

The Dhimmi's Question on Predetermination and the Ulama's Six Responses: The Dynamics of Composing Polemical Didactic Poems in Mamluk Cairo and Damascus

INTRODUCTION

Among the many epistles about predetermination and free will composed by the Damascene scholar Ibn Taymiyah (d. 728/1328), one stands out. This work is a lengthy poem which appears in the eighth volume of his epistles and *fatāwā* compilation (*Majmū'at al-Fatāwā*). The poem, usually known as "A Question about Predetermination" (*Su'āl 'an al-Qadar*),¹ is also entitled *Al-Manẓūmah al-Tā'īyah*, a didactic versification rhyming in *tā'* throughout the work.² And indeed, the monorhyme *tī* appears in all 124 verses of the poem. According to the prologue, penned by Ibn Rushayyiq (d. 749/1348), the copyist of Ibn Taymiyah's works,³ Ibn Taymiyah composed this poem as a response to an eight-verse poem attributed to a dhimmi scholar. Ibn Rushayyiq introduces the poem as: "A question about predetermination set forth by one dhimmi scholar" (*aḥad 'ulamā' al-dhimmīyīn*).⁴

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¹The full text of the poem is available in both well-known and widely-used editions of Ibn Taymiyah's *fatāwā*: Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyah, "Su'āl 'an al-Qadar," in *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā li-Shaykh al-Islām Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyah al-Harrānī*, ed. 'Āmir al-Jazzār and Anwar al-Bāz, 37 vols. (Riyadh and al-Mansura, 1419/1998), 8:149–54; idem, "Su'āl 'an al-Qadar," *Majmū' Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyah*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim, 37 vols. (Medina, 1425/2004), 8:246–55. This edition was originally printed in Riyadh, 1961–66, and has several reprints: Beirut, 1398–1403/[1978–1982]; Rabat, 1981; [Cairo], 1980; Cairo, [1990]. For several versions of the poem, see Appendix II, Part B, n. 163.

²Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah (d. 751/1350), Ibn Taymiyah's most celebrated disciple, mentions Ibn Taymiyah's *Al-Tā'īyah* in three of his theological works: [Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, *Shifā' al-Ālīl fī Masā'il al-Qaḍā' wa-al-Qadar wa-al-Ḥikmah wa-al-Ta'līl*, ed. Al-Sayid Muḥammad al-Sayid and Sa'īd Maḥmūd (Cairo, 1414/1994), 475; idem, *Ṭarīq al-Hijratayn wa-Bāb al-Sa'adatayn*, ed. Abū 'Abd Allāh Muṣṭafā ibn al-'Adawī et al. (Cairo, 1421/2001), 115; idem, *Madārij al-Sālikīn bayna Manāzil Īyāka Na'budu wa-Īyāka Nasta'in*, ed. Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Ayyūb (Beirut, n.d.), 1:437.

³On Ibn al-Rushayyiq's role in copying Ibn Taymiyah's works, see: Caterina Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya wa-Jamā'atuhu: Authority, Conflict and Consensus in Ibn Taymiyya's Circle," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi, 2010), 47 endnote 46; idem, "The Collection and Edition of Ibn Taymiyah's Works: Concerns of a Disciple," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (2009): 53–68.

⁴Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* (1998) 8:149.



In 1956, Serajul Haque published a scientific edition of both the dhimmi's and Ibn Taymīyah's poems. This edition, based on two identical manuscripts penned by an anonymous copyist, is slightly different from the *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* edition. The prologue of Serajul Haque's edition clearly states that the dhimmi was in fact a Jew: "This is a question composed by one dhimmi Jew" (*hādhā su'ālu ba'di ahli al-dhimmati min al-yahūd*).⁵ Both versions of Ibn Taymīyah's poem—the *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* version and Serajul Haque's version—contain similar prologues. According to both versions, when the poem (written either by an unspecified dhimmi or by a Jew) was presented to Ibn Taymīyah, "Shaykh al-islām, the most erudite imam Aḥmad ibn Taymīyah, responded in kind, in a poem he composed" either "in extempore" (*murtaḥḥil*)⁶ or "in a hurry" (*musta'ḥil*).⁷

Ibn Rushayyiq and the anonymous copyist wrote the prologue with a dual purpose: By adding the words *murtaḥḥil* or *musta'ḥil*, they emphasized Ibn Taymīyah's excellent command of Arabic; and they managed to give us, the readers, the impression that Ibn Taymīyah composed his poem publicly: either in an actual public debate, in which the two debaters stood facing each other, reciting their verses in front of an astonished crowd, or in a class, in which one of Ibn Taymīyah's disciples presented the poem to Ibn Taymīyah, and he responded immediately. The dhimmi or the Jewish scholar composed a well-structured poem, which stimulated the mind and presented a theological challenge. Immediately after hearing the poem, Ibn Taymīyah excelled by reciting more than 100 verses in extempore, a truly amazing achievement.⁸

A more fascinating possibility nevertheless emerges from the description of Abū 'Alī Ḥafṣ 'Umar ibn 'Alī al-Bazzār (d. 749/ 1348), one of Ibn Taymīyah's biographers. Al-Bazzār quotes here an eyewitness to this exciting event:

The righteous shaykh Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad known as Ibn al-Dawrī told me that he participated in one of the shaykh [Ibn Taymīyah]'s classes (*majlis*). A Jew asked Ibn Taymīyah a question on predetermination (*mas'alah fī al-qadar*), which he (i.e., the Jew) composed as an eight-verse poem. When Ibn Taymīyah read the question,

⁵Serajul Haque, "A Poem of Imām Ibn Taymiyya on Predestination," *Journal of the Asiatic Society* (Pakistan) 1 (1956): 2.

⁶Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* (1998) 8:149. *Irtijāl* is improvising or extemporizing a poem or a speech. The many quotations of improvised poetry in the *adab* sources, like *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, and the sources specializing in poetical theories and grammar, indicate that improvised poems were composed in various meters, and not solely in the inferior *rajaz* meter. S. A. Bonebakker, "Irtidjāl," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 4:80.

⁷Serajul Haque, "A Poem of Imām Ibn Taymiyya," 2.

⁸Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* (1998) 8:149; Serajul Haque, "A Poem of Imām Ibn Taymiyya," 2.



he contemplated for a brief moment, and then he started writing a response to that question. He wrote and wrote, and all the while we thought he was writing in prose. When he finished, his companions (*aṣḥāb*) who were present there looked at what he wrote, and to their astonishment they saw that he composed a poem in the same meter as the verses composed by the man who sought Ibn Taymīyah's opinion. Ibn Taymīyah's work was a rhymed poem of nearly 184 verses. The poem contained vast knowledge to such an overwhelming extent, that were it interpreted, its interpretation would have filled two huge volumes. The poem was truly an unprecedented legal response to a question (*jawāb fatwā*).⁹

This remarkably detailed anecdote is consistent with the aura which is often attributed to Ibn Taymīyah's personality, as the most prominent intellectual of his time. Al-Bazzār's description can be read as a direct confrontation between Ibn Taymīyah and a Jew, who dared enter his *majlis*. Still, as the scene reaches its narrative peak—with Ibn Taymīyah presenting his elaborate response—the mysterious anonymous Jew disappears. Ibn Taymīyah is not even described by al-Bazzār as reciting his fresh new response in verse. He merely gives the papers on which he wrote the poem to his companions, and leaves them to get acquainted with the text, while he himself withdraws to the background of the narrative. In this respect, al-Bazzār's story does not correspond completely with the succinct prologues of Ibn Rushayyiq and the anonymous copyist: although all three texts place the composition of Ibn Taymīyah's poem in the public sphere, Ibn Rushayyiq and the anonymous copyist aim at depicting a vibrant and excited Ibn Taymīyah, reciting a poem in the making, while al-Bazzār describes Ibn Taymīyah as meticulously writing a poem, and upon its completion tossing the papers to his disciples.

The questions arising from all three descriptions of this single event are highlighted especially when it becomes evident that prominent biographers of Ibn Taymīyah, such as Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347-8) and Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1392), ignored it. Moreover, other prominent biographical sources present the dhimmi's poem and Ibn Taymīyah's poem differently: not as a memorable event which involved Ibn Taymīyah alone, but as part of a larger intellectual endeavor, in which several prominent ulama participated. This article, then, begins with the quest for the identity of the dhimmi or Jewish poet, and continues with an inquiry into the path his poem took until it reached Ibn Taymīyah and five other scholars of his time. The details of the exact circumstances about the composition

⁹Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Bazzār, *Al-A'lām al-'Alīyah fī Manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Beirut, 1396/1976), 28.



of the dhimmi's question and the six responses to it enable us to place this case study in the context of the larger phenomenon of the composition of polemical didactic verses in Mamluk Cairo and Damascus. Furthermore, we are able to examine the role of this literary device in that setting. Why were didactic verses composed at all? What was the appeal of such a literary device to the ulama? I will examine these questions mainly through the biographical sources, which emerge as a rich reservoir of both historical data and theological texts of limited scale. I will also present the poems in question, although I will not delve too much into their content. The theological issues raised by these poems and the form of their theological argumentations, although touched upon in this article, certainly deserve further investigation, which remains for future research.

THE DHIMMI'S QUESTION AND HIS IDENTITY

The poem of the dhimmi or the Jewish scholar (henceforth: the dhimmi's question) is a poetic presentation of a well-known Quranic concept. According to this concept, the infidels used the argumentation of predetermination in order to rationalize their refusal to join the Muslim community and the Islamic faith. The infidels in the Quran cite God's will in their argumentation, albeit—as Kate Zebiri comments in a recent article—“with questionable sincerity.”¹⁰ For example, in Q. 6:148: “The idolaters will say, ‘Had God pleased, neither we nor our fathers would have served other gods beside Him; nor would we have declared anything lawful.’”¹¹ The same argumentative line characterizes the dhimmi's question:

1. Listen, you scholars of Islam! I, the non-Muslim under the protection of your religion (*dhimmī dinikum*), am baffled, so please lead me towards the clearest theological proof.
2. If, as you claim, my Lord decreed my infidelity, although my infidelity did not please Him, what could I have done?
3. He urged me [to be a believer], but at the same time He blocked the entrance [leading to faith] for me. Is there a way that I can enter [your religion]? Please, explain this to me!
4. He decreed that I will go astray, and then He said: Be pleased with the decree! Should I not be pleased with the source of my misery (*shaqwātī*)?
5. Thus, ye people (i.e., Muslims), I am pleased with what has been decreed, while my Lord is not pleased with the misfortune which befell me.
6. Is it possible for me to be pleased with what my Lord is not pleased with? I am confused! Pray, tell me how am I to cope with this confusion.

¹⁰Kate Zebiri, “Argumentation,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qurʾān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden, MA, 2006), 280.

¹¹*The Koran with Parallel Arabic Text*, trans. N. J. Dawood (London, 1956; repr. London, 2000).



7. Since My Lord wished me to be an infidel by virtue of His divine volition (*mashī'ah*), how is it possible [to call me] disobedient, when all I did was to obey the divine volition?¹²
8. Do I have the choice (*ikhtiyār*) to disobey the Lord's decree? Do quench my thirst with theological proofs!¹³

This brief poem defies the traditionalist notion of predetermination (*al-qaḍā' wa-al-qadar*), while presenting the familiar paradox of divine decree (*al-qaḍā'*) versus divine command (*al-amr*) and divine good pleasure (*al-riḍā*). From this presentation two more questions evolve: the question of human good pleasure (also called *al-riḍā*) and human choice (*ikhtiyār*). The essence of the paradox is as follows: God commands the individual to be a believer through His divine speech (the Quran). When the individual acts according to God's command, then he pleases God. Still, the individual's fate and conduct are predetermined by God. Thus, when the individual disobeys God's command, he nonetheless acts according to God's predetermination. When the sinner, i.e., the dhimmi narrator in this poem, refers to this paradox, he does not question the existence of God's divine command or God's predetermination; he merely asks whether this paradox allows his choice to exist, and whether he should be pleased with his preordained fate as a dhimmi, hence a sinner.

The text of the poem itself does not, unfortunately, disclose any information on the identity of its author, but merely states that the narrator, whose words are the words of the poem, is a dhimmi. But can we assume that there is a complete compatibility between the narrator (the *dhimmī dīnikum*) and the poet? In a key article on the identity of a poet (any poet), T. S. Eliot made the distinction between three possible voices the poet may adopt:

The first voice is the voice of the poet talking to himself—or to nobody. The second is the voice of the poet addressing an audience,

¹²Here I follow the reading in *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā*, while Serajul Haque's reading is slightly different; hence it slightly changes the meaning of the verse. The version of verse 7 in *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* is: *fa-hal anā 'āṣin fī ittibā'i al-mashī'ati*. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* (1998) 8:149. The same reading appears in Tāj al-Dīn Abū Naṣr 'Abd al-Wahhāb ibn 'Alī 'Abd al-Kāfi al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyah al-Kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭināḥī and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Hilw (Cairo, [1992]), 10:352. Serajul Haque's version is *fa-hal anā 'āṣin fī ittibā'i mashī'atī*. Accordingly, Serajul Haque paraphrases this verse: "am I to be a sinner if I follow my own desire?" Serajul Haque, "A Poem of Imām Ibn Taymiyya," 2, 14. Since the meter is broken in both cases, both readings are acceptable. However, the dhimmi's argument is more precise according to the reading in the *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā*'s version, because the theological problem is how to escape God's decree and volition, and not how to escape human volition.

¹³Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* (1998) 8:149; Serajul Haque, "A Poem of Imām Ibn Taymiyya," 2–3.



whether large or small. The third is the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse; when he is saying, not what he would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character. The distinction between the first and the second voice, between the poet speaking to himself and the poet speaking to other people, points to the problem of poetic communication; the distinction between the poet addressing other people in either his own voice or an assumed voice, and the poet inventing speech in which imaginary characters address each other, points to the problem of the difference between dramatic, quasi dramatic, and non-dramatic verse.¹⁴

The dhimmi's question is obviously addressed to other people, the "scholars of Islam." It can be defined as a dramatic verse because the oral element of performance in it is distinct. Even more so, when the dhimmi's question is read in the context of the circumstances surrounding its composition and later in the context of the six responses to it, this brief poem can certainly be reimagined as a dramatic scene. Following Eliot's definitions, what is needed here is first and foremost to establish which voice the poet uses in this poem: is it his own voice addressing an audience? Or does he speak from the mouth of an imaginary character, whose position he assumed in order to make his own point clearer or even stronger? These questions can be easily answered from the text of the poem itself.

The dhimmi's question, although simple at first glance, is quite sophisticated, because it juggles between the narrator's own position and the position of his audience, to whom he refers as "the scholars of Islam." The narrator does not spell out his beliefs in the poem, because he pretends to have adopted the position of "the scholars of Islam." However, this pretense is quite distinct, mainly because of the dramatized tone, in which the narrator refers to himself as a miserable and confused infidel. This tone obviously discloses the aim of the poem, which is to mock the Sunni belief in predetermination. According to the narrator, God decrees the infidel to be an infidel, but at the same time He is not pleased with his infidelity. This is the basic traditionalist position as reflected in numerous Quranic verses and hadiths, which were later processed in traditionalist creeds and treatises.¹⁵ The narrator then continues with a series of questions, demonstrating the paradox which lies at the basis of the traditionalist position: Through

¹⁴T. S. Eliot, *The Three Voices of Poetry: The Eleventh Annual Lecture of the National Book League Delivered by T. S. Eliot, O.M., at the Central Hall Westminster on 19 November 1953* (Cambridge, 1953), 4.

¹⁵The most useful sources for Islamic creeds are Arent Jan Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (London, 1932), and William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Creeds: A Selection* (Edinburgh, 1994).



the Quranic message, God urged the infidel to become a believer, but at the same time He prevented him from complying with His command; another message, conveyed by God to the infidel, is to be pleased with the way he was created, namely as an infidel; in this contradictory message, human good pleasure does not correspond with divine good pleasure. As an infidel, the narrator subjects himself to the divine volition, and in any case, it is unclear whether his will is sufficient to reverse the decree of his infidelity.

The identification of the audience as Muslim traditionalists actually helps determine the identity of the poet himself (assuming there is a complete compatibility between the identities of the poet and the narrator). Although the narrator states that he is a *dhimmi*, it is more likely that he is a Muslim scholar with rationalistic tendencies, hence a *Muʿtazili*. That the narrator is a *Muʿtazili* scholar or a Muslim scholar with *Muʿtazili* tendencies is evident from the narrator's acquaintance with the basic outlines of the discussion on predetermination in the inner circles of Islamic theology, and his use of the relevant traditionalist vocabulary of predetermination. In verses 5–6, the narrator mentions the theme of feeling content with God's decree (*al-riḍā bi-al-qadar*). This notion, whose origins are tracked in the hadith literature, was thoroughly processed in Hanbali and Ashʿari treatises.¹⁶ In verse 4, the narrator refers to the source of his misery, by which he means his heresy. This verse actually discloses the narrator's knowledge of Islamic theological texts, because the equation "heresy equals misery" (*shaqwah*) appears in the highly deterministic hadith literature.¹⁷

The key to the narrator's true position is hidden in the closing verse of the poem, where the narrator presents the concept of human choice (*ikhtiyār*) in the guise of a cry for help. "Do I have the choice to disobey the Lord's decree?"—he innocently questions, and then begs—"Do quench my thirst with theological proofs!" This question can be interpreted as doubting the effectiveness and indeed the existence of human *ikhtiyār*, but it can also be read differently: in verse 2, the narrator simply argues that human *ikhtiyār* cannot co-exist with divine predetermination. Verse 8 is simply a rhetorical question, which rephrases the same argument the narrator made in verse 2. This is a blunt attack on the traditionalist and indeed the Ashʿari claim, that human *ikhtiyār* co-exists with divine predetermination. In other words, the narrator expects the Ashʿari response.

¹⁶W. M. Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London, 1948), 66; idem, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973), 232–33.

¹⁷See, for example, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad ibn Nūr al-Dīn Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad (Beirut, 1408/1988), 11:404–16 (*Bāb al-Qadar*), and Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn ibn ʿAbd Allāh Abū Bakr al-Ājurri, *Kitāb al-Sharīʿah* (Beirut, 1421/2000), 154–55, 188–92. There are, of course, other numerous relevant hadith references.



The poem's content therefore suggests that the narrator is a Mu'tazili scholar. But who was the poet who adopted the voice of a dhimmi in this poem? Was he indeed a dhimmi, hence his own person was identical to the voice of the narrator, or was he someone else, hence the narrator in the poem is a character he created for his own artistic or maybe theological and even political agenda? Fortunately, several medieval biographers and historians referred to the identity of the anonymous poet.

Two different assumptions appear in the biographical sources: the poet was either a dhimmi or a Jew; or he was a Muslim scholar with Mu'tazili-Shi'i tendencies, who composed the poem as a part of the polemic with the Ash'aris. The scholars who claimed that the poet was a dhimmi or a Jew assumed that a complete correlation between his actual identity and the identity of the narrator of the poem indeed existed. In other words, the poem was perceived by these scholars as an accurate reflection of its author's position.¹⁸ On the other hand, the biographers and historians who believed that the poet was a Muslim scholar viewed the narrator as a literary fiction, designed to serve its creator's theological agenda. Here, scholars were divided between two possibilities: that the poet was either Aḥmad ibn Maḥmūd Faṭḥ al-Dīn Ibn al-Baqaqī (who was executed in the year 701/1301), or Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr al-Sakākīnī (d. Ṣafar 721/1321). Both poets have received some attention in previous studies. Most of the biographers attributed the poem to al-Sakākīnī, while only Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī attributed the poem's authorship to Ibn al-Baqaqī. Al-Subkī's treatment of the poem, its author, and the responses to the poem is remarkable, and his text is the basis of the present study.

Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) was probably the first historian to attribute the dhimmi's question to the shaykh of the Shi'is (*shaykh al-imāmīyah*) al-Sakākīnī.¹⁹ Al-

¹⁸Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* (1998) 8:149; al-Bazzār, *Al-A'lām*, 28; Serajul Haque, "A Poem of Imām Ibn Taymiyya," 2. Al-Ṣafadī ascribes the dhimmi's question to an anonymous Jew, "the Jew, who asked for a legal opinion in verses." Salāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān al-ʿAṣr wa-A'wān al-Naṣr*, ed. 'Alī Abū Zayd et al. (Beirut-Damascus, 1418/1998), 3:484 (the biography of 'Alā' al-Dīn, no. 1210). Cf. *ibid.*, 3:292 (the biography of 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, no. 1122).

¹⁹['Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'il] Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Wahhāb Futayḥ (Cairo, 1418/1998), 14:228. Al-Ṣafadī, Ibn Ḥajar, and others cite Ibn Kathīr, giving him credit for the identification of the anonymous poet as al-Sakākīnī: "shaykh 'Imād al-Dīn Ibn Kathīr said that the verses that were addressed to shaykh Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymīyah, which begin with 'O you people of Islam, I, the non-Muslim under the protection of your religion (*ayā ma'sharu al-islām dhimmī dīnikum*)'...were composed by that al-Sakākīnī." Al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt*, ed. Aḥmad al-Arnā'ūt and Turkī Muṣṭafā (Beirut, 1420/2000), 2:193 (biography no. 689); *idem*, *A'yān al-ʿAṣr*, 4:355–59 (biography no. 1525). For an almost identical reference, see Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah fī A'yān al-Mī'ah al-Thāminah*, ed. 'Abd al-Wārith Muḥammad 'Alī (Beirut, 1418/1997), 3:249 (biography no. 3721). The nineteenth-century scholar al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834) also identified the dhimmi as al-Sakākīnī. Muḥammad 'Alī ibn



Sakākīnī, as several biographers tell us, was born in 635/1237–38 at the foot of the Qāsiyūn Mountain, near Damascus, and moved to Damascus later in life.²⁰ He was a pleasant and amiable man, who was never caught—as other Shi‘is were—in abusing the memory of the Prophet’s companions. On the contrary, he composed versifications on the virtues of the *ṣaḥābah*. As a learned man of culture (*fāḍil*), who was well-versed in the doctrines of the Shi‘ah (which are, to a large extent, identical to the Mu‘tazili doctrines), he used to argue (*nāẓara*) about predetermination, which was a major controversial issue between the traditionalists and the rationalists. The biographers do not mention with whom he argued; however, the phrase “he denied the existence of *jabr*” clearly indicates that his major rivals were the Ash‘aris, whose theory of *kasb* was often considered by their rivals as a rationalized version of *jabr*.²¹ As a Shi‘i propagandist (*dā‘iyah*), al-Sakākīnī influenced many laymen from the villages surrounding Damascus to become Shi‘is. His propagandist activity is the subject of Ibn Taymiyah’s pun on al-Sakākīnī: “He was one of those [scholars] who made the Shi‘i become a Sunni, and made the Sunni become a Shi‘i” (*huwa mimman yatasannanu bi-hi al-shi‘ī wa-yatashayya‘u bi-hi al-sunni*).²² Ibn Kathīr states that towards the end of his life, al-Sakākīnī

Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, *Al-Badr al-Ṭālī‘ bi-Maḥāsin Man ba’d al-Qarn al-Sābi‘*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan Ḥallāq (Damascus-Beirut, 1427/2006), 1:101, 704–5. The beginning of the verse as quoted in all these sources is slightly different from the version which appears in *Majmū‘at al-Fatāwā* and other sources: here, the audience is “the people of Islam”; in *Majmū‘at al-Fatāwā* the audience is “the scholars of Islam.” Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmū‘at al-Fatāwā* (1998) 8:149.

²⁰ Stefan Winter discusses the life of al-Sakākīnī’s son, as an illustration to the persecution of Shi‘is in Damascus. Stefan H. Winter, “Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Makkī ‘al-Shahīd al-Awwal’ (d. 1384) and the Shi‘ah of Syria,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 167–68.

²¹ A recent discussion on the connection between *jabr* and *kasb* is: Livnat Holtzman, “Debating the Doctrine of *Jabr* (Compulsion): Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya Reads Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, ed. Georges Tamer and Birgit Krawietz (Berlin, forthcoming).

²² Al-Ṣafādī, *Al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, 2:192–94; idem, *A‘yān al-‘Aṣr*, 4:355–59; Shams al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *Dhuyūl al-Ibar fi Khabar Man Ghabar*, ed. Abū Hājir Muḥammad al-Sa‘īd Ibn Basyūnī Zaghlūl (Beirut, 1405/1985), 4:60; Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:249 (al-Sakākīnī’s biography, no. 3721), and 1:94 (Ibn Taymiyah’s biography, no. 409); Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Tuḥfah al-Laṭīfah fi Tārīkh al-Madīnah al-Sharīfah*, ed. As‘ad Ṭarābizūnī al-Ḥusaynī (Cairo, 1399–1400/1979–80), 3:544–45; al-Shawkānī, *Al-Badr al-Ṭālī‘*, 1:704–5 (al-Sakākīnī’s biography, no. 305), and 1:101 (Ibn Taymiyah’s biography, no. 40). In my translation of that sentence, which differs from Winter’s translation (Winter, “Shams al-Dīn,” 168), I paid special attention to the preposition *bi* (*tasannana bi-tashayya‘a bi-*) which frequently gives a causative meaning to a verb. Also, verbs in the fifth form often bear the significance of adopting a set of convictions: *tashayya‘a*—to adopt the tenets of the Shi‘ah, *tazarraqa*—to adopt the tenets of the Azāriqah, *tahawwada*—to convert to Judaism, *tanaṣṣara*—to convert to Christianity, etc. All these examples appear in the unsurpassed book by William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 3rd edition (Cambridge, repr. 1997), 1:36–37,



repented and became a Sunni. This made his son very angry with him, “and he wanted to kill his father, when the father pronounced his loyalty to the Sunnah.”²³ Al-Sakākīnī made his reputation as a talented poet and a composer of questions on doctrinal issues, targeting the Sunni system of beliefs.²⁴ One of these questions, so believes Ibn Kathīr, was the poem attributed to a dhimmi scholar.²⁵ Al-Sakākīnī, however, never admitted to having written the dhimmi's question.

The story of another of al-Sakākīnī's literary works, related by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), sheds more light on al-Sakākīnī's purpose in composing the dhimmi's question (if he, as Ibn Kathīr claims, composed it). This other literary work, entitled *Al-Ṭarā'if fī Ma'rifat al-Ṭawā'if* (Curiosities about religious sects), was brought to the chief judge Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (the father of the historian Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, d. 756/1355) in the year 750 (1349–50), some twenty-nine years after al-Sakākīnī's death. The qadi was impressed by the content of the work: it was indeed a work which defamed the principles of Sunni Islam, yet the author of that work presented his profound knowledge of the hadith. Al-Subkī himself destroyed the work by cutting it to pieces, washing it, and then burning it, though not before several *muḥaddithūn* identified the handwriting in the work as al-Sakākīnī's.²⁶ If al-Sakākīnī was indeed the author of both works—the dhimmi's question and the *Ṭarā'if*—then he employed the same writing technique in both: in the short poem he made use of the character of the dhimmi, while in the *Ṭarā'if* he ascribed the work to a fictional dhimmi, whom he named 'Abd al-Maḥmūd ibn Dāwūd al-Miṣrī.²⁷ In the short poem the dhimmi asks “the scholars of Islam” to help him in

paragraph 47. Another illuminating example appears in the biography of the mystic al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922): “From the outside he was a recluse, but when he saw that the people of his town considered the Mu'tazili convictions appropriate, he became a Mu'tazili. When they considered the Shi'i convictions appropriate, he became a Shi'i. When they considered the Sunni convictions appropriate, he became a Sunni (*aw yarawna al-tashayyu' tashayya' aw yarawna al-tasannun tasan-nan*).” Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-Wafayāt al-Mashahīr wa-al-A'lām*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 1413/1992), 23:36.

²³Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:228.

²⁴According to Ibn Kathīr, al-Sakākīnī composed questions “in the doctrinal style of the People of Good” (*'alā madhhabī ahli al-khayrī*). Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:228. Three of al-Sakākīnī's poems are quoted by al-Ṣafadī. One of the poems is a praise of the human intellect, the light of which expels the darkness. Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt*, 2:192; al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān al-ʿAṣr*, 4:358.

²⁵Ibn Kathīr identifies the poem as “the one to which our shaykh Ibn Taymiyah responded.” Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:228.

²⁶Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt*, 2:192–93; idem, *A'yān al-ʿAṣr*, 4:356–57. On the treatment given by the ulama to books containing “heresies,” see: Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994), 166–67.

²⁷In Ibn Ḥajar's version of the story, the dhimmi's name is 'Abd al-Ḥamīd. Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:249.



his predicament; in the opening of the *Ṭarāʾif*, Ibn Dāwūd al-Miṣrī also addresses the Muslim scholars. In fact, after writing only the first half of the *shahādah* (*lā ilāha illā allāh*) and omitting the second half (*wa-Muḥammadun rasūlu allāh*)²⁸—a clear indication of his non-Muslim conviction—Ibn Dāwūd says: “I am a dhimmi man, and I do hold respect for Islam. Therefore, I beg of you not to shed my blood, before you hear what I have to say.”²⁹ The rest of the work, which is unfortunately lost forever, revealed, according to al-Ṣafadī, its author’s heresy (*zandaqah*) and Shiʿi convictions.³⁰ Last but not least, both works disclose their author’s profound knowledge of Islamic theology and hadith.

Al-Sakākīnī, then, is a likely candidate to be the anonymous dhimmi scholar, but the candidacy of Ibn al-Baqaqī, whose name is mentioned by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, should also be examined here. Al-Subkī was a bit hesitant about naming the poet, and he cautiously remarked that the dhimmi was a literary character invented by “a certain Muʿtazili, who concealed his name, and composed his poem on behalf of one dhimmi.”³¹ Thereafter, al-Subkī remarks, “Some say that the composer was Ibn al-Baqaqī, for whom there was solid evidence that he held heretical views (*zandaqah*). He was killed by the sword of the noble divine law in the time (*wilāyah*) of the shaykh Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd al-Qushayrī.”³² The cautious tone of al-Subkī discloses the fact that he was not at all sure that Ibn al-Baqaqī was the poet behind “the dhimmi’s question.” As far as I know, al-Subkī’s suggestion to identify the poet as Ibn al-Baqaqī was adopted only by al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791) in his *Ithāf al-Sādah*, although he named the poet Āmin al-Baqtī, which is obviously a misreading or a miscopying of Ibn al-Baqaqī.³³

²⁸This observation is made by al-Ṣafadī himself. Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, 2:192; idem, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*, 4:356.

²⁹Al-Ṣafadī, *A-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, 2:192; idem, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*, 4:356.

³⁰Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, 2:192; idem, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*, 4:356.

³¹Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:352.

³²Ibid., 10:352–53.

³³Al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī quotes the first two verses of the dhimmi’s question, then he says: “Some say that the composer of these words is Āmin al-Baqtī, who was executed because of his heretical views in the time (*zamān*) of Shaykh al-Islām Taqī al-Dīn ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd.” Muḥammad Murtaḍā ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Ithāf al-Sādah al-Muttaqīn bi-Sharḥ ʿUlūm Iḥyāʾ al-Dīn* (Beirut, 1326/2005), 3:279. I have not seen the manuscript of al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī’s *Ithāf al-Sādah*; however, replacing Ibn al-Baqaqī with Āmin al-Baqtī is understandable when considering the closeness between *tāʾ* and *qāf* in the Arabic script. Furthermore, al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī mentions Ibn al-Baqaqī in the entry *b.q.q.* in his monumental dictionary *Tāj al-ʿArūs*. Al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿArūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs*, ed. ʿAlī Shayrī (Beirut, 1414/1994), 13:44.



Faṭḥ al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Baqaqī, with the strange *nisbah* which was a source of ridicule,³⁴ was a captivating provocateur and a condemned heretic. His flamboyant and misunderstood behavior led the legal establishment first to excommunicate him, and then to execute him. Ibn al-Baqaqī's activity and the story of his execution have been discussed in previous studies,³⁵ and especially by Joseph H. Escovitz, who offers an accurate reading in the biographical sources on Ibn al-Baqaqī.³⁶ However, since Escovitz's goal is to explore the activity of the Cairo judges, he is less interested in Ibn al-Baqaqī's religious views and poetic activity, which are crucial in order to determine whether or not Ibn al-Baqaqī is the poet behind the dhimmi's question. Hence, there is no choice but to re-read the same sources, and to describe yet again the complicated events that preceded Ibn al-Baqaqī's execution, but from a somewhat different angle than Escovitz offers.

Lengthy entries in several biographical dictionaries are dedicated to Ibn al-Baqaqī, while the description of the events leading to his execution is most fully elaborated in al-Maqrīzī's (d. 845/1442) *Sulūk*, Ibn Ḥajar's (d. 852/1449) *Durar*, and al-ʿAynī's (d. 855/1451) *ʿIqd al-ḥumān*.³⁷ All these sources describe him as a scholar, whose training in Islamic law was thorough, and who was highly skilled in pub-

³⁴ Al-Dhahabī comments that it is a *nisbah* of the town Baqaq, near Ḥamāh. Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:182. Ibn Dānyāl (d. 711/1311) composed the following verse on Ibn al-Baqaqī: "Do not reproach al-Baqaqī [sic!] for his actions when he diverts from the true conduct/Because had the Divine Law improved his behavior, then he would not have been called after a bedbug (*baqq*)!" Obviously, Ibn Dānyāl calls his protagonist al-Baqaqī mainly to make the connection to the bedbug. In terms of meter, this verse seems to me a broken form of *Sarīʿ*. Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:182 (biography no. 784). This poem is also quoted in a modern study on poetry in the Mamluk era, and in a compilation of Ibn Dānyāl's poems. Yāsīn al-Ayyūbī, *ʿĀfāq al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī fī al-Aṣr al-Mamlūkī* (Tripoli, 1415/1995), 365; al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Mukhtār min Shiʿr Ibn Dānyāl*, ed. Muḥammad Nāyif al-Dulaymī (Mosul, 1399/1979), 9, 168. See also a reference in Li Guo, "Paradise Lost: Ibn Dānyāl's Response to Baybars' Campaign against Vice in Cairo," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121, no. 2 (2001): 227, n. 40.

³⁵ Ibn al-Baqaqī's story as it appears in al-Yūnīnī's (d. 726/1326) *Dhayl Mirʾāt al-Zamān* was translated fully by Li Guo in his *Early Mamlūk Syrian Historiography: Al-Yūnīnī's Dhayl Mirʾāt al-Zamān* (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 1998), 1:200–1. Also, a description of Ibn al-Baqaqī's story, which relies heavily on Joseph Escovitz's description (see the following footnote), appears in: Knut S. Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan: A History of Islamic Law* (New York, 2005), 293–95. See below, n. 40.

³⁶ Joseph E. Escovitz, *The Office of Qāḍī al-Qudāt in Cairo under the Bahrī Mamlūks* (Berlin, 1984), 136–38. Escovitz reads Ibn al-Ḥajar's *Durar*, al-Ṣafadī's *Wāfī*, al-Maqrīzī's *Sulūk*, Ibn al-Dawādārī's *Kanz al-Durar*, and al-ʿAynī's *ʿIqd*.

³⁷ Ibn Ḥajar's *Al-Durar al-Kāminah* contains the most coherent account on Ibn al-Baqaqī. Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:181–83 (biography no. 784). Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk li-Maʿrifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut, 1418/1997), 2:350–51 (the events of the year 701/1301–2); Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-ḥumān fī Tārīkh Ahl al-Zamān*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo, 1412/1992), 4:177–83 (the events of the year 701/1301–2). An account which basically contains the same details as the former sources appears



lic debates.³⁸ However, this brilliant, active, but controversial scholar³⁹ seemed to take religious matters rather lightly. For instance, he regularly ate during the days of Ramadan with no justifiable excuse. But worse than that: he was once seen by his dinner-guests stepping on a leather-chest (*rab'ah*) in which copies of the Quran were kept, in order to reach an object on a top shelf.⁴⁰ When his appalled guests reproached him, he called them a bunch of asses, and “said heretical words” (*talaffaḥa ba'da dhālika bi-al-kufri*). These guests were among those who testified against Ibn al-Baqaqī in front of the Maliki judge.⁴¹

According to al-ʿAynī, Ibn al-Baqaqī's general conduct indicated his total disparagement of the religious observances and his lack of belief (*wa-kāna qalīla al-dīni sayyi'a al-i'tiqādi*).⁴² According to al-ʿAynī, Ibn al-Baqaqī dived in logic and philosophy, “and that corrupted his moral conduct” (*afsadat 'alayhi niẓāmu*).⁴³ The sources referred to Ibn al-Baqaqī as a *zindīq*, *kāfir*, or *murtadd* (heretic), terms

in Ibn al-Dawādārī's *Kanz al-Durar wa-ḡāmi' al-Ghurar*, *Die Chronik des Ibn Ad-Dawādārī*, ed. Hans Robert Roemer (Cairo, 1960), 1:9:76–78.

³⁸Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:181: “He taught a lot, and studied a lot. He was well-educated and participated in debates, until he became skillful in every branch [of knowledge]. He defeated his rivals in public debates (*wa-qata'a al-khuṣūma fī al-munāzarati*), and surpassed his peers in lecturing (*wa-fāqa al-aqrāna fī al-muḥādarati*).”

³⁹Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Ya'murī said about Ibn al-Baqaqī: “He used to practice medicine and to educate others without any knowledge. He claimed to be using his reason, but he had no brains at all. He was devoid of any good quality.” Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:182.

⁴⁰Ibid. See Escovitz's note on *rab'ah*. Escovitz, *The Office of Qāḍī al-Qudāt*, 165, n. 33. Lane's translation of *rab'ah* follows al-Firūzābādī's definition (*al-rab'atu...ṣundūqu ajzā'i al-muṣḥafi*). Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Firūzābādī, *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, ed. Yūsuf al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Biqā'ī (Beirut, 1424/2003), 647 (*r.b.*). Even more, al-ʿAynī says that Ibn al-Baqaqī actually stepped on the Quran: “He put the Holy book under his feet, so he could reach for the top shelf.” Al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, 4:179. Al-Maqrīzī records one of Ibn al-Baqaqī's slips of the tongue: “If al-Ḥarīrī, who authored the *Maqāmāt*, was lucky, I would have recited his *Maqāmāt* in the mosques.” Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:350. Al-ʿAynī adds to the list of Ibn al-Baqaqī's misdeeds that he allowed sinful Turks and other ignorant people to drink wine and have homosexual intercourse. Al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, 4:177–78. This description of Ibn al-Baqaqī is probably drawn from Ibn Kathīr, who names him Ibn al-Thaqafī. Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:20 (the events of the year 701/1301–2). See also: Louis Pouzet, *Damas au VIIe/XIIIe siècle: vie et structures religieuses dans une métropole islamique* (Beirut, 1991), 366; Everett K. Rowson, “Homosexual Liaisons among the Mamluk Elite in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria,” in *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, ed. Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2008), 213–14.

⁴¹Al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, 4:179.

⁴²Ibid., 178.

⁴³Ibid. *Niẓām*, according to the *Lisān*, is behavior, as in the phrase *laysa li-amrihi niẓāmu*, which means that his conduct was not appropriate. [Muḥammad ibn Mukarram] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* ([Beirut], n.d.), 6:4469 (*n.z.m.*).



reserved for either Muslim or non-Muslim heretics.⁴⁴ Still, these labels, and especially the term *zindīq*, were officially granted to Ibn al-Baqaqī only after a legal procedure,⁴⁵ while he obviously saw himself as a part of the Sunni community. In other words, there is no doubt that to his mind Ibn al-Baqaqī was a Sunni, whose interpretation of Sunni behavior and the Sunni creed was completely different from that of his immediate environment.⁴⁶

Apart from the anecdotal descriptions of Ibn al-Baqaqī's behavior, the sources detail his shaky relationship with the entire religious establishment. As an erudite scholar, he never concealed his belittlement of the ulama, whom he considered ignorant. He had a longtime dispute in verses with the Shafī'i chief judge Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd (d. 702/1302),⁴⁷ and he also cursed the Maliki chief judge Zayn al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Makhlūf.⁴⁸ What led to Ibn al-Baqaqī's imprisonment in 701/1301 was his shaky relationship with that Maliki judge, Ibn Makhlūf. That, combined with Ibn al-Baqaqī's well-known lax religious conduct, provided the Maliki qadi with the necessary proof of Ibn al-Baqaqī's *zandaqah*. The Maliki qadi, having heard witnesses attest to Ibn al-Baqaqī's conduct, ruled that Ibn al-Baqaqī was a heretic, and sentenced him to death. When this ruling (*maḥḍar*) of the Maliki qadi arrived at the Shafī'i chief judge, Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd, he refused to approve the Maliki judge's

⁴⁴ Al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, 4:180. F. C. de Blois, "Zindīq," *EI2*, 9:510, claims that the usage of the term *zindīq* "for Muslim or non-Muslim 'heretics' is clearly secondary, though widespread." This categorical statement should be re-evaluated, especially in view of different indications in the biographical sources. Vikør's treatment of *zindīq* seems to me more accurate. According to Vikør, the term *zindīq* "is used for someone who said he was a Muslim, but in reality presented ideas that were in opposition to the foundations of Revelation." Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan*, 292.

⁴⁵ A *sajʿ* description of Ibn al-Baqaqī, written by al-Ṣafadī, for instance, could be understood as an emphasis on the formalities of the procedure: "He demonstrated unacceptable disdain, and he exposed things that even the Christians deem inappropriate, until it became evident on the basis of a thorough investigation (*ʿan taḥqīq*) that he was a heretic (*zindīq*) who withdrew from the Islamic faith (*murtaddun ʿan al-islāmi*)." Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān*, 1:356. Although the use of *ʿan taḥqīq* could be taken as a linguistic ornament with no substantial meaning, which is meant to rhyme with the other parts of the sentence, it is probably used here to denote a critical investigation of the evidence by the qadi or the mufti.

⁴⁶ Ibn al-Baqaqī was mistakenly identified as a Jew by Serajul Haque, whose mistake derives from combining two sources, without checking the biography of Ibn al-Baqaqī. The first source is the anonymous copyist of Ibn Taymīyah's poem, who attributes the poem to a Jew. The second source is al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, who attributes the poem to ʿAmin al-Baqtī, which is a misreading of Ibn al-Baqaqī. Serajul Haque, "A Poem of Imām Ibn Taymīyya," 1. A similar process of combining two different sources led Reuven Snir to include Ibn al-Baqaqī in an article which discusses the contribution of Jews to Arabic literature, and to identify Ibn al-Baqaqī as a Jewish poet. Reuven Snir, "The Emergence and Demise of Arab-Jewish Culture in Modern Times," *Electronic Journal of Oriental Studies* 8, no. 9 (2005) 9:5.

⁴⁷ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:182; al-ʿAynī, *Iqd*, 4:182–83.

⁴⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:350.



verdict, claiming that Ibn al-Baqaqī was not a heretic.⁴⁹ In doing so, Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd accepted Ibn al-Baqaqī's line of defense, as revealed in an appeal he wrote from his prison cell to Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd. This appeal, a pseudo-legal opinion (*ṣifat futyā*) commenting on Quran 8:38 ("Tell the unbelievers that if they mend their ways their past shall be forgiven"), was meant to emphasize Ibn al-Baqaqī's repentance and remorse, but also to provide the judges with the appropriate Quranic proof on the necessity to exonerate him. Obviously, Ibn al-Baqaqī thought he should be forgiven for his misdeeds, because the Quranic text specifically promises God's forgiveness to the unbelievers, if they repent. Ibn al-Baqaqī's line of defense was rejected by the Maliki judge, who thought that the Quranic verse referred only to born-heretics who converted to Islam and then regretted their conversion.⁵⁰ In the same vein, Ibn al-Baqaqī screamed this argument out loud in front of Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd, when he was taken to trial: "O Muslims! I was a heretic, and then I became a Muslim" (*yā Muslimūna anā kuntu kāfiran wa-aslamtu*).⁵¹ When Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd received the *maḥḍar* prepared by the Maliki judge, he ruled: "I will not carry out the execution of a man who testifies that there is no God but Allāh, and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God."⁵² Thereafter, Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd discarded the *maḥḍar* without signing it.⁵³

Another line of defense was then taken, this time with the intervention of the wali of Cairo, Nāṣir al-Dīn Ibn al-Shaykhī, who was fond of Ibn al-Baqaqī.⁵⁴ The wali ordered that Ibn al-Baqaqī's case be transferred to Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd's court, thinking that it would be a more favorable venue for Ibn al-Baqaqī. This time, the wali ordered the Shafi'i judge to prepare a different *maḥḍar*, in which Ibn al-Baqaqī was proclaimed insane and exempt from the charge of heresy. Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd took his time to read the new *maḥḍar*, and then said: "God protect me from that! I know this man and he is in full possession of his mental faculties."⁵⁵ This difference of opinion ignited another round of appeals, this time to the Maliki judge, urging him to execute Ibn al-Baqaqī. Finally, the sultan himself intervened: he assembled all the relevant parties, and the four chief judges of Cairo. The Maliki judge presented his case for execution. The Hanafi judge agreed with him, and said: "Kill him! His blood will be upon my head."⁵⁶ In Rabi' I 701 (November 1301) Ibn al-Baqaqī was executed in the Madrasah al-Ṣāliḥiyah in the Bayn al-Qaṣrayn

⁴⁹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:183; al-Maqrizī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:350.

⁵⁰ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:181–82; Guo, *Early Mamlūk*, 1:200.

⁵¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:181–82.

⁵² Ibid., 183; al-Maqrizī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:351.

⁵³ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:183.

⁵⁴ Al-Maqrizī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:350.

⁵⁵ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:183.

⁵⁶ Ibid.



area in Cairo.⁵⁷ A detailed description of the execution appears in several sources. Ibn al-Baqaqī continued to proclaim his innocence, and screamed: “Are you going to kill a man who testifies that his Lord is Allāh, and says the *shahādah*?” He then was beheaded; his head was stuck on a spear and displayed, while his body was hanged and crucified in Bāb Zuwaylah.⁵⁸

The most important feature in Ibn al-Baqaqī's personality, which is relevant to our case, is his deep involvement in poetry: he was very well-read and knew volumes of poetry by heart in addition to composing his own poems.⁵⁹ His casual use of poems is reflected in the following anecdote, told by an eyewitness who was sitting in Ibn Daqīq al-ʿId's court when Ibn al-Baqaqī barged in, and asked the qadi about some unspecified issue. The qadi was prepared to answer, but before he had a chance to do so, Ibn al-Baqaqī turned away from him, mumbling: “My passion for you made me stop where you live” (*waqafa al-hawā bī ḥaythu anti*). This is actually the opening verse of a love poem by the poet Abū al-Shīṣ al-Khuzāʿī (d. 196/811): “My passion for you made me stop where you live/and therefore I cannot go back or move forward/I think that my love for you makes the memories pleasant, so let the rebukers rebuke.”⁶⁰ Ibn Daqīq al-ʿId responded calmly to Ibn al-Baqaqī's outburst, and predicted that Ibn al-Baqaqī's fate was doomed. Indeed, three weeks later Ibn al-Baqaqī was executed.⁶¹ The poem is a key to understanding the special friendly relationship between Ibn al-Baqaqī and the respectable judge, although its message is not entirely coherent. I assume that the poem is meant to express Ibn al-Baqaqī's disappointment in his longtime friend, who did not help him in his time of distress.⁶² At any rate, I would not connect this love poem to the evidence of Ibn al-Baqaqī's lenient approach towards homosexuality.⁶³

⁵⁷ Bayn al-Qaṣrayn is a square between the Great East Palace of the Fatimid Caliph al-Muʿizz (d. 365/975) and the Lesser West Palace, today a part of Khān al-Khalīlī. See Stanley Lane-Poole, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1901), 109–11.

⁵⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:183; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:351.

⁵⁹ Al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, 4:178.

⁶⁰ As quoted in Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:183; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:350; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, 4:178. For the rest of this four-verse poem, see: Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Marzūqī, *Sharḥ Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah li-Abī Tammām*, ed. Gharīd al-Shaykh and Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 1424/2003), 3:961–62 (poem no. 565).

⁶¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:183; al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:350.

⁶² This is al-Maqrīzī's interpretation. After quoting the verse, he adds: “It means that the qadi ceased to be [my friend]” (*yaʿnī anna al-qāḍīya inqataʿa*). Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, 2:350. Cf. “*inqaṭaʿtu ʿan baytihi* - j'ai cesse d'aller chez lui cesser d'être auprès de quelqu'un le quitter. *inqaṭaʿu ʿan baʿḍihim* - cesser d'être amis.” Reinhart Pieter Anne Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes* (Leiden, 1967), 2:370.

⁶³ Al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, 4:178.



Prior to these events, at an unknown date, Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd composed a poem in which he criticized the ruling elite for neglecting the ulama. In this poem, Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd praised the knowledge and humility of the ulama, as opposed to the vanity of the people of governance. Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd called the ulama “the people of virtue” (*ahl al-faḍā’il*), while he named the people of governance “the people of ranks” (*ahl al-marātib*):

1. As for the people of highest ranks in this world, to their mind the people of virtue are outcast.
2. They have no interest in protecting us from harm, nor do they have interest in improving our circumstances.
3. Indeed, they made us go lower and live in the dwellings of wild beasts, because we are not their kind, and because they neglect us.
4. I wish we could have let them know what we think of them, I wish they would have known
5. that they have comforts of ignorance and wealth, while we have the burdens of knowledge and the lack [of means].

Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd’s poem, which was meant to be a political critique, received a poetic response from Ibn al-Baqaqī. Using the same vocabulary of Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd’s poem, Ibn al-Baqaqī criticized him harshly:

1. Where are the highest ranks in this world? He who possesses knowledge is not among them.
2. There is no doubt that they have their good fortune, and that they and their kind have no interest in helping the likes of us.
3. They are the wild beasts and we are the civilized people. Our wisdom will lead them to wherever we want; while all they can say is “yes.”
4. Only neglect from their part will keep us separated from them, because their passionate love is lacking.
5. We have the comforts of knowledge and the lack [of means], while they have the burdens of ignorance and servants.⁶⁴

When Ibn al-Baqaqī’s case was rejected at Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd’s court, an anonymous enemy urged a poet by the name of Shihāb al-Fazzārī to write a poem to the Maliki judge. Al-Fazzārī wrote: “Tell the Maliki judge, the blessed, the revealer of all things ambiguous and obscure/Do not neglect the heretic, and treat him as a Muslim should.” Ibn al-Baqaqī wrote to the Maliki judge from his prison cell:

⁶⁴Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:182; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd*, 4:182–83. The poems are quoted also in Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd’s biography, written by al-Subkī. Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:215. Ibn al-Baqaqī’s poem is quoted out of context, and hence improperly described in: Khālid Ibrāhīm Yūsuf, *Al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī Ayyām al-Mamālik wa-Man ʿĀṣarahum Dhawī al-Sulṭān* (Beirut, 2003), 479.



"You, who compelled me to obey and put on a dress, whose touch is as pleasant as the touch of a snake/You prepared for me chain-mail, whose weaving is very tight, and I am forced to tear its links with arrows."⁶⁵ Not only a prolific poet,⁶⁶ Ibn al-Baqaqī inspired others to write about him in verses. His predicament was documented by Ibn Dānyāl (d. 710/1310) in the following verses: "The hero al-Baqaqī thinks that he will escape the clutches of the Maliki/indeed, the Maliki will hand him over soon to the Mālik (i.e., God)."⁶⁷

Was Ibn al-Baqaqī the poet behind the dhimmi's question, as only al-Subkī suggested? The biographers and historians did not connect the poem with Ibn al-Baqaqī, but with al-Sakākīnī. Still, al-Subkī's suggestion that Ibn al-Baqaqī's was the author of the dhimmi's question is not far-fetched. Given the abundant evidence in the biographical sources of his poetic activity on the one hand, and his unconventional "heretical" views on the other, Ibn al-Baqaqī is a very likely candidate to have been this anonymous poet: he was bold enough to defy Sunni convictions and standards for proper religious conduct, and he certainly possessed both the poetic skills and the mischievous character to assume the identity of a dhimmi, and to pose a tricky theological question to the smug Sunni ulama whom he so much despised. Ibn al-Baqaqī's attraction to logic and philosophy, although not specifically to Mu'tazilism, established another linkage between him and the dhimmi's question. In terms of poetic skills, the ability to say things with tongue in cheek, and his overall unconventional personality, Ibn al-Baqaqī is a more likely candidate to be the poet behind the dhimmi's question than al-Sakākīnī. When taken at face value, the dhimmi's question is an utterance of a Mu'tazili conviction. As such, both Ibn al-Baqaqī and al-Sakākīnī are likely candidates to have composed it. However, there is no way to determine which of the two is the author, and that is the meaning of al-Subkī's hesitation.

THE ENVY OF SCRIBES

The dhimmi's question received responses from six ulama in Cairo and Damascus. The six responses (including a shorter version of Ibn Taymīyah's response) were collected by al-Subkī, who cited them in the biographical entry of 'Alā' al-Dīn

⁶⁵Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:183; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:351. I use here al-Maqrīzī's version, which is more comprehensible. See also: 'Alī Ṣāfi Ḥusayn, *Ibn Daqīq al-'Īd Ḥayātuhu wa-Dīwānuhu* (Cairo, 1960), 183.

⁶⁶For a two-verse love poem by Ibn al-Baqaqī, see: Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Dalīl al-Shāfi 'alā al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt (Cairo, 1998), 1:87 (biography no. 304). For more poems, see: Muḥammad ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-Wafayāt wa-al-Dhayl 'alayhā*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut, 1973), 1:152–53 (biography no. 57); al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, 8:103–4 (biography no. 1238); idem, *A'yān al-Aṣr*, 1:356–59 (biography no. 182).

⁶⁷Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:182; al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Mukhtār min Shi'r Ibn Dānyāl*, 169.



al-Bājī (d. 714/1314). Al-Bājī, a respectable Shafi‘i scholar, was credited for his immense knowledge of Ash‘ari *kalām*, and his skills in public debates.⁶⁸ Apart from al-Bājī’s and Ibn Taymiyyah’s, al-Subkī cites the poems of Nāṣir al-Dīn al-‘Asqalānī (d. 730/1330), Ibn al-Labbān (d. 749/1348), Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (whom I identified as Ibn al-Rif‘ah) (d. 710/1310),⁶⁹ and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 729/1329). This cluster of poems, recorded in al-Subkī’s *Ṭabaqāt*,⁷⁰ addresses the dhimmi’s question directly. These six poems were probably composed soon after the circulation of the dhimmi’s question; however there is no indication as to the exact year in which they were written. It is safe to assume that the poems were composed before the year 710/1310, the year in which Ibn al-Rif‘ah died. Ibn Taymiyyah’s poem was completed on the 3 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 712/1 April 1312.⁷¹

From the few background details which al-Subkī provides in the preface of this cluster of poems, we can determine with certainty that there was no open debate between Ibn al-Baqaqī and any of the above-mentioned ulama. Such a high-profile public debate would have been recorded in the sources. Furthermore, the uncertainty about the identity of the poet in the contemporary sources suggests that the dhimmi’s question was circulated orally without being ascribed to a specific author. Still, the infrequent clues which al-Subkī occasionally inserts between the poems help us reconstruct the following narrative: When the poetic question of the dhimmi (composed by either an anonymous Shi‘i-Mu‘tazili,⁷² or the *zindīq* Ibn al-Baqaqī) started circulating in Cairo and Damascus, it was obvious that the author meant “to defame the Divine Law” (*al-ṭa‘n ‘alā al-sharī‘ah*). Al-Subkī continues: “As a result, the most senior (or prestigious) ulama from Egypt and Syria were enthusiastic to respond to his poem in kind, through poems” (*jawābihi*

⁶⁸ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:353–54.

⁶⁹ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:25. The editors of the *Ṭabaqāt* do not identify Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī at all. I succeeded in associating Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī with Ibn al-Rif‘ah based on the work of al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, who refers to al-Najm Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī as one of the ulama who responded to “Āmin al-Baqtī’s” poem. Al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Ithāf al-Sādah*, 2:279. This clue led me to Ibn al-Rif‘ah’s biography in the biographical dictionaries. Also, in his poem, Ibn al-Rif‘ah inserts a few hints about his identity. Ibn al-Rif‘ah identifies himself as Aḥmad of Ṭūs (verse 93). Then he inserts the word *rif‘ah* (high position) when he refers to his shaykh (verse 97). See below, Appendix II, Part E.

⁷⁰ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:352–66. There are two additional poems which appear in a fifteenth-century Hanafi *kalām* manual and a fourteenth-century *adab* compilation. See below, Appendix III.

⁷¹ This information appears in the colophon of the manuscript which Serajul Haque used for his article. Serajul Haque, “A Poem of Imām Ibn Taymiyya,” 2. In Dhū al-Qa‘dah 712/February 1313 Ibn Taymiyyah arrived in Damascus after his four-year stay in Egypt. Yahya Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule: Ibn Taymiyya* (Oxford, 2006), 163.

⁷² Al-Subkī attributed the dhimmi’s question to a Mu‘tazili who concealed his identity. Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:352.



nazman).⁷³ In other words, the ulama composed their poems in order to rebut the outrageous words of a heretic.

However, the case study of the dhimmi's question and the responses it evoked necessitate a comprehensive, broad-based examination: the place of poetry in intellectual activities in Mamluk Cairo and Damascus. Composing poetry was always considered a desirable trait for a scholar in the eyes of the learned elite, from the early days of the Umayyad caliphate. The famous poet and scholar Ibn Rashīq (d. 456/1063–64 or 463/1070–71) dedicated a chapter in his *Kitāb al-Umdah* to the poems written by caliphs, *quḍāh*, and *fuqahā*, while indicating that the famous Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) “was one of the finest of all men who were subjected to the temptations of poetry.”⁷⁴ Similar remarks about the composition of poetry appear in the biographical dictionaries from the Mamluk period. A typical example, one of many, is the biography of a fourteenth-century Shafi'ī scholar. This scholar's detailed biography in al-Sakhāwī's (d. 902/1497) *Al-Daw' al-Lāmi'* lists the names of several poems he composed on various topics, among which is *Al-Manẓūmah al-Lāmiyah fī al-Jabr* (a didactic verse with the rhyme letter *lām* which discusses the doctrine of fatalism).⁷⁵

We take the entry of al-Bājī in al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt* as another typical example: biographical entries of ulama contain hundreds of verses composed either by the subject of the biographical entry, or by his colleagues and friends. The poems cover a vast range of topics: they can be poems lamenting a scholar or praising his virtues, and also poems that the scholar himself composed for the purpose of teaching. The poetic activity of the ulama cannot be ignored, both because of the sheer volume of this poetry and its popularity, especially in Cairo and Damascus.⁷⁶ Michael Chamberlain's observation on the poetic ambitions of the intellectual elite hits the mark: “The a'yān valued poetry highly as can be seen by the vast

⁷³ Ibid., 353.

⁷⁴ Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, *Al-Umdah*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, 1353/1934), 1:24. Al-Shāfi'ī's poetry is cited in the bibliographical sources, and was also preserved in a *dīwān*. *Dīwān al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī*, ed. Imām al-Biqā'ī (Beirut, 1421/2000). The thirteenth-century Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qiftī describes al-Shāfi'ī's poetry as “splendid poetry of the jurists” (*shī'r ajall min shī'r al-fuqahā*). Jamāl al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Yūsuf al-Qiftī, *Al-Muḥammadūn min al-Shu'arā' wa-Ash'aruhum*, ed. Riyād 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Murād (Damascus, 1975), 193.

⁷⁵ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Daw' al-Lāmi' li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi'*, ed. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Ḥasan 'Abd al-Raḥmān (Beirut, 1424/2003), 2:138 (biography no. 1331).

⁷⁶ This point is emphasized in Geert van Gelder's comprehensive discussion on didactic verses in Arabic. Geert Jan van Gelder, “Arabic Didactic Verse,” in *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, ed. Jan Willem Drijvers and Alasdair A. MacDonald (London–New York–Köln, 1995), 106.



quantities of it quoted in the chronicles and biographical dictionaries, and many shaykhs tried to attain some distinction in it.”⁷⁷

Still, the belletrists and philologists did not think highly of the poems written by the ulama, because these poems were contaminated by legal jargon. Even when a jurist tried to write a proper *qaṣīdah* while sticking to the prosodic conventions, his language revealed his identity, as is illustrated in the following anecdote conveyed by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) in his *Al-Muqaddimah*. According to Ibn Khaldūn, one of his colleagues tried to trick the leading philologist of his times. He recited a *qaṣīdah* which began with the conventional *nasīb*: “I did not know when I stood near the traces of the abandoned dwelling places/what the difference (*mā al-farq*) was between the new ones and those that were almost effaced.” The philologist immediately recognized the poem as the work of a jurist, because the phrase *mā al-farq* was a juridical expression (*min ‘ibārāt al-fuqahā’*) and not proper Arabic speech and style (*wa-laysat min asālīb kalām al-‘arab*).⁷⁸ The term “the poetry of the jurisprudents” (*shi‘r al-fuqahā’*) and the phrase “composed poetry in the manner of the jurisprudents” (*qāla shi‘r ‘alā ṭarīqat al-fuqahā’*) were derogatory when used by a literary epicure like Ibn Khaldūn.⁷⁹ In the context of the biographies of the ulama, *shi‘r al-fuqahā’* was an indication of a desirable skill for scholars.⁸⁰

Ibn Khaldūn’s illuminating anecdote illustrates that the ulama’s compositions were never regarded as real poetry. Indeed, the ulama may have not succeeded in composing *shi‘r* in the sense of “genuine poetry” or high literary poetry.⁸¹ However, they certainly were skilled enough to compose instrumental verses and even full-scale poems “for the sake of providing explicit information on a particular

⁷⁷ Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 85.

⁷⁸ Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, ed. Ḥāmid Aḥmad al-Ṭāhir (Cairo, 1425/2004), 738; idem, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, 1958), 3:395.

⁷⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, 737; idem, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 394–95. See also a reference to *shi‘r al-fuqahā’* in: George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1981), 268, 342 n. 210.

⁸⁰ Al-Qiftī, *Al-Muḥammadūn min al-Shu‘arā’*, 193.

⁸¹ I adopted the definition of *shi‘r* as “genuine poetry” from Wolfhart Heinrichs’ defining article “Literary Theory: The Problem of Its Efficiency,” in *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development*, ed. Gustav E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden, 1973), 26–27. Heinrichs states: “in many cases it is impossible to keep ‘genuine’ and didactic poetry apart.”



branch of knowledge.”⁸² These were the mnemonic textbooks in the madrasahs;⁸³ they were often branded as *qaṣīdah*, but not in the classical sense of the term. Instead of *shiʿr*, the ulama wrote *naẓm* in a variety of scholarly fields, and therefore the term *manẓūmah* was more appropriate.⁸⁴ The authors of the *manẓūmāt* had the liberty to compose poems on any theme they desired, and their poems were also free from the strict conventions of writing a proper *qaṣīdah*. Sometimes the didactic poem disguised itself as a “genuine poem,”⁸⁵ but mostly the poems were direct and to the point, as is the case of the responses to the dhimmi’s question.

Were the responses to the dhimmi’s question indeed recited as part of a theological debate? Probably not, but one cannot ignore two clues which imply that these poems were composed orally, and recited to the disciples of the specific *ʿālim* who composed them. One of al-Bājī’s students testified that al-Bājī’s students overheard their teacher recite the poem to himself. Did al-Bājī recite the poem while composing it, or after completing it? Perhaps he was preparing himself for a public recitation of the poem? This we cannot know. But we have Ibn Ḥajar’s description of Ibn Taymīyah. Ibn Ḥajar derived this description from previous sources. According to Ibn Ḥajar, when Ibn Taymīyah was informed (*waqafa ʿalā*) of the dhimmi’s question, “he crossed his legs and responded in a *majlis*—responded in one sitting—without getting up, in a 119-verse poem, which begins:

⁸²Van Gelder, “Arabic Didactic Verse,” 117. Studying the various branches of poetry was an essential part of the curriculum of the *ʿulūm al-ʿarabīyah*, the study of the Arabic language. Thus, the students were required to study *ʿarūd* (metrics), *qawāfī* (rhymes), and *ṣunʿat al-shiʿr* (prosody). Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 79.

⁸³Makdisi mentions the importance of didactic verses in grammar lessons. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 80–91.

⁸⁴Geert Jan van Gelder, “Nazm,” *EI2*, 12:668. The term *shiʿr taʿlīmī*, which is used in several modern studies to denote didactic verses, is inaccurate, as van Gelder persuasively demonstrates in “Arabic Didactic Verse.” This term is a translation of the English “didactic poetry,” and is not drawn from Arabic sources. Van Gelder, “Arabic Didactic Verse,” 104. For two important discussions on didactic verses, which use all the same the term *shiʿr taʿlīmī*, see: Ṣafāʾ Khulūṣī, “Didactic Verse,” *Religion, Learning and Science in the ʿAbbasid Period*, ed. M. J. L. Young, J. D. Latham, and R. B. Serjeant (Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney, 1990), 498–509; Yāsīn al-Ayyūbī, *Āfāq al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī*, 467–85.

⁸⁵See, for instance, the traditional amatory prologue (*nasīb*) in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah’s 6000-verse didactic poem. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah fī al-Intiṣār lil-Firqah al-Nājiyah*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-ʿUmayr (Riyadh, 1416/1996), 31–34 (verses 1–52). The fine line between “genuine” poetry and didactic versification is well reflected in Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī’s (d. 449/1058) *Luzūmiyat*. A good example is his poem on predetermination. Khulūṣī, “Didactic Verse,” 504. Another example is Ibn al-Wardī’s (d. 749/1349) poem. Ibid., 505–6. See also van Gelder, “Arabic Didactic Verse,” 111.



“Your question, hey you!”⁸⁶ So these poems were definitely recited orally to the ulama’s disciples.

The six responses of the ulama served several purposes and satisfied several needs apart from their obvious didactic purpose: prominent scholars were expected to defend the pillars of Sunni Islam, which were severely attacked by a persuasive heretic. This defense should be as eloquent as possible. Since the attack was in verse, the defense was likewise. In this respect, the dhimmi’s question dictated the meter and the rhyme: because the poem was written in the *ṭawīl* meter (considered a respectable meter),⁸⁷ and rhymed with *tī* throughout, all the six respondents retained the same prosodic structure. Last but not least, the dhimmi’s question provided the six respondents with an opportunity to air their poetic skills and to boast about them.

We further cannot exclude the possibility that these poems also reflect the scholars’ inclination to compete with each other. Al-Subkī himself and the scholars whose poems he cited came from the same milieu: they either permanently lived in Cairo or commuted between Damascus and Cairo. The biographical sources reveal extensive interaction between them. For example, al-Bājī taught al-Subkī’s father the art of debating; Ibn Taymīyah (so we are told by al-Subkī) highly respected al-Bājī, and refrained from speaking in his presence; Ibn al-Labbān, a colorful although eccentric Sufi, resided in Cairo and studied *fiqh* from Ibn al-Rifʿah; Ibn al-Rifʿah, a prominent scholar with a reputation of never having lost a public debate, was once appointed as Ibn Taymīyah’s opponent in a public debate; Nāṣir al-Dīn al-ʿAsqalānī, better known as Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī, a well-known man of letters and a historian with a reputation as a competent poet, corresponded regularly with al-Qūnawī; al-Qūnawī was a chief judge in Cairo, and maintained an amiable relationship with Ibn Taymīyah. In brief, these scholars were well acquainted with each other, often debated one another publicly, and occasionally wrote poetry.⁸⁸

This close-knit relationship among the six scholars suggests that the scholars were familiar with each other’s literary yield. At least, they were all familiar with al-Bājī’s response. According to al-Subkī, al-Bājī was the first of the senior scholars in Cairo and Damascus who took the challenge of responding to the dhimmi’s question. Al-Bājī’s response was taken by his contemporaries as an example, and so other scholars participated in the endeavor to rebut the dhimmi’s question. Al-Subkī emphasizes that all six scholars drew upon their poetic skills, and each

⁸⁶Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar*, 1:94 (biography no. 409).

⁸⁷*Ṭawīl* is one of the four meters which were of frequent usage in the classical pre-Islamic *qaṣīdahs*. O. Wright, “Music and Verse,” in *Arabic Literature of the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge, 1983), 456–57.

⁸⁸For the biographies and references to the biographical sources, see Appendix I.



wrote a poem according to his rank or level (*‘alā ṭabaqātihim*).⁸⁹ This phrase may indicate that the scholars who belonged to various groups participated in the endeavor to rebut the dhimmi's claims. On the other hand, it may also indicate that, like in many other scholarly areas, the ulama who wrote poetry were evaluated, graded, and ranked by their peers. We find numerous references which rank the muse of poetry of this scholar or another in al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary. Poetry or *naẓm* is ranked by al-Sakhāwī as good (*ḥasan or jayyid*), acceptable or satisfactory (*maqbul*), or mediocre (*wasaf*).⁹⁰ In the same vein, a scholar can be ranked "at a mediocre level in poetry...and at a high level in philosophy" (*wa-huwa fī al-shi'r mutawassif al-ṭabaqah...wa-kāna qawī al-ṭabaqah fī al-falsafah*).⁹¹

When al-Subkī remarks that the people of that time took al-Bājī's response and arranged it or composed it again according to their ranking in composing poetry (*fa-naẓamūhu ‘alā ṭabaqātihim fī al-naẓm*), he means that the ulama made their best efforts, and that the outcome was dependent upon the poetic skills of each scholar. Al-Subkī, however, does not rank the poems. He is more interested in the fact that the six had a unanimous response (*wa-al-kull mushtarikūn fī jawāb wāḥid*), and that al-Bājī's response represented "the essence of the theology of the Sunnis" (*ḥāṣil kalām ahl al-sunnah*).⁹² Al-Subkī did not appreciate al-Bājī's poetry in general, but he considered the content of this particular poem good. Nevertheless, there is no way of telling which of the six responses was al-Subkī's favorite.⁹³

⁸⁹ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:354.

⁹⁰ Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi'*, 1:23 (biography no. 49). Ibn al-Qurḍāḥ's (d. 841/1438) biography is a case in point. Ibn al-Qurḍāḥ was a talented musician, who played the dulcimer (*sanṭir*) and the lute (*ūd*). Al-Sakhāwī remarks: "He was skilled in many fields of art: he composed poetry and wrote prose and versified mediocre poetry and below that" (*wa-ḍaraba fī kathīr min al-funūn bi-naṣīb wa-naẓama wa-nathara al-naẓm al-wasaf wa-mā dūnahu*). Mediocre poetry or versification (*naẓm wasaf*), here and elsewhere, is actually categorized as good. Al-Sakhāwī also says about Ibn al-Qurḍāḥ: "He composed poetry, which sometimes was perceived as mediocre and acceptable, while most of it was silly and inferior (*wa-kāna rubbamā yudraku minhu al-wasaf al-maqbul wa-al-kathīr minhu safsaf*)." Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi'*, 2:125 (biography no. 1288). Ibn Taymiyyah's poetry was also marked as "mediocre" (*shi'r wasaf*), but I doubt whether this term means that his poetic skills were bad, as Caterina Bori claims in her comprehensive discussion of Ibn Taymiyyah's biography. Caterina Bori, *Ibn Taymiyya: una vita esemplare: Analisi delle fonti classiche della sua biografia*, Supplemento no. 1 alla *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 76 (Roma-Pisa, 2003), 70–72.

⁹¹ Al-Ṣafādī, *Al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, 8:197 (biography no. 1373 of al-Nahrājūrī the poet).

⁹² Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:354.

⁹³ Al-Subkī's father heard a poem by al-Bājī whose topic was the divine attributes according to the Ash'ari doctrine. The poem goes like this: "His life and knowledge, potency and will, His hearing and seeing and word, His eternal existence. These are the eternal attributes of God's essence, praised be He, according to al-Ash'arī, the most learned and pious." Al-Subkī comments: "the



To my mind, al-Qūnawī's poem, which is the most impressive of all six responses, has the highest poetical quality.

THEOLOGY IN VERSES

In examining the form and content of the dhimmi's question and its responses, I considered all the poems as parts of a single literary compendium. This compendium was created by different poets, who zealously retained the meter and rhyme of the poem which ignited this literary activity. The direct responses to the dhimmi's question form a magnificent although eclipsed work of a debate (*munāẓarah*) in verses,⁹⁴ with conspicuous common features in terms of language and argumentation. We should consider this poetic unit as an eclipsed *munāẓarah* simply because it does not actually reflect a dialogue between two or more disputants. This compendium is merely a single question and several responses. In this respect, it would have been much more enlightening to read the dhimmi's response to the responses of the ulama, had there been one. Furthermore, this poetic compendium cannot be classified as a dispute poem because it was written by several authors.⁹⁵

All the poems were indeed written as responses to the dhimmi's question, because all six poems specifically address the literary character of the dhimmi.⁹⁶ These direct addresses to the dhimmi mostly appear in the beginning of the poems, but also as the poems proceed and reach their climax. Al-Bājī refers to the dhimmi as "you scholar" (*ayā 'āliman*). Shāfi' ibn 'Alī refers to the object of his poem as "O dhimmi" (*yā dhimmi*), and so does Ibn al-Rif'ah. Ibn Taymīyah rudely refers to the addressee of his poem as "hey, you!" (*yā hādhā*).⁹⁷ Apart from

words of al-Shātibī (d. 790/1388) in his poem rhyming in *rā'* are more elegant or nicely put than al-Bājī's." Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:343.

⁹⁴On the importance of *munāẓarah* in theological literature, see: E. Wagner, "Munāẓara," *EI2*, 7:565–68; G. J. H. van Gelder, "Debate Literature," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London and New York, 1998), 1:186. An analysis of a fully fledged literary *munāẓarah* in prose appears in: Livnat Holtzman, "Debating the Doctrine of Jabr" (forthcoming, see n. 21). For the art of debating and the place of *munāẓarah* in intellectual activity in Mamluk society, see: Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 164–65; Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 109–11, 128–29.

⁹⁵Cf. Wolfhart Heinrichs, "Rose versus Narcissus: Observations on an Arabic Literary Debate," in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East*, ed. G. J. Reinink and H. L. J. Vanstiphout (Leuven, 1991), 180–81.

⁹⁶All the references to the poems are from al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt*. For a complete translation of the poems, see Appendix II.

⁹⁷Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:352 (Al-Bājī's Response, verse 1); *ibid.*, 10:357 (The Response of Shāfi' ibn 'Alī, verse 2); *ibid.*, 10:359 (The Response of Ibn al-Rif'ah, verse 1); *ibid.*, 10:354 (The Response of Ibn Taymīyah, verse 1).



these direct references, all the poems describe the dhimmi and his viewpoint. They mock, reproach, and try to educate the dhimmi, and finally they express their desperation and complete disgust with him and his views. Three references to the dhimmi's stubbornness are echoes of the descriptions of the heretics in the Quran.⁹⁸ In his poem, the dhimmi claimed that God blocked the entrance leading to the true faith for him. Three of the respondents chose to directly answer his claim, using his own words.⁹⁹

Among the six responses, Ibn al-Labbān's presentation of the dhimmi is the richest. In the course of four verses, Ibn al-Labbān portrays the dhimmi as an ignoramus, who refuses to be persuaded by rational argumentation; but also as a hypocrite, who uses the excuse of predetermination to justify his improper deeds and false convictions. This hypocrite begs God to give him guidance, when he is not interested in it in the first place. His question does not reflect genuine perplexity and a sincere request for help, but is an artifice (*hīlah*), which is meant to allow him to stick to his heretical convictions. Ibn al-Labbān, however, is willing to be generous with the dhimmi, and he indeed hopes that he will receive God's grace and mercy.¹⁰⁰

But did the six ulama indeed consider their rival to be a dhimmi (a Jew, a Christian, etc.)? Apparently, even though the response to the dhimmi's question was unanimous, as al-Subkī claims, each response was custom-made for a different persona. Each response is dependent on the way the scholars interpreted the extreme fatalism which the dhimmi expressed in his question. Also, some of the scholars took the dhimmi's question at face value, and did not try to remove the fatalistic mask of the dhimmi's true identity. Here, the scholars had several possibilities: either they perceived the dhimmi the way he introduced himself in his poem, that is as a non-Muslim who seeks advice from Muslim scholars, or they perceived the dhimmi as a Muslim, who disguises himself as a dhimmi. As a Muslim, the dhimmi is either a Mu'tazili-Shi'i, who upholds free will and opposes fatalism, or he is a fatalist. As an upholder of fatalism, it is somewhat difficult to pinpoint the dhimmi's affiliation to a specific theological trend.

Al-Bāji and Shāfi' ibn 'Alī direct their responses to a Mu'tazili, because their addressee does not understand the essence of the belief in predetermination,¹⁰¹ and he presumptuously assumes that he is a creator whose actions are not pre-

⁹⁸Ibid., 10:354 (The Response of Ibn Taymīyah, verse 1); *ibid.*, 10:364 (Ibn Rif'ah's Response, verse 85); *ibid.*, 10:365 (Al-Qūnawī's Response, verse 5).

⁹⁹Ibid., 10:352 (The Dhimmi's Question, verse 3); *ibid.*, 10:352 (Al-Bāji's Response, verse 14); *ibid.*, 10:364 (The Response of Ibn Rif'ah, verse 78); *ibid.*, 10:366 (Al-Qūnawī's Response, verse 8).

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 10:357–58 (Ibn al-Labbān's Response, verses 5–8).

¹⁰¹Ibid., 10:353 (Al-Bāji's Response, verse 12).



determined.¹⁰² Ibn al-Labbān, al-Qūnawī, and Ibn al-Rifʿah, on the other hand, direct their responses to a rival who is outside the conventional circle of Islamic theology. Ibn al-Labbān's dhimmi is portrayed as an unconventional Muslim sinner, in the image of Ibn al-Baqaqī, who is pleased with his heresy. Ibn al-Labbān in his turn encourages him to repent. This summons to repent can only be directed to a Muslim.¹⁰³ According to al-Qūnawī, the dhimmi is a non-Muslim (he refuses to utter the Muslim profession of faith) with extreme fatalistic tendencies (he rejects the notion that man has the ability to act).¹⁰⁴ Ibn al-Rifʿah's dhimmi is also a Muslim sinner, whose arguments are sophistic.¹⁰⁵ The interesting turn in Ibn al-Rifʿah's attitude towards the dhimmi takes place after the middle of his long response, where he refers to his opponent as a sinner of dubious Jewish origin: he was a historical Jew in times immemorial prior to the Prophet's message. Ibn al-Rifʿah warns the dhimmi that his stance, as reflected in his question, raises the suspicion that he still has Jewish tendencies. If the dhimmi wishes to be considered a Muslim—adds Ibn al-Rifʿah—then he should follow the Islamic shariʿah.¹⁰⁶ Ibn Taymīyah addresses an extreme fatalist, who uses the excuse of predetermination in order to proceed with his sinful life. This position calls to mind Ibn Taymīyah's harsh attacks on Ibn ʿArabī's (d. 638/1240) followers, but also his wide-ranging polemics with the Ashʿaris.¹⁰⁷ Ibn Taymīyah's dhimmi is, then, either an Antinomian Sufi, or an Ashʿari, or both.

Following the conventions of the medieval *munāzarah*, the six ulama insult the dhimmi in the course of their responses. Al-Qūnawī, for example, doubts

¹⁰²Ibid., 10:357 (The Response of Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī, verse 2).

¹⁰³Ibid., 10:358 (The Response of Ibn al-Labbān, verses 16, 19, 20).

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 10:366 (Al-Qūnawī's Response, verse 14).

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 10:364 (The Response of Ibn al-Rifʿah, verse 90).

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 10:362–63 (The Response of Ibn al-Rifʿah, verses 61, 65, 67–68). In verses 67–68 Ibn al-Rifʿah raises the argumentation of *naskh* (the abrogation of Quranic verses), which was a fixed ingredient in the polemic between Muslims and Jews. A clarifying example appears in: Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. Sālim Muṣṭafā al-Badrī (Beirut, 1420/2000), 2:44 (interpretation of Q. 2:106). See also: Camilla Adang and Sabine Schmidtke, "Polemics (Muslim-Jewish)" *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman A. Stillman (Leiden, 2010)

^{Brill} Online http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=ejiw_COM-0017750 (Last accessed March, 2011).

¹⁰⁷From the vast literature on Ibn Taymīyah and his rivals, suffice it to mention: Ibn Taymīyah, "Fī al-Iḥtijāj bil-Qadar," *Majmūʿat al-Rasāʾil al-Kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā ([Cairo], [1966]), 2:97–156. The epistle appears also in *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā* (1998) 8:183–221. For an analysis of Ibn Taymīyah's epistle, see: Fritz Meier, "The Cleanest about Predestination: A Bit of Ibn Taymiyya," in *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O'Kane with the editorial assistance of Bernd Radtke (Leiden, 1999), 309–34. Translation of idem, "Das Sauberste über die Vorbestimmung," *Saeculum* 32 (1981): 74–89.



the dhimmi's ability to understand his response. He declares that he could have provided a much more elaborate and methodical response, but he knows that his opponent is incapable of understanding the subtleties of the kalāmic method. To that he apologetically adds that since his purpose was to persuade his opponent, his response is but a summary.¹⁰⁸ This apology of al-Qūnawī may hint that he was familiar with the much longer responses of his peers, and that he felt obligated to explain the brevity of his response. Ibn al-Labbān's attack on his opponent is less insulting: he refers to the deficiencies in the dhimmi's argumentation, and his lack of rational thinking. He also urges the dhimmi to get rid of his sophistic thinking.¹⁰⁹ Al-Bājī's attack on the dhimmi concentrates on the dhimmi's "tricks and snares" (*ḥabā'il ḥīlati*), which is a common description of false methods of theological speculation.¹¹⁰ Even Ibn al-Rif'ah, whose poem is the most patient and polite attempt to convince the dhimmi, mocks the latter's verses, calls them "invalid and absurd," and opines that the dhimmi should be flogged with a whip.¹¹¹

As al-Subkī claimed, the essence of the ulama's response to the dhimmi was the traditionalist concept of *al-riḍā bi-al-qadar*, that is, being satisfied with God's predetermination. According to al-Subkī, al-Bājī's response and the subsequent responses had the following message: "Be satisfied with God's predetermination and not with the consequence or the outcome of that action. You should be satisfied with the action of predetermining, since it comes from God. As for the outcome of this action: well, it is divided into things you should be satisfied with, like faith, and things you are forbidden to be satisfied with, like unbelief."¹¹² This message, one might add, is repeated in each of the six responses. Al-Subkī's understanding of the kernel of all six responses is, of course, correct. We can, however, add several observations to his analysis.

Although all six responses basically reject the dhimmi's attempt to blame God for his being a heretic and to therefore be held unaccountable for his actions, each scholar tackled this concept from a different angle. As literary texts, not all the poems are interesting or captivating. However, each poem has its conspicuous theme. The shorter poems of al-Bājī and Shāfi' ibn 'Alī, and Ibn al-Labbān's poem, are direct answers to the question. They lack metaphors and other literary devices, and are generally dull. The longer poems, however, are well-developed, rich with metaphors, allusions, and images. These poems widen the theoretical discussion using numerous examples in a variety of areas, from the history of the world's faiths to everyday life. All these examples are typical of theological treatises.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:366 (Al-Qūnawī's Response, verses 21–3).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 10:357–58 (The Response of Ibn al-Labbān, verses 6, 14).

¹¹⁰ Cf. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 331 (verse 4650).

¹¹¹ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:360, 364 (The Response of Ibn al-Rif'ah, verses 23, 94).

¹¹² Ibid., 10:354.



tises in prose. Ibn Taymīyah's response, for example, gives a survey of heretical faiths, like the views of the philosophers and the Zoroastrians.¹¹³ When explaining to the dhimmi that his claims are bound to shake the foundations of society, Ibn Taymīyah depicts a horrendous situation, in which acts of murder, highway robbery, corruption of rulers, etc., will be dismissed as the outcome of God's will and predetermination.¹¹⁴ Al-Qūnawī's poem gives two everyday examples to corroborate his claim (quenching one's thirst is dependent on drinking water; one should not starve himself to death thinking that this death was predetermined). Al-Qūnawī concludes his words with two vivid and captivating metaphors (the ship and the carpet).¹¹⁵ Ibn al-Rif'ah's magnificent piece concentrates on the creation of the world, the creation of the human race, and the human spirit.¹¹⁶ Ibn al-Rif'ah also plants hints to his identity and inclination to Sufism.¹¹⁷

The ulama's six responses represent a typical mixture of fourteenth-century traditionalism and rationalism. The traditionalist position is reflected both by the frequent references to the concept of predetermination, and also by direct and indirect reference to the concepts of *fiṭrah* and divine guidance, which are embedded in the Quran and hadith. According to these intertwined concepts, Islam is the natural disposition of every human being, and God guides every human being as He pleases: to the correct path of Islam or to the deviant path of heresy.¹¹⁸ The *fiṭrah* is an axial theme in Ibn al-Rif'ah's poem. According to Ibn al-Rif'ah, had the dhimmi eliminated the artificial thinking of *kalām*, and listened to the sound mind and followed the pure instincts God had granted him, he would have reached the correct answer to the question he had asked.¹¹⁹ The same idea, in different variations, also appears in other responses.¹²⁰

The rationalist Ash'ari position is reflected by the use of kalāmīc argumentations, and more so, by using explicit references to the Ash'ari theory of *kasb*,¹²¹

¹¹³ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:355 (The Response of Ibn Taymīyah, verses 9–18).

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 10:355–56 (The Response of Ibn Taymīyah, verses 20–29).

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 10:366 (Al-Qūnawī's Response, verses 11, 15, 24, 25).

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 10:360–62 (The Response of Ibn al-Rif'ah, verses 26–48).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 10:364–65 (The Response of Ibn al-Rif'ah, verses 95–98).

¹¹⁸ For a recent discussion of the traditionalist concept of *fiṭrah*, see 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*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi, 2010), 163–88. For references to the rich literature on this topic, see *ibid.*, 184, n. 11.

¹¹⁹ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:361, 363 (The Response of Ibn al-Rif'ah, verses 44, 64–65).

¹²⁰ Ibid., 10:353 (Al-Bāji's Response, verse 5); *ibid.*, 10:355 (The Response of Ibn Taymīyah, verse 19); *ibid.*, 10:366 (Al-Qūnawī's Response, verse 10).

¹²¹ This theory holds that the ability to perform an action does not exist in the human agent, until God creates this ability in him. The formula—God creates the ability to perform an ac-



as the ultimate tool for solving the problem of predetermination. The scholars emphasize that God creates the human action and the ability to perform the action. The human being acquires this ability, and then performs the action. The idea that the human being has a choice to act or to abandon the act also stands in the middle of the *kasb* theory. The scholars in general succeeded in dressing the fundamentals of *kasb* in a poetic garment, while maintaining the rhythmic tone of their poems. Al-Bāji presents the basic principle of *kasb* in the following words: "Both our actions and our essences are created by God. We do not create either of them, not really."¹²² Another principle of *kasb* is stated well by Ibn al-Labbān: "God the All-Knowing created in the human being a choice between actions which entail God's satisfaction and His alienation. Through this [choice], God enabled the human being to perform what He predetermined for the human being; thus God's will always prevails."¹²³ Ibn al-Rif'ah specifically mentions *kasb* twice in his poem.¹²⁴ Apart from the *kasb* theory, the scholars refer to other subtle theological issues, like causality.¹²⁵ Ibn Taymiyah's poem, which indeed deserves special attention, is slightly at variance with the other poems, since it reflects Ibn Taymiyah's longtime adversity with the Ash'aris, although not in the version that al-Subkī quotes. Rather, in the complete version of the poem, as it appears in *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā*, Ibn Taymiyah used his response as a vehicle to indirectly criticize the Ash'ari concept of *kasb* and *ikhtiyār* (choice), and to promote his idea of real choice for the human being.¹²⁶

Both traditionalism and rationalism are two sides of the same coin of highly theorized theology not meant for laymen. But since the six ulama share a common didactic purpose to educate both the "dhimmi" and their lay audiences, they also offer some advice (which the dhimmi initially requested in his poem). In addition to asking the dhimmi to listen attentively to their responses, and promis-

tion, and the human agent acquires (*kasaba*) the ability from Him—was glossed and refined by Ash'ari theologians in order to prove that the human agent's actions are not his, but also were not forced upon him. The *kasb* theory was perceived by its proponents as a golden mean between the Mu'tazili concept of free will, with the human agent as the creator of his actions, and the traditionalist position, which negated any possibility of the human agent being a creator of his actions. A definitive article on *kasb* is: Michael Schwarz, "Acquisition (*kasb*) in Early Kalām," in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays Presented by His Friends and Pupils to Richard Walzer on his Seventieth Birthday* (Columbia, SC, 1972), 355–87. For more references, see: Livnat Holtzman, "Human Choice," 183, n. 3.

¹²² Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:353 (Al-Bāji's Response, verse 6).

¹²³ Ibid., 10:358 (The Response of Ibn al-Labbān, verses 12–13).

¹²⁴ Ibid., 10:360–61 (The Response of Ibn al-Rif'ah, verses 17–18, 33–34).

¹²⁵ Ibid., 10:355 (The Response of Ibn Taymiyah, verses 10–11); *ibid.*, 10:358–59 (The Response of Ibn al-Labbān, verses 9–11, 20, 26); *ibid.*, 10:366 (Al-Qūnawī's Response, verses 9, 14).

¹²⁶ See Appendix II, B, Part 2 (a few more verses by Ibn Taymiyah).



ing him that if he follows their line of thinking he will reach the peace of mind that he is seeking,¹²⁷ the ulama mainly guide the dhimmi through the etiquette of religious discourse. They urge him to listen to their voice, which is the true voice. “Stop using this language of protesting!” suggests Ibn al-Labbān.¹²⁸ “You should be pleased with that predetermination,” advises al-Bājī, “Abandon all your straying doubts and embrace the most apparent proof!”¹²⁹ Ibn Taymīyah’s suggestions are similar: “Do not abandon the apparent truth. Do not turn your back to the upright idea.”¹³⁰ The ulama’s direct approach to the dhimmi represents a mixture of self-confidence and disdain. Each scholar is convinced that his advice is the ultimate guide for attaining the truth, and the dhimmi’s success in reaching this truth is guaranteed (provided that he follows the scholar’s advice). All six responses represent the practical aspect of theology; however, al-Qūnawī’s apology is by far the most pragmatic and realistic of the six: knowing that the dhimmi will not listen to his sage advice, let alone understand it, al-Qūnawī decides to issue a brief response, and not to waste his time on the lost soul of a dhimmi.

CONCLUSION

The ample anecdotes in the biographical sources indicate that composing poetry was one of the favorite and most prestigious activities of the Damascene and Cairene ulama. The historian al-Ṣafadī, a distinguished poet himself, refers to didactic poems about grammar and prosody, but also about *fiqh* and the *Quran*, as a remarkable achievement, an indicator of the ulama’s linguistic skills.¹³¹ The ulama’s six responses to the dhimmi’s question indeed represent an important aspect of the intellectual life in Mamluk Damascus and Cairo.

The case-study of the dhimmi’s question—although we have only partial and scanty textual evidence—demonstrates how an intellectual activity is ignited, and how a fashionable trend is established. First, a riddle in rhyme was orally circulated. Perhaps several students of Islamic law in Mamluk Cairo excitedly and amusingly recited the dhimmi’s question in one of the *majālis*, without knowing how to correctly answer the paradox it posed. Perhaps laymen repeated the catchy short poem of the dhimmi. Finally, the dhimmi’s question reached al-Bājī. The horrified scholar decided to confront the controversial poem, and composed his response. Al-Bājī’s peers envied his literary endeavor, and challenged his re-

¹²⁷ See, for example, al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:357 (The Response of Shāfi‘ ibn ‘Alī, verse 7).

¹²⁸ Ibid., 10:358 (The Response of Ibn al-Labbān, verses 14).

¹²⁹ Ibid., 10:353–54 (Al-Bājī’s Response, verses 12, 14).

¹³⁰ Ibid., 10:356 (The Response of Ibn Taymīyah, verse 37).

¹³¹ Al-Ṣafadī, *Nuṣrat al-Thā‘ir ‘alā al-Mathal al-Sā‘ir*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī Sulṭānī (Damascus, [1971]), 386–87.



sponse by composing their own responses. The anonymous “dhimmi” faded into oblivion, and his identity was never categorically defined. Still, the ulama added another academic achievement to their résumé: they defied the heretic while demonstrating their intellectual superiority.

The general framework of the medieval *munāẓarah* includes mainly lengthy debates in prose. The dhimmi's question and the ulama's six responses expanded the boundaries of this genre to include poetry. The use of poetry enables these theological works to become a powerful tool in polemics, simply because the texts are easily and orally proliferated. The theological argumentations, which are usually difficult to grasp, are molded into rhythmic texts with a clear enthusiastic tone. The medieval debates appear in abundance in the theological literature; while the *munāẓarāt* written in prose have received much attention in modern scholarship, those written in poetry were neglected. The stage is now set for researchers to turn their attention to the theological debates written in poetry—although these poems demand extra effort in order to understand their contents, and to study these challenging works of theology.



APPENDIX I: NOTES ON THE ULAMA

The following description contains some details about the ulama who wrote responses to the dhimmi's question, including the scholar's poetic skills, his experience in debating, and his relationship with other members of this group. Ibn Taymīyah's biography is not included, for obvious reasons.

1. 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Bājī ('Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaṭṭāb, d. 714/1314):¹³² A prominent Shafi'i jurist, who according to his own avowal was a close friend of the famous Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), the author of the famous commentary on Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*.¹³³ According to al-Subkī, al-Bājī was a skilled and almost undefeated debater, and an expert in Ash'ari *kalām*.¹³⁴ An elliptical anecdote, told by an eyewitness, connects al-Bājī to a debate with a Jew: "We were at Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd's, and he said: 'O *fuqahā*!' A Jewish fellow came in and wanted to debate." We stayed still, but al-Bājī did not hesitate and promptly said: 'Bring him over! With God's grace we will oppose his sophistic argument (*shubḥah*)!'"¹³⁵ Unfortunately, there is no record of the debate itself. Al-Subkī's father, *al-imām al-wālīd*, Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), learned the art of debating from al-Bājī. The celebrated Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd admired al-Bājī, and treated him with an extraordinary measure of respect.¹³⁶ Al-Bājī was also treated with the utmost respect by Ibn Taymīyah: "Whenever Ibn Taymīyah saw him, he treated him with admiration. When in the presence of al-Bājī, Ibn Taymīyah dared not make an utterance. So 'Alā' al-Dīn used to say: 'Speak so we can argue with you!' And Ibn Taymīyah said: 'The likes of me does not speak in your presence. It is my duty to benefit from you.'" ¹³⁷ Al-Subkī

¹³²For al-Bājī's biography, see: al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:339–67 (biography no. 1394); Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:60–61 (biography no. 2865); al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-Wafayāt*, 3:73–74 (biography no. 352); al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 3:483–87 (biography no. 1210).

¹³³Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:341–42

¹³⁴Ibid., 10:339–40. Al-Subkī describes al-Bājī as an undefeated lion (*wa-kāna asad lā yughālabu*). Ibid., 10:339. Al-Bājī's expertise in Ash'ari *kalām* is reflected by the names of the books for which he wrote abridgements, for example Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1209) *Kitāb al-Arbaʿīn*. His profound understanding of Shafi'i *fiqh* is demonstrated by an anecdote which appears in *Al-Durar*. Apparently, as a youth he attended a class in which al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *fiqh* manual, *Al-Wasīṭ*, was studied. The young al-Bājī addressed one of the issues in the text, raising fifteen different questions and giving elaborate answers to each question. The astonished teacher asked al-Bājī his age, and conveyed his admiration at his knowledge. Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:60.

¹³⁵Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:60; al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 3:485. Al-Ṣafadī claims that al-Bājī was well versed in the Torah, and he used to argue with Jews about it.

¹³⁶Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:339.

¹³⁷Ibid., 10:342. Al-Bājī is mentioned as one of the six ulama who discussed Ibn Taymīyah's release from prison with the amir Salār. The ulama demanded that Ibn Taymīyah correct his creed.



establishes the reputation of al-Bājī as a poet by quoting two of al-Bājī's poems: one short autobiographical poem,¹³⁸ and a long *manẓūmah*, which al-Bājī's students memorized after hearing al-Bājī recite it to himself (*anshada li-nafsihi*). This 122-verse *manẓūmah* or *urjūzah* describes the happiest of all men as a believer whose knowledge of all branches of science, such as *fiqh*, *tafsīr*, history, languages, and medicine, is vast. In the poem, al-Bājī advises his listeners to travel in order to acquire knowledge.¹³⁹

2. **Nāṣir al-Dīn Ibn 'Asākir al-'Asqalānī** (Shāfi' ibn 'Alī ibn 'Abbās al-Kinānī al-'Asqalānī al-Miṣrī, d. 730/1330).¹⁴⁰ A poet and historian, who wrote biographies of the Mamluk sultans. He was skilled in calligraphy and versification.¹⁴¹ He was blinded by an arrow during the Mongol attack on Ḥimṣ in Rajab 680/October 1281.¹⁴² An enthusiastic bibliophile, Shāfi' ibn 'Alī, who had eighteen closets full of rare books, recognized each book by feeling it and touching it. Al-Ṣafadī, who was a personal acquaintance of Shāfi' ibn 'Alī, lists his numerous works in various Islamic sciences, which include a *dīwān* of his poems, glosses of poetry, and a poem describing a dispute between the sword and the pen.¹⁴³ Al-Ṣafadī, however, does not associate

Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:46 (the events of 706/1306–7). Al-Bājī is also named among the many *fuqahā'* who attended Salār's residence in order to witness the debate between Ibn Taymīyah and the three qadis, a debate that never took place, as the qadis declined the invitation to attend. Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:49. In the edition of *al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah* that I use, the text incorrectly writes al-Bājī as al-Tājī, and also writes Ibn al-Rif'ah as Ibn Raf'. These errors are corrected in the anthology: *Al-Jāmi' li-Sīrat al-Shaykh Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Muḥammad 'Uzayr Shams and 'Alī ibn Muḥammad 'Imrān, with an introduction by Bakr Abū Zayd (Mecca, 1420/1999–2000), 363.

¹³⁸ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:344. According to al-Ṣafadī, al-Bājī himself told him that he made Ibn Taymīyah retract things that he wrote. Al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 3:485.

¹³⁹ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:345–52.

¹⁴⁰ The identification is that of the editor of al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt*, 19:357, n. 1. Shāfi' ibn 'Alī's biography appears in al-Ṣafadī, *Nakt al-Himyān fī Nakt al-Umyān*, ed. Aḥmad Zakī Bak (Cairo, 1427/2007), 166–70. A similar biography appears in Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 2:109–10 (biography no. 1923). Shāfi' ibn 'Alī is also mentioned in the events of the year 730/1329–30 in Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Beirut, 1413/1992), 9:207.

¹⁴¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 2:109. For a short biography, which is mainly based on Ibn Ḥajar, see P. M. Holt, "Shāfi' b. 'Alī," *EI2*, 9:180. Holt was interested in Shāfi' ibn 'Alī because of the latter's biography of Baybars.

¹⁴² Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 2:109–10 (biography no. 1923).

¹⁴³ As far as I know, the poem is no longer extant. The theme of a debate between a pen and a sword is well known in Arabic poetry. Perhaps Shāfi's poem preceded Ibn al-Wardī's dispute poem on the same theme, which drew van Gelder's attention. Geert Jan van Gelder, "The Conceit of Pen and Sword: On an Arabic Literary Debate," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32, no. 2 (1987): 353–56.



Shāfi' ibn 'Alī with responses to the dhimmi's question.¹⁴⁴ Here is a nice *khafīf* verse by him: "Whoever saw the morning brightness of white hair, which has broken in the blackness of my curls, asked me:/Pray, what is it? And I answered: This is a night of worries [about love], obliterated by the wise conviction of the morning."¹⁴⁵

3. **Shams al-Dīn Ibn al-Labbān** (Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Mu'min, d. 749/1348, from the plague).¹⁴⁶ A gifted Sufi preacher of the Shādhiliyah order and teacher who conducted regular sessions of recitations (*majlis tadhkīr*) and sessions of academic sermons (*majlis al-wa'z*) in Cairo.¹⁴⁷ He also wrote a few treatises on Shafi'i *fiqh*, grammar, and *tafsīr*. There are several references to Ibn al-Labbān's reputation in the brief entries which were written about him. Al-Subkī is subtle and does not disclose many details: "He sometimes uttered spontaneous words of which the literal meanings could raise doubts about him, but we are sure he was innocent of them. And also a dreadful thing happened to him."¹⁴⁸ Ibn Ḥajar volunteers a few more details: apparently, Ibn al-Labbān's reputation as a Sufi preacher preceded him; however, he was heard producing monist utterances (*kalimāt 'alā ṭarīq al-ittiḥādīyah*). He was put on trial, but eventually rescued by the Maliki qadi.¹⁴⁹
4. **Najm al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī** (Shaykh al-Islām, Najm al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Murtafi' ibn Ṣārim Ibn al-Rif'ah, d. 710/1310). Al-Subkī refers to Ibn al-Rif'ah as the greatest Shafi'i of his time, and adds various superlatives to his name. Ibn al-Rif'ah was a skilled debater, who had a reputation of never being defeated in debates, as he never met his equal on these occasions (*lā yuqāwamu fī majlis munāẓarah wa-lā yuqāwā*).¹⁵⁰ According to Ibn Ḥajar, Ibn al-Rif'ah

¹⁴⁴ Al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 3:484 (the biography of 'Alā' al-Dīn, no. 1210); *ibid*, 3:292 (the biography of 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, no. 1122).

¹⁴⁵ Al-Ṣafadī, *Nakt*, 168; Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 2:109. Yāqūt ascribes the poem to someone else. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Udabā': Irshād al-Arib ilā Ma'rifat al-Adīb*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut, 1993), 1163 (biography no. 406).

¹⁴⁶ Al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 4:300.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:94.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:94.

¹⁴⁹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:201.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:25 (biography no. 1298). Ibn Rif'ah's biography in al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt* is brief (three pages long) for a scholar of his caliber. Cf. Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:66 (the events of the year 710/1310–11) and Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi wa-al-Mustawfā ba'da al-Wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo, 1999), 2:82–83 (biography no. 256).



was appointed to be Ibn Taymīyah's rival in a debate. After the event was over (Ibn Ḥajar does not report who won the debate), people asked Ibn Taymīyah about Ibn al-Rifʿah. Ibn Taymīyah complimented Ibn al-Rifʿah's knowledge of Shafiʿi law: "I saw a shaykh from whose beard the laws and regulations of the Shafiʿis were flowing."¹⁵¹ The well-to-do Ibn al-Rifʿah, who was appointed to several official positions in Cairo during his lifetime, was subjected to a slander campaign initiated by other scholars, but from which he was exonerated.¹⁵²

5. **ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Qūnawī** (ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl ibn Yūsuf, Qāḍī al-Quḍāh, d. 729/1329). Al-Qūnawī, born in Konya, was a Shafiʿi *faqīh* and a prominent Sufi, who lived and worked in Cairo for thirty years. He conducted a life of piety and poverty in Cairo, until he was appointed as a teacher in the Sharīfiyah, and as the director of the Ṣāliḥiyah *khānqāh*. Two years before his death, he was appointed as the Shafiʿi head judge of Damascus.¹⁵³ Al-Qūnawī was well-versed in Ashʿari *kalām*, logic, and polemics.¹⁵⁴ He also had poetic skills: apart from his response to "someone who meant to defame the divine law," al-Qūnawī composed a poem in the *ṭawīl* meter which discusses different kinds of head wounds (*shijāj*).¹⁵⁵ Al-Subkī also mentions a debate (*munāzarāh*) between al-Qūnawī and Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, but unfortunately the contents of this debate are no longer extant.¹⁵⁶ In 727/1328, prior to his departure from Cairo to take up his position as the new chief Shafiʿi judge in Damascus, al-Qūnawī was asked by the sultan al-Nāṣir ibn Qalāwūn to intervene with the governor of Syria to release Ibn Taymīyah from prison. The following is a description of these relationships, as it appears in al-Ṣafadī's *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*: "Although he (i.e., al-Qūnawī) had disagreements with Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymīyah, and although he thought that Ibn Taymīyah was wrong in many issues, he praised Ibn Taymīyah, admired him, and defended him. However, when al-Qūnawī was about to leave Cairo [for his post in Damascus], the sultan said to him: 'When you arrive in Damascus, tell the governor of Damascus to free

¹⁵¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:169 (biography no. 730). Cf. al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*, 1:325 (biography no. 169).

¹⁵² Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:169–70.

¹⁵³ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:132–34 (biography no. 1388); Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi wa-al-Mustawfā baʿda al-Wāfi*, 8:51 (biography 1568); Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:169 (the events of the year 729/1328–29); Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-Wuʾāh fī Ṭabaqāt al-Lughawiyīna wa-al-Nuḥāh*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1384/1965), 2:150 (biography no. 1674).

¹⁵⁴ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:133.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 10:134–35.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 10:135–36.



Ibn Taymīyah.’ [Al-Qūnawī] asked: ‘Your Excellency, on what grounds did you put him in jail?’ The [sultan] replied: ‘Because of his *fatāwā* on that issue.’” Al-Qūnawī indeed met the governor upon his arrival in Damascus;¹⁵⁷ however, his mission failed. It was probably the governor who made Ibn Taymīyah’s release conditional on his retracting his *fatāwā*, although a lacuna in al-Ṣafadī’s text does not allow us to determine this with a great deal of certainty. According to al-Ṣafadī, “He [probably the governor] said: ‘If he retracts them, we shall set him free.’”¹⁵⁸ Ibn Ḥajar concludes: “Some say that this answer is the reason for the continuance of Ibn Taymīyah’s stay in prison until he died, because it was unconceivable that he would retract.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷Shams al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Bakr al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh Ḥawādith al-Zamān wa-Anbā’ihī*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Sidon-Beirut, 1419/1998), 2:196, 369; Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:141 (the events of the year 727/1326–27).

¹⁵⁸Al-Ṣafadī, *A’yān*, 3:290 (biography no. 1122). The ambiguity in al-Ṣafadī’s text (which was copied by Ibn Ḥajar) remains in Laoust’s description of al-Qūnawī’s intervention for Ibn Taymīyah. Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Takī-d-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taimīya* (Cairo, 1939), 148, n. 1. See also Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule*, 168.

¹⁵⁹Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:16 (biography no. 2687); al-Shawkānī, *Al-Badr al-Ṭālī*, 1:479 (biography no. 305).



APPENDIX II: TRANSLATION OF THE SIX RESPONSES

Notes:

1. The translation is as accurate and literal as possible, although I often had to paraphrase text.
2. The terms *mashī'ah* and *irādah* are consistently translated as [divine] creative will and commanding will, respectively.

A. AL-BĀJĪ'S RESPONSE:¹⁶⁰

1. Hear me out, you scholar, who exposed the signs of his embarrassment, who craves for the guidance of a small and selected group of notable men.
2. I was so pleased to see that you seek the truth. May a breath of truth coming from the clouds of His mercy reach you!
3. You know that truth is regained only by truth, so seek refuge at its doorstep, like other reasonable people, and abandon the tricks and snares.¹⁶¹
4. A long time ago did God decree who strays from the correct path and who walks in it. He did that through His power as an effective agent (*fa'āl*). So [do not look] for the restrictions of wise purpose [in creation].¹⁶²
5. God created human reason, and more so, He created the action of thinking that God's actions are good (*taḥsīn*). The limitations of human beings do not apply to the Creator.
6. Both our actions and essences are created by God. We do not create either of them, not really.
7. But He granted those He created, the human beings, a guide to all these predetermined eternal actions.
8. Through that guide we were able to recognize the people of happiness, the believers, from the people of misery, the heretics. The same applies to us: what He had wished for us is solely by virtue of His creative will.
9. As we put on clothes for everyone to see, so we mark our actions. These actions were created either as actions that please Him, or actions that make Him angry.

¹⁶⁰ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:353–54.

¹⁶¹ Trick and snares, here *ḥabā'il ḥīlah*. What al-Bājī means here, obviously, is that the dhimmi is requested to abandon the incorrect reasoning and logical analogies which the Mu'tazilah usually use.

¹⁶² Wise purposes, here *ḥukm ḥikmah*. Al-Bājī refers here to the Ash'ari notion according to which God did not create the world for a cause or a wise purpose. Cf. Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-Aqdām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*, ed. Alfred Guillaume (Baghdad, [1960]), 397.



10. His relationship to us is like the relationship of a king, who is beyond asking “how” his actions are performed, and “what is the reason” for his actions.
11. It is He who ordains life and death. It is He who is exempt from any condemnation. What the weak minds think as good is but a shameful thing.
12. Thus, you should be pleased with that predetermination, while you shouldn’t be mistaken and be pleased with the object of this predetermination, when it is a predetermined act of heresy.
13. That we are assigned commands and interdictions obliterates our excuses on the Day of Resurrection.
14. Therefore you should come through that entrance, whether it is blocked or open. Abandon all your straying doubts, and embrace the most apparent proof!
15. The commands and interdictions are clearly revealed, and there is no doubt about it and no delusion.

B. THE RESPONSE OF IBN TAYMĪYAH:¹⁶³

1. Hey, you there! Your question is the question of a stubborn man, who argues with the Lord of the Throne, the Creator of all beings!
2. A long time ago, the devil Iblīs, who is the root of all evil, used this question in order to argue with [the angels], the most respectable creatures residing up above.¹⁶⁴
3. The root of all errors that people make—regardless of the group or sect they are affiliated to—is to question the reasons for God’s actions.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:354–57. This version of Ibn Taymīyah’s poem is abridged, but all the same it retains the kernel of the complete version of the poem. There is no doubt that Ibn Taymīyah’s poem should be studied for its own merit. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, Ibn Taymīyah’s poem is presented as part of the six responses found in the original set of al-Subkī. When translating the poem, I consulted what seems to be the most complete version of the poem as it appears in: Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū‘at al-Fatāwā* (1998) 4:149–54 (here indicated as MF). This version contains 124 verses. I also consulted Serajul Haque’s version (here indicated as SH), which contains 103 verses. Another version of the poem, which I have not consulted, appears in Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *Al-Uqūd al-Durīyah min Manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Abū Muṣ‘ab Ṭal‘at ibn Fu‘ād al-Ḥulwānī (Cairo, 1423/2003), 300–6. Serajul Haque’s summary of the poem was of great help. In addition, the following studies on Ibn Taymīyah’s poem also were of help: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir al-Sa‘dī (d. 1376/1956), *Al-Durrah al-Bahīyah: Sharḥ al-Qaṣīdah al-Tā‘īyah fī Ḥall al-Mushkilah al-Qadariyah*, ed. Abū Muḥammad Ashraf ibn ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd (Riyadh, 1419/1998); Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamd, *Al-Qaṣīdah al-Tā‘īyah fī al-Qadar li-Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymīyah* (Riyadh, 1424/2003).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. verses 1–2 in MF and SH.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. verse 6 in MF and SH.



4. The creative will of God, the Lord of the Throne and the Creator of all beings, necessitates the actual existence of all the creatures.
5. The essence of God is necessary, with its necessary and eternal attributes.¹⁶⁶
6. Therefore, when you ask “why did He want [this and that from me]?” it is the same as asking “why did He exist from all eternity?”
7. Such a question negates every reason, and it was sanctioned by every religion.
8. In this reality, there are many particular phenomena or particularities (*takhṣīṣ*). Anyone with a certain degree of reason can point out the fact that these particularities came about by virtue of His will.
9. [The theory] that one existent emanates from another, and the theory that two creators are possible, are like shots that miss the mark.¹⁶⁷
10. There is no doubt that every effect (*musabbab*) has its entailing cause (*‘illah*).
11. However, causes—as you can very well see—emanate by virtue of His creative will.
12. Therefore, when you say: “why did God want [this and that from me]?” your words make people fall right into the pit.
13. The Zoroastrians believed that there is one creator who creates things that are good and benefit us, and one creator who creates things that are evil and harm us.
14. The ancient Zoroastrians stumbled and fell into this sophistic argument of dualism, because they inquired about the cause of evil.¹⁶⁸
15. The heretical philosophers, who believe in the “eternal intellect” (*al-‘aql al-qadīm*) as the [first] cause,
16. Were looking for a cause of existence after non-existence, and they failed to find it. Therefore they went astray.
17. The roots of evil in any nation which was blessed by the religion of the prophets
18. Were revealed when these nations delved into these questions and their idolatry was thus evident. As a result, the indisputable evidences were erased throughout the era of apostasy.

¹⁶⁶ Verses 4–5 here correspond to verses 8–9 in MF and verses 7–8 in SH.

¹⁶⁷ Ibn Taymīyah refers here to the theory of *iṣḍār* (emanation) of the philosophers, and the Mu‘tazili view which allows (*tajwīz*) the existence of another creator (which is the human being) other than God. See: al-Sa‘dī, *Al-Durrah al-Bahīyah*, 128–29.

¹⁶⁸ “The cause of evil”: the text says *‘illat al-sirr*, which is “the cause of the secret.” However, Serajul Haque’s version provides a better solution (*‘illat al-sharr*), which I decided to adopt. Cf. verse 18 in SH.



19. We can easily contradict what you say, because this excuse that you seek can be easily refuted by anyone who possesses pure instincts.¹⁶⁹
20. Let us assume that you stop blaming heretics and sinners who divert from the correct path.
21. This approach inevitably leads you to ignore every offender, whether he committed a murder, or stole property, or violated the sanctity of one's marriage.
22. In other words, you have no right whatsoever to be angry with a murderer or with a thief who robbed the needy.
23. You have no right to be angry with a man who abuses your well-guarded honor, even if he abuses you publicly. You have no right to be angry with the adulterer for fornicating.
24. You have no right to be angry with the highway robbers. You cannot be angry with the perpetrators of corruption in the land.
25. You cannot be angry with false witnesses who spread evil lies and slander. You cannot be angry with those who recklessly defame women of unblemished reputation on the basis of one single doubt.
26. You cannot be angry with those who purposefully annihilate the civilization of mankind, nor can you be angry with the corrupt ruler.
27. So stop condemning every perpetrator. Do not demand to punish the offender.
28. In sum, you must smooth the way of these liars and slanderers.¹⁷⁰
29. Can people's minds or their innate nature accept the claim of this vile person, who says: "What could I have done?"¹⁷¹
30. When someone is administered a poison, this surely guarantees his death. And still, everything was predetermined by virtue of God's creative will.
31. In the same vein, your apostasy is like a poison you swallow. Its outcome is the punishment of hellfire, just as the outcome of gulping poison is death.
32. Don't you think that in this world, whoever perpetrates a crime is bound to be punished, either by predetermined punishment, or by a punishment as prescribed in the divine law?
33. The perpetrator is never pardoned, and this is God's predetermination. [The perpetrator will be punished] also in the hereafter. There is no doubt about that.¹⁷²
34. If you wish to receive an answer, which may possibly save you from God's great fire,

¹⁶⁹Verses 6–19 here correspond to verses 30–43 in MF and verses 11–23 in SH.

¹⁷⁰Verses 20–28 here correspond to verses 47–55 in MF and verses 27–35 in SH.

¹⁷¹Verse 29 here corresponds to verse 69 in MF and verse 49 in SH.

¹⁷²Verses 30–33 here correspond to verses 74–77 in MF and verses 54–57 in SH.



35. Beware of the Lord of creation! Go towards Him humbly, and implore Him that would He guide you to the truth.
36. Entrust the shackles of your soul in the hands of the truth, and listen attentively. Never defy whoever preaches for the sound divine law.
37. Do not abandon the apparent truth. Do not turn your back to the upright idea.¹⁷³
38. We are content with God's decree, because we were ordered to be content, even with misfortunes,
39. Like diseases, poverty, humiliation, and exile. We are pleased with every hurtful thing, provided that it is not a crime.
40. As for the evil deeds that are considered reprehensible, there is no Quranic text which orders us to be pleased with these acts.¹⁷⁴
41. The knowledgeable people said: We should not be pleased with acts of disobedience and hateful sins.
42. A group of people said: We are pleased with His decree, but we are not pleased with the outcome of this decree [when this outcome is bad deeds performed by the human being]. [These bad deeds] deserve the ugliest epithets.
43. Another group of people said: [These bad deeds] are attributed to Him, but since we perform them, we should be discontent with them.
44. We are pleased with these deeds because He created them. We are discontent because we acquire or perform these sins.¹⁷⁵

C. A FEW MORE VERSES BY IBN TAYMĪYAH:¹⁷⁶

1. There is no escape for the human being from what God predetermined, but he can choose between a good act and a vile one.
2. He is not compelled to act, and he is not devoid of a will. But he wills because a will was created [for him].

¹⁷³Verses 34–37 here almost correspond to verses 85–88 in MF and verses 65–68 in SH. However, the second hemistich of verse 36 corresponds to the second hemistich of verse 88 in MF and verse 68 in SH, while the second hemistich of verse 37 corresponds to the second hemistich of verse 87 in MF and verse 67 in SH.

¹⁷⁴“There is no Quranic text”: the text in al-Subkī actually says *fa-lā hunna matī*, which does not make sense. I therefore adopted Serajul Haque's version, which has: *fa-lā naṣṣun yatī*.

¹⁷⁵Verses 38–44 here correspond to verses 99–104, 106 in MF and verses 79–84 and 86 in SH. In the case of verse 44 above, I preferred the version in MF; otherwise, the verse is incoherent.

¹⁷⁶The above are verses 116–22 in MF and verses 96–102 in SH. Al-Subkī omitted these verses, but because they present the kernel of Ibn Taymīyah's approach, I decided to include them.



3. One of the most wonderful things is the creation of the will, by virtue of which the human being can choose the correct path from the erroneous path.
4. When you [O dhimmi] say: Do I have the choice to abstain from God's decree? it is as if you say: Do I have the choice to abstain from God's creative will?
5. [You could have said]: I choose not to choose to perform an erroneous act. If only you had taken this approach to abandon heresy, you could have earned redemption.
6. This approach is possible, although it is dependent on what God wills from the individual who has a will.
7. Be careful and make an effort to understand the significance of the many notions I conveyed to you. If you use your innate nature, you will surely grasp these notions.

D. THE RESPONSE OF SHĀFI' IBN 'ALĪ:¹⁷⁷

1. You asked, however you did not express your words clearly. A small group of scholars conducted numerous inquiries about Him, who holds the truth.
2. You, O dhimmī, are not—as you are presumptuous to assume—a creator whose actions are not predetermined.
3. Indeed, everything necessarily exists by virtue of His predetermination, and for this there is the clearest evidence.
4. Is it possible that the things He does not want exist in His kingdom? Indeed, whoever holds this opinion goes astray.
5. So, you should be pleased with whatever He predetermined, and nothing else, so do not struggle with what He wanted by virtue of His creative will.
6. For He, the Most Sublime, has the ability to erase and confirm. So do not resist His judgment, and accept this as true.
7. If you follow my response, you will be a Muslim and resign yourself to the will of God. So, by following the truth, you will be a part of the best of all nations.

E. THE RESPONSE OF SHAMS AL-DĪN IBN AL-LABBĀN:¹⁷⁸

1. Hear me out! After praising God, the creator of all created, for giving us guidance through the Quran and Sunnah

¹⁷⁷ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:257.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 10:357–59.



2. And through the most virtuous messenger, who was sent to the best of all nations, carrying with him the purest greeting from the All-Merciful:
3. Indeed, things exist by virtue of God's creative will. Things which do not correspond with His will do not exist.
4. However, He was never pleased with heresy. He never liked that for the human being. Heresy is not praiseworthy.
5. Whosoever is not guided by God uses the following artifice (*ḥīlah*): at every moment, he emphasizes what cannot be done.
6. He ignores the thorn in the flesh of his thought. He does not let his intellect distract him from his destination.
7. But at the same time, he endeavors with all his might to appeal to his Lord, with a sincere, determined, and passionate prayer.
8. At that time, let us hope that the grace and mercy that he hopes for will be granted to him.
9. Still, God's predetermination applies at times to heresy, and at other times to belief. But this predetermination is concealed, because of God's wise purpose.
10. Many a time, what is predetermined for us occurs by virtue of a cause, which we are accustomed to perceive as conditional.
11. Thus we see, for instance, that the causal connection between poison and death, cure and good health, is like the causal connection between actions of obedience and happiness, and actions of disobedience and misery.
12. God the All-Knowing created in the human being a choice between actions which entail God's satisfaction and His alienation.
13. Through this [choice], God enabled the human being to perform what He predetermined for the human being, thus God's will always prevails.
14. So, stop using this language of protesting. Remove your locks of hair and pretty clothes. It is good to be patient in times of distress (*al-ṣabr 'inda al-muṣībah*).
15. As for displaying our satisfaction with God's predetermination, it is obligatory, because it means subservience to the ruling of the divine creative will.
16. The fact that you are pleased with your misery is misery itself, because you do not recognize the miracle of predetermination.
17. This miracle will be revealed when you empty your heart of caprices, and be pleased with the right belief and conviction.
18. Then you will be pleased with what God is pleased with and with what He predetermined. That way you will eliminate one perplexity after the other.
19. You said: If my Lord wishes me to be an apostate, then I should wish it too. These words are true, provided that you wish to repent.



20. The effect of the cause is separated from the outcome. In the same vein, you should confirm that what He actually wants is for you to repent.
21. When you disobey the divine ordinance, you are considered a rebel, even though you act in accordance to God's will.
22. There is no doubt that the human being has a choice. One person believes that he can affect his action alongside the divine eternal power.
23. Another person says: human actions are varied and specific, like performing pilgrimage or adultery.
24. Therefore, the human agent can affect his action to be either adultery or pilgrimage. However, this action is actually predetermined.
25. According to the people of truth, the Ash'aris, the human agent cannot affect the action with his created ability.
26. God has the power to create in the human being the action and the ability which accompanies it, in a mechanism of causality (*sababīyah*).
27. This is a choice in us, which has no effect on the action. The greatest proof is for God.
28. In a nutshell, we are submitted to the sovereignty of the Creator of the creation.

F. THE RESPONSE OF IBN AL-RIF'AH, NAJM AL-DĪN AL-ṬŪSĪ:¹⁷⁹

1. Lend me your ears, O dhimmi! If only you were able to hear the response to your question, a response backed up with proofs, a response which you sought!
2. Use your intelligence and try to decipher the secret of all that the Lord of Existence created.
3. He predetermined and compelled the creation of all the existents through His knowledge and power, entirely of His volition.
4. He dealt with His creation as He pleased. Nobody knows what He wishes. His goal is well-concealed.
5. Indeed, He created the entire existence, which had no shape in the beginning.
6. But, hey, you! Your question should have never been written down; because it implies that He causes every despicable thing to appear;
7. And that He, as a proprietor, causes the slave to act by creating his act, whether an act of kindness, or an act of evil;
8. And that He grants the human being the ability to understand all the facts, so he is able to distinguish between the various things he is given;

¹⁷⁹Ibid., 10:359–65.



9. And that He has partners in His property and in the object of His will, and thus the evil deeds of some of His creatures should be ascribed to Him;
10. And that He creates in all mortals the incapability to act, and that He compels them to act.
11. According to what is known to all His creatures, this is sheer misery which demonstrates your slip of the tongue.
12. All the things that we quoted are from a poem rhyming with *tī*, which is the response of a despicable slave to the acts of his Lord. These things make our Lord angry.
13. An action whose benefit we cannot see, like the death of a dear friend bitten by a snake, is not necessarily reprehensible.
14. There is no injustice when He deprives His creatures of their ability and compels them to act (*ilzām*).
15. Because He creates things by virtue of His knowledge, and He knows the invisible. He endows these things that He creates with life and existence through His generosity and mercy.
16. And so, He does with His creatures as He pleases, even though the external signs of His wisdom are concealed from us.
17. If God did not state that the acquisition of human acts (*kasb*) existed, then actions would not have been specifically attributed
18. To a specific creature, not metaphorically and not otherwise, because it was as if He categorically stated that there was no creative will.
19. People who claim to use their minds should not contemplate their regular false analogies;
20. For example, when they say that tying up a child and then commanding him to walk is an ugly act. This claim is adjacent to their stupidity.
21. This analogy to His actions is false, because everything exists by virtue of the divine will.
22. If this is their claim, then the reply to them should be: For what purpose did He create humankind, if after a while He makes them die in disgrace?
23. When He acts, He is above any benefit or damage. These are the words of a person who should be flogged with a whip.
24. He is the Creator, the All-Merciful, utterly and totally. When He created [the world] with His sound judgment, He made clear
25. What He wished: He wished for light and life, and He wished to lead His creatures through the darkest nights.
26. And so He arranged the parts of existence (*ajzā' al-wujūd*) and brought them to realization by His actions. All this came about when the spirits were at the beginning of creation.



27. When this was created, He brought to light a third substratum (*maḥall thālith*), in which even the strange and mysterious secrets became evident.
28. And after all was created, He created [a creature] whose attributes are manifested. By virtue of His power He made [this creature] perfect in his understanding and knowledge.
29. He informed [this creature] what He wanted him to be, and He also informed him that He wanted him to obey His continuous command.
30. This is Man, the crown jewel of His creation. He is more magnificent than any other being, because he is able to go higher and nearer [to God] than any other being.
31. He gave him a mind, with which he understood what goodness and piety were. When using the mind, this creature is able to prove the existence of his Creator, while using the clearest proofs.
32. He gave him knowledge and the ability to hear. He also granted him light, so he was able to distinguish between the various forms.
33. He made him choose from whatever he wished for himself the things which he needed in order to improve his posture and shape.
34. He made him acquire good deeds as he pleased, deeds the outcome of which is generous and scented.
35. He installed in him an irascible faculty (*quwwah ḡadabīyah*). By using it he could push back anything harmful, like mortal sins and other calamities.
36. He also installed in him the lustful faculty. By using it he could obtain anything his instincts desired.
37. So, it is entirely up to this creature to acknowledge the deeds which his [Creator] wishes and loves, and to push back the deeds which his [Creator] hates and despises.
38. Therefore, the All-Merciful entrusted him with the divine law, after He expelled any possible flaw that was originally in him.
39. When this creature followed the desires of his heart, and dived into the ocean of ignorance without a doubt in his mind,
40. In came the messengers, carrying a message from his Creator to each soul. The message was about the illuminating roads, which the Creator made visible.
41. [The Creator] obligated mankind to follow the Messenger, and to acknowledge every religious duty and every Prophetic habit.
42. [The Creator] made clear that everything that came into existence came from Him. He also declared that every creature definitely must obey Him.
43. [The Creator] predetermined that a certain man would be an ignorant heretic, remote from his [Lord], and that even if he followed the divine law, it would not benefit him.



44. [The Creator] predetermined that another man would be created with a pure mental constitution. This man rigorously opposed what was perceived by the senses.
45. However, nobody knows what was predetermined for him, so he cannot graciously follow his destiny as he wishes.
46. But when a vile soul inclines to the road which is not the road of Islam and its followers,
47. She tends to ascribe the will that drove her to act to the Creator, without having a substantial knowledge about that.
48. That this soul remains in the state of heresy is not by virtue of a divine command. [This soul] was expelled from the doorstep of heresy, and all the same [it became a heretic].
49. It is possible that a man lives as a heretic all his life, and suddenly the happiness of the Islamic belief that was preordained for him will catch him.
50. And so he converts to Islam, and by doing so, he will erase his biggest sins. By virtue of God's grace, he will become one of the inhabitants of heaven.
51. Another man, who is a devout Muslim, praying night and day, constantly invoking God's name, and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca every year,
52. And suddenly what was preordained for him, by virtue of God's knowledge, will catch him, and so he will be led to be one of the inhabitants of hell.
53. This is the judgment that is always carried out. It is well-concealed even from the shrewdest heart.
54. And so, I clarified the highlights of the way this judgment is carried out from the beginning of this world until the very last generation.
55. So, you dhimmi! Do you acknowledge that according to the people of the divine law you are definitely a heretic?
56. That is because you stated, God forbid, that God predetermined your heresy, whereas God never wished that the people of any religious faith would be heretics!
57. Look, since He predetermined at the beginning of creation that people would be heretics, He will not change the verdict of His will.
58. That is what the Prophet of God, who never became silent, said: that things materialize by virtue of His creative will.
59. Therefore, we cannot be positively certain that you are a heretic, because there never is a final resolution at any epoch, if you turn to Islam.
60. However, the predetermined verdict only clarifies where a person is headed to, whether heaven or hell.
61. If you were predetermined to be one of the inhabitants of heaven, the fact that you were a Jew before the Prophet was sent did not do you any harm.



62. And if you were predetermined to be one of the inhabitants of hell, then your atonement would not benefit you at all.
63. The predetermined verdict is never known. Performing deeds which do not please God does not necessarily lead to hell.
64. He gave you a mind and an established understanding. He also showed you a way of natural behavior, a way which includes every natural disposition that you have.
65. So, pronounce the Muslim profession of faith, and walk under the flag of the divine law as a believer, using your power to do good deeds.
66. Furthermore, you choose for yourself anything that you wish to try, whether disturbing doubts or lustful desires.
67. If you do not believe in abrogation (*naskh*), then you consider the divine message and law that Moses brought a lie,
68. Because the message and law that Moses brought abrogated customs that some people used to have, such as the marriage of a sister to several of her brothers.
69. So, if you affirm the truthfulness of *naskh*, then you should follow the divine law, which contains every agreeable and nice rule.
70. But if you defame *naskh*, then there is no textual proof for the notion that you prefer (*tarjīh*).
71. When poverty strikes you, do you not make your best own effort in order to protect [yourself] from hunger?¹⁸⁰
72. And when you are suddenly hit by a crime, like an attempt to kill you or rob you, or by any other evil deed or temptation,
73. Do you actually attribute all these, at any moment, to the All-Merciful Creator?
74. If you choose to strengthen your soul, preach to her the message of the Muslim profession of faith.
75. The particular is entailed from the general, without any exception. You can clearly see that from the various signs of the divine wisdom.
76. If, in your time of trouble, you make a speedy effort to shove away any sin that comes your way,
77. And at the same time you lie, and you are truly not pleased with God's actions,
78. Then know this: He called you, and He did not block the entrance for you. So seek refuge in Him, and ask Him to lead you to the good path.
79. If you were born just to burn in His hellfire, then following the divine law was of no avail.

¹⁸⁰This translation is approximate given the fact that one of the words (*ḥūbīyā*), as the editor of al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt* comments, is unreadable and has no meaning.



80. Whether or not you are pleased is of no importance, because you are seized by the most evil grasp.
81. The Lord of all beings obligated you to be pleased with what He predetermined and created by virtue of His knowledge and power.
82. At the same time, He is not pleased that you are pleased with a certain thing that He predetermined. Therefore, He forbade you to refrain from vile deeds at any time.
83. Therefore, to be pleased with what He forbade you to be pleased with, does not please Him at all. He is pleased only when you follow His legislative will.
84. [He is pleased when you follow] what emerged after the world was created. [He is pleased when] you see the deeply hidden things in your natural disposition.
85. But since He wanted you to be a heretic, you became stubborn and did not accept and fear the divine law.
86. That you are pleased with what was predetermined for you does not please Him. Following the judgment of His creative will is not the correct way.
87. In time immemorial He shaped you in a form through which His judgment was carried out and His proof installed.
88. So actually there is no option to resist His firm judgment or to deviate from it.
89. But He granted you with the power and the ability to acquire your action. He generously granted you a great gift, which is the ability to achieve complete understanding.
90. So, O dhimmi, your argument is sophistical and cannot be considered as sound.
91. Do not meddle in God's words and actions. He chooses every action, as He pleases.
92. There is no good outcome to what you desire, because it is a distressful deed, which only miserable and sinful souls possess.
93. My answer to you, O dhimmi, includes ninety-six verses, the gems of my artistic skills.
94. You wished to refute the truth, woe unto you, by your invalid and absurd verses.
95. My Lord! Have compassion and mercy for your slave Aḥmad, who was born in Ṭūs.
96. Aḥmad plunged into the oceans of knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is the ultimate goal. He plunged into the light of divine providence,



97. Equipped with the highest spiritual states (*aḥwāl rifʿah*) he acquired with the help of His shaykh: the spiritual states of passion (*wajd*), exaltation (*ijlāl*), and repentance (*inābah*).
98. Aḥmad is very knowledgeable and devout, because he recognizes the splendor of the divine grace.
99. Whoever bows sincerely to the divine presence, which is the ultimate haven of every soul,
100. Has a vast knowledge of secrets. When you travel there by night, you sense the gentle breeze of happy spirits.
101. You, who contemplates this response and tries to understand it, you should reflect on this knowledge and not dismiss it.
102. Place the meaning of each and every word in its right place. Note that we have included here numerous virtues.
103. Do not blame others before you accomplish in good faith what He created you for.
104. [Do not] act meanly towards Him, who created human mind and particularized it with the ability to understand, every hour of the day.
105. We send our prayer to the Prophet Muḥammad. This prayer will grant us closeness [to God] in the Day of Recompense.

G. THE RESPONSE OF ‘ALĀ’ AL-DĪN AL-QŪNAWĪ:¹⁸¹

1. I praised my Lord before every word I uttered. I prayed in order to glorify the Prophet, the best of humankind.
2. I tried to come up with sound advice for the person who sought a clarification in order to solve a sophistic argument.
3. The first thing that a person who seeks the truth and wishes to follow the truth should do
4. Is to grab every difficult puzzle and sophistic arguments by their halter and make them move away. These arguments interfere with our efforts to versify our proof.
5. Next, you should listen carefully and refrain from being stubborn, because there is no use in a stubborn-head who wishes to seek the truth.
6. If you truly wish to reveal the grief that was inflicted on you, then listen to me, and I hope that you will be guided to the correct path.
7. You are right: God the All-Knowing indeed predetermined by virtue of His creative will everything that was and everything that will be.
8. If you think about that seriously, you will realize that after He sent His prophet, He never blocked the entrance.

¹⁸¹ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:365–66.



9. It is a well-known fact that His predetermination is dependent on conditions.
10. And that is what a healthy mind sees as possible and never rejects. The same happens when you see how things are created after other things happen.
11. For example, you can quench your thirst each time you drink. And you can satisfy your appetite only after you eat.
12. No wonder that it is dependent on conditions. God, who created all beings, predetermined
13. That you will be a heretic, as long as you are in a state of committing injustice, and as long as you refuse to take [into consideration] the causes leading to divine guidance, and the capacity [to rightly act].
14. Among the causes that you rejected are divine ordinance, the ability to act, and the uttering of the Muslim profession of faith.
15. You are like a person who fasts for a very long time, thinking to himself: "I should die from starvation, since He predetermined that I would starve."
16. If you submissively turned to your Lord and surrendered to the true religion,
17. If you paid your dues to the good contemplation in full, and fixed your eyes attentively and willingly with every glance you have,
18. Then the good guidance that God wished for you would come true, and His predetermination would not be violated at all.
19. Hear me out! The effusions of God in eternity are plentiful. Address yourself to God so you win an effusion.
20. Or else trust the Lord and act, because every good deed is made easy for the man who is meant to perform it. There is no doubt about that.
21. Had I known that your mind is capable of understanding things which are vague and subtle,
22. I would have elaborated on this and gone on and on about it. I would have investigated the matter according to the methods of theology and philosophy.
23. But since my goal here is to persuade the likes of you, what I present is but a summary of long chapters.
24. The ship would have sunk in the depths of the sea had it not been forbidden to discuss these matters on which you had inquired.
25. Therefore I fold the carpet that I spread before, and I beg the Almighty God to forgive my slip of the tongue.



APPENDIX III: TWO ADDITIONAL RESPONSES

The following two responses are not included in al-Subkī's account. The first response was composed by Abū Sa'īd Faraj ibn Qāsim ibn Aḥmad ibn Lubb al-Taghlibī (d. 782/1380–81). Ibn Lubb was the mufti of Granada and taught in al-Madrasah al-Naṣrīyah. His response is quoted by the Andalusian Maliki scholar Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā al-Shāṭibī al-Andalusī (d. 790/1388), in his *adab* compilation *Al-Ifādāt wa-al-Inshādāt*. According to al-Shāṭibī's account, Ibn Lubb was asked about the dhimmi's question, probably in a letter. Ibn Lubb signed his response with the following note: "These written verses are a response to the above six verses." The dhimmi's question in this version is, then, a six-verse question (verses 5–6 of the original do not appear in this version). Al-Shāṭibī, who provides a brief interpretation of Ibn al-Lubb's response, heard the author recite his response in Rajab 759/July 1358.¹⁸²

The Response of Ibn Lubb:

1. The Lord predetermined the heresy of the heretics; however He did not determine that this heresy is an obligation, which pleases Him. This principle applies to all religions.
2. He forbade His creatures to perform the [bad] deeds that He all the same wished to occur. His sovereignty is the conclusive proof.
3. We are pleased with God's decree, while our hatred is reserved for sins.
4. You should not be pleased with a human act which was specifically forbidden by the divine law. However, you should commit your cause to the way He organized things and to the rule of His creative will.
5. He invited everyone to observe the practices of religion. He made some of them successful in performing their religious duties. In sum, the success was granted to a few, but the invitation to perform these duties was to all.
6. Therefore, when you take other routes than the route of His divine law, you are disobedient, even though you walk in the path of the divine creative will.
7. The choice of performing an act is yours, while God is the creator. His will is materialized in His creation.
8. What God does not want to exist, does not exist. God, who created creation, is exalted and sublime.
9. This is the answer to the questions of an ignoramus, a blind man who shouts:

¹⁸² Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Ifādāt wa-al-Inshādāt*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Ajfan (Beirut, 1403/1983), 172–75.



10. Listen, you scholars of Islam! I, the non-Muslim under the protection of your religion, am baffled, so please lead me towards the clearest theological proof.

The second response, that of Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn As'ad al-Tustarī (d. ca. 737/1336), appears in a Hanafi *kalām* manual written by Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Humām (d. 861/1457). The Persian al-Badr al-Tustarī visited Cairo in 727/1326–27, but there is no indication that he learned about the dhimmi's question during his stay there. Al-Tustarī's poem comprised two verses only:

1. God predetermines heresy, which means that He knows the most secret truths by virtue of His eternal knowledge.
2. Then He created things according to what He knows, by virtue of His eternal power.¹⁸³

According to Ibn al-Humām, al-Tustarī “wrote a preface in prose in which he summarized the essence of his two-verse response. He wrote: the meaning of God's predetermining the heresy of the heretic is that God has knowledge of things.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn 'Alī Ibn Abī Sharīf, *Al-Musāmarah: Sharḥ al-Musāyarah fī al-'Aqā'id al-Munjiyah fī al-Ākhirah li-Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wāḥid al-Hanafī al-Ma'rūf bi-Ibn al-Humām wa-ma'ahu Hashiyah 'alā al-Musāyarah li-Zayn al-Dīn al-Qāsim ibn Quṭlūbughā al-Miṣrī al-Hanafī*, ed. Muḥammad 'Umar al-Dumyātī (Beirut, 1423/2002), 136.

¹⁸⁴Ibn Abī Sharīf (d. 905/1499–1500), the Shafi'i scholar who glossed Ibn al-Humām's text, sees these verses as an explanation to the term *al-qadā'* wa-*al-qadar*: God's *qadā'* indicates God's eternal knowledge, while God's *qadar* indicates God's creating by virtue of His power. Ibn Abī Sharīf, *Al-Musāmarah*, 136.

