḍā, the culture of honoring the *shurafā'* among the 'Alawiyya had far-reaching consequences for the social fabric and led to hierarchies within society that were at odds with the notion of equality that was rising in popularity together with the concept of democracy.⁹¹

The Aftermath in *al-Manār*

In 1910, Rashīd Riḍā's famous journal *al-Manār* received a concerned letter from Ḥasan b. 'Alawī Ibn Shihāb, the author of *al-Ruqya al-shāfiya*, about the controversy surrounding Ibn Taymiyya. The month before, Riḍā had given a lengthy answer to a question from Batavia about the new trend in Java to reject *taqlīd* and call for *ijtihād* based on the Qur'an and the Sunna. In his answer, he spoke about the Batavian 'Alawī scholar 'Uthmān b. 'Aqīl's (d. 1914) resistance against propagating Ibn Taymiyya's

91 Riḍā, "Ibn 'Aqīl," 240.

ideas in the Indonesian archipelago.⁹² Sayyid 'Uthmān based his judgment about Ibn Taymiyya solely on the polemics of Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī al-Makkī (d. 974/1566) against his ideas. Riḍā considered this unjust and ill-informed.⁹³ Riḍā's response had annoyed Ibn Shihāb. In his letter to Riḍā, he points out that the Muslims in his country are so ignorant, that they have never heard of Ibn Taymiyya, nor of terms like *ijtihād* and *taqlīd*, and that the proponents of his thought are the first to even mention his name in the Singaporean context. In Riḍā's reflections on this latest letter from Ibn Shihāb in *al-Manār*, he felt the need to make his position on Mu'āwiya a bit clearer than he initially did in his fatwa. He did reiterate that he refuses to curse Mu'āwiya but was eager to stress that he, himself was a *sayyid*, and that he was loyal to 'Alī rather than to Mu'āwiya and his followers. He quoted his late father approvingly to have said: "Neither do we love Mu'āwiya, nor do we curse him." Although he had not yet found the time to read Ibn 'Aqīl's treatise, he did agree that it was impossible to love Mu'āwiya while he had been unjust toward their forefather 'Alī and rebelled against him, which led to the infights (*fitan*, sing. *fitna*) that had become characteristic of the first century of Islam and to the change "from a model of consultation (*shūrā*) to a model of personal tyrannical leadership that turned the interests of the Ummah into something to be inherited by the nearest relative, even if the whole Ummah despises that." To Riḍā, this was a defining moment for the Ummah, and the root of all later religious and worldly problems. He did stick to his earlier point that discussing this matter was not in the best interest of the Muslims. He therefore advised the Muslims of Java and Singapore to leave this controversy behind them. The issue was not pressing enough to cause mutual enmity and division, which was more harmful than having a wrong opinion on the matter. Riḍā was afraid that Ibn Shihāb's treatise in response to Ibn 'Aqīl would only make matters worse, especially because it was so clearly polemical.⁹⁴

In later issues of *al-Manār*, Riḍā addressed the controversy again. In 1911 he gave an overview of the treatises written in the controversy. In this overview, he defended Ibn 'Aqīl as a well-intended Sunni reformer,

92 On the debate between Sayyid 'Uthmān and Riḍā, see Kaptein, *Sayyid 'Uthman*, 161-89.

93 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, "Anṣār al-bida' wa-l-taqālīd wa-kutubuhum," *al-Manār* 12, no. 8 (1327/1909): 614-23.

94 Riḍā, "Tafarruq," 953-55.

who only sought to collect everything that was said in the books of the Hadith scholars and historians on the status of Mu'āwiya as a transmitter of Hadith and on his unjust rebellion against 'Alī. He expressed his difference of opinion with Ibn 'Aqīl on cursing Mu'āwiya once more but stressed that this difference of opinion was legitimate and not an issue for him. He did regret that Ibn 'Aqīl published his treatise as a response to Riḍā's fatwa, because of the social unrest and division that it caused. Ibn 'Aqīl did not agree with him that he should not publish it back then but now did admit that he underestimated the consequences. Still, he felt the benefits of publishing it were more numerous than its harms. In the same overview, Riḍā expressed his strong dislike for Ibn Shihāb's *Ruqya*. He considered Ibn Shihāb's accusation of being a Shi'ite toward Ibn 'Aqīl unfounded. He accused Ibn Shihāb of inciting a smear campaign against his fellow 'Alawī scholar Ibn 'Aqīl, out of personal jealousy for Ibn 'Aqīl's high standing as a scholar among the Ḥaḍramīs and other Muslims, both in their home base Singapore and globally. He now used this controversy to make himself more important. Not only did he write to *al-Manār* about this treatise repeatedly, but he apparently also wrote letters to other Islamic scholars around the world to convince them of the evil positions taken in Ibn 'Aqīl's treatise. This constant criticism materialized in al-Shihāb's own treatise on the issue according to Riḍā. He had a distaste for Ibn Shihāb's style in this controversy, suggesting it was motivated by his lower desires instead of upright scholarly inquiry and a genuine search for truth. When Riḍā refused to further engage in the controversy, Ibn Shihāb and his fellow travelers considered Riḍā their enemy. When Riḍā read parts of Abū Bakr b. Shihāb al-Dīn's *Wujūb al-ḥimya*, it appeared to him how weak Ibn Shihāb was as a scholar compared to Ibn 'Aqīl, and that he was not only ignorant, but indeed also very jealous and motivated by lower desires. Riḍā was most charmed by al-Qāsimī's response, which he considered fair and balanced, with the utmost respect for Ibn 'Aqīl as a scholar and written as an invitation to open dialogue based on evidence, without any motivation from lower desires. Riḍā noted how al-Qāsimī mainly used the controversy to make some general points about the proper application of the *uṣūl* of the knowledge disciplines of *fiqh*, Hadith, and disputation (*munāẓara*), thus really focusing on the content of the argument.⁹⁵ Still, Riḍā felt that al-Qāsimī presented a one-sided version

95 This corresponds with al-Qāsimī's publication efforts. Coppens, "Silent *uṣūl* Revolution."

of the events, and thus ironically did something similar to Ibn 'Aqīl in his attempt to correct him. However, al-Qāsimī did set the right tone that should be followed when discussing such matters, concludes Riḍā.⁹⁶

Conclusion

This debate proves that it was not yet clear to Islamic reformers globally in this age what exactly should be the method to follow in source criticism, legal reasoning, and proper disputation. This was actively negotiated among them in an increasingly connected as well as diverse international network of reform-minded scholars. The fact that a Ḥaḍramī-'Alawī scholar like Ibn 'Aqīl could raise this controversy on the status of Mu'āwiya in the first place, was exactly because of the reformist rhetoric of a return to the Qur'an and the Sunna and the earliest generations of Muslim scholars, combined with a dismissal of dogmatically following the tradition as established by later scholars who were bounded by their doctrinal school. Ibn 'Aqīl was part of this same discourse, meanwhile remaining loyal to his Ḥaḍramī-'Alawī identity and tradition. He showed that following this method of reform could also lead to revisions of certain established Sunni norms that were a bridge too far for other reformers but were closer to what the Ḥaḍramī-'Alawīs had more or less secretly professed for centuries as a minority position but now deserved to be professed openly under the banner of this method of reform. The mild response of al-Qāsimī should be understood in this light: he recognized the integrity of Ibn 'Aqīl's method and considered it similar to his own. To him scholarly integrity in truth-seeking had preference over acceptance of dogmatic stances, even if this could cause social unrest. In this more "purist" approach al-Qāsimī was different from Riḍā, who preferred to eschew the topic out of concern for the common interest of the worldwide Muslim community.⁹⁷

Given the significance 'Alawī scholars gave to their own identity as descendants of the Prophet and the role it played in their spiritual

96 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, "Kitāb al-naṣā'ih al-kāfiya wa-l-rudūd 'alayhi wa-l-intiṣār lahu," *al-Manār* 14, no. 4 (1329/1911): 314-16.

97 Dyala Hamzah, "From *ilm* to *sihāfa* or the Politics of the Public Interest (*maslaha*): Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and his Journal *al-Manār*," in *The Making of the Arab Intellectual: Empire, Public Sphere and the Colonial Coordinates of Selfhood*, ed. Dyala Hamzah (Routledge, 2013), 90-127; Coppens, "Wiping over Socks," 154-87.

organization and social stratification, this demand of love for members of the Prophetic household does not come as a surprise.⁹⁸ Love for the Prophetic household also meant love for them, and an ascertainment of their special social standing and religious authority. However, the global community of 'Alawī scholars appeared to be differing on this special standing of the *sāda* themselves now, leading to a religious rift in their own circles over the issue. The non-*sāda* among the Ḥaḍramīs became increasingly annoyed about the privileges the *sāda* among them had.⁹⁹ In these tensions, *al-Manār* and Rashīd Riḍā also played a role. A fatwa from Rashīd Riḍā in *al-Manār* allowed a *sharīfa* to marry a non-*sayyid*, an affront to the 'Alawī tradition of only marrying their social equals (*kaf-ā'a*).¹⁰⁰ Riḍā was critical of Ibn 'Aqīl's partisanship for his identity as a *sayyid*, an issue in which his independent mind did not sufficiently show according to Riḍā.¹⁰¹ The position of the *sāda* became such a big issue that non-*sayyid* reformers established their own organization in 1914, *al-Irshād*, establishing their own educational program in the archipelago, that Ibn 'Aqīl vehemently opposed.¹⁰² The fierce responses Ibn 'Aqīl received from his own circles should, I believe, be understood in that light.

Noteworthy is the complete lack of mention of the epithet "*salāfi*" in all treatises under discussion. We know for a fact that epithet had gained in importance in the network of al-Qāsimī and Riḍā in this time, and that it was used transregionally in their letter correspondences. There is difference of opinion as to what it exactly signified in that time, however. Did it only signify a theological commitment, as it historically always had, or was it also slowly changing into a reference to a method in *fiqh* that was not bounded to the postclassical schools of law, or even a broader attitude toward Islamic knowledge?¹⁰³ That the epithet does not show up in these treatises and the related private and public correspondence

98 See Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea*, 16-8.

99 Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea*, 139-42.

100 Kaptein, *Sayyid Uthman*, 164, 211; Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea*, 17, 100, 212n24. This issue of *kafā'a* is also addressed in Ibn 'Aqīl's treatise, as an example of how the 'Alawīs have traditionally always disagreed with the mainstream Ash'arite and Shāfi'ite positions on certain issues, despite being Ash'arites and Shāfi'ites themselves. The issue of Mu'āwiya is comparable in their specific local tradition according to him. Ibn 'Aqīl, *Naṣā'ih*, 202.

101 Riḍā, "Ibn 'Aqīl," 240.

102 Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, "Islamic Modernism in Colonial Java: the al-Irshād Movement," in *Hadhrāmī Traders*, eds. Freitag and Clarence-Smith, 231-48.

103 Coppens, "Wiping over Socks," 156n7, 168-74.

between the involved scholars in the controversy over Mu'āwiya, may indicate that for the 'Alawī scholars involved it was not an attractive epithet to use, perhaps due to its theological associations.

The global Islamic reform movement in the 1900s was multifaceted, with a shared concern for educational and societal reform. Despite a claim to a shared method of "returning to the Qur'an and the Sunna" and an orientation toward the *salaf*, differences of opinion among these reformers could be deep and harsh, as this controversy shows. The label "*salafī*" and the related hermeneutical method did not encompass all facets of this movement. The case of the 'Alawīs shows that despite the imaginary of a shared method and shared ultimate interest in reform, it did not necessarily go hand-in-glove with traditionist theology (the *madhhab al-salaf*), and that the viewpoints of the recent rediscovery Ibn Taymiyya were certainly not self-evidently adopted by all.¹⁰⁴

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104 One can perhaps compare their position in the reform movement to that of the Ibādīs. Amal Ghazal, "Seeking Common Ground: Salafism and Islamic Reform in Modern Ibādī Thought," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies* 7, no. 1 (2005): 119-41.

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CHAPTER 8

Ibn Taymiyya between Fact and Fiction in Modern Turkey: A Special Reference to Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's (1905-1983) Perception of Ibn Taymiyya

Kadir Gömbeyaz

Abstract

This study explores the evolving image of Ibn Taymiyya in modern Turkish thought, focusing on the writings of poet and thinker Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–1983). Often linked with Wahhābism and Salafism, Ibn Taymiyya has been portrayed in polarized ways – either as a reformer or a threat to traditional Islam. In his 1970s work *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, Kısakürek harshly criticized Ibn Taymiyya, depicting him as a rationalist and corrupter of faith. This paper investigates the roots and context of Kısakürek's portrayal, while also highlighting the broader spectrum of Ibn Taymiyya's reception in Turkey, from popular admiration to academic reassessment. It concludes by examining whether Turkish discourse has moved toward a more nuanced and historically informed view of his legacy.

Keywords: Ibn Taymiyya; Modern Turkey; Necip Fazıl Kısakürek; Wahhābism; *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*

Introduction

The present study examines the perceptions of Ibn Taymiyya, a controversial Muslim scholar, within modern Turkey by both the general populace and the academic community. It specifically focuses on the remarks and evaluations of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1905-1983), a poet and thinker who was influential in modern Turkey with his ideas and activities, about Ibn Taymiyya. Kısakürek is intentionally selected for this focus because of his significant impact within nationalist-conservative circles as well as religious-Islamic communities in Turkey. His influence in shaping the ideologies of these groups and their emergence as effective parts of Turkish society cannot be overlooked. These groups also attempt to base their

ideologies and stances on his poems and statements. Therefore, understanding the nationalist-conservative and religious segments in modern Turkey since the founding of the Republic in 1923 necessitates reading and comprehending Kısakürek. Thus, Kısakürek serves as one of the most ideal examples to understand the perception of Ibn Taymiyya in modern Turkey, especially given that some of his works, those presenting sectarianism in Islamic history in his poetic language and perspective, particularly *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları* (The Deviant Branches of the Right Path),¹ include evaluations about Ibn Taymiyya, making our selection even more meaningful and functional.

Kısakürek's view of Ibn Taymiyya is largely negative. However, the fact that Kısakürek has a decisive and lasting effect in Turkey's political and social memory does not mean that all segments in modern Turkey share the same negative view toward Ibn Taymiyya. In some circles, Ibn Taymiyya and his thoughts have been respected, with nearly all his works translated into Turkish. While some describe Ibn Taymiyya as a radical or extremist figure, others see him as a great scholar who purified Islam from superstitions. In academic circles, both Ibn Taymiyya himself and his views, as well as his impacts in later periods, have been studied at an academic level and manner. This study will provide a general outline of different perspectives toward Ibn Taymiyya in modern Turkey but will first present and summarize Kısakürek's approach following a brief overview of his biography.

1. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek was born in Istanbul in 1904 as a citizen of the Ottoman Empire. He developed an interest in literature while studying

1 According to Asım Öz, known for his work on Islamist thought in Turkey, "Necip Fazıl's views on contemporary Muslim thought can be placed under the auspices of his book, *The Deviant Branches of the Right Path*; this title is also of great importance because of its title, which shows his almost complete perspective on the names he judges in his different works. Necip Fazıl's logical and psychological fortress can only be penetrated through the approaches presented in the aforementioned book. Therefore, this book has a 'metaphorical' world of meaning beyond being considered only as a work." See: Asım Öz, "Necip Fazıl'ın Çağdaş Müslüman Düşünürlerle Hesaplaşması Üzerine [On Necip Fazıl's Reckoning with Contemporary Muslim Thinkers]", in *Necip Fazıl Kitabı 'Kalır Dudaklarda Şarkımız Bizim, Sempozyum Tebliğleri*, ed. Asım Öz, İsmail Kara, and Aykut Ertuğrul (Zeytinburnu Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2015), 409.

at Galatasaray High School and enrolled in the Philosophy Department of Istanbul Darülfünun in 1921. Following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, he was selected in 1924 to study in Europe as part of the first group of students sent abroad by the Ministry of National Education. He attended Sorbonne University in Paris, where he met the intuitive and mystical philosopher Henri Bergson. However, his time in Paris was marked by a bohemian lifestyle, including gambling and struggles with alcohol and gambling addiction, which eventually led to the termination of his scholarship. Upon returning to Turkey, he continued his bohemian life for a while.

The year 1934 was a turning point in Kısakürek's life when he met Abdülhakim Arvasi, a Naqshbandi shaykh, and underwent a significant intellectual and spiritual transformation. In 1943, he published the "Büyük Doğu [The Great East]" magazine, reflecting his political thoughts and opposition to Turkish modernization efforts. The magazine, which ran until 1978, was the period's sole Islamist publication and formed the basis of the "Büyük Doğu Movement" he led. This movement also represented an anti-communist stance during the Cold War. Additionally, Kısakürek became politically active, giving lectures across Anatolia and facing political persecution, including convictions. His work spanned poetry, theater, stories, novels, memoirs, as well as religious, mystical, political, and historical writings.²

Kısakürek's intellectual journey can be divided into three phases: his early "bohemian period," a "progress and development period" after turning thirty and embracing religion, and a "political struggle and action period" starting in the 1960s. He emphasized the importance of religious, national, and moral values, which he believed were sidelined by the Westernization efforts since the Tanzimat period and became more oppressive with the establishment of the Republic.³

2 Most articles about Kısakürek have been written in Turkish. For detailed information about his life, see: M. Orhan Okay, "Kısakürek, Necip Fazıl," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* [Turkish Religious Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam] (TDV Yayınları, 2002), 25:484-488.

3 Erdal Şahin, "Necip Fazıl Kısakürek'in Düşünce Eksen ve Siyasi Aksiyonu [The Thought Axis and Political Action of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek]," *Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 17, no. 4 (2019): 3, <https://doi.org/10.18026/cbayarsos.471865>.

2. Kısakürek's Perception of Ibn Taymiyya

To understand Kısakürek's perception of Ibn Taymiyya, it's crucial to focus on his work *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*⁴, which addresses political and doctrinal splits within the Islamic community. This book, in the style of modern heresiography, examines early disputes among the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad and the resulting sectarianism. Kısakürek attempts to present these disagreements as differences in legal reasoning without opening the Companions to criticism, while other sects are strongly criticized. The work is noted for its normative character and ideological approach, presented through a distinct literary style, rather than a historical analysis.

According to Kısakürek, history of Islamic thought is divided into two periods regarding the formation of deviant groups. He labels the first period as the “era of delirious reason,” spanning from the emergence of sects like the Khārijites, Shia, and Mutazilites, up to Ḥasan Şabbāḥ's esotericism. This era is characterized by various delusions grounded in reason. The subsequent period, which he terms the “age of rational delusion,” reached a materialistic interpretation of Islam in his own time, initiated by Ibn Taymiyya, whom he views as the first to offer a destructively materialistic perspective on Islam.⁵

Kısakürek critiques the respect and reverence Ibn Taymiyya received in certain Islamic encyclopedias of his time, particularly pointing to the Turkish translation of Brill's *Encyclopedia of Islam: The First Edition*, enhanced with additional articles by Turkey's Ministry of National Education. He also mentions Ibn Taymiyya's significant esteem among certain religious groups and individuals issuing fatwas during his era. Kısakürek laments the lack of recognition for a great saint's description of Ibn Taymiyya as a “heretic destroying religion from within” and regrets the absence of an antidote against “this creed's scorpion poison.”⁶

Kısakürek describes Ibn Taymiyya as a “donkey laden with books” for attacking a wisdom genius like al-Imam al-Ghazālī and accusing him of ignorance in Hadith science. He warns not to be deceived by Ibn

4 The first edition of the work was published in 1978. The 24th edition (September 2021) of the work, which has been published in many printings to date, will be used throughout this study.

5 Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları* (Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 2021), 105.

6 Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 106.

Taymiyya's refutations against deviant sects, which might lead some to mistake him for a Sunni thinker. Kısakürek characterizes his works as "chocolate boxes hiding a bomb" and labels the author of *Kitāb al-imān* as a delusional figure who murders spiritual perception and "an unbeliever hidden behind the veil of truth." Viewing Ibn Taymiyya's literal interpretations of the anthropomorphic expressions mentioned in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, accusations of polytheism toward mysticism and saint veneration as actions of polytheism, besides some of his fatwas and his accusing al-Ghazālī and Ibn 'Arabī of blasphemy, Kısakürek considers it as the most sensitive danger point and unluckiness. Ultimately, he criticizes Ibn Taymiyya for lacking any insight or intuition beyond the five senses, branding him as "spiritually blind and lame."⁷

Kısakürek targets Ibn Taymiyya primarily because he sees him as facilitating the adoption of Western materialism within the Islamic world, thus undermining Islam at its core. He argues that Ibn Taymiyya, whom he considers unworthy of attention, cannot simply be ignored due to the significant influence he had, particularly in inspiring Wahhābism and reformers like Muḥammad 'Abduh.

It is understood from Kısakürek's own statements that behind this reaction lies the positive presentation and evaluation of Ibn Taymiyya by *The Encyclopedia of Islam* published by the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Turkey, which "seems to speak in the language of the Sunni Islam." According to Kısakürek, Muḥammad 'Abdūh's "Egyptian Reform Party" warmly embraced Ibn Taymiyya's works, viewing him as a pioneer of the reform movement, thereby positioning Ibn Taymiyya as a principal disruptor within Islam.⁸

Kısakürek's criticism of Ibn Taymiyya appears to be significantly influenced by Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's (1703-1792) practical implementation of Ibn Taymiyya's teachings, which played a crucial role in the foundation of Wahhābism. Kısakürek views Wahhābism's actions, such as destroying the graves of companions, as one of the darkest forms of disbelief and a treacherous application of Ibn Taymiyya's views.⁹ According to him, Wahhābism emerged as a movement that rebelled against the Ottoman Empire, "the sole Islamic power of its time," seeking

7 For his evaluations, see: Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 106-107.

8 Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 108-109.

9 Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 125.

to undermine it from within. Like Lenin applied Marx's ideas, Wahhābīs implemented Ibn Taymiyya's teachings.¹⁰ Wahhābism is described as a form of Islamic materialism, which ironically leads to the denial of God, the ultimate end of materialism. However, Wahhābīs claim to recognize and rightly understand God, contradicting their materialistic approach by completely denying Sufism.¹¹

Another reason for Kısakürek's opposition to Ibn Taymiyya is his animosity toward Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh. He likens them to "clowns wearing turbans painted by Western painters,"¹² indicating their adoption of Western influences. Kısakürek claims these two were part of the Masonic circles in Egypt. This perspective reflects Kısakürek's broader critique of Islamic reformers who, in his view, compromised Islamic values under Western influence.

Among those targeted by Kısakürek is Mawdūdī, whom he calls "Merdudi [Mardūdī (The Refused)]" and criticizes for devout following of Ibn Taymiyya. Mawdūdī's advocacy for unifying sects and his opposition to the four Sunni schools of thought, alongside his criticism of Sunni scholars, underscores Kısakürek's view of him as dangerous. Additionally, Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh, whom Kısakürek derisively calls "Baidullah [Ba'īdullah (The one distant from God)]," is labeled a "dwarf thinker," criticized for his welcomed presence in Turkish universities because his book *İslam Peygamberi* (The Prophet of Islam) is so dangerous according to him. Sayyid Quṭb, initially supported by Kısakürek but later rejected upon realizing his admiration for Ibn Taymiyya, and Mūsā Jārullah Bigiev, with his dangerous reliance on Ibn Taymiyya, are also mentioned as problematic figures.¹³

2.1 Background of Kısakürek's Perception of Ibn Taymiyya

Kısakürek's negative perception of Ibn Taymiyya is driven by several factors:

10 Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 124.

11 Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 126.

12 Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 152.

13 For his evaluations of Mawdūdī, Ḥamīdullāh, Sayyid Quṭb and Bigiev, see: Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapık Kolları*, 155-158.

1. Opposition to Wahhābism, which uses Ibn Taymiyya as a primary reference,
2. Deep opposition to Islamic modernists and reformers, who also regard Ibn Taymiyya highly,
3. The anti-Sufi stance of both groups, with Ibn Taymiyya as their key reference,
4. Their opposition to the four Sunni schools and the concept of *madhhab*, which Kısakürek labels as *mezhepsizlik* (*lā madhhabīyya*/the refusal of submitting oneself to a theological/legal school), with Ibn Taymiyya as the main reference for this stance,
5. The transformation in his life and views after meeting the Naqshbandi shaykh Abdülhakim Arvasi,
6. His struggle against Westernization, viewing both Wahhābism and reformism as Western projects to corrupt Islam.

Kısakürek's critiques of Ibn Taymiyya are not rooted in academic reasons but in ideological and emotional factors. Lacking the proficiency to read Ibn Taymiyya's works in their original languages, Kısakürek does not aim to understand or familiarize himself with Ibn Taymiyya directly. Instead, he perceives Ibn Taymiyya through the lens of the groups he opposes,¹⁴ fitting him into his own narrative of history, where he interprets Islamic history through the dichotomy of spirituality versus materialism. Consequently, Kısakürek places Ibn Taymiyya alongside movements he views as harmful, such as the Wahhābī-Salafī and reformist-Islamist lines, seeing them all as part of the same problematic camp. His stance on Ibn Taymiyya should be considered within the context of the left-right polarization in Turkey and the bipolar world of the Cold War era and should be seen as the product of an ideological perspective. He was extremely opposed to the understanding of Islamism that came through translations from outside Turkey from the 1960s onwards.¹⁵ Kısakürek considered reformist figures like Mawdūdī, Sayyid Qutb, and Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh as significant threats, labeling Ibn Taymiyya as the source of such reformist movements and accusing him of "showing not how to

14 Ahmet Yalçın, *Selefi Düşünce'nin Tarihsel Gelişiminde İbn Taymiyye* [Ibn Taymiyya in the Historical Development of Salafī Thought] (Kimlik Yayınları, 2020), 234.

15 Mahmut Hakkı Akın, "Muhafazakâr Siyasal Kültürde Bir Sembol Olarak Necip Fazıl Kısakürek [Necip Fazıl Kısakürek as a Symbol in Conservative Political Culture]," *Muhafazakâr Düşünce Dergisi* 10, no. 39 (2014): 40.

believe in the Prophet but how not to.”¹⁶ We find the expressions that best reflect his perception in the following lines:

Today’s greatest menace to Islam is not those who attempt to destroy it from the outside and directly, but those who seek to ruin it from within, treating their actions as a form of repair, correction, and renewal...

These “reformers,” grounded in the temperament of a barren intellect from centuries ago (Ibn Taymiyya), have through Wahhābism and later through the likes of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ‘Abduh, plunged into a mire of misunderstanding, trying to support Islam like a crumbling building with external props, thus revealing their hidden doubts and distrust in Islam. Figures like Ḥamīdullāh and Mawdūdī, as well as recent writers in Egypt claiming to be Islamic scholars, mostly follow the pragmatic, superficial school of ‘Abduh and al-Afghānī, lacking deep understanding and spirituality. Their works should either be avoided or read critically by those deeply knowledgeable in Sharia and Islamic critique. Otherwise, hoping for benefit from these works is like getting into the car of a driver who does not know how to turn a corner.

It’s time to discern our heroes with this perspective.¹⁷

In fact, Kısakürek’s targets were the professors of the Higher Islamic Institutes, who were influenced by the al-Afghānī-‘Abduh-Rashīd Riḍā line and who took a sympathetic stance toward Ibn Taymiyya, brought some of his views to the agenda and made translations from his works, especially in the second half of the 1970s.¹⁸ Kısakürek characterizes these people who leaned on Ibn Taymiyya as “traitors of ideas and lack of

16 Kısakürek, *Doğru Yolun Sapkın Kolları*, 106.

17 Kısakürek, Önsöz [Preface] to *Dini Tamir Davasında Din Tahripçileri [Destroyers of Religion Claiming to Repair Religion]*, by Ahmed Davudoğlu (Bedir Yayınları, 1997), 11.

18 These people made their ideas known through the magazine *Nesil*, which was published monthly between September 1976 and September 1980. Kısakürek and like-minded people targeted especially the writers of this magazine and their circle. For a detailed analysis, see İbrahim Hakkı İnal – Muhammed Nurullah Alagöz, “1970’ler Türkiye’sinde Dinde Reform Tartışmaları: Nesil Dergisi Çevresi Örneği [Discussions on Reform in Religion in 1970s Turkey: The Case of Nesil Magazine],” *Harran Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 21, no. 35 (2016): 28-52. Also see Eyyüp Said Kaya, “Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nde Fıkıh Literatürü: Bir Hasıla [Fiqh Literature in the Republic of Turkey: A Review],” *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi* 12, no. 24 (2014): 9-126.

faith who think that Islam is in need of help and endeavour to supply this help from outside.”¹⁹ Actually, behind Kısakürek’s denigration of the leading figures of contemporary Muslim thought was the idea of his “Turkey-centredness.”²⁰

2.2 *Effects of Kısakürek’s Perception of Ibn Taymiyya*

Kısakürek had a serious impact on both the nationalist-conservative and Islamist segments in Modern Turkey, and became the main reference source for many political formations and non-governmental organizations that were raised within Büyük Doğu Movement he founded or were influenced by his ideas.²¹ Just as Ibn Taymiyya served as a basic reference for the groups Kısakürek saw as dangers, Kısakürek similarly became a primary reference for many groups during and after his time. Therefore, religious groups or political formations following his ideas have also continued his perception of Ibn Taymiyya, often based on images linked to antagonism toward tendencies like Wahhābism, Neo-Salafism, Qur’anism, and Reformism, projecting them onto Ibn Taymiyya as their ideologue.

The opposition to Ibn Taymiyya in both the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey, especially among Sufi groups and orders, is a significant factor. Today, the majority of Sufi orders in Turkey criticize Ibn Taymiyya, viewing him as an adversary, largely due to the positive regard Wahhābism holds for him.²² The favor that Wahhābism showed

19 İnal – Alagöz, “1970’ler Türkiye’sinde Dinde Reform Tartışmaları,” 47.

20 Öz, “Necip Fazıl’ın Çağdaş Müslüman Düşünürlerle Hesaplaşması Üzerine,” 411; For a similar remark, see Mesut Mezkit, “Türkiye’nin Gelecek Ufku: Muhafazakâr Değişim [Turkey’s New Horizon: Conservative Change], *Yeni Fikir* 10, no. 1 (2013): 48. According to Büyükkara, “Kısakürek, who had set the Turks in the vanguard of the Islamic movement, did not want to see these foreign men in Turkey. Perhaps he could not tolerate their growing influence on the youth. For these reasons, there has always been an unbridgeable distance between Kısakürek and the radical sectors that advocate a universal Islamic movement that transcends nations and sects.” See: Mehmet Ali Büyükkara, “Türkiye’de Radikal Dini-Siyasi Akımlar,” *Demokrasi Platformu* 2, no. 8 (2006): 119.

21 As a matter of fact, some researchers describe Kısakürek as “the founder of Republican Islamism”; see Ercan-Yıldırım, *İslâmcılığın İki Kurucusu: Mehmet Akif – Necip Fazıl* [Two Founders of Islamism: Mehmet Akif – Necip Fazıl] (Pınar Yayınları, 2015), 113.

22 For example, Cübbeli Ahmed Hoca, a famous preacher belonging to an influential Sufi sect (Naqshbandi) in Turkey, states in his conversations that although there are scholars who call Ibn Taymiyya an infidel, they do not say so, but that he is a person with extremely perverted views; see “İbni Teymiyye’ye Kâfir Denilebilir mi? [Can Ibn Taymiyya be Called a Disbeliever?],” Cübbeli Ahmed Hoca, March 3, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68AWO_O8f8Y. Also, see the video titled “İbni Teymiyye’nin Sapıklığı ve İbni Arabî’nin de Veliliğinde İttifak Vardır. [There is Consensus

toward Ibn Taymiyya left a negative impact on those who were against Wahhābism. Since Wahhābism was a movement undertaken to destroy the state in Ottoman history, this situation brought opposition to both Wahhābism and Ibn Taymiyya in modern Turkey.²³ The fact that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, who laid the foundations of Wahhābism, made frequent references to Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn al-Qayyim while forming his views on belief and practice, makes Wahhābism the pioneer of movements that accept Ibn Taymiyya as the main reference source.²⁴ Consequently, Ibn Taymiyya is often associated with Wahhābism. Even people and groups who advocated similar views before Wahhābism were evaluated as Ibn Taymiyyahists. This stance was contrary to the thought that Kısakürek adhered to through Arvasi. Because it was an approach that sees the following a *madhhab* as mandatory, that the door of *ijtihad* has been closed, that *ijtihad* within the *madhhab* is now only possible, and at the same time follows Sharia-centered Sufism such as Naqshbandiyya.²⁵

on Ibn Taymiyya's Deviation and Ibn Arabi's Sainthood],” Cübbeli Ahmed Hoca, March 3, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Us2MjYONOeg>. He criticizes Ibn Taymiyya for some of the narrations containing praise about ‘Alī for portraying them as Shiite fabrications; “İbni Teymiyye’nin Bazı Hadis-i Şerifler İçin Söylediği ‘Şī’a’nın Uydurmasıdır!’ Sözüne Reddiye,” Cübbeli Ahmed Hoca, March 3, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHpVZHUuWD0>.

23 Therefore, discussing Ibn Taymiyya in Turkey has always been a political discussion at the same time; see: Öz, “Necip Fazıl’ın Çağdaş Müslüman Düşünürlerle Hesaplaşması Üzerine,” 432.

24 Ahmet Yalçın, who works on the negative perception about Ibn Taymiyya in Turkey, explains this situation for three main reasons: His serious criticism of some Sufis of his time, especially Ibn ‘Arabī, and some of their ideas; the movements that emerged after him, known as “Qadızadelis” and “Wahhābis,” which have negative meanings in Ottoman history; embracing Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Taymiyya’s understanding of the antropomorphic expressions in the Scripture or his literal interpretations of these expressions. See Ahmet Yalçın, “İbn Teymiyye Hakkında Olumsuz Algının Kritiği [The Critique of Negative Perception about Ibn Taymiyya],” *e-Makālāt* 11, no. 1 (2018): 139, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/497210>.

25 As a matter of fact, Hüseyin Hilmi Işık, who says that he follows Abdülhakim Arvasi and follows his path, just like Necip Fazıl, and the group (Işıkçılar) that follow him also strongly oppose Ibn Taymiyya. Işık states that Ibn Taymiyya was a heretic and not from the Ahl al-Sunna. He again describes Wahhābism as “a mixture of the lies of the perverted cleric Ahmed ibn Taymiyya and [British spy] Hempher”; see Işık, *Saadet-i Ebediyye*, 447, <https://www.hakikatkitabevi.net/bookread.php?bookCode=001>.

3. Other Perceptions of Ibn Taymiyya in Modern Turkey

In modern Turkey, the view on Ibn Taymiyya is not homogeneously negative as Kısakürek's perspective might suggest; there are various perceptions. These can be briefly described as follows:

3.1 A Positive and Exalting View of Ibn Taymiyya

The vitality observed in Islamist movements in Turkey after the 1950s was reflected in the publishing life mostly through the translation of Islamist texts, which intensified in the 1960s. During this period, the texts of writers belonging to the circles called Neo-Salafī, such as the Afghānī-'Abduh-Rashīd Riḍā line and their intellectual followers, the Muslim Brotherhood, and al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya, were widely translated. However, the texts of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, which were occasionally referenced by these circles, did not come to the fore and the identification of these circles with Ibn Taymiyya was avoided.²⁶ The effect of the fact that classical sources for Islamic sciences had not yet come to the fore at that time probably played a role in this. By the 1980s, with the increasing emphasis on returning to sources, the texts of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim began to come to the fore, and the translation of these texts had intensified since the mid-1980s.

The acceleration of translations of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim's works, along with mainstream Islamic publishers in Turkey releasing these texts, has coincided with the rise of Salafi discourse in the country. Publishers like Tevhid, Pınar, İhya, İklim, and later Dergah and İnsan which showed interest in Political Islam, have translated works of these scholars.²⁷ These translations became a primary reference for those questioning Sufism and Sufi orders, and aiming to purify Islam from what they saw as superstitions within society. However, post-1990s, as this discourse struggled to find a place within the mainstream Islamic narrative in Turkey, such publications became limited and remained marginal for publishers driven by Islamic motives.

26 Muhammed Uşame Onuş, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi İslamî İlimler Literatüründe Selefilik ve İbn Taymiyye Çizgisi: Başlangıç Mülâhazaları [Salafism and the Line of Ibn Taymiyya in the Islamic Sciences Literature of the Republican Era: Preliminary Considerations]," *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi* 13, no. 25-26 (2015): 318.

27 Onuş, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi İslamî İlimler Literatüründe Selefilik ve İbn Taymiyye Çizgisi," 316. For details about the development of the translations of Ibn Taymiyya's works in Turkey, see 315-317.

3.2 A Moderate and Academic View of Ibn Taymiyya

In Turkey, over sixty doctoral and master's theses have been written on Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim,²⁸ along with hundreds of books, articles, and conference papers.²⁹ The majority of these theses focus on Ibn Taymiyya's doctrinal views on various subjects and his perspective on Sufism, often examining these topics from a historical viewpoint rather than discussing his influence across different periods or commenting on the causes and dimensions of this influence.³⁰ There are relatively few theses on his impact on modern Salafi groups and movements.³¹ Despite occasional praise or criticism, these works generally maintain a moderate and academic tone, aiming to present Ibn Taymiyya's views as they are. It is seen that in academic studies and circles, Kısakürek's negative perception of Ibn Taymiyya has almost no effect, and Ibn Taymiyya is perceived as an important scholar whose ideas should be studied.

Conclusion

In modern Turkey, Ibn Taymiyya has often been either demonized or idealized, which may be seen as his greatest misfortune. Caught between extreme adulation by his supporters and severe criticism by his detractors, his true identity often remains obscured by these contrasting images.³² Kısakürek represents those who have demonized him, focusing less on Ibn Taymiyya's actual ideas and more on placing him within the

28 For theses, find "Thesis Center," the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/giris.jsp>.

29 For these works, find "Article Databases," ISAM Library Catalog, <https://makale.isam.org.tr/home>.

30 For a brief analysis of academic studies such as theses, articles and proceedings on Ibn Taymiyya, see Onuş, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi İslamî İlimler Literatüründe Selefilik ve İbn Teymiyye Çizgisi," 297-302.

31 In academic studies in Turkey, another issue in which Ibn Taymiyya is particularly brought to the agenda is about one of the most important events in the history of Ottoman religious thought: the Qadizadelis-Khalwatîs conflict of sixteenth century. Some researchers easily associate the Qadizadelis movement with Ibn Taymiyya based on some similar discourses and characterize it as proto-Wahhabism. However, this anachronistic reading is problematic. For a study containing significant analyses on the subject, see Mustapha Sheikh, *Ottoman Puritanism and Its Discontents: Ahmad al-Rumi al-Akhisari and the Qadizadelis* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 3, 28-35, 174-175.

32 Faruk Sancar, "Bağnaz Bir Selefi mi Endişeli bir Entelektüel mi? (İbn Teymiyye'nin Eleştirel ve Reaksiyoner Karakteri Hakkında) [A Begoted Salafi or a Concerned Intellectual? (A Review on Ibn Taymiyya's Critical and Reactionary Character)]," *Dini Araştırmalar* 18, no. 46 (2015): 97, <https://doi.org/10.15745/da.85975>.

ideological conflicts of his own era. Kısakürek has categorized Islamic figures into “spiritualists” versus “materialists,” reflecting his era’s dualistic perspective. He positioned those aligning with his religious and historical perceptions as spiritualists, while labeling opponents, including Khārijites, Mutazilites, Shīa, modern Wahhābīs, and rationalists such as Sayyid Qutb, Mawdūdī, and Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh, as materialists regardless of their differences. This binary classification underscores his ideologically driven interpretation of Islamic history. According to him, Ibn Taymiyya is the pioneer and primary reference for those he considers to be corrupters of Islam. As such, any positive aspects of Ibn Taymiyya are inherently unlikely from his perspective. Furthermore, Kısakürek’s poetic and sharp writing style has rendered the image of Ibn Taymiyya even more negative and formidable.

Although Kısakürek’s ideological construct continues among those who share similar views and concerns, this does not mean that there are no different perceptions toward Ibn Taymiyya in modern Turkey. On the contrary, there are individuals and groups who see Ibn Taymiyya as a great Islamic scholar and reformer. In the middle of these two extremes is the academic community, which tries to present Ibn Taymiyya’s thought and influence as impartially as possible.³³ The academy’s interest in Ibn Taymiyya continues to be strong, but this interest is often retrospective, and Ibn Taymiyya’s impact on the present is the subject of relatively little research. The main danger that awaits Ibn Taymiyya’s perception and research both in the public and in the academia is that Ibn Taymiyya is often aligned with Wahhābism and/or Reformist-Islamist movements that emerged much later than him.

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33 Each interpretation and perception is closely linked to the background of the person studying him; see Islam Bagakashvili, “İbn Taymiyyah: The Doctrine of Jihad and His Modern Reception,” PhD diss., Istanbul 29 Mayıs University (2023), 121.

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CHAPTER 9

From the Shaykh al-Islam to the Intellectual: Reception and Functions of Ibn Taymiyya in Francophone Islamic Literature

Daoud Riffi

Abstract

This chapter explores the evolving reception of Ibn Taymiyya in French-language Islamic publishing over the last thirty years. Initially the preserve of French Orientalist scholarship, the figure of Ibn Taymiyya has been reappropriated by a new wave of authors within politicized Salafism. The study analyzes how these authors reinterpret Taymiyya not solely as a medieval jurist and theologian, but as a modern intellectual whose thought offers analytical and strategic resources for confronting the perceived decline and subjugation of Islam in contemporary contexts. Through a close reading of selected texts, the chapter sheds light on the mechanisms of intellectual appropriation, ideological reconfiguration, and the construction of religious authority in a transnational francophone Islamic space.

Keywords: French-speaking edition; *Salafiyya*; *Ṣaḥwa islāmiyya*; Nawa editions; French Islam

Introduction

The life and work of Ibn Taymiyya have given rise to an extensive body of literature, both within the realm of Islamic religious production and in academic research. Doctoral theses, articles, conferences, and translations of his books, along with a devotional literature, indeed provide avenues for exploring various aspects of this intellectual figure who continues to evoke both fascination and repulsion. The academic world first encountered the Damascene scholar through the pioneering works of Duncan B. Macdonald (d. 1943).¹ This work includes translations of excerpts from Ibn Taymiyya and contributes to the image that has persisted to this day:

1 Particularly his book *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence, and Constitutional Theory* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903).

that of a reformer theologically adhering to the apparent meaning of texts, legally rigorous, and spiritually opposed to Sufism as defended by the dominant religious establishment. However, it is certainly the interest and works of Henri Laoust, guided in that direction by Louis Massignon,² that have granted Ibn Taymiyya's work the recognition it holds today in research, emphasizing its complexity and subtlety and presenting a more positive image.

Yet, intellectual history is not solely concerned with the produced works but also with their influence through posterity; the history of ideas is inherently tied to their receptions. The case of Ibn Taymiyya is no exception. The study of his reception became even more imperative with the development of printing in Islam (delayed and fully realized only in the late nineteenth century), which led to a clear misunderstanding: the notion that Ibn Taymiyya had always been a major intellectual and religious figure in Islam, serving as a key resource in debates and that his work had been extensively taught since his death. This misconception largely stems from the editing and the wide dissemination of his writings made possible by the "editorial revolution" in the publication of the early *Salafiyya* of Damascus, initially around Tāhir al-Jazā'irī (d. 1920) and Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935),³ then by the post-World War II Saudi publishing industry: Ibn Taymiyya seemingly "emerged" simultaneously with the advent of printing.⁴

2 According to Charles Pellat, in his tribute to the work of H. Laoust. Charles Pellat, "Notice sur la vie et les travaux de Henri Laoust, membre de l'Académie," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, no. 3 (1986): 507.

3 Regarding the roles of al-Jazā'irī and Riḍā in the rediscovery, compilation, and edition of Ibn Taymiyya's work, refer to Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Brill, 2001); See also: Joseph H. Escovitz, "He Was the Muḥammad 'Abduḥ of Syria' a Study of Tāhir al-Jazā'irī and His Influence," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18, no. 3 (1986): 293-310, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/163380>. On the notion of an "editorial revolution" and what it encompasses, see Stéphane Lacroix, *Le Crépuscule des saints. Histoire et politique du salafisme en Égypte* (CNRS éditions, 2024), 47-102.

4 Thus, it is worth noting that the first printing of Ibn Taymiyya's significant book, *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql aw muwāfaqat ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl li-ṣarḥ al-ma'qūl*, was not published until 1979 (Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyya, 1399/1979). Previously, the book had only been available in a few fragmentary editions: *Dar'* 1:3, 4:295 corresponds to *Bayān muwāfaqat ṣarḥ al-ma'qūl li-ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl*, published on the margin of Ibn Taymiyya, *Minḥāj al-Sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqḍ kalām al-Shī'a wa al-Qadariyya* (Būlāq, 1321/1903-4). Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, 1:2 - 3:87 corresponds to Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamid and Muḥammad Ḥamid al-Fiḳī (ed.), *Muwāfaqat ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl li-ṣarḥ al-ma'qūl*, (Maṭba'at

The study of the reception of the Damascene master has been undertaken more recently than that of his biography: the proliferation of monographs and prosopographical studies has altered our perceptions, relegating Ibn Taymiyya's legacy to a more niche status. Khaled El-Rouayheb, in particular, demonstrates that not only has Ibn Taymiyya always been contested among scholars, but he has also experienced a relatively limited reception.⁵ Until contemporary times, the mapping of Taymiyyan thought mainly comprises only a few isolated instances, and the study of the Shaykh al-Islam has long been the activity of exclusive circles with carefully selected disciples.

This study seeks to examine the reception of Ibn Taymiyya through the lens of a relatively unexplored aspect of cultural history: that of Francophone Islamic literature. Western languages are not yet perceived as "languages of Islamic sciences," despite the spread of Islam in Europe, the United States, or Australia, leading to the emergence of Islamic literature in the languages of these countries. Therefore, this study considers the reception of Ibn Taymiyya in French-language books, questioning the portraits they present and ways his thought and work have been used.

Following an initial section dedicated to the presentation of Francophone Islamic publishing and its specificities, the second part offers an overview of Taymiyyan publishing in the French language. Finally, an analysis of the usage made by three French authors, whose work seeks to promote the thought and methodology of Ibn Taymiyya, concludes the study. This article thus seeks to explore the reception and functions of the shaykh in a new context: that of a minority Islam that perceives itself as such and aims to restore its power in a world that appears fundamentally akin to that of Ibn Taymiyya – one marked by the generalized collapse of Islam as a religious and political system.

1. "Francophone Islamic Literature": An Understudied Ecosystem

The nature of the sources used for this study must first be clarified. The term "Francophone Islamic literature" can encompass two types of

al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1370/1951). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this chapter for pointing out these partial editions.

5 Khaled El-Rouayheb "From Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d.1566) to Khayr al-Din al-Alusi (d.1899): Changing Views of Ibn Taymiyya Amongst non-Hanbali Sunni Scholars," in *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport, Shahab Ahmed (Oxford University Press, 2015), 269-318.

editions, relatively distinct from each other: the “general public” edition, which is generalist and non-confessional, publishing texts on Islam or derived from its heritage on one hand, and the confessional edition, whose actors and target audience are primarily Muslims on the other hand.

The first type of edition is well-known and has been extensively researched in cultural history, represented by publishing houses such as Gallimard, Seuil, or Le Cerf, for example. The second type, however, is less known: it refers to houses founded by Muslims and “for” Muslims themselves, at least primarily.

This second literature is the subject of my present study, which I term “Francophone Islamic literature.” While it has received limited attention from researchers despite its crucial role for French-speaking Muslims, the history of Islamic publishing contributes to a cultural and intellectual history of Islam. The book, as both a vehicle for ideas and a material object, stands at the intersection of economic, professional, and ideological stakes and networks that demand further study.⁶ The history of Francophone Islamic publishing has received limited scholarly attention to date. Following Soraya El-Alaoui’s pioneering – but now dated work – on the Islamic bookshop scene in Paris,⁷ only one comprehensive research effort has been undertaken, led by Anne-Laure Zwilling, examining the editorial phenomenon more broadly.⁸ However, no in-depth study, involving textual analysis, has been conducted thus far.⁹

However, Francophone Islamic literature is central. Not only does this literature serve a function similar to that of publishing in the Arab-Muslim world – disseminating a corpus and participating in debates – but

6 This contribution is not the place to conduct a comprehensive study of this nature. My approach will focus on a specifically Taymiyyan angle, part of a broader literary universe, of which it constitutes an enlightening example in many respects, as we shall see.

7 Published in 2006, her book is her thesis, defended in 1998. Note that her study concerns not so much publishing in the strict sense but rather the Islamic book trade, specifically in Paris. Soraya El-Alaoui, *Les Réseaux du Livre Islamique: Parcours Parisiens* (CNRS Éditions, 2006).

8 Anne-Laure Zwilling (ed.), *La Foi Musulmane par les Livres. Dynamiques, Stratégies et Évolution Religieuse des Publications Islamiques en Langue Française* (Cerf Patrimoines, 2023). This book was preceded by a chapter (partly programmatic) by Anne-Laure Zwilling, “Le contenu des livres confessionnels en français sur l’islam: que peuvent lire les musulmans francophones?” in *Les Territoires Conquis de l’Islamisme*, ed. B. Rougier (Presses universitaires de France, 2020).

9 The book edited by A.-L. Zwilling is more of a comprehensive, partly statistical study than an analysis of the actual content of the books.

it also replaces traditional channels for the transmission of knowledge. Oral teaching, for instance, remains limited due to the insufficient presence of trained imams capable of imparting tools and knowledge to a predominantly non-Arabic-speaking audience. Thus, the book, for a Muslim living in France or Belgium, has spontaneously taken the place of the scholar, even for daily needs related to religious practice.

In addition to this predominant role of the book, another important characteristic, as mentioned earlier, comes into play: the “Islamic book,” i.e. a book dealing with subjects related to Islam, circulates within a market divided into two parts that remain relatively separate to this day. Non-confessional and confessional editions are produced and disseminated in different spaces: general bookstores (physical or online) for the former and Islamic bookstores – the *maktaba*-s – for the latter, usually concentrated in specific areas.¹⁰

In practice, *maktaba*-s sell very few books from non-Muslim publishers, and vice versa; Islamic editions are rarely available in the non-community book market, with few exceptions.¹¹ Even the prominent online bookstore Amazon, despite its dominance in the market, sells only a limited portion of books from confessional publishing. Indeed, there exists a parallel market of online *maktaba*-s: the e-commerce sites of the publishers/booksellers themselves, complemented by numerous other websites (Orientica, Al-Imen, Deenshop, for example).

These elements have significant implications for my study, as they lead to a sectoralization of offerings based on the points of sale, and explain why there are in fact two literatures that intersect very little. This lack of knowledge is particularly evident in the case of Ibn Taymiyya. Francophone Muslims are largely unaware of scholarly works on Ibn Taymiyya, or even of popularizations of such works. Conversely, scholars have limited knowledge of the writings about Ibn Taymiyya and the translations of his works produced for Muslim circles. This economic reality explains why “Francophone Islamic publishing,” as identified

10 *Maktaba*-s are typically located near mosques or in neighborhoods with high concentrations of Muslim communities. A specific French feature is the Couronnes neighborhood in Paris, which houses a significant number of Muslim publishers/bookstores.

11 This was the case with AlBouraq editions (Paris), the only confessional actor participating in both markets. Since the writing of this article, the publisher Sana has also been able to enter the general book market.

here, offers a specific portrayal of the Shaykh al-Islam, which will be the focus of this study.

A specific mention must be made of the works conducted by Yahya Michot, which will not be the subject of the present study but constitute a singularity in Francophone publishing. Indeed, his work – largely consisting of commented and analyzed translations of Ibn Taymiyya – straddles both academic research and activist engagement within European Islam. Thus, the scholarly rigor characteristic of academic work – critical edition, footnotes, analysis, etc. – is evident in Y. Michot's studies, including his books and articles predominantly published by Muslim editions, with AlBouraq being his publisher for several years.¹² Y. Michot enjoys a solid reputation among the Muslim literate public, both for his erudition and undoubtedly for his status as a convert to Islam. However, his books do not reach a wide audience and are often absent from the shelves of *maktaba*-s. His translations are scholarly (with lengthy introductions and numerous notes),¹³ and focus on subjects that may seem obscure to the general public.¹⁴ Michot's academic output does not align with the typical standards of Francophone Islamic publishing, where intellectually rigorous works rarely achieve bestseller status,¹⁵ despite the often-excellent

12 His series *Textes spirituels d'Ibn Taymiyya* was published between 1990 and 1998 in the journal *Le Musulman*, the magazine of the Association Islamic Students in France (Association des Étudiants Islamiques de France, AEIF), to eventually be compiled in the collection *Études Taymiyyiennes - Taymiyen studies* (AlBouraq 2020). In an introductory note to the series I-XVI, "translations published in 'Le Musulman' and compiled for some brothers and friends," Y. Michot insists that his texts be cited with "the original references in *Le Musulman*."

13 For instance, the preface, foreword, introduction, bibliography, and index of *Les Saints du mont Liban* extend over 121 pages, compared to 93 pages for the translation itself, which is largely composed of scholarly explanatory notes. Ibn Taymiyya, *Les Saints du Mont Liban. Absence, Jihād et Spiritualité, entre la Montagne et la Cité. Cinq Fetwas Traduits de l'Arabe, Introduits et Annotés par Yahya Michot* (AlBouraq, 2007).

14 The titles chosen by the author do not correspond to a commercial strategy aimed at attracting the widest possible audience: *Un Dieu Hésitant?* (AlBouraq, 2004); *Mardin. Hégire, Fuite du Pêché et 'Demeure de l'Islam'* (AlBouraq, 2004); and *Le Hashish et l'Extase* (AlBouraq, 2001). As for his latest publication with AlBouraq, *Études Taymiyyiennes - Taymiyen studies*, its bilingual nature and its relatively high price (75 euros), despite the fact that a significant portion of the texts it contains are freely available online, mean that it can only reach a limited audience, including specialists.

15 Through multiple rounds of interviews with key players in the Islamic book industry during my fieldwork in France and French-speaking Belgium (namely booksellers and publishers), I found that print runs are generally low. A book reaching a print run of 500 copies per year, while uncommon, is already considered a bestseller.

reputations of converts to Islam. While Michot's work on Ibn Taymiyya straddles the boundary between confessional and non-confessional publishing, it cannot be considered characteristic of either. Y. Michot's Taymiyyan work is thus the only one straddling both confessional and non-confessional publishing but cannot be deemed characteristic of either.

2. The Taymiyyan Landscape: What Can Be Read from Ibn Taymiyya in French?¹⁶

Within the publishing industry focused on Islamic texts, which publishers are producing works by Ibn Taymiyya? With a singular exception – the translation of his *Wāṣitiyya* by Henri Laoust, published by Geuthner editions¹⁷ – only confessional publishers release excerpts from his oeuvre. Furthermore, not only do non-denominational publishing houses not publish translations of his works, but they do not even publish scholarly studies on him. Only editions with a more limited readership delve into Taymiyyan themes – it is noteworthy that Geuthner is an orientalist publisher accustomed to academic texts – typically approached from an academic standpoint. This is exemplified by the study on jihad in Ibn Taymiyya's works by Mohammed Guenad¹⁸ or the doctoral thesis by Adrien Candiard dedicated to the *Dar' ta'āruḍ*, published by a Catholic publisher familiar with academic texts.¹⁹ Apart from these two works, no other studies on the Damascene master appear readily accessible for the general public.

16 This study relies heavily on the information provided by actors in the book industry (translators, writers, publishers) in their publications. Unfortunately, it has not always been possible to trace the exact source of the French books attributed to Ibn Taymiyya, including, for example, French translations of his most well-known texts, compiled in the 1960s under the title *Majmū' fatāwā*: the chosen title often differs from that of the chapter in the original edition, and the edition used is rarely mentioned, making it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to pinpoint the precise source. Additionally, I will maintain the transcription used by my sources when I quote extracts and provide their bibliographical references.

17 Henri Laoust, *La Profession de Foi d'Ibn Taymiyya. La Wāṣitiyya* (Geuthner, 1986). Several reissues since, bilingual edition.

18 Mohammed Guenad, *Le Jihad chez Ibn Taymiyya* (Vérone éditions, 2022).

19 Adrien Candiard, *Le Dieu Immédiat - Le Concept de Vérité dans le Dar' Ta'arud al-'Aql wa-l-Naql d'Ibn Taymiyya* (Cerf, 2023).

On the side of Muslim publishers, the Taymiyyan legacy manifests itself through three types of publications: biographical works, citations from his oeuvre within books authored by others, and translations of his works. It is noteworthy from the outset that Ibn Taymiyya is more often cited than translated,²⁰ that his biography is generally only outlined, and that his authority within French-speaking Islam relies more on reputation than on a genuine understanding of the man and his works. Another significant aspect is that while medieval Hanbalite authors are themselves extensively represented in Islamic publishing,²¹ such as Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) and Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1393), Ibn Taymiyya and his loyal disciple Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) stand out as the most translated and cited ancient authors in French.²²

Access to the life of Ibn Taymiyya has long been relatively difficult for the French-speaking general public. Until 2022,²³ with the exception of the academic works of limited public reach published by Henri Laoust, notably his translation of the shaykh's biography by Ibn Kathīr (d. 701/1373),²⁴ there were only two short biographies with limited circulation available in *maktaba*-s: in 2001, *Ibn Taymiyya sa vie, son œuvre* by Mahboub Moussaoui, and *Ibn Taymiyya sa vie et son œuvre* by Ibn Soulayman al

20 This is particularly evident in another form of dissemination of the Taymiyyan legacy: the internet and social networks. Preachers frequently invoke the authority of Ibn Taymiyya, citing his attributed opinions (particularly in short articles and videos) generally based on extracts from the *Majmū' fatāwā*. The examination of his legacy and its utilization on these new editorial platforms encompassing various digital media would be intricate and lengthy, exceeding the constraints of a single article. Nonetheless, such an investigation would prove highly interesting, revealing an even more pronounced presence of Ibn Taymiyya than in printed media.

21 It is noteworthy that Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) is one of the few non-Hanbalite and non-Taymiyyan pre-modern scholars to have enjoyed extensive representation in Francophone publishing (alongside al-Imām al-Nawawī, d. 677/1277). His work, *Ihya' ulūm al-Dīn*, for example, has been fully translated in French.

22 "Ancient authors" refers to those predating the establishment of Wahhabism in the eighteenth century. Indeed, Islamic publishing, predominantly influenced by Wahhabi/Salafi publishers and authors, is characterized by a significant representation of contemporary Salafi authors. Notably, figures such as al-Albānī (d. 1999), Ibn Bāz (d. 1999), al-Uthaymīn (d. 2001), Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān, and Rabī' al-Madkhali feature prominently in this domain.

23 This contribution was submitted in November 2022, but it takes into account publications from 2023.

24 Henri Laoust, "La biographie d'Ibn Taymiyya d'après Ibn Kathīr," in *Bulletin d'études orientales* 9 (1942-1943): 115-62.

Athari.²⁵ In 2023, two significant biographies were finally published: the reissue by Héritage Editions of the one by Ibn Kathîr originally translated by H. Laoust,²⁶ and the translation of Muḥammad Abū Zahra's (d. 1979) biography by al-Qalam Editions.²⁷

Biographical introductions that precede some translations of his works generally provide only a "smooth" portrait of the shaykh, avoiding discussion of his controversial and provocative aspects. They often adhere to a few traditional lines from the *ṭabaqāt*, adopting a hagiographical style: studies and mentors, family background, written works, and prominent disciples. The shaykh's authority during his time is never contested, nor is the controversy surrounding his memory, and his conflicts with the religious establishment are seldom addressed. As his biographer I. S. al-Athari writes, "Recognized as an unavoidable religious authority, his name resonates not only within the Islamic community but also throughout human history." Furthermore, there is no mention of the ultimately limited circle of his disciples in the strict sense – only 9 according to Ibn Rajab.²⁸ The praise for the greatness of these disciples is consistently attributed to his genius, and internal criticisms within his *jamā'a* are overlooked.²⁹

25 Respectively Sana editions (2001) and Sabil editions (undated), reissue, without an author's name this time: Al-Bidār editions, 2022. I was unable to access the entirety of Mr. Moussaoui's book of 2001, but it would seem that his book is, in reality, the same as the one published by Sabil, this time under the name Ibn Soulayman al Athari. If this hypothesis were confirmed, there would have ultimately been only one biography of Ibn Taymiyya available in French before 2022.

26 Henri Laoust, *La Biographie d'Ibn Taymiyya d'après Ibn Kathîr* (Editions Héritage, 2023). Héritage Editions was founded by Thomas Sibille, the founder of Al Bayyinah. Under the name Al Bayyinah, there are actually two types of activities: first, a bookstore that sells all kinds of books related to the Muslim world, and second, a publishing house specializing in contemporary Salafi texts (which has published a large part of the corpus, including all the books and epistles of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb). Héritage Editions, for its part, is notably dedicated to reprinting Orientalist books, works by twentieth-century Muslim intellectuals (including the painter Étienne Dinet and the scholar Muḥammad Hamidullah), and promoting figures of Algerian reformism (notably Ibn Badis).

27 M. Aboū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya. Sa Vie, son Œuvre*, trans. Michel Galloux (al-Qalam, 2023). This is the fifth and final volume in the series dedicated to eminent jurists; the first four, also published by al-Qalam, focused on the four founders of *madhhab*-s.

28 See Caterina Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya *wa-Jamā'atuhu*: Authority, Conflict and Consensus in Ibn Taymiyya's Circle," in *Ibn Taymiyya and his times*, 31-33.

29 Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya *wa-Jamā'atuhu*: Authority, Conflict and Consensus in Ibn Taymiyya's Circle," 31-33.

This smooth and consensual appearance of the figure of Ibn Taymiyya has been reinforced by the absence of dissenting voices in Islamic literature; indeed, the voices of his opponents have scarcely been promoted in printed books. In fact, the initial “refutations” of Salafism and its reference heritage were predominantly found in online discussion forums rather than in the publication of printed texts. Two websites emerged from the early 2000s that became spaces for sometimes heated debates between Salafis and traditionalists supporting classical Islam, as well as archives for translations of brief texts refuting Salafi interpretations of *‘aqida* (dogma) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence): first, the Aslama Forum, and subsequently, the Doctrine Malikite. In these online sites, major figures of Salafism, notably Ibn Taymiyya, were challenged for their orientations and opinions. The shaykh’s theological positions were particularly targeted, categorizing him as a *hashwiyya* (“crude literalist”), along with his subdivision of *tawhīd*. However, it was not until 2007 that these debates and texts timidly manifested in printed form with the release of Tarek Bengarai’s book, a member of “Doctrine Malikite,” titled *L’essentiel de la religion musulmane* (The Essence of the Muslim Religion).³⁰ This book, a commented translation of the famous *al-Murshid al-muʾin* by the Moroccan Ibn ʿAshir (d. 1040/1631), was a charged attack against the Salafī perspective on law, theology, and spirituality, dedicating numerous pages to translations of fatwas against Salafī authors or those integrated into Salafism, including Ibn Taymiyya.³¹ A similar but brief critique was also presented in a theology book by a French author, former student of the Islamic University of Damascus, and advocate of traditional Islam – Corentin Pabiot. In 2014, he published *Sunnism: From Origins to the Formation of Schools*,³² in which Ibn Taymiyya is criticized in the section on crude literalism.³³ However, these few critiques remain marginal and limited in both quantity and quality, incomparable to the vehement attacks on internet sites that issue warnings using extensive citations from past authorities, describing Ibn Taymiyya as

30 Tarek Bengarai, *L’Essentiel de la Religion Musulmane. Tawhīd, Fiqh et Spiritualité* (Iqra Editions, 2007). Two new expanded editions were published afterwards.

31 Refer especially to pages 91-94, “Weaknesses in the positions of Ibn Taymiyya,” a section borrowed from the Moroccan scholar Aḥmad Al-Ghumārī (d. 1993).

32 Corentin Pabiot, *Le Sunnisme. Des origines à la Constitution des Écoles* (Maison Ennour, 2014).

33 Pabiot, *Le Sunnisme*, 138 n. 199.

a notorious deviant.³⁴ That being said, without support from publishers, these attacks ultimately had a limited impact on the image of the shaykh, who remains an undisputed reference in Islamic publications.

Citations of Ibn Taymiyya within works authored by others are numerous, yet a systematic and quantitative study, albeit tedious and complex, remains to be undertaken. Nevertheless, it is clear that his primary contribution to this body of literature lies in the realm of Islamic jurisprudence, and his texts compiled in *Majmū' al-fatāwā* remain the most frequently cited.

The translations themselves, finally, constitute a significant part of the Taymiyyan legacy in French. Notably, there are at least 62 books attributed to him, with eight of them translated by Y. Michot (AlBouraq Editions). Fifteen of these pertain to dogma (*'aqīda*), including 7 editions of the *Wāṣitiyya*,³⁵ five of which feature commentaries by contemporary Wahhabi authors.³⁶ In addition to the translation of this *'aqīda*, Francophone readers have access to *La Grande Fatwa Hamawiyya*³⁷ as

34 See, for instance, the website “islamsunnite.net,” which dedicates several pages critiquing Ibn Taymiyya: <https://islamsunnite.net/sounna/3-autre-personnes-citees/ibn-taymiyah/> [last accessed: January 4, 2024].

35 Translations of this profession of faith often rely more or less on that of H. Laoust, with few minor changes. It was published without scholarly commentaries by Ennour Editions (2011) and al-Haramayn (2016).

36 al-'Uthaymīn, *Le Commentaire de la Wāṣitiyya par le Cheikh al-'Uthaymīn* (Darousalam Editions 2012, also Al-Hadīth Éditions, 2014); al-Sa'dī, Ibn Bāz, *Commentaire du Livre al-'Aqīda al-Wāṣitiyya. La Profession de Foi d'Ibn Taymiyya. Par le Cheikh Sa'dī avec les Annotations du Cheikh Ibn Bāz* (Dar al-Muslim, undated); Sālih b. Fawzān Al-Fawzān, *Commentaires de la Profession de Foi dite Al-Wāṣitiyya* (Assia Editions 2014); Sālih b. Fawzān Al-Fawzān, *Commentaire Du Livre la Profession de Foi Al Wāṣitiyya* (Ibn Badis Editions, 2022).

37 Ibn Taymiyya, *La Grande Fatwa Hamawiyya* (Al-Hadīth, 2015). This is the *Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyyah al-Kubrā*, edited by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā' and Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā', 6 vols. (Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1987). The editor (Al-Hadīth), who has published numerous texts from the contemporary Salafī corpus, specifies, “Ibn Taymiyya restores the original doctrine of the Salaf and refutes speculative theologians (*al-Mutakallimūn*) who have increasingly deviated from the creed of the early generations, thereby creating a schism – initially methodological and ultimately doctrinal – between the *Salaf* (the Ancients) and the *Khalaf* (the moderns).”

well as the epistle *Le Précepte de Marrakech*,³⁸ *La Sunna face aux hérésies*,³⁹ and the *La Lettre Palmyrienne (Risāla tadmūriyya)*.⁴⁰

While citations of Ibn Taymiyya's legal positions are common in French, full translations of his legal texts are surprisingly scarce. They seem to be mainly published in response to ongoing controversies within Francophone Salafism. Noteworthy is the translation of *Raf' al-malām 'an a'immat al-a'lām*, which implicitly critiques the categorical rejection of legal schools by a faction of Salafīs.⁴¹ This rejection has sparked intense debates within the Muslim world at large and, specifically, within the Francophone community. Similarly, there is the translation of a fatwa titled "Obedience to Allah, the Messenger, and the Rulers," which serves as a critique against the foundations of revolutionary and jihadist Salafism.⁴²

38 Ibn Taymiyya, *Le Précepte de Marrakech* (Imam Malik Editions, 2017), bilingual edition, with a commentary by Shaykh Abd al-'Azīz al-Rājiḥī. This theological treatise, *al-Qā'ida al-marākishiyya*, was written in Egypt in 712 A.H. in response to a query from Moroccan scholars regarding *al-istawā*. It has been included in the *Majmū' fatāwā* (vol. 5) and the vol. 1 of *Majmū'at al-rasā'il wa-l-Masā'il*, ed. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā in five volumes, (Maṭba'at al-Manār, 1341-9/1922-1930).

39 Ibn Taymiyya, *La Sunna Face aux Hérésies* (al-Hadīth, 2015). I have been unable to identify the specific text to which this translation refers. In it, Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes the obligation to follow the Qur'an and obey the Prophet, exposes the universality of the Revelation and its unity beyond varying laws, and condemns certain groups, including the Kharijites.

40 Ibn Taymiyya, *La Lettre Palmyrienne* (Nawa, 2020). I will return to this *Risāla* and its function below in my section devoted to Nawa editions.

41 Ibn Taymiyya, *Pourquoi les Savants Divergent-ils?* (Al-Hadīth, 2011), excerpt from volume 11 of the *Majmū' fatāwā*, (*Majmū' Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad, 37 vols, Maṭābi' al-Riyāḍ, [1961-67]). Typically, for Francophone Salafī editions, the translator remains anonymous, with the translation being credited to the publisher's "translation department." However, and contrary to the usual practices in this publishing milieu, the publisher is precise about the work undertaken: they relied on the evaluation of al-Albānī's *taḥqīq* (hadith critique), independent of the four editions used as the basis for the translated text (11-12):

- "the version that is in the *Majmū'*" (edition unspecified);
- the Dār al-Rajab edition (2003);
- the Maktabat al-Sunna edition (1998);
- "the version prefaced and annotated by 'Alī Ibn Nāyif Shahūd" (preface, 12).

42 *L'Obéissance à Allah au Messager et aux dirigeants* (al-Hadīth, 2007). The text is extracted from Volume 35 of the *Majmū' fatāwā*. The translation is supplemented with an introduction and comments by the contemporary Saudi scholar 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Badr. With copious citations, he emphasizes the strict legalism that should characterize a Muslim and underscores the essential obedience to those in power.

This translation is published by a Salafī editor aligned with the Saudi perspective and strictly apolitical.

Alongside theology, it is ultimately in the realm of spirituality that Ibn Taymiyya's translations are most abundant. For many publishers, he embodies the "orthodox Sufism," distanced from any "blameworthy innovation" (*bid'a*) or heresy, in accordance with orthodoxy and orthopraxy.⁴³ Among numerous other examples, notable translations include *Les Actes ne valent que par leurs intentions*; *La Servitude de Dieu*; *Les Actes du cœur*; *Le Livre de l'amour* and *Les Voies du cheminement spirituel*.⁴⁴ While he personifies the very image of religious extremism and rigorism in the eyes of many Western media, Francophone Islamic publishing ultimately presents him as a complete spiritual master, far removed from any violence.⁴⁵

With this overview of Ibn Taymiyya's works in mind, it is now appropriate to explore these texts by examining their reception by authors who offer more than a mere linguistic translation. These authors do not perceive Ibn Taymiyya merely as a repository of diverse fatwas to be drawn from. We will delve into those who aim to present the Damascene scholar as having contemporary relevance. They seek not only to understand his opinions on various matters but, more importantly, to engage with his overarching methodology, positioning him as the shaykh of Islam. This is evident in the works published by the three authors under study: Mostafa Brahami, Aïssam Ait Yahya, and Abû Soleiman Al-Kaabi.

3. Ibn Taymiyya, the Reformist Scholar in *Les Six grands Imams* by Mostafa Brahami, Tawhid Editions (2010)

One of the French-speaking Muslim authors who has extensively promoted the works of Ibn Taymiyya, attempting to imbue them with contemporary relevance, is Mostafa Brahami, particularly in his book *Les Six grands imams*.⁴⁶

43 Even more than Ibn Taymiyya himself, his student Ibn al-Qayyim is the most translated for his texts related to spirituality.

44 Respectively: Tawhid, 2011; AlBouraq, 2014; Ibn Badis, 2020; MuslimLife, 2020; Bayyinah, 2020. I have not been able to identify the source of these translations in the shaykh's work.

45 It is worth noting that Y. Michot had initiated this trend through the long-term publication of the "Spiritual Texts of Ibn Taymiyya" in the journal *Le Musulman*.

46 Mostafa Brahami, *Les Six Grands Imams. Évolution Historique de la Jurisprudence Islamique* (Tawhid, 2010).

This is a book on history of Islamic law, which presents the major *madhhab*-s (existing and extinct schools), the “six great imams” being Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), Zayd b. ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (d. 122/740), Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765), al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820), and Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). The final chapter is devoted to seven imams whose schools have disappeared,⁴⁷ as well as Ibn Taymiyya. Inspired by the work of the jurist Muḥammad Abū Zahra (d. 1974), the work aims to be both historical and methodological (it presents the principles, foundations, and legal tools of each school).

M. Brahami’s background and religious orientation (perceptible through his work) make him an interesting example of the reception, updating, and appropriation of Ibn Taymiyya in a contemporary “Islamist” perspective, focused on the idea of an essential normativity of Islam, including its political dimension, as we will see. However, to understand the place of the Damascene master in M. Brahami’s preaching and reform work, it is necessary to first contextualize the latter within contemporary Islamic currents.⁴⁸

An Algerian author residing in Switzerland, he has published a series of significant books combining erudition and practical aspects on various areas of Islamic law – prayer, *zakāt*, pilgrimage, mortuary washing, study of *ḥalāl* – for the French-speaking audience.⁴⁹ In addition to his books, he regularly gives lectures, often recorded and available online, and is active on various social media platforms.⁵⁰ Moreover, he is a teacher in various Islamic institutes in Switzerland and France, including the Shatibi

47 al-Awzā‘ī, Layth b. Sa’d, al-Thawrī, the Zaydī school (Dāwūd and Ibn Ḥazm), and al-Ṭabarī.

48 Biographical information available on M. Brahami is relatively concise. However, he has given two partly autobiographical interviews in which he discusses his background: Mostafa Brahami, “Prédication et lutte perpétuelles? Dr Mostafa Brahami,” interview by L’Observatoire Islam et Civilisation, October 12, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g59sSC8FBnc>, January 12, 2022 [last accessed: January 4, 2024]; and more briefly, Mostafa Brahami “Entretien avec l’auteur Mostafa Brahami,” interview by Thomas Sibille, for the Al-Bayyinah Medias, March 11, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QCOTbhs5vE> [last accessed: January 4, 2024].

49 His preferred publisher is Tawhid (Lyon), where he has published all his books, except *Le Ḥalāl. Spiritualité, Connaissance et Éthique* (AlBouraq, 2014), and *Zakat. Guide pratique* (Nawa, 2019), before the latter was dissolved by the Ministry of the Interior (see below in the section dedicated to this publishing house). We will see below that Nawa shares certain doctrinal beliefs with Mr. Brahami, beyond their differences.

50 He has Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) accounts. Many videos of his lectures and courses are available on Youtube.

Institute in Lyon, in the fields of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *al-qawā'id al-fiqhiyya*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'a*.

Initially trained in electronic engineering and quantum physics, which he taught at the University of Algiers until 1993, he left Algeria during the “dark decade” due to his political involvement with the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). He obtained the title of political refugee in Switzerland, where he eventually earned a Ph.D. in economics. Alongside his studies and university teaching duties, M. Brahami was very active early on in the field of preaching: during his youth in Algeria, he published newspapers and pamphlets in both Arabic and French. A “candidate for deputy” for the FIS, without being a strict member, he was also a promoter of the ideas of Algerian intellectual Malek Bennabi (d. 1973), whose teachings he transcribed and published.⁵¹

M. Brahami's religious orientation can be characterized as Salafist, in the sense of a religious reform seeking normative jurisprudence claimed as orthopraxy, at least critical of systematic reliance on legal schools, promoting a “dynamic *fiqh*” organized around the search for scriptural evidence authenticated beyond the *madhhab*-s, abundantly quoting major contemporary Salafist authors in his works,⁵² but strongly engaged in contemporary socio-political causes (such as the fight against Western hegemony and dictatorships in Muslim countries, the establishment of “Islamic societies” and environmental issues). M. Brahami's political commitment could place him in the category of politicized Salafism, especially since he is very critical of apoliticism. In an interview with *L'Observatoire Islam et Civilisation*, he vehemently denounces Madkhalist Salafism – a form of Salafism opposed to any form of political engagement and rebellion against authority. By highlighting the numerous verses calling for “commanding right and forbidding wrong” (especially in Qur'an 3:110) and recalling the hadith stating that the master of martyrs is the one who

51 Information provided in his interview, Brahami, “Prédication et lutte perpétuelles ?” His involvement with the FIS is also discussed in more detail in interviews given to L. Aggoun and J.-B. Rivoire, *Françalgérie, crimes et mensonges d'États. Histoire secrète, de la guerre d'indépendance à la “troisième guerre” d'Algérie*, (La Découverte, Poche / Essais, 2005).

52 He classifies the eponymous founder of Wahhabism, Muḥammad b. Abd al-Wahhab, among the revivers of Islam (*Les Six Grands Imams*, 22 and 75) and describes him as “one of the revivers of the Hanbali school” in contemporary times. Similarly, in *Le Ḥalāl*, Mostafa Brahami extensively cites the opinions of Shaykh Al-Uthaymīn (d. 2001) and Ibn Bāz (d. 1999), as well as the fatwas issued on the Salafist website founded by Muḥammad al-Munajjid, IslamQA.info.

speaks a word of truth to a tyrant, M. Brahami asserts, “Madkhalism is the denial of the Qur’an.” Madkhalist Salafism and Sufi orders are equally to blame for him, of turning away from politics or, conversely, being too complacent with authority.⁵³

As we will see, Ibn Taymiyya thus emerges as central to M. Brahami’s religious thought, to which the Yemeni shaykh al-Shawkānī (d. 1834) must be added – whom he designates as a “grand imam” three times in his book.⁵⁴ The *Nayl al-awṭār*, “*Sharḥ muntaqā l-akhbār*” by the latter is a commentary on the *Muntaqā* of Ibn Taymiyya’s grandfather, a commentary whose purpose is precisely to provide, for each legal question, an answer drawn from scriptural sources without adhering to a single school.⁵⁵ In addition to these two authors, the major reference for M. Brahami is not a scholar in the strict sense but an intellectual: Malek Bennabi. Asked about his religious background, M. Brahami responds:

My religious curriculum does not include schools of Islamic sciences like Al-Azhar or Medina or Al Karawiyin or others. These are state-contracted schools known for domesticating knowledge seekers. We see the great damage today through individuals or trends. Unfortunately. I am self-taught. My only teacher was Malek Bennabi, whom I accompanied during the last 3 years of his life (70-73).⁵⁶

The words are strong – “my only teacher” – especially coming from an author so critical of institutions and who does not hesitate to condemn conformism in religious matters. They also help illustrate the role of Ibn Taymiyya, who actually fits into the Bennabist historiography: a historiography of the decline of Islam, which he theorized under the concept of the “post-Almohad man” (a state of general decay affecting the

53 “Prédication et lutte perpétuelles? Dr Mostafa Brahami,” interview.

54 Brahami, *Les Six Grands Imams*: twice on page 52 (where he mentions “the need for the renewal of fiqh through the example of this grand imam”) and page 73.

55 In *Les Six Grands Imams*, apart from the Muslims of the early generations (*salaf*, especially the Companions, their Followers, and the founders of Schools), al-Shawkānī is one of the most cited authors by the author (in six pages of the book), with Ibn Taymiyya, to whom he devotes a complete subchapter. For comparison, jurists like al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, or al-Suyūṭī are mentioned only four times – as much as Muḥammad b. Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792), who was not a jurist – and Ibn Qudāma twice. The *Nayl al-awṭār* is also cited many times in *Le Halāl*.

56 Response to a user in a comment on his interview “Prédication et lutte perpétuelles”.

Muslim world) from the fall of Baghdad and “Almohad reflux,” in which the Muslim “will become a minus habens, a man capable only of half an effort, half a result, half a concern.”⁵⁷

This Bennabist historiography is characterized by two opposing tendencies. One is general and negative, marked by intellectual and spiritual declines, corresponding, in the spatiotemporal order, to political decline;⁵⁸ the other – the flip side of the first – held by an active minority that has remained true to the spirit of the early generations (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), advocating *ijtihād*, against post-Almohadian *taqlīd*, and fighting against the enemies of progress and those responsible for sociopolitical decline. Ibn Taymiyya is part of this minority. In *Les Six grands imams*, M. Brahami applies this Bennabian schema to the scale of Islamic Law,⁵⁹ and Ibn Taymiyya, to whom the long final subchapter is dedicated (20 pages),⁶⁰ embodies the model of awakening, in intellectual domains (*ijtihād*) but also socio-political ones (with episodes of imprisonment and struggles against the Mongols). Significantly, Ibn Taymiyya is the most cited scholar in the book after the founders of Schools or the *salaf*, immediately followed by Ibn al-Qayyim.⁶¹ He embodies the role model in all important areas according to the Salafism advocated by M. Brahami.⁶²

The general presentation provided by the author of “*Les Six Grands Imams*” deserves to be extensively quoted, as it encapsulates the reputation of the Damascene scholar Ibn Taymiyya among the French-speaking

57 Brahami, *Les Six Grands Imams*, 70.

58 This triple decline would manifest in history, respectively, through “intellectual sclerosis”, heretical Sufism, and “colonizability” (according to the concept coined in 1954 by Malek Bennabi in *Vocation de l’Islam* (Seuil, 1957); AlBouraq, 2006 [with a preface by Nour-Eddine Boukrouh]; Tawhid, 2016).

59 This explains why Malek Bennabi is cited in five different pages throughout the book – more than important jurists like Al-Ghazālī or Ibn Rushd (*cf. infra*) even though it is a book on the history of *fiqh* – not to mention the two pages dedicated to lengthy quotes from his work, quotes precisely used to explain the regressive historical process.

60 This subchapter is part of the third and final part of the book: “The Other Imams,” which devotes a section to each of the major figures who did not leave a living school. Twenty-six pages are dedicated to these seven imams (365-391), compared to 20 for Ibn Taymiyya alone (392-412).

61 Apart from the subchapter devoted to him, Ibn Taymiyya is cited in 23 pages of the book. Ibn al-Qayyim is cited in 17 pages, which is also significantly higher than all other jurists, excluding the founders of the schools. The concluding part of the book is titled “Ibn Taymiyya Today.”

62 The author devotes four pages of critical analysis to the term “Salafism” (“On the Use of the Term Salafi and Salafiyya,” 358-361), in which he revisits the uses of the term, rejecting them all. His conclusion: “true Salafiyya is not a return to the pious ancestors [...] in their intellectual productions but rather a return to the original sources constituting the matrix of *ijtihād* [...]”

readership: intellectual rigor, independence, courage in the face of persecution, combativeness both literally and metaphorically, and “orthodox Sufism.”⁶³ All these qualities attributed to him – in Islamic literature in general and particularly in M. Brahami’s work – are often juxtaposed with two moments in Ibn Taymiyya’s life systematically reactivated by his contemporary defenders, especially within the ranks of engaged Salafism: his opposition to the religious establishment and his imprisonment by the authorities on the one hand, and his struggle against the Mongols on the other.⁶⁴ The Shaykh al-Islam’s fight against the power holders of his time, through word and pen (via his sermons, books, and fatwas) initially, and then with the sword (against the Mongols), establishes the myth of the scholar engaged in his era against all enemies, both internal and external.

In his subchapter dedicated to Ibn Taymiyya, M. Brahami presents a biographical sketch of an apologetic nature, in the sense that it aims to both introduce the man and his work (emphasizing that he was a victim of unjust opposition throughout his life),⁶⁵ but more importantly, it seeks to understand his relevance as a model in contemporary times. The adjectives and lexical field used bear witness to the apologetic intention, in a readily binary history where the camp of good (intellectually dynamic, spiritually orthodox, politically combative) opposes that of evil (sterile, heterodox, compromised). The shaykh, whose “strength of argument and power of speech were well known,” possessed “a very broad culture, deep

63 This expression is commonly used within French-speaking Salafism. It refers to a spirituality predominantly characterized by asceticism, in contrast to brotherhood (*turuq*) and intellectual Sufism (embodied by Ibn ‘Arabī, d. 638/1240), and has as its models figures such as Junayd (d. 297/911) or ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166). Ibn Taymiyya himself having valorized these two masters, the Islamic edition in general and Salafism in particular have done the same.

64 The Salafi use of Ibn Taymiyya’s texts on the Mongols generally focuses on his condemnation of the Mongol law, the *yasaq*, deeming it equivalent to *kufr*, and thus, operating by analogy, condemning contemporary democratic regimes. For an overview of Taymiyyan positions on the subject and their appropriation by contemporary Salafism, see Caterina Bori, “Théologie Politique et Islam à Propos d’Ibn Taymiyya (m. 728/1328) et Du Sultanat Mamelouk.” *Revue de l’histoire Des Religions* 224, no. 1 (2007): 9, notes 10 and 11, [last accessed, January 4, 2024]. For examples of contemporary appropriations of the shaykh’s texts, and for a historical analysis and contextualization of his fatwas on the concepts of *dar al-kufr* and *hijra*, refer to Ibn Taymiyya, in Yahya Michot, *Mardin*. On *yasaq* and its perception by Islamic texts, notably by Ibn Taymiyya and his sources, see: Denise Aigle, “Loi mongole vs loi islamique. Entre mythe et réalité,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* (2004/5-6), 971-996.

65 The core of the subchapter consists of two lengthy sections – half of the complete subchapter (398-409) – rehabilitating his memory and struggles: “the jihad of Imam Ibn Taymiyya”; “Trials and Prison for Ibn Taymiyya.”

knowledge, eloquence”; he opposed “certain controversial practices”; courageously confronted the Tatars, with his delegation then “fearing his courageous and rather audacious words”; he endured four types of “trials” (imprisonments), was a victim of “conspiracies” and “plots,”⁶⁶ including by Sufi shaykhs who could not bear that Ibn Taymiyya “could not tolerate seeing [their] heresies spread,” and by jurists opposing him on legal points (including divorce), “but [who] were far from seeing the extent of our shaykh’s knowledge,” as “Ibn Taymiyya’s positions frightened many adherents of immobility [who] had thus convinced themselves that his freedom of thought and interpretation had become too dangerous.” Unjustly imprisoned by “all the allied enemies [...] often too envious,” who led “a final attack,” the Shaykh of Islam died in his cell, having forgiven because he remained “faithful to his qualities.” “God wanted this great imam to die owing nothing to anyone, neither sovereign nor notable. He lived for his ideas, fought for freedom of speech and expression, preferring prison to the gags of power and established thought. Even the friendship he had with the Sultan never prevented him from saying what he believed to be the truth. He left this world, far from men and power, so that no one could say that he had a certain merit.”⁶⁷

This life of trial in the service of truth thus represents a model for the revival of contemporary Islam. M. Brahami draws five lessons provided by the Shaykh al-Islam – knowledge, involvement, genuineness, endurance, spirituality – which serve as keys to action for today’s activists: “Ibn Taymiyya can be rightly considered the symbol:

1. Of knowledge and knowledge production in an environment shaped by *taqlid* (blind conformity) and a quasi-absence of *ijtihād*. [...] For Ibn Taymiyya, science did not consist of regurgitating what one had learned from teachers or through their books; it rather required efforts of reflection, original production, and addressing new questions.
2. Of the liberating struggle against the Tatar invader. It was necessary to reconcile the pen and liberating military engagement. [...] He thus took up arms three times, as we will see.

66 The word “conspiracy” is used twice (401, 403), “plot” once (403), all orchestrated by jurists, Sufis, and Shiites.

67 Brahami, *Les Six Grands Imams*, 400-408.

3. Of freedom of expression and free speech. Indeed, his life was an example of the struggle for freedom of expression; scholars should be at the forefront of this fight. For him, without freedom of expression, there is no intellectually worthy production.
4. Of patience and forgiveness. Indeed, the corollary of freedom and militant engagement is often prison, a tribute paid heavily by Shaykh Ibn Taymiyya. But, upon each release from prison, when he had the opportunity to take revenge on those who had unjustly imprisoned him, he showed magnanimity and forgave them. This is the other aspect of the sincerity (*ikhhlâs*) of this unique man. Great men have a total commitment to Islam and the ideas they defend; they ask for nothing for themselves, neither for the school to which they belong nor for the party to which they are affiliated.
5. Finally, of a purified Islamic spirituality, which is the corollary of the sincerity of the journey toward God and the love borne for Him. It is also the culmination of love for the Prophet, a spirituality in his path, according to his teachings, not an imported or corrupted spirituality.”⁶⁸

4. Ibn Taymiyya in the Revolutionary Salafism of Nawa Editions

The reappropriation of Ibn Taymiyya within Salafism is a well-known phenomenon, especially in Salafi-jihadist literature that readily draws from the extensive corpus of the master.⁶⁹ The religious thought of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792) itself was heavily influenced by his reinterpretation of the shaykh’s texts and those of his student Ibn al-Qayyim.⁷⁰ However, the Shaykh al-Islam was to undergo a new

68 Brahami, *Les Six grands Imams*, 392-393.

69 For the Salafi-jihadist appropriation of Ibn Taymiyya, see, among others, G. Anawati, “Une résurgence du Kharigisme au XXe siècle: L’Obligation absente” in: *Mélanges de l’Institut Dominicain d’Études Orientales du Caire*, 16 (1983), 191-228; G. Kepel, *Le Prophète et Pharaon* (Gallimard, 2012), 242-249; Yahya Michot, *Mardin*.

70 Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s dependence on these two scholars had already been highlighted by Henri Laoust (*Essai sur les Doctrines Sociales et Politiques de Taki-d-Dīn Ahmad b. Taimīya*, [IFAO, 1939], 506-541), later confirmed by an all-important article by Michael Cook, “On the Origins of Wahhabism,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, third series, 2/2 (1992), 191-202. Abdul Hakim I. Al-Matroudi provides a statistical overview of Ibn Taymiyya’s influence on the founder of Wahhabism: A. H. I. Al-Matroudi, *The Ḥanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict or Conciliation* (Routledge, 2006),

and peculiar utilization within a young and short-lived French publishing house – Nawa Editions – founded in 2009,⁷¹ at the instigation of the two almost exclusive authors of this publishing house: Aïssam Ait Yahya and Abû Soleiman Al-Kaabi.⁷² Despite its unique position within French Salafi-jihadi thought and the renewal it heralds, Nawa has received little attention from researchers.⁷³ Through the reflections it conducts and the authors it promotes, Nawa stands out as a French variant of the “Islamic Awakening” (*ṣaḥwa Islamiyya*), a movement born in Saudi Arabia from the 1960s and onwards, resulting from the hybridization between Saudi Wahhabism and political activism inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood (in its orientation driven by Sayyid Qutb).⁷⁴

Both co-authors/editors had higher education backgrounds (in economics and political science) and were linked to the Franco-Belgian Salafi-jihadist circles, particularly around the association “Ana Muslim” (“I am a Muslim”), active during the 2000s.⁷⁵

159-161. See also Daoud Riffi, “Historiographie du wahhabisme: écueils et enjeux,” *Arabica* 69, no. 3, 319-353.

71 Nawa was dissolved in September 2021 after twelve years of activity and nearly 2400 published pages, at the request of Gérard Darmanin under the “Law reinforcing respect for the principles of the Republic” adopted on July 23, 2021. The dissolution was motivated by several accusations, including the promotion of “extremist Islam through [...] the editing and dissemination [...] of fundamentalist authors or those from the radical Islamist movement [...] that the president of the association and its vice-president evolve in a pro-jihadist environment whose values they share [...].” Dissolution decree of September 16, 2021.

72 Only one other author was published by Nawa: Mostafa Brahami (*Pourquoi donner?* and *Zakât, mode d'emploi*, both in 2019), whose Taymiyyan prism and political commitment were previously discussed. M. Brahami was primarily published by Tawhid Editions until then. Another translator, Karim Foudili, is also published by Nawa: the translation of Ibn Abî Al-Dunya's book, *Le Livre du Silence* (2018). These three books are the only ones in the catalog that do not possess, in one way or another, a sociopolitical dimension.

73 The only research work that dedicated part of its study to Nawa is a master's thesis in general sociology: Zine-Eddine Gaïd, “*Qu'est-ce qu'un Intellectuel Musulman Radical Français?*” supervised by Gisèle Sapiro (EHESS, 2019). Hugo Micheron briefly mentions Nawa in the subsection dedicated to jihadist networks in the Southwest, in his published doctoral thesis: *Le Jihadisme Français. Quartiers, Syrie, Prisons* (Gallimard, 2020).

74 On the *ṣaḥwa*, see Stéphane Lacroix, *Les Islamistes Saoudiens, une Insurrection Manquée* (PUF, 2010).

75 The association presents itself as follows, notably on its inactive YouTube channel: “Ana-Muslim is a Francophone Islamic associative structure promoting the ideological restoration of the spirit, dogma, and Muslim identity in the West. Ana-Muslim aims to be both an idea center and an activist structure aiming to elevate the Islamic consciousness of the Western Muslim, by promoting an

At the end of the 2000s, Al-Kaabi and Yahya distanced themselves from jihadist networks, considering the concept of jihad solely as an armed enterprise to be a mistake.⁷⁶ Amid the period when Europeans were departing for Syria to join the ranks of ISIS, particularly within the network associated with Ana Muslim, Al-Kaabi and Yahya decided to embark on what they termed a “*djihad fikri*” with Nawa.⁷⁷ This can be distilled into three major aspects: a) the ideological and political critique of the West (within a new form of heresiography – ‘*ilm al-firaq*’ – termed “occidentology”); b) challenging democracy and apoliticism (two shortcomings they assimilate to contemporary *irja*)⁷⁸; c) the construction of renewed knowledge combining Wahhabi theological principles with insights from the human and social sciences (*fiqh al-wāqī*).⁷⁹

In these three domains, Ibn Taymiyya constitutes a major resource for Nawa. The uniqueness of this house, compared to other Salafist groups, notably Salafi-jihadists, lies in the fact that Al-Kaabi and Yahya do not merely extract passages from the works of the Damascene master to support their opinions. The authors of Nawa perceive Ibn Taymiyya more as a precursor – the great ancestor⁸⁰ – and an intellectual in the modern

orthodox Sunni reading of various contemporary subjects revolving around Islam and Muslims.” <https://www.youtube.com/@collectifanamuslim> [last accessed, january 4, 2024].

76 Interview with Al-Kaabi. Gaïd, “*Qu’est-ce qu’un Intellectuel Musulman Radical Français?*” 54-56.

77 Aïssam Aït Yahya, *De l’Idéologie Islamique Française* (Nawa, 2011), 516. This book was reissued in 2013.

78 The accusation of Murjism against other currents of contemporary Islam is a consistent theme in Nawa, especially regarding the “quietist” Saudi Wahhabi movement and the pro-democratic activism of the Muslim Brotherhood. See, among others, Aïssam Aït-Yahya, *Les Origines Chrétiennes de la Laïcité Musulmane – L’Irja ou le Chânon Manquant* (Nawa, 2013). Ana Muslim was already doctrinally opposed to voting, considering it disbelief and *shirk*, and led an anti-voting campaign with the slogan: “Preserve your faith, do not vote.”

79 Regarding *fiqh al-wāqī*: refer to the extensively annotated translation by A. A. Yahya of the book by Nāṣir al-Umar (b. 1952), Nasir al-Omar, *Fiqh al-Wāqī. Le savoir profane au service du savoir révélé en islam*, trans. Aïssam Aït Yahya (Nawa, 2015). On this book by N. al-Umar and the context of its emergence: Lacroix, *Les Islamistes saoudiens*, 174-176.

80 Precursor even to modern thought: “[...] Ibn Taymiyya preceded Kant by several centuries in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Ibn Taymiyya asserts that knowledge produced by reason is inseparable from experience. However, since all subjects related to the Hereafter, such as the question of divine attributes, escape human experience, then only revealed knowledge is capable of addressing them. This is exactly the same reasoning that Emmanuel Kant will develop many centuries later, but for very different ideological purposes...” Abû Soleiman Al-Kaabi, preface to Ibn Taymiyya, *La Lettre palmyrienne*, 18.

sense of the word, providing a methodological and intellectual architecture to the revolutionary vanguard that must lead to “the restoration of Islam.”⁸¹ While Salafism often sees the shaykh al-Islam as a repository of often violent fatwas and opinions, Nawa offers a Taymiyyan structure of thought that is universal and timeless. Furthermore, invoking the master’s pioneering nature allows Nawa to conform to the Salafist tradition, advocating self-affiliation to a mythical intellectual genealogy – aligning oneself with a glorious and supposedly continuous chain of renowned scholars who are considered singular, original, and reformist:

Understand me well and follow me well: in this spirit, it leads us to say that **Salafiyya jihadiyya** obviously had many predecessors in times of crisis in the history of Islam: [...] whether it be the active reformist movement originating from the school of Imam Ahmed initiated by Shaykh Al Islam Ibn Taymiyya and his students Ibn Kathir and Ibn Qayyim against the quasi-secular system of the Tatars.⁸²

The Nawist project, characterized by the “restoration of Islam,” can be summarized in three points: anti-Westernization, politicization, and intellectualization of Salafism – each finding embodiment and archetype in Ibn Taymiyya. The promotion of Ibn Taymiyya occurs through two means: the translation of parts of his work on the one hand, and his nuanced and diffuse presence within books on the other. In either case, Ibn Taymiyya sheds light on contemporary issues or provides a relevant model for our time.

Nawa has thus far published five books rooted in the Taymiyyan heritage: two pertaining to *‘aqida* (dogma), one on spirituality, and two on politics.

81 The expression “restoration of Islam” is used in various forms in Nawa’s work and seems to constitute the ultimate goal of the two authors (for example, in Yahya, *Fiqh al-wâqî’*, 114; “restoration of its civilization, autonomy, independence, and integrity in all areas,” 141). Note that Ana Muslim aimed to “promote the ideological restoration of the spirit, dogma, and Muslim identity in the West” (cf. note 75).

82 (Emphasis added by the author) Aissam Ait-Yahya, alias Abu Ishaq Al Masloul, *La Salafiyya-jihadiyya, la France, nous et les autres* (undated text, written between 2002 and 2012), originally published on the Salafi-jihadist website *Ansar al-Haqq*, 19. In this genealogy, the text adds, among others, the Almoravid dynasty, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ayyūbī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. In any case, these predecessors had to combat, according to the text, heterodoxy, religious innovations, and Christian enemies or “quasi-secular” regimes.

The theological aspect comprises two texts translated by A.S. Al-Kaabi. In 2014, the translation of the *Risāla tadmūriyya: La Lettre Palmyrienne*,⁸³ followed in 2018 by *Comment Définir l'Absolu*, a translation of a theological epistle recently published by the Saudi scholar 'Alī b. Muḥammad 'Imrān.⁸⁴ The *Lettre Palmyrienne*, notably, is not a simple creed in the traditional sense; the translator sees it as participating in the Taymiyyan function of resisting Western hegemony, as demonstrated by its lengthy introduction (40 pages). The opposition presented between Ibn Taymiyya and philosophy is but one illustrious stage in the spiritual economy of humanity, where the clash between civilizations – heterodox versus orthodox – serves as the engine of history.⁸⁵ The publishers of Nawa, following in the footsteps of Ibn Taymiyya, play their part in the twenty-first century:

Ibn Taymiyya's genius lies in understanding that the true dividing line between philosophy and monotheism resides in this definition of the relationship between Reality and Language, and that this divergence is the basis for all disputes. These two divergent conceptions even explain the irreducible

83 Ibn Taymiyya, *La Lettre Palmyrienne. Une théorie du langage appliquée aux questions de dogme*, trans. Abū Soleiman al-Kaabi (Nawa, 2014; reissue 2017). In his lengthy introduction (7-39), the translator provides no details about the original text used (edition, date, *taḥqīq*, critical edition eventually used), nor any further information on the context of the composition of this *Risāla*. He focuses instead on the substance of the message that the two translated epistles would, according to him, convey. *La Lettre Palmyrienne* is an annotated translation of *Al-Risāla Tadmūriyya: Taḥqīq al-Ithbāt li l-Asmā' wa l-Ṣiḥāḥ wa Ḥaḳīqat al-Jam' Bayna al-Qadar wa l-Shar'* (Maktabat al-'Ubaykān, 2000), 6th edition. The translator does not specify the edition used.

84 Ibn Taymiyya, *Comment définir l'Absolu, Al-Qayyūm*, trans. Abū Soleiman al-Kaabi (Nawa, 2018). The translator notes in the preface that this book "appears in a compilation of original texts which the Saudi researcher has entitled '*Jāmi' al-Masā'il*.'" This refers to the *Jamī' al-masā'il, faṣl fī ma'nā al-Ḥayyū-l-Qayyūm*, edited and verified (*taḥqīq*) by Muḥammad 'Uzayr Shams (Dār 'Aṭā' at al-'ilm, 2nd edition, 1440/2019), vol. 1, 35, 61. The translator follows the verification of the hadiths (*taḥqīq*) of this edition, although the notes of the Saudi editor are only partially reproduced, and are largely replaced by those of A. S. Kaabi.

85 The Nawist project and its vision of power dynamics in history constitute a historiography in itself, notably inspired by Malek Bennabi. Al-Kaabi explicitly draws an analogy between the Roman Empire and contemporary West, on the one hand, and the disciples of Jesus and "orthodox Muslims" on the other hand. Cf. *La Voie des Nazaréens. Ou l'héritage de Jésus dans l'islam contemporain* (Nawa, 2012). I have presented this Nawist historiography in "Historiographie et devenir eschatologique de la Oumma dans le salafisme révolutionnaire francophone. Le cas des éditions Nawa," in *Discours et Imaginaires Eschatologiques de l'Islam. VII-XXI siècle*, ed. Mehdi Berriah and Hassan Bouali (De Gruyter, 2026).

opposition in our time between Western and Muslim civilizations and the profound ideological differences between them. (9)

The spiritual aspect, next: *Le Livre du Repentir* (2011), also drawn from the *Majmū' fatāwā*. It notably contains a critical chapter toward the Shiites ("The Concept of Infallibility among the Shiites," 81-88) and another against the Sufis ("The Deviation of the Sufis," 88-93) – two targets of recurrent and vehement attacks by Nawa Editions.

Finally, the political aspect is embodied in two volumes titled *Political Texts*. These two books,⁸⁶ published in January and November 2017, play a crucial role for revolutionary Salafist authors, inheritors of the *Ṣaḥwa*. The first volume is Al-Kaabi's translation of six Taymiyyan epistles from *Majmū' fatāwā*.⁸⁷ In addition to the six translated epistles, this concise book (194 pages) consists of nearly half introductory (pages 9-52) and concluding remarks (pages 169-190), where the translator presents Ibn Taymiyya's political thought by contrasting it with Western traditions from antiquity (Plato and Aristotle) and modern theorists (John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Charles-Louis de Montesquieu, Carl Schmitt). Here, too, the exercise aims to be both theoretical and critical, as the translator strives to demonstrate the essential opposition between the Islamic political vision and that of the ancient and modern West, failing by the way to avoid his own contradictions.⁸⁸ According to Al-Kaabi, Ibn Taymiyya's work embodies the conceptual gap between European "idealism" and "institutionalism" on the one hand and Islamic "pragmatism"

86 Ibn Taymiyya, *Textes politiques. Tome 1*, trans. Abū Soleïman Al-Kaabi (Nawa, 2017); Ibn Taymiyya, *La Politique Religieuse. Textes Politiques. Tome 2*, trans. Aïssam Aït Yahya (Nawa, 2017). These are indeed two distinct texts, even though they are presented as two volumes under the same title with the same author (Ibn Taymiyya) but two different translators. The initial intention of the publisher was to offer "a collection entitled 'Political Texts' that would bring together political writings of great classical Muslim authors." Al-Kaabi, *Textes Politiques*, 9.

87 The translator relies on the edition published by Maktaba Mālik Fahd, Riyāḍ 1425/2004 (Al-Kaabi, *Textes Politiques*, 13-14). It should be noted that this translation by Al-Kaabi is one of the few to mention with precision the references (albeit incomplete) of the original Arabic texts of Ibn Taymiyya (cf. also note 83).

88 Especially in his reflection on a supposed opposition between an Islamic political "personalism" and European "institutionalism," a reflection promptly contradicted by the examples provided by Al-Kaabi (cf. p. 20-25). The contradiction arises from his attempt to draw a contrast between Western and Islamic political thought – two civilizations conceived as monolithic and immutable entities across centuries – while the differences result from either traditional or modern conceptions of the State.

and “personalism” on the other.⁸⁹ The second volume offers the famous *al-Siyāsa al-sharʿiyya fī iṣlāḥ al-rāʾ wa-l-raʿiyya*, translated by Aïssam Ait-Yahya and Zaynab Asswab as *La Politique religieuse* (“Religious Politics”). Similar to *Fiqh al-wāqīʾ*, Yahya’s translation of the *Siyāsa* is surpassed by extensive commentaries. If the translation covers pages 66-195, the introductory sections (pages 9-65), the “historical study and political commentary” (pages 225-360), and the “general conclusion” (pages 361-448) indeed form the core of the book. The analysis of this translation-commentary would warrant a separate study that goes beyond the scope of an article, but let us note simply that this book appears, in a certain way, as the culmination of Nawist logic and reflects its perspective: a critical, often acerbic, stance on Orientalism (especially the work of H. Laoust, which Aït Yahya seeks to distance himself from);⁹⁰ a claim for the relevance and timeliness of an effective and strictly Islamic “religious policy”; a demand for “radicalism”⁹¹ and a critique of Islamic tepidity, including from self-professed disciples of Ibn Taymiyya.⁹²

89 Ibn Taymiyya, *Textes Politiques*, especially 15-20.

90 H. Laoust, *Le Traité de Droit Public d'Ibn Taymiyya. Traduction Annotée de la Siyāsa al-Sharʿiyya* (Institut Français de Damas, 1948), ix-xiv. Yahya accuses Laoust of bias and being a pawn of colonialism, following in the footsteps of his father, Émile Laoust. Aït Yahya writes, for example, “It would be false and naive to believe that he was merely a scholar whose mind was entirely immersed in the study of historical Muslim works in his office in Damascus. [...] In reality, there is no need to try to prove the strong collusion and collaboration that existed between various ministries and the academics in charge of ‘orientalist’ teaching chairs and research institutes scattered throughout the French colonial empire. [...] Thus, it is quite evident that one cannot ignore the political interest of Orientalism, as scientific as it may appear.” Ibn Taymiyya, *La Politique Religieuse*, 14, 16-17.

91 The second volume begins with two highlighted quotations: Ibn Ḥazm (“If it were not for the presence of my enemies, I would not have written a single word”) and Hannah Arendt (“Evil can be both banal and extreme; only goodness is radical”). In an interview from 2018, Aït-Yahya stated, “Radicality, the word radicality, fundamentally means ‘returning to the root.’ And all the great political revolutionaries have either been designated as such or claimed the word. So, if I am designated in that sense, then okay, I accept it; I am returning to the root of Islam, to its orthodoxy and foundations.” Gaïd, “Qu’est-ce qu’un Intellectuel Radical Musulman Français,” 51.

92 Aït Yahya thus notes regarding Y. Michot, “on this subject [i.e., the radicalism of Ibn Taymiyya], we could not fail to mention the work of Professor Yahya Michot, who carried out remarkable research [...]. However, it seems that the widespread dissemination of Yahya Michot’s work (and most likely the demands of his position given his past experience) unfortunately does not occur without a certain inclination toward a kind of ‘conciliatory conformity’ (?) concerning certain delicate points in Ibn Taymiyya’s writings” (Ibn Taymiyya, *La Politique religieuse*, 35, note 38). One might hypothesize that Aït Yahya is alluding here to the scandal surrounding Y. Michot following his translation, under the pseudonym Nasreddin Lebatelier, of a fatwa by Ibn Taymiyya titled “*Le Statut des moines*” (Beirut,

In addition to these translations of the shaykh, references to his thought are thus scattered throughout the publications of Nawa editions, placing him very prominently at the top of the cited authors, even beyond Sayyid Quṭb, who is also a central figure for this publisher. Ibn Taymiyya, as we have seen, is both the precursor and the model for the three aspects of “*djihad fikri*”: geopolitical independence (today: the struggle against the West); politicization (today: condemnation of apoliticism and democracy), intellectualism (today: production of a theologically Wahhabi thought but politicized and relying on a reactualized heresiology including modern ideologies):

The interest, for us, in this author is that he knew how to use his erudition and his knowledge of Greek and Arabic philosophical texts to effectively compare Islam and the philosophical tradition. The study of this author is all the more useful in our time, as he had detected and analyzed the irreducible opposition between the tradition of philosophers and that of prophets, an opposition that, in our time, takes the form of a cataclysmic and global conflict between a dominant Western world and a Muslim world struggling to recompose itself.⁹³

The uniqueness of Nawa lies in its elevation of Ibn Taymiyya, not only as all Salafists do to the rank of Shaykh al-Islam but also, and more importantly, as a complete intellectual who knew how to summon the knowledge of his time to serve a distinctly Islamic perspective: “By mastering *fiqh al-wāqī*, [scholars] will be capable of excelling in the solutions they propose. It is in this perspective that Shaykh of Islam Ibn Taymiyya was one of those who mastered religious sciences and related profane sciences the most.”⁹⁴ By bestowing on the Damascene shaykh the status of a complete intellectual, Nawa’s authors can also effectively cast their adversaries within Salafism as bad disciples. Thus, after stating, “I wanted to revive the methodology of Ibn Taymiyya in the acquisition of knowledge,” A. S. Al-Kaabi adds, “It is deplorable to note that today, Muslims who forcefully claim the heritage of Ibn Taymiyya are the first to

1997). This publication was then perceived as legitimizing the massacre of the Tibhirine monks by the GIA in 1996. However, one must question whether Aït Yahya’s criticism implies reproach for the condemnation of the jihadist appropriation of Ibn Taymiyya in his work *Mardin*, particularly 105-125.

93 Ibn Taymiyya, *Textes Politiques*, 12 (note by Al-Kaabi).

94 Omar, *Fiqh al-Wāqī*, 73 (note by A. A. Yahya).

betray his methodology of knowledge, which combined strictly religious sciences with profound encyclopedic knowledge.”⁹⁵

As we have seen, one of the constantly evoked major episodes in Ibn Taymiyya’s life is his “struggle against the Tatars” and his criticism of their mode of government based on *yasāq*.⁹⁶ This tension between Ibn Taymiyya and the Mongol power is systematically reinterpreted by politicized Salafism and Salafi-Jihadism to condemn “human laws,” assimilated to *kufr* and *shirk*, as a violation of *tawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya*. Nawa’s authors align themselves with this perspective, which involves *takfīr* but in a more subtle manner,⁹⁷ by invoking Ibn Taymiyya, who appears once again as a source of enlightening insight for Muslims in the West. Additionally, he anticipates the democratizing deviations of movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood.⁹⁸ By combining religious knowledge (in the classical sense of the term) with an understanding of the challenges of his time (through the analysis of secular knowledge), Ibn Taymiyya perceived “de-Islamization” behind the acceptance of “human laws”:

He [Ibn Taymiyya] understood very well the fatal risk of de-Islamization of Muslim populations living under the yoke of the Tatars if the Islamic legislative order no longer governed their societies. At that particular moment in Muslim history, this case was unique; it required scholars to fully understand the implications of the non-application of Sharia and its replacement. Ibn Taymiyya was the historical example, the archetype of the scholar who understood the profound reality of this situation, perfectly concluding on the legal statuses of those responsible. Even today, this crucial position is either widely criticized or completely diluted to avoid drawing logical (and dangerous...) conclusions about our own reality and the current state of the Muslim world.⁹⁹

95 Al-Kaabi, *La Voie des Nazaréens*, 116-117.

96 See my analysis of Ibn Taymiyya in the work of Mostafa Brahami above.

97 In the following excerpt, A. A. Yahya uses the expression “legal status” twice, a term particularly used within Salafism and referring to the term *ḥukm*. The legal status alluded to here is apostasy.

98 Nawa regularly criticizes the democratic legalistic engagement of the Muslim Brotherhood. “I have always been hostile to the MB [i.e., Muslim Brotherhood] and considered them the main problem,” explains Al-Kaabi, “because they lack intelligence and do not understand anything about current issues, not to mention more serious underlying ideological problems. It is not because I also criticize jihadist movements that I lean toward the MB.” Gaïd, “*Qu’est-ce qu’un Intellectuel Musulman Radical Français?*” 62. A. A. Yahya reserves several criticisms for the Muslim Brotherhood, including, among others, *Fiqh al-Wāqī*.

99 Omar, *Fiqh al-Wāqī*, 44-45 note 23 (note by A. A. Yahya).

Conclusion

In conclusion of this study, it appears that the figure of Ibn Taymiyya has achieved a form of centrality in Francophone publishing, both through his personality and his works or those of his disciples. The shadow of his presence looms over all debates and themes related to Islam, unwittingly appointing him to the title of al-Shaykh al-Akbar, a title previously reserved for his major rival Ibn 'Arabī. Whether in theology, law, spirituality, or politics, he emerges as the contemporary “magister dixit,” the authoritative argument.

In many respects, his memory thus belongs to the founding myth: first, that of the unsurpassed scholar; then, the *mujtahid* and *mujāhid* complete (by pen and sword); and finally, the spiritual master. Ibn Taymiyya is thus one of the strong links in the “mythical genealogy” embraced by all advocates and architects of an Islamic reform aiming to return to the Salaf, whether they advocate a renewed *ijtihād* through reason or, conversely, a more or less complete rejection of it in religious matters, or a political intransigence, or the struggle against other civilizations, or, finally, a call to war. The uses and misuses of the Damascene master, therefore, serve specific functions and contribute to the often-turbulent debates within Islam in general, particularly in the Francophone context.

With so many debates and uses of this scholar, one is tempted to paraphrase the words of the French historian Marc Bloch (d. 1944), regarding another divisive figure in history: “Taymiyyans, anti-Taymiyyans, we implore you: please, tell us simply who Ibn Taymiyya was!”¹⁰⁰

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