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The Collection and Edition of Ibn Taymīyah's Works: Concerns of a Disciple

In the world of medieval Islam generally, and particularly in the Mamluk period with which we are concerned here, the transmission of knowledge was closely connected to the willingness and ability of a scholar's pupils to transmit his writings. This implies the existence of a circle of students and their engagement in activities of copying, abridging, and commenting on a scholar's work. In itself, this constituted a mark of recognition and affiliation.

In a book devoted to the formation of the four Sunni schools of law (*madhāhib*) in the ninth and tenth centuries, Christopher Melchert has significantly highlighted the pivotal moment of this process as the point when the students of the four imams started recognizing their doctrines, collecting and editing them, and then teaching them. The subsequent formal inclusion of the schools' adherents in collections of biographies organized according to school affiliation substantially contributed to the formalization of the schools, as did the development of a system of qualification for the transmission of knowledge in teaching institutions.¹ Although this discourse concerns the end of the formative period of Islam (ninth and tenth centuries A.D.), which is not the one involved in this article (first half of the fourteenth century A.D.), some of these observations can serve as theoretical focal points for the case presented in this contribution. Additionally, Michael Chamberlain has written a fascinating and rich book on the social dynamics that affected the production and reproduction of knowledge in medieval Damascus (1190–1350).² His arguments on the importance of personal affiliation and mechanisms of loyalty form the general framework of this article.

Despite the attention that the renowned Hanbali jurist and theologian Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1328) has attracted in recent years, Ibn Taymīyah's journey to modernity remains a fascinating and relatively unexplored subject of research. This article tackles the earliest stage of the long and complex process of the transmission of Ibn Taymīyah's works after his death. It will also bring to light

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¹ All these issues are synthesized and critically presented by Christopher Melchert, "The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law," in *The Formation of Islamic Law*, ed. Wael B. Hallaq (Aldershot, 2004), 351–66, and see the bibliography therein; idem, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th–10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden, 1997).

² Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994).



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some issues regarding the status of Ibn Taymīyah that have been discussed in greater detail elsewhere.³

A number of factors could affect the survival, transmission, and eventual circulation and success of somebody's corpus of knowledge in the Mamluk period. Among these, one can cite the position that a scholar enjoyed among the influential people who promoted a culture of patronage in important teaching institutions. Patronage of urban works and scholarly enterprise was indeed an important cultural and political feature of Mamluk society, as a good deal of modern scholarship devoted to this topic shows.⁴ Another non-negligible aspect concerns the popularity of the ideas and practices endorsed by a given scholar, as well as the ability of his scholarship to offer appropriate responses to the religious and social demands of his time. The dynamics that the circulation of somebody's ideas created in the political, social, and religious arena in which he was located, and the consequent need to respond to his doctrines, should also be taken into account. This latter factor may be relevant when dealing with some of the controversial doctrines of Ibn Taymīyah. However, a thorough analysis of scholarly reactions to Taymīyan doctrines has yet to be carried out.⁵

As for the first two factors, I am of the opinion that neither played a relevant role in the transmission and dissemination of Ibn Taymīyah's scholarship. As far as patronage is concerned, the common idea that Ibn Taymīyah was at odds with the Mamluk authorities needs to be revisited.⁶ Nevertheless, his closeness

³ Caterina Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya *wa-jamā'atu-hu*: Authority, Conflict and Consensus in Ibn Taymiyya's Circle," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Shahab Aḥmad and Yossef Rapoport (Karachi, forthcoming), 23–52.

⁴ For Mamluk patronage in teaching institutions and scholarly life, see Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, 1992), 95–127, esp. 96–107; Mohammad Awad, "Sultan al-Ghawri: His Place in Literature and Learning (Three Books Written under His Patronage)," in *Actes du XXe congrès international des orientalistes, Bruxelles, 5–10 September 1938* (Louvain, 1940), 321–22; Carl F. Petry, "A Paradox of Patronage during the Later Mamluk Period," *The Muslim World* 73 (1983): 182–207; idem, "Scholastic Stasis in Medieval Islam Reconsidered: Mamluk Patronage in Cairo," *Poetics Today* 14 (1993): 323–48; Anne F. Broadbridge, "Academic Rivalry and the Patronage System in Fifteenth-Century Egypt: Al-Aynī, al-Maqrizī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 85–107.

⁵ The most notorious group of texts produced in refutation of some of Ibn Taymīyah's doctrines is that by Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), *Al-Rasā'il al-Subkīyah fī al-Radd ʿalā Ibn Taymīyah wa-Tilmidhihi Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah*, ed. Kamāl Abū al-Mūnā (Beirut, 1983). An analysis of polemical reactions to Ibn Taymīyah in the first half of the fourteenth century can be found in Caterina Bori, *Ibn Taymiyya: una vita esemplare: analisi delle fonti classiche della sua biografia*, Supplemento monografico n. 1 alla *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 76 (Pisa, 2003), 141–70.

⁶ The idea of conflict between the Mamluk authorities and Ibn Taymīyah is upheld, for instance, in an influential article by Donald P. Little, "The Historical and Historiographical Significance of the Detention of Ibn Taymiyya," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 3 (1973):



311–27. Biographical sources and chronicles report plenty of evidence regarding the relationship between Ibn Taymiyyah and the Mamluk authorities. For instance, Ibn Taymiyyah seems to have been on good terms with the amir Sayf al-Dīn Jāghān, the finance agent (*mushidd al-dawāwīn*) in Damascus between 697 and 702/1297 and 1303 and occasionally deputy of the viceroy (Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī [d. 744/1343], *Al-Uqūd al-Durriyah min Manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib Ḥamid al-Fiḳī [Cairo, 1938], 198–99). He had good relations with the governor of Damascus Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afram (d. ca. 720/1320–21) as well. Ibn Kathīr reports that he had accompanied al-Afram on one of the campaigns against the Shi‘i populations of Kasrawān in 699/1300 (Ibn Kathīr [d. 774/1373], *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah fī al-Tārīkh*, ed. Fu‘ād ‘Alī al-Kurdi [Cairo, 1932–39], 14:12, ll. 12–20). In the year 700/1300 the viceroy and the amirs of Damascus are described as asking Ibn Taymiyyah to go to Egypt to exhort the sultan to send his troops against the Tatars (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:15, ll. 15–20). According to Ibn Kathīr’s version, in Cairo Ibn Taymiyyah met with the sultan, the vizier, and the notables who consented to come to Syria (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14: 6, ll. 11–13). Ibn Taymiyyah’s interventions regarding both the Mongol authorities and the Egyptian administration are recorded by several chronicles (al-Birzālī [d. 739/1339], *Al-Muqtafā*, in *Al-Jāmi‘ li-Sīrat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (661–728) khilāl Sab‘at Qurūn*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Uzayr Shams and ‘Alī ‘Imrān [Mecca, 1420 H], 149–50; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:8 and 14; al-Yūnīnī [d. 726/1326], *Early Mamluk Syrian Historiography: Al-Yūnīnī’s Dhayl Mir‘āt al-Zamān*, ed. and trans. Li Guo [Leiden, 1998], 2:108–9, 119, 123–24; Ibn Dawādārī [d. ca. 736/1335], *Kanz al-Durar wa-Jāmi‘ al-Ghurar*, ed. Hans Robert Roemer [Cairo, 1960], 9:32–33, 36; Karl Vilhelm Zetterstéen, ed., *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mamlukensultane in den Jahren 690–741 der Hīgra nach arabischen Handschriften* [Leiden, 1919], 69–70, 76–79; al-Nuwayrī [d. 733/1333], *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, ed. al-Bāz al-‘Arīnī [Cairo, 1992], 31:395). It is hard to believe that he acted only privately. According to al-‘Umārī (d. 749/1349), al-Afram was not willing to let Ibn Taymiyyah go to Egypt when summoned there in 705/1306 (al-‘Umārī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, in *Al-Jāmi‘ li-Sīrat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah*, 260: “fa-manā‘a nā‘ib al-shām . . .”). The sultan Qalāwūn (d. 741/1341), after regaining power in 709/1310, asked Ibn Taymiyyah to avenge his enemies with a fatwa, but the shaykh refused (Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, ‘Uqūd, 282–83). In the same year Ibn Taymiyyah persuaded the sultan to maintain the status of *dhimmīs* as instituted by Baybars al-Jashnīkīr (Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, ‘Uqūd, 281). In 711/1311–12 Ibn Taymiyyah is reported to have advised Qalāwūn to appoint al-Afram to the vice-regency of Tripoli (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:60–61: “*intaqala al-Afram ilā niyābat Ṭarābulus bi-ishārat Ibn Taymiyyah ‘alā al-sultān bi-dhālika*”). In the same year he went back to Damascus in the company of the sultan and the army (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:67, ll. 7–10), where he is reported to have aroused the envy of some of his fellow scholars “*li-taqaddumihi ‘inda al-dawlah*” (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:37, l. 7). Ibn Taymiyyah himself declares his allegiance to the Mamluk regime in various instances: “There is no enmity or hatred between me and anybody in Egypt. I never stopped loving them (the Mamluks) and considering them as friends: their amirs, their scholars and judges” (Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim al-Najdī al-Ḥanbalī [Rabat, 1981], 3:259, ll. 5–7; see also 3:216, ll. 7–8). The very composition of his political treatise *Al-Siyāsah al-Shar‘īyah* is usually associated with Ibn Taymiyyah’s close connection with the sultan Qalāwūn (see Caterina Bori, “Théologie politique et Islam, à propos d’Ibn Taymiyya [d. 728/1328] et du sultanat mamelouk,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 224, no.1 (2007): 10, n. 13, for all the references regarding the composition of the *Siyāsah* according to Henri Laoust. See also Ibn Taymiyyah, *Les intermédiaires entre Dieu et l’homme [Risālat al-wāsita bayna l-khalq wa l-haqq]*, suivi de *Le Shaykh de l’Islam Ibn Taymiyya: Chronique d’une vie de théologien militant*, ed. Yahya



to some prominent men of the military elite does not imply any kind of direct patronage either from the Mamluk authorities themselves or from other powerful scholars of his time. This does not mean that he was beyond the dynamics of competition that characterized the scholarly life of his time. On a few instances he is reported as actively taking part in the struggles for control of stipendiary posts (*manāṣib*).⁷ Even so, generally speaking Ibn Taymīyah's teaching activities took place in peripheral institutions.⁸ While some aspects of his scholarship and personal activism seem to have been appreciated—I am thinking mainly of both his physical and intellectual engagement in activities of jihad—nevertheless, many other aspects of his doctrines remained minority views.⁹ I am referring to his unpopular positions on divorce oaths and triple divorce (*al-ḥilf bi-al-ṭalāq* and *al-ṭalāq al-thalāth*) and the visitation to tombs of pious men (*ziyārat al-qubūr*) in particular, but also to his open criticism of Sufi ideas and practices.¹⁰

Michot [Paris, 1996], 22). The letters that Ibn Taymīyah wrote to the sultan to support the war against the Mongols or to promote the Islamization of the Jabal Kasrawān populations also point in the same direction (see Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 182–94, and Ibn Taymīyah, *Risālah ilā al-Sultān al-Malik al-Nāṣir fī Sha'n al-Tatār*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid [Beirut, 1976]). It was the *fitnah* which broke out in Damascus in 718/1318 regarding divorce oaths that caused Ibn Taymīyah to lose the support of both the sultan and the governor of Damascus, Tankiz (d. 740/1339). In fact, as demonstrated by Yossef Rapoport, the position of Ibn Taymīyah on divorce oaths did not only challenge well-established social practices and issues of patriarchal authority, but also the sphere of public life. See Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cambridge, 2005), esp. 89–110; and idem, "Ibn Taymiyya on Divorce Oaths," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Syrian and Society*, ed. Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni (Leiden, 2004), 191–217.

⁷ See the reports about the deliberations (and subsequent strife) over the allocation of positions that took place at the death of the shaykh al-Fāriqī (d. 703/1304) (see Ibn Kathir, *Bidāyah*, 14:28, and al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad 'Ulwī Shaltūt [Cairo, 1998], 32:79–80) and at the death of the shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn al-Sharīsī (d. 718/1318) (see al-Dhababī, *Thalāth Tarājim Nafisah lil-A'imma al-A'lām: Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah, al-Ḥāfiẓ 'Alam al-Dīn al-Birzālī, al-Ḥāfiẓ Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī: Min Kitāb Dhayl Tārīkh al-Islām*, ed. Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir al-'Ajmī [Kuwait, 1995], 56).

⁸ See Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya wa-jamā'atu-hu," 31–32.

⁹ Ibn Taymīyah's intervention during the Mongol invasions of Syria has been an important factor in the construction of his image as a paradigm of activism to this very day. The bio-hagiographical literature has doubtless exploited Ibn Taymīyah's activism in jihad as an undisputable point in his favor (see for instance al-Bazzār, *Al-A'lām al-'Alīyah fī Manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid [Beirut, 1976], 63–65; al-'Umārī, *Masālik*, 253–54, 258–59; Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 177–80; al-Mar'ī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī [d. 1033/1623–24], *Al-Kawākib al-Durriyah fī Manāqib al-Mujtahid Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Najm 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khalaf [Beirut, 1986], 93–94). On jihad against the Mongols, now see Denise Aigle, "The Mongol Invasion of Bilād al-Shām by Ghāzān Khān and Ibn Taymīyah's Three 'Anti-Mongol' Fatwas," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2007): 89–120.

¹⁰ On the *ṭalāq* controversy, see—as quoted above—Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce*;



With this in mind, the role of his circle of pupils must have been crucial in the process of transmission of his work. The massive 37-volume fatwa collection of Ibn Taymīyah, the many printed books of his writings available on the market today, and the large number of manuscripts lying scattered in libraries all over the world encourage one to imagine a steady, ongoing, and successful transmission throughout the centuries.¹¹ Contrary to these expectations, this article will show that just after Ibn Taymīyah's death, the issue of the collection and transmission of his *mu'allafāt* (writings) was a rather troublesome matter for one scholar in particular.

A DISCIPLE'S PRACTICAL CONCERNS

An impressive amount of biographical material on Ibn Taymīyah has survived. No other contemporary scholar was the subject of such a large number of biographical writings. Among these, two monographs written shortly after his death stand out, together with a third, later one, which does not impress the reader with its originality—in fact, it draws heavily on previous materials.¹² A series of biographical entries in collective dictionaries or obituaries in chronicles adds to

idem, "Ibn Taymiyya on Divorce Oaths"; and Abdul Hakim I. Al-Matroudi, *The Ḥanbalī School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict or Conciliation* (London and New York, 2006), 171–85. For Ibn Taymīyah's criticism of Sufi ideas and popular practices, see Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden, 2007), 108–14; Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford, 2002), 126–38, esp. 130–34; Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, 1999), 87–111; Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden, 1999), 168–218; Thomas E. Homerin, "Ibn Taymiyya's al-*Ṣūfiyya wa-al-fuqarā'*," *Arabica* 32 (1985): 219–44; idem, "Sufis and their Detractors in Mamluk Egypt: a Survey of Protagonists and Institutional Settings," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, ed. Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden, 1999), 225–45, esp. 231–35; Niels H. Olesen, *Culte des saints et pèlerinages chez Ibn Taymiyya (661/1263–728/1328)* (Paris, 1991); Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Delmar, NY, 1984), 5–14 and 24–39; Paul Nwyia, "Une cible d'Ibn Taymīya: Le moniste al-Timlisānī (m. 690/1291)," *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales* 30 (1978): 127–45; Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taymīya's Struggle against Popular Religion* (The Hague, 1976).

¹¹ However, it should be noted that some of Ibn Taymīyah's most voluminous works are not included in the Saudi collection of his *fatāwā*. See, among others, Ibn Taymīyah, *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-Naql wa-al-'Aql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 11 vols. (Riyadh, 1981–83); and idem, *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyah fī Naqd Kalām al-Shī'ah al-Qadariyah*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 9 vols. (Riyadh, 1986).

¹² Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, 'Uqūd. See also the new edition from a different manuscript, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār fī Dhikr Aḥwāl Qāmī' al-Mubtadi'īn wa-Ākhir al-Mujtahidīn Taqī al-Dīn Abī al-'Abbās Aḥmad Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Jalaynad (Cairo, 2003). Al-Bazzār, *Al-A'lām al-'Alīyah*; al-Mar'ī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī, *Al-Kawākib al-Durriyah*.



this bulk of texts.¹³ To my knowledge, no other fourteenth-century scholar was inundated by such a cascade of bio-hagiographical attention, let alone the single-subject volumes composed for him in the style of *manāqib* (usually monographic biographical works of a laudatory nature). For instance, although the powerful Shafi'i chief qadi Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355) received an impressively long and wordy *tarjamah* (biographical notice) composed by his son Tāj al-Dīn (d. 771/1369) that was inserted in his monumental *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, no monographs were penned to enhance his personal and scholarly status.¹⁴ Sultans did enjoy the privilege of being subjects of *sīrahs*, but this is a matter of an altogether different nature.¹⁵

Luckily, many epistles of Ibn Taymīyah to his family and companions have withstood the ravages of time, as have some letters written by members of his close circle of students and supporters. These materials do not usually share the language and purpose of the bio-hagiographical tradition, but they can still be considered biographical materials.¹⁶ Some of them display an interesting personal flavor mixed with doctrinal issues that help contextualize and further our understanding of the vicissitudes of the *shaykh al-islām* and the cultural and political milieu of which he was a part. Among these letters is that of Ibn Murri al-Ḥanbalī, to which I shall now turn my attention.

Ibn Murri was a Hanbali scholar from Ba'lbak. This background in itself did not necessarily entail his being a follower of Ibn Taymīyah, but he indeed was. His name comes up in the sources in connection with some disturbances that

¹³ For a critical survey of Ibn Taymīyah's biographical tradition, see Hasan Qasim Murad, "Miḥan of Ibn Taymiyya: A Narrative Account based on a Comparative Analysis of the Sources" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1968), 1–73; and Bori, *Ibn Taymiyya: una vita esemplare*, 29–59, 177–81. Al-ʿUlaymī (d. 927/1520–21), *Al-Manhaj al-Aḥmad fī Tarājim Aṣḥāb al-Imām Aḥmad*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Arnāʿūt et al. (Beirut, 1997), 5:24–44, should be added to the list of sources examined in the latter reference. I should like to thank Christopher Melchert for letting me have a copy of the text.

¹⁴ Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāhī and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥilw (Cairo, 1964–76), 10:139–340.

¹⁵ See for instance Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ibn Nāhiḍ (d. 841/1438), "Ibn Nāhiḍ's *as-Sīra aṣ-Ṣaykhiyya* (Eine Lebensgeschichte des Sultans al-Mu'ayyad Ṣaykh): Ein Beitrag zur Sīra-Literatur," ed. Rudolf Veselý, *Archiv Orientalní* 67, no. 2 (1999): 149–220; Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir (d. 692/1292), *Al-Rawḍ al-Zāhir fī Sīrat al-Malik al-Zāhir*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir (Riyadh, 1976). Paulina B. Lewicka, *Šāfi' ibn ʿAlī's Biography of the Mamluk Sultan Qalāwūn* (Warsaw, 2000), contains a critical edition of a biography of the sultan Qalāwūn (d. 689/1290) entitled *Al-Faḍl al-Ma'thūr min Sīrat al-Sultān al-Malik al-Manṣūr*.

¹⁶ See Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī, *ʿUqūd*, 257–59, 259–67, 272–77, 284–85, 291–321; Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 3:202–10, 211–47, 249–77; 28:30–46, 47–48, 48–50, 50–57, 57–59. Some of the letters in *Majmūʿ Fatāwā* coincide with those in *ʿUqūd*. This list does not include the letters sent to the sultan Qalāwūn, which display, all in all, a different type of discourse.



took place in the year 725/1324–25 in Cairo, where he was tried and punished by the Maliki judge al-Ikhnāʿī (d. 732/1331–32) for preaching in support of Ibn Taymiyah's ideas on asking for the Prophet's aid and intercession (*al-istighāthah wa-al-tawassul*). The affair concluded in his expulsion from Cairo together with his family.¹⁷

Ibn Murri is the author of a *risālah* to Ibn Taymiyah's pupils. The letter was written shortly after the shaykh's death,¹⁸ and it has the clear purpose of encouraging Ibn Taymiyah's students to engage in the collection and edition of their master's works. Ibn Murri's concern regards the state of Ibn Taymiyah's *mu'allafāt*—which, he laments, are scattered, disordered, and full of lacunae—and their subsequent transmission.

He illustrates this painful situation as follows:

I urge your sound endeavors to get hold of the notebooks (*karārīs*) of the “Refutation of the Doctrines of the Philosophers” (*Al-Radd ʿalā ʿAqā'id al-Falāsifah*), as there is not a complete extant copy of this work except mine, which was stored in the northern cabinet (*al-khuristān al-shamālī*) of our shaykh's madrasah.¹⁹ The shaykh Sharaf al-Dīn²⁰—may God be compassionate to him—informed me that he had deposited the whole collection in a secure place, but he was loath to help me access these notebooks when he went to Damascus—God is the uniquely powerful. Abū ʿAbd Allāh [ibn Rushayyiq] took the fourth one from me, which is [now] with him,

¹⁷ A biographical note on Ibn Murri can be found in Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 1:178–79. For an account of his *fitnah*, see al-Jazarī (d. 739/1338–39), *Tārīkh Ḥawādith al-Zamān wa-Anbāʾihi wa-Wafayāt al-Akābir wa-al-Aʿyān min Abnāʾihi al-Maʾrūf bi-Tārīkh Ibn al-Jazarī*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmuri (Beirut, 1998), 2:61–62. Ibn Kathir, *Bidāyah*, 14:117; al-Maqrizī (d. 845/1441), *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Maʾrifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Mustafā Ziyādah (Cairo, 1971), 2:1:263; Hasan Qasim Murad, “Ibn Taymiyya on Trial: A Narrative Account of his Miḥan,” *Islamic Studies* 18 (1979): 24–25; and idem, “Miḥan of Ibn Taymiyya: A Narrative Account based on a Comparative Analysis of the Sources,” 110–11. Joseph H. Escovitz, *The Office of Qāḍī al-Quḍāt in Cairo under the Bahri Mamlūks* (Berlin, 1984), 141–43.

¹⁸ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, in *Al-Jāmiʿ li-Sīrat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyah*, 97–104. One of the people mentioned in the letter as most suitable to revise and edit Ibn Taymiyah's work is the qadi Sharaf al-Dīn who died in 731. One may therefore assume that the letter was written between 728 and 731. *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁹ Perhaps *al-madrasah al-ḥanbaliyah* where he last taught. For the history of the madrasah, see al-Nuʿaymī (d. 927/1521), *Al-Dāris fī Tārīkh al-Madāris*, ed. Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 1990), 2:50–62. For Ibn Taymiyah's teaching career there, see *ibid.*, 57–58.

²⁰ It is unclear who the person in question is. Perhaps it is Ibn Taymiyah's brother, Sharaf al-Dīn, who died in 727/1326–27, i.e., before Taqī al-Dīn. Alternatively, perhaps it is the judge Sharaf al-Dīn mentioned below.



while the original copy written by the shaykh is in a state of severe disarray (*fī al-qatʿ al-kabīr*); that one was also here [with me]. Less than one page remains of the other two copies. So let all this reach Abū ʿAbd Allāh that he may complete the copy until he says: “This is a chapter and that is a chapter. God knows best what is right.”²¹

On the one hand, and as underscored elsewhere, this source demonstrates Ibn Murri’s close and active affiliation with Ibn Taymiyah. On the other hand, and more significantly for the purposes of this paper, it brings to light the issue of the written transmission of Ibn Taymiyah’s works. In this regard, Ibn Murri’s practical concern is fascinating in its seemingly down-to-earth character. In fact, in its unusual nature, the *risālah* is an interesting text since it is not primarily concerned (at least apparently) with God’s eternal attributes and the great theoretical debates that animated theological and religious scholarship in fourteenth-century Mamluk Egypt and Syria, but with the material survival of his teacher’s books, obviously instrumental to the circulation and consolidation of his doctrine. For a number of concrete reasons, the issue was not at all banal.

Firstly, Ibn Taymiyah was renowned for being a very prolific author: “From one day to the next he would write four quires or more of exegesis, jurisprudence, the principles of Islamic religion, and refutation[s] of the philosophers and of the speculative sciences. It is no exaggeration [to say] that up to now his writings have reached five hundred volumes.”²² Al-Dhahabī also mentions “the utmost difficulty and obscurity” of his handwriting.²³ His most renowned biographer, Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343), was well aware of the difficulty of putting together a complete list of Ibn Taymiyah’s *muʿallafāt*, and, with due caution, he warns that it is almost an impossible task due to the amount he wrote, the speed with which he wrote, and the fact that he used to write from memory without relying on any written texts (*wa-yaktubu min ḥifẓihi min ghayr naql*).²⁴ Yet, he promises he will make every effort to compile a comprehensive list. To a certain extent, the dismay of the shaykh’s biographer can be understood, for even today it is not easy to acquire a systematic knowledge of the whereabouts of Ibn Taymiyah’s

²¹ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 99.

²² Al-Dhahabī, *Nubdhah min Sirat Shaykh al-Islām Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyah*, in Caterina Bori, “A New Source for the Biography of Ibn Taymiyya,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 67, no. 3 (2004): 321–48, quotation is from p. 341. See also Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī, *ʿUqūd*, 64–65.

²³ Al-Dhahabī, *Nubdhah*, 340.

²⁴ Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī, *ʿUqūd*, 64. One should not forget the hagiographical character of such statements. In this case memory (*ḥifẓ*) is emphasized as a most desirable quality for the good traditionist. As a matter of fact, in one of the letters sent to Damascus from Egypt, Ibn Taymiyah asks for some books to be brought to him; Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī, *ʿUqūd*, 285.



manuscripts and writings.²⁵

Secondly, in the first half of the fourteenth century it is unlikely that any copyists would assure the reproduction and diffusion of somebody's work in exactly the way it was first conceived by its author. Moreover, Ibn Taymīyah did not have a systematic mind. Rather, he was unsystematically explosive both in the quantity and in the quality of his works. Anybody approaching his writings must cope with his digressive and repetitive style, with the immense number of authorities and past scholars he had in mind or to whom he directly refers, and with his polemical language and the targets it implicitly or explicitly strikes.

To this one may add that his mandatory travels and changes of residence (from Damascus to Cairo, from Cairo to Alexandria, from Alexandria back to Cairo, then finally to Damascus), combined with his ongoing intellectual activity, must have contributed to the dispersal. Ibn Murri mentions several times. Furthermore, when he was imprisoned in 726/1326 in the Citadel of Damascus, his books were taken away and were only recovered after his death by the amir Sayf al-Dīn Qutlūbughā al-Fakhri (d. 742/1343). Ibn Taymīyah himself recalls the confiscation episode in two of his letters. He rejoices that his books were taken from the prison (Damascus, 728/1328), for they would be read and understood and his arguments would show the wrong charges of his enemies.²⁶ It seems that the recovery of Ibn Taymīyah's books was a bone of contention between the amir al-Fakhri, who held Ibn Taymīyah in great esteem, and Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, the major detractor of Ibn Taymīyah. Once he had successfully retrieved them, al-Fakhri is said to have handed them to over Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah and to Ibn Taymīyah's brother Zayn al-Dīn.²⁷

Should we believe al-Bazzār (d. 749/1349) when he highlights the shaykh's great generosity by reporting that he gave his books away to whoever came to visit him and asked for one of them? The anecdotal and hagiographic character of these reports revolves around the idea that Ibn Taymīyah did not stop anybody from accessing religious knowledge, therefore complying with prophetic injunctions.²⁸ We read of him saying about the confiscation of his books in prison: "I have never

²⁵The following catalogs may be of use: *Majmū'at Mu'allafāt Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah al-Makhtūṭah (al-Aṣṣīyah wa-al-Matbū'ah) al-Mahfūẓah fī al-Maktabah al-Sulaymānīyah bi-Istānbul*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Shaybānī, pt. 1 (Kuwait, 1993); *Majmū'at Mu'allafāt Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah al-Makhtūṭah (al-Aṣṣīyah wa-al-Matbū'ah) al-Mahfūẓah fī Markaz al-Makhtūṭāt wa-al-Turāth wa-al-Wathā'iq*, ed. idem, pt. 1 (Kuwait, 1993).

²⁶ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, 28:47 and 58.

²⁷ See Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:197–98; and Henri Laoust, "Hanbalisme sous les Mamlouks Bahrides (658/784–1260/1382)," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 28 (1960): 60.

²⁸ Meaning not necessarily, or not only, the books he had written, but also the books he possessed. See al-Bazzār, *Al-A'lām al-'Alīyah*, 65–66.



written anything in order [for it] to be concealed from anybody.”²⁹

Moreover, we are informed that: “He would write an answer, and if somebody turned up to make a good copy of it, [it would be preserved], otherwise the person who asked for it (*al-sā'il*) would take his writing and go,” or: “Perhaps one of his disciples took it, so it was impossible to get it transcribed, [and furthermore] he did not return it, so it was gone.”³⁰ This report points to the circumstantial nature of Ibn Taymīyah's scholarship, which is attested by the shaykh himself. In various instances, he affirms that he used to write (in matters of belief [*i'tiqād*]) only at the request of a person that would present him with a query and press him for an answer.³¹ The *mustaftī*, the person who demands a legal response (*fatwā*), is here defined as *mustarshid*, seeking (and being in need of) guidance. In this way the ethical value of conveying knowledge is also underlined.

It is the very circumstantial nature of his *fatāwā* (the occasions of their composition are often left unspecified) and the overwhelming quantity of Ibn Taymīyah's production that makes it hard even today to date Ibn Taymīyah's production. Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī was fully aware of this, as he explains:

He was asked about something, so he would answer, “I have already written about this but do not remember where it is.” So he turned to his disciples and told them, “Return my writing to me and show it to him (i.e., the *mustaftī*) so that it may be transmitted.” But because of their own greed to keep it (*fa-min hirsihim 'alayhi*), they would not bring it back, and because of their own inability, they would not transmit it, so his work got lost and its title remained unknown. For this and other reasons it is impossible to enumerate what he wrote and what he composed.³²

In a somewhat dramatic picture, we are then informed that when Ibn Taymīyah was imprisoned, his followers were dispersed, as were his books (*tafarraqa atbā'uhu wa-tafarraqa kutubuhu*). His disciples were afraid of showing his books, so they fled with them, kept them hidden, sold them, and gave them away as gifts; some of their books were even stolen or their existence disavowed.³³ Loyalty turned into shameful behavior, it would seem.

This leads to the most relevant point of my argument: despite Ibn Taymīyah's

²⁹ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, 28:47, see also 3:259, l. 1.

³⁰ Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 65.

³¹ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, 3:161, 243, 258–59.

³² Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 65.

³³ *Ibid.*



immense popularity, which is stressed by all of his biographical accounts, there seems to be a very limited number of people Ibn Murri envisages as capable transmitters of the shaykh's thought and doctrines. He remarks, "There will be no substitute for any of the most important brothers once they have gone, after him" (*wa-kull man dhahaba ba'dahu min akābir al-ikhwān mā 'anhu 'iwaḍ*).³⁴ What is more, and worse, Ibn Murri seems to question the willingness of the shaykh's pupils to engage fully in this crucial activity. Hence, he composed the *risālah*.

In sum, the situation was dire enough to cause Ibn Murri substantial worry. As a remedy, Ibn Murri proposes to his addressees a communal editorial undertaking. Ibn Taymiyah's writings should be gathered and handed over to Ibn Rushayyiq (d. 749/1348), whom he considers the most competent and expert of the group, for "he is the one of the *jamā'ah* who best knows the possible locations of the individual benefits which have been cut off from their original source" (*huwa akhbar al-jamā'ah bi-maẓānn al-maṣāliḥ al-mufradah allātī qad inqata'a mādḍatuhā*).³⁵ His efforts should next be checked by the best of the group (*jamā'ah*), or collated with the original copy. A further revision should then be carried out by the traditionist al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341–42), the most trustworthy of them,³⁶ and then by Ibn Qayyim (d. 750/1351)³⁷ and the judge Sharaf al-Dīn,³⁸ who are the most proficient in the rational method (*al-manāḥij al-ʿaqliyah*) and theological research (*al-mabāḥiṭh al-uṣūliyah*). A sound transmission will thus be guaranteed.³⁹

The real protagonist of this procedure is the above-mentioned Ibn Rushayyiq, who emerges as the new face of this group of scholars. An attentive reading of the sources indicates that Ibn Rushayyiq, a Maliki, was a faithful disciple of Ibn Taymiyah, as well as the one who was most dedicated to the collection and edition of his works. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) and Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī confirm Ibn Murri's

³⁴ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 100.

³⁵ Ibid. By *al-maṣāliḥ al-mufradah*, the author means any single-topic work (such as a *risālah* or a fatwa), or even a passage, paragraph, or sentence from such a work, which is beneficial for the *jamā'ah* or to readers in general. The meaning of this phrase, as well as the phrase *qad inqata'a mādḍatuhā*, is clarified in an earlier passage of Ibn Murri's *risālah*, when he laments the loss of many of Ibn Taymiyah's works or parts of them: "We ask God for assistance in the recovery of these splendid benefits after their dispersal" (. . . *jam' shaml hādhihi al-maṣāliḥ al-jalīlah ba'da shatātihā*). In his opinion, Ibn Rushayyiq is the only one capable of recovering these works or restoring the fragments to their original source material (*māddah*). My gratitude goes to Livnat Holtzman for her help with this passage.

³⁶ For a lengthy biography of al-Mizzī, see al-Subkī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyah*, 10:395–430.

³⁷ For a good introduction to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, see now Birgit Krawietz, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah: His Life and Works," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (2006): 19–64.

³⁸ Not identified.

³⁹ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 100.



view.⁴⁰ For instance, it is reported that a small part of what the *shaykh al-islām* wrote during his last incarceration relating to Quranic exegesis was sent by him to Ibn Rushayyiq, whereas the rest remained with the judges. Then, according to Ibn Rushayyiq, “The shaykh died and his works are still with them, approximately fourteen bundles (*rizmah*).”⁴¹ Ibn Murri encourages his “brothers” (as he calls them) to support, help, and protect Ibn Rushayyiq, for “he has truly remained peerless in this skill (*li-annahu qad baqiya fi fannihi faridan*) and no one of the *jamā‘ah* can ever, in any way, replace him . . . so write down the works that he has with him and let him write what you have with you.”⁴²

On the basis of Ibn Murri’s letter combined with other evidence, the editors of the large collection of biographical materials on Ibn Taymīyah, Muḥammad ‘Uzayr Shams and ‘Alī ‘Imrān, believe that the list of Ibn Taymīyah’s writings usually attributed to Ibn Qayyim and published by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid in 1953 should instead be attributed to Ibn Rushayyiq.⁴³ The point is well taken, but the issue is still open to further research. In any case, the letter brings to light somebody who was hardly known from previous studies, and it also offers a starting point for reflection over Ibn Qayyim’s long-assumed role in the reception and transmission of his master’s work.

What is at stake is quite clear: a sound and attentive transmission of Ibn Taymīyah’s doctrines is obviously vital to the survival of his thought and of his understanding of Islam: “As the shaykh benefited from the scholarship (*kalām*) of the previous imams, similarly who comes after him will benefit from his scholarship. So, follow the divine command and engage in the collection of everything you can of the different types of his voluminous writings (*al-mu‘allafāt al-kibār*), of the scattered pieces of his small questions, of the copies of his dispersed fatwas, and

⁴⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:229; Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *‘Uqūd*, 27.

⁴¹ Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *‘Uqūd*, 28.

⁴² Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 98.

⁴³ Shams and ‘Imrān, *Al-Jāmi‘ li-Sirat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah*, 8–13, 98 n. 1, and 220ff. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, *Asmā’ Mu‘allafāt Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Damascus, 1953). Their argument is based on various observations: (1) a confusion created by the fact that the two authors (Ibn Rushayyiq and Ibn Qayyim) share the same *kunyah* (Abū ‘Abd Allāh); (2) that Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī and Ibn Kathīr make statements about Ibn Rushayyiq’s engagement in the writing down of Ibn Taymīyah’s works; (3) that Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī reports some parts of Ibn Rushayyiq’s list of the shaykh’s works (4) on the basis of Ibn Murri’s *Risālah*. As for point 3, it needs to be noted that Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī does not report the *Risālah* of Ibn Rushayyiq, but only some titles of Ibn Taymīyah’s works on the authority of Ibn Rushayyiq. Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī reports the opening of a work called *Kitāb Tanbih al-Rajul al-‘Āqil ‘alā Tamwīh al-Jadal al-Bāṭil* (pp. 29–35), followed by a list of the shaykh’s *mu‘allafāt* which, however, is not attributed to Ibn Rushayyiq (pp. 35–67). See also Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, 6, n. 14.



of the rest of his scholarship that has already been dictated.”⁴⁴

What is less obvious is the reason for Ibn Murri’s anxious concern over this issue. Was the problem simply that Ibn Taymiyah had been overly productive and, unfortunately, rather careless in the compilation of his works? Or was the sense of vacuum left by the death of the *shaykh al-islām* so overwhelming as to produce the urgent appeal of this text? The letter seems to follow shortly after Ibn Taymiyah’s death. The passing of time (*al-fawt*) looms heavily in the *risālah* and hints at both the death of the shaykh and the threatened loss of his precious oeuvre unless a collective effort to preserve it is promptly undertaken.⁴⁵ But is the death of the shaykh enough to have caused Ibn Murri’s lack of confidence and gloomy state of mind? Or does the letter reflect something else about the status of Ibn Taymiyah (and of his scholarship) among his circle of scholars at the time of his death? I propose that the latter is true, for it seems that a subtext lurks behind the lines of Ibn Murri’s *risālah*.

IN SEARCH OF UNCHALLENGING AUTHORITIES: IBN ḤANBAL, AL-BUKHĀRĪ, AND IBN TAYMĪYAH

If Ibn Taymiyah was such a popular scholar and his ideas were so widely known and accepted (except by those who persistently criticized him), what would inspire Ibn Murri’s urgent and insistent call to take action against the loss of his works? If his “circle of pupils” (*jamā’ah*) or his “brothers” (*ikhwān*) (both words are repeatedly used by Ibn Murri) were the people most faithful to Ibn Taymiyah—those who had attended him, studied with him, shared with him his understanding of Islam (with its active implications) and experienced his grievances and sorrows—why would they need to be so strongly exhorted?

As noted above, Ibn Murri is not confident about the eagerness of his “brothers” to commit to assuring Ibn Taymiyah’s works the survival they deserve. Sorrow and mourning for Ibn Taymiyah’s death are simply not enough to preserve his memory and do not do justice to Ibn Taymiyah’s efforts. Spreading his knowledge is intended as a fulfilment God’s command in a charismatic vision of activism that perfectly matches that of Ibn Taymiyah.⁴⁶ At some point, he admonishes them: “Do not behave at present as you have behaved in the past.”⁴⁷ The allusion is not completely clear here, but it has recently been sufficiently demonstrated that Ibn Taymiyah’s theological and legal choices created uneasiness even in his own circle of scholars. Ibn Taymiyah himself seems to be well aware of this when he writes in one of his letters from Egypt to his companions: “Even when someone

⁴⁴ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 101.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 98, 99, 101.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 97, 104.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 98.



from the group has remained absent from us, or has come to us only now, his status in our eyes today is [nevertheless] greater, higher, and more honorable than it was before" (*wa-mā ghāba 'annā aḥad min al-jamā'ah, aw qadima ilaynā al-sā'ah, illā wa-manzilatuhu 'indanā al-yawm a'ḡam min mā kānat, wa-ajall, wa arfa'*).⁴⁸ The main idea running through the text is that of forgiveness towards those who have harmed him, be it his enemies or some of the people close to him.⁴⁹

Ibn Murri provides two authoritative examples from the past by which he presumably intends to motivate his addressees and to corroborate Ibn Taymīyah's stature. The first one is Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). He mentions Ibn Ḥanbal's dislike of his opinions being recorded. But after his death, writes Ibn Murri, his disciples (*aṣḥābuhu*) attended to this matter: "They transmitted his knowledge, clarified his objectives, and made his benefits known, so his way (*ṭarīqatuhu*) became victorious and his footsteps were followed."⁵⁰ In other words, Ibn Ḥanbal's opinions became the basis for a "school" (*madhhab*), although this is not what he would have liked.⁵¹ Ibn Taymīyah's followers are therefore encouraged to imitate Ibn Ḥanbal's pupils' example, with the difference that Ibn Taymīyah does not seem to have been disturbed by the idea of his doctrines being written down; however, the parallel is evocative. Ibn Murri then goes on to reassure any sceptics that Ibn Taymīyah's scholarship (*kalām*) will be accepted (*maqbul*).

The vicissitudes of the famous traditionist al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) are then mentioned as somebody who, despite the excellence of his knowledge, was banned (from Nishapur) and died as an outcast (*thumma māta ba'da dhālika gharīban*). The allusion here is to the charge made against al-Bukhārī late in his life that he held that the uncreatedness of the Quran did not apply to its recitation: "The Quran is the uncreated speech of God, but the deeds of men are created." Or, more explicitly: "Al-Bukhārī . . . was among those who stated, 'my pronunciation of the Quran is created' (*lafẓi al-qur'ān makhluq*). For this reason he died in the

⁴⁸ See Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 264; on the previous page Ibn Taymīyah hints at dissent among his own companions concerning him. See Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya wa-jamā'atu-hu" for plenty of other pieces of evidence.

⁴⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Uqūd*, 259–67; also in Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, 28:50–57.

⁵⁰ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 101–2: "It is known that, in his life, al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal prohibited the writing down of his opinions (*kalām*) so that the hearts may keep together on the original great source (*al-māddah al-aṣliyah al-uzmā*). On Ibn Ḥanbal's reluctance about his opinions being written down, see Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law*, 137, 141, and idem, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (Oxford, 2006), 59, 81.

⁵¹ On the formation of the Hanbali *madhhab*, see Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law*, esp. 137–55; Nimrod Hurvitz, "Schools of Law and Historical Context: Re-examining the Formation of the Hanbali Madhhab," *Islamic Law and Society* 7, no. 1 (2000): 37–64; and idem, *The Formation of Hanbalism: Piety into Power* (London, 2002): 103–12.



sorrow of hostility.”⁵² Yet, God compensated his misfortunes with success and wide acknowledgment of his works and skills. Great men are destined to meet with obstacles and grief, but it is part of God’s plans to turn seeming defeats into victories. It is not difficult to detect here a pattern of prophetic lives in general, and of the Muḥammadan *sīrah* in particular.⁵³ Towards the conclusion, Ibn Murri expresses his wish for Ibn Taymiyah’s scholarship to enjoy a great share in this authentic heritage (*al-wirāthah al-ṣāliḥah*), referring to the above-mentioned al-Bukhārī.

Here Ibn Taymiyah is firmly placed in the most honored traditionist scholarly experience. In so doing, Ibn Murri prepares the ground for the exposition of Ibn Taymiyah’s rational theological method. He used correct tradition (*al-naql al-ṣaḥiḥ*) as the foundation for each of his scholarly statements, and then corroborated them by sound reasoning (*bi-al-‘aqliyāt al-ṣaḥiḥah*). Ibn Taymiyah’s ultimate goal, states Ibn Murri, was to demonstrate the lack of contradiction between the two kinds of proofs while connecting his views back to the *salaf* (the early generation of pious Muslims).⁵⁴ In a letter written from Egypt in the month of Ramaḍān 706/1307 to an unspecified addressee, Ibn Taymiyah uses similar language when he refers to the lack of argument produced by his enemies against him:

If they want to refute [my beliefs] with whatever they will of the rational and traditional arguments (*min ḥujaj ‘aqliyah wa-sam‘iyah*), I will answer them to all of it and I will explain by clear exposition—understandable both to the elite and the commoners—that my words are in agreement with what reason and constitutional nature have made necessary (*li-ḍarūrat al-‘aql wa-al-fiṭrah*) and that they are in agreement with the Book, the Sunnah, and the Consensus of the Pious Ancestors of the community, and that the person who contradicts all this opposes clear reason and correct tradition (*sariḥ al-ma‘qūl wa-ṣaḥiḥ al-manqūl*).⁵⁵

⁵² See al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), *Tārīkh Baghdād aw Madīnat al-Salām* (Cairo, 1931), 2:4–34, esp. 30–33; al-Subkī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyah*, 2:212–41, esp. 228–30, and 218–20 (quotations are from pp. 228, ll. 9–10, and 229, ll. 16–17); Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (Hyderabad, 1907–9), 9:47–55, esp. 53–55, and 2:361–62.

⁵³ For instance, on the theme of Muḥammad’s persecution, see Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of the Prophet as viewed by the early Muslims: A Textual Analysis* (Princeton, 1995), 127–66.

⁵⁴ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 103. For a competent exposition of his method, see now Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, 19–69; Shahab Ahmed, “Ibn Taymiyya and the Satanic Verses,” *Studia Islamica* 87 (1998): 67–124, esp. 112.

⁵⁵ Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmū‘ Fatāwā*, 3:246, ll. 6–9. The letter is dated by Yahya Michot between Shawwāl and the beginning of Dhū al-Ḥijjah 706 (April–beginning of June 1307); see Yahya Michot, “Textes Spirituels d’Ibn Taymiyya IX: «Moi, je ne vous ai pas demandé de me faire sortir



A number of important recent studies have highlighted Ibn Taymiyah's combination of philosophical and traditionist discourses, which led him to support his literalist views with a selective and highly original application of rational argumentation.⁵⁶ Accordingly, the long-established image of Ibn Taymiyah as an uncompromising anti-rationalist is now undergoing a process of serious revision. Ibn Murri was aware of the novelty that Ibn Taymiyah's views represented in the fourteenth-century Syrian and Egyptian traditionist milieu, and he therefore had to convince his addressees that, despite his trials and tribulations, Ibn Taymiyah could still be considered as having the same rank as Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Bukhārī and that his works were thus worthy of transmission.

The absolute prominence Ibn Taymiyah attributes to the *salaf* in his own theological and legal reasoning is crucial and can explain some of the tensions his doctrine created in his own environment. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Ibn Murri already defines the Taymiyan way as *al-ṭariqah al-salafiyyah* (the way of the pious ancestors).⁵⁷ Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, draws its concept of authority from the past. Identification with the *salaf* was therefore a very powerful weapon that allowed Ibn Taymiyah to support the incontestability of his arguments in the face of the condemning authorities, while simultaneously leading him to bypass the boundaries of the dominant theological and legal schools which were a significant component of the Mamluk legal system, a focal point of social identity, and an important form of professional network.⁵⁸

Ibn Taymiyah's challenge is exemplified by the charge commonly levelled against him of contradicting the four schools of law, as well as by the sentiment

d'ici...», p. 2, n. 7, located at www.muslimphilosophyonline.com/it/index.html, under the heading "His Works" and the subheading "TEXTES SPIRITUELS I–XVI." Here Michot presents the translation of some excerpts of the letter. A summary of the letter can be found in Henri Laoust, *La profession de foi d'Ibn Taymiyya: La Wasitiyya* (Paris, 1986), 26–29.

⁵⁶ The best demonstration of this Taymiyan method is now that of Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*. See also Yahya Michot, "Vanités intellectuelles...L'impasse de rationalistes selon *Le Rejet de la contradiction d'Ibn Taymiyya*," *Oriente Moderno* 19 (2000): 597–617; idem, "A Mamluk Theologian's Commentary on Avicenna's *Risāla aḍḥawiyya*: Being a Translation of a Part of the *Dar' al-Ta'āruḍ* of Ibn Taymiyya, with Introduction, Annotation and Appendices," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14 (2003): 149–203, esp. 165–72, and 309–63. On different issues regarding Ibn Taymiyah's rational theology and methodology, see also the articles by Livnat Holtzman, Jon Hoover, Mehmet Sait Özervarli, and Racha el-Omari in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*.

⁵⁷ Ibn Murri, *Risālah*, 101.

⁵⁸ On the meaning of the *salaf* in Ibn Taymiyah's thought, see the papers of Walid Salih and Racha el-Omari in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* and the introduction to the volume. For Ibn Taymiyah's attitude to *madhāhib*, see the articles of Yossef Rapoport and Caterina Bori in the same volume. For Ibn Taymiyah versus his own school, see now Al-Matroudi, *The Ḥanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah*, 40–45.



expressed in his own words:⁵⁹

In my life up to this point, I have never pushed anybody in the field of theology (*fī uṣūl al-dīn*) to join the school of Aḥmad or anybody else, and I have not supported this sort of attitude nor have I mentioned it in my doctrine. I only mention that upon which the Pious Ancestors of the community and its imams have agreed. In spite of this, I have told them [i.e., his opponents in the 706/1307 Egyptian trial] more than once: I am indulgent with he who has been contradicting me for [the last] three years [and I wait for him] to come about with one word on the authority of the imams of the first three centuries that contradicts what I have said.⁶⁰

This attitude towards creed goes hand in hand with that towards jurisprudence in a logical correspondence between theological and legal reasoning.⁶¹ In the same text, Ibn Taymiyah expounds on the ways the term *sharʿ* was understood in his day. Three basic meanings are highlighted: the revealed law (*al-sharʿ al-munazzal*), the interpreted law (*al-sharʿ al-muʿawwal*), and the distorted law (*al-sharʿ al-mubaddal*). The first consists of the Book and of the Sunnah of the Prophet. Adherence to it is compulsory (*wa-hādhā yajibu ittibāʿuhu*) and punishment (*al-ʿuqūbah*) must be inflicted on whoever contradicts it. The second consists of the activity of *ijtihād* and the opinions of the scholars. It is into this category that the various *madhāhib* fall, and adherence to them is permissible but not obligatory. Nobody can either compel the commoners to follow the opinions of a jurist or prevent them from doing so; *taqlīd* is not prohibited, but neither is it encouraged, especially for the majority of Muslims.⁶² The distorted or substituted law consists of lies made in the name of God, the Prophet, or other religious figures, and propagated by means of false testimonies (*al-shahādāt al-zūr*). The person who engages in it is an unbeliever.⁶³ In this context, Ibn Taymiyah's organization of the meanings of law works in his defense and serves to invalidate the judgment of his prosecutor, Ibn Makhlūf. In

⁵⁹ For instance: Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 3:217, 253; but also Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāyah*, 14:67; Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1393), *Kitāb Dhayl ʿalā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*, ed. Muḥammad Hāmid Fiḳī (Cairo, 1952–53), 2:389, 394.

⁶⁰ Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 3:229.

⁶¹ On this point see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, 19–69, and Yossef Rapoport, "Ibn Taymiyya's radical legal thought: Rationalism, pluralism and the primacy of intention," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, 193–95.

⁶² Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 11:265 and 431: "*wa-lā yajibu ʿalā ʿumūm al-muslimīn ittibāʿ aḥād bi-ʿaynihi illā rasūl Allāh*" (the polemic runs here towards those pseudo-Sufis and ascetics who blindly imitated their shaykhs).

⁶³ Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 3:268.



fact, he argues, no matter to which school Ibn Makhlūf (d. 718/1318) belongs, it is not his right to compel people to accept it. Before, he had strongly argued for the incompetence of Ibn Makhlūf in matters of creed, in order to explain his failure to produce a favorable verdict.⁶⁴ Yet, the debate over Ibn Makhlūf's competency has far-reaching implications. It reveals a contention over who is entitled to have the final word in cases involving religious issues. In the same letter, Ibn Taymīyah broaches the boundaries of both the sultan's and the judges' judicial power in matters of religious sciences; his imprisonment provided a crucial opportunity to reflect upon these matters. He argues that it does not devolve to the judge to resolve disputes concerning issues of universal religious knowledge (*fī masā'il al-'ilm al-kullīyah*), such as Quranic exegesis, hadith, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and so forth.⁶⁵ On the contrary, it is incumbent upon the sultan either to resolve these disputes by referring to the Book and the Sunnah (Q. 4:59 is the verse quoted) or to accept the way in which his subjects live, their doctrines (*madhāhib*) included. Yet, whenever innovations are manifestly opposed to the shari'ah, it is the sultan's duty to declare their reprehensible character (*'alā al-sultān inkāruhā*). Since the number of innovators is so high, it can happen that their doctrines are considered equivalent to those of righteous people (here *ahl al-'ilm wa-al-sunnah*). In this case, the authority (*man yatawallā al-amr*) is in need of "somebody that brings to light the proof of God (*ḥujjat Allāh*) and explains it clearly so that after the proof there can be the punishment." The formulation of the punishment before the proof is presented is unlawful (*mashrū'*). Thus, the sultan is to be assisted by experts in religious science who help him produce legal proofs, without which no judgement is permissible and no punishment applicable. What does the qadi do, then? He basically ascertains what the disputants involved in the case have said or done, and he assesses the proofs, but he is not asked to produce a legal verdict on general statements that belong to the realm of doctrine.⁶⁶

A broader look at Ibn Taymīyah's *fatāwā* shows that his differentiation of the three *shar'* types occurs a few other times.⁶⁷ He specifies that "the interpreted law" consists of the judgment of the person who is entitled to formulate it (*ḥukm al-ḥākim*), and this person may be right or wrong. What Ibn Taymīyah is trying to say here is that there is a high possibility for a judge to be wrong: "When a

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3:235–36, 255.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 3:238.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 3:240–41. These passages have been also translated and commented upon by Yahya Michot, "Textes spirituels d'Ibn Taymiyya X « Je ne suis dans cette affaire qu'un musulman parmi d'autres... », " *Le Musulman* 23 (Paris, 1994): 27–29 (reproduced at the website www.muslimphilosophyonline.com/it/index.html; see n. 54 above).

⁶⁷ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, 11:262–65, 430–31, 506–9, in particular 506–7; 19:308–9; 35:389 (for *al-shar' al-munazzal*) and 395–96.



judge judges according to something that he considers a legal proof (*al-ḥujjah al-sharʿīyah*), like a piece of indisputable evidence (*bayyinah*) or a confession (*iqrār*), and the inner meaning is in contradiction with the outward one, it is not permissible for the person in favor of whom the judgement was produced (*al-maqḍī lahu*) to follow it, and this should be agreed upon.”⁶⁸ Thus, it is not only the doctrinal authority of the four schools, but also that of judges, that the *shaykh al-islām* is trying to define and, in the case of his own trial, to restrict.⁶⁹

The theological controversy over the createdness of the Quran that is implicit in the mentioning of al-Bukhārī is also significant. Ibn Murri seems to imagine an invisible thread joining the three vexed traditionists. The *miḥnah* regarding the createdness of the Quran (*khalq al-qurʿān*) initiated by the caliph al-Maʾmūn (d. 218/833) reflected some Hanafī and Muʿtazilī positions.⁷⁰ The eventual defeat of al-Maʾmūn’s position was not only a milestone in the consolidation of the ninth century ulama’s religious authority⁷¹ and in the formation of the dogma of the uncreated and eternal Quran,⁷² but, more specifically, it marked the success of the party headed by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and established his fame once and for

⁶⁸ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā*, 11:262–63.

⁶⁹ For an overview on the judges’ competencies and activities during the Bahri period in Cairo, read Escovitz, *The Office of Qāḍī al-Quḍāt in Cairo under the Bahri Mamlūks*, 131–72, and esp. 133–47 for cases involving charges of *kufr*, *zandaqah*, and apostasy.

⁷⁰ Joseph Schacht was the first to suggest a connection between the issue of the created Quran and some fringes of Hanafī thinking rather than Muʿtazilī doctrine. See Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muḥammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950), 258–59; Joseph van Ess, “Ḍirār b. ʿAmr und die ʿCahmiya’: Biographie einer vergessenen Schule,” *Der Islam* 13 (1967): 1–70, esp. 35; and idem, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (New York, 1992), 3:175–88. Martin Hinds’ article “Miḥna,” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1993): 7:2–6, remains a good starting point on this fascinating episode of early Islamic history and contains a useful bibliography. More recent analyses of the *miḥnah* are to be found in John A. Nawas, “A reexamination of three current explanations for al-Maʾmūn’s introduction of the Miḥna,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (1994): 615–29; Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophet in the Age of al-Maʾmūn* (Cambridge, 2000), 117–38; Nimrod Hurvitz, “Miḥna as self-defense,” *Studia Islamica* 92 (2001): 93–111; idem, *The Formation of Hanbalism*, 115–57.

⁷¹ The *loci classici* of this argument are Ira M. Lapidus, “The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6 (1975): 363–85; and Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, 1986). Muhammad Qasim Zaman has challenged the argument of the separation between state and religion in his *Religion and Politics under the early Abbasids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunni Elite* (Leiden, 1997), 70–118.

⁷² For an analysis of the early development of the dogma with reference to Ibn Taymīyah as well, see Wilferd Madelung, “The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran,” in *Orientalia Hispanica sive Studia F. M. Pareja octogenario dicata*, ed. J. M. Barral (Leiden, 1974), 1:504–25.



all.⁷³ The highly respected traditionist al-Bukhārī was possibly as involved in this controversy concerning the physical recitation of the Quran as some other scholars of his time.⁷⁴ For his part, Ibn Taymīyah elaborated a dynamic vision of God's essence that led him to a similar conclusion, i.e., that God speaks from eternity by his will and power, that the Quran is uncreated, but its human recitation is created.⁷⁵ The issue was one that Ibn Ḥanbal apparently shunned, preferring that the matter be avoided.⁷⁶

In connecting the life stories of Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Bukhārī, and Ibn Taymīyah, Ibn Murrī reveals not only his need to ground the soundness of Ibn Taymīyah's method and scholarship in the example and experience of eminent past authorities, but he also explicates his own understanding of Ibn Taymīyah's lack of consensus in his own time, which he attributes to theological factors.

CONCLUSIONS

In fourteenth-century Mamluk Syria and Egypt, knowledge was transmitted from master to student, and this process took place both inside and outside formal teaching institutions. At that time the qualification that granted somebody the authority to transmit a scholar's corpus of knowledge was sometimes formalized by written certification (*ijāzah*), and sometimes not. Yet, the *ijāzah* was not a *conditio sine qua non* for knowledge to be transmitted. As Michael Chamberlain has put it, the *ijāzah* represented a formal acknowledgement through which "shaykhs deemed disciples ready to represent a body of knowledge and to exemplify its carriers."⁷⁷ However, without a social network of loyal pupils willing to recognize their affiliation and legal or theological orientation openly, the process of transmission would have been severely hampered.⁷⁸

⁷³ See *ibid.* On Ibn Ḥanbal and his pious attitude towards the Quran, see Christopher Melchert, "Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Qur'ān," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2004): 22–34.

⁷⁴ See al-Subkī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyah*, 9:119, ll. 1–3; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, 2:361–62; and Christopher Melchert, "The Adversaries of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal," *Arabica* 44 (1997): 234–53, esp. 241–42.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of this issue in comparison also to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, see Jon Hoover, "Perpetual Creativity in the Perfection of God: Ibn Taymiyya's Hadith Commentary on the Creation of this World," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, no. 3 (2004): 296–99; and *idem*, "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*.

⁷⁶ Al-Subkī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyah*, 9:118–19 and 229–31. Melchert, "The Adversaries of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal," 241.

⁷⁷ Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Practice*, 89.

⁷⁸ On the *ijāzah* system in Damascus, see Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Practice*, 69–90, esp. 87–89; in Egypt see Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 31–33; George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1981), 140–52. For a complete bibliography



The letter of Ibn Murri concerns exactly this topic. The text deals with the issue of the transmission of Ibn Taymiyah's writings and presents some practical concerns. Who was to carry out the work, and how? A group of followers is identified as apt to do the job, and some names are specified; Ibn Rushayyiq stands out among these names, and not Ibn Qayyim as one would normally expect. Ibn Murri is rather direct about the method to be followed. He envisages it as a collective endeavor, but highlights the names of the most skilful. So far, no inconsistencies emerge except for the fact that, for some reason, the project seemed problematic to Ibn Murri. Why was that? Two main reasons have been identified. The first is the state of disorder of Ibn Taymiyah's writings (confirmed by other sources); the second is an embarrassing reluctance on the part of those who would have normally performed the task.

As I have argued elsewhere, by the time of his death, the status of Ibn Taymiyah was more problematic and less established than we are accustomed to believe (as also the amount of his biographical writings confirm), and this is true even among the traditionist ulama of his circle. The letter of Ibn Murri splendidly testifies to this situation. By recalling Ibn Taymiyah's rational method and the theological issue of the uncreated Quran, Ibn Murri suggests that the uneasiness was theological. Here and elsewhere, I suggest that Ibn Taymiyah's detachment from the authority of the four *madhāhib* and his challenge to judicial authority became socially and politically inconvenient at some point, as his death in prison shows. These different factors do not contradict each other. On the contrary, they underline Ibn Taymiyah's scholarly consistency and complexity.

Finally, one must note that in spite of all the difficulties, the plea of Ibn Murri did not go unheard. Ibn Rushayyiq seems to have done a good job, for we do possess today the large collection of *fatāwā* and many other fulsome volumes. How, to what extent, where, and in which circles and circumstances Ibn Taymiyah's ideas were eventually taught, discussed, and transmitted after his death remains an unexplored subject of research.⁷⁹ On a broader level, the letter sheds light on the patterns of transmission of religious knowledge among the civilian elite of fourteenth-century Mamluk society and confirms the logic of personal affiliation and social consensus to which it was subjected.

on the subject, refer to Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 30, n. 43.

⁷⁹ Al-Matroudi, *The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah*, devotes a chapter (pp. 129–70) to the influence of Ibn Taymiyah on later Hanbali jurists.

