

LIVNAT HOLTZMAN
BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

Insult, Fury, and Frustration: The Martyrological Narrative of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah's *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*

Introduction

A student of Islamic theology is bound to find ample evidence of the heated theological disputes that occurred as early as the seventh century in various literary genres. Theological manuals and treatises, Quran and Hadith exegeses, heresiographical compendia, chronicles, and biographies: all of these provide material on theological controversies. Poetry, on the other hand, has rarely been considered a possible source of information on theological disputes, though those disputes also generated poems. For example, in the famous closing line of his reproachful poem against the Mu'tazilī theologian al-Nazzām (d. ca. 230/845), the illustrious poet Abū Nuwās (d. between 198/813 and 200/815) rejects the Mu'tazilī doctrine of *al-manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn* (a definition of the status of the Muslim grave sinner).¹

Theological controversies are often façades behind which political struggles over hegemony occur. We learn this from the very first *fitan* in Islamic history, which led to the appearance of sectarian groups such as the Khawārij. Further examples occur throughout the history of the development of Islamic thought. Scholars passionately arguing over theological issues such as the nature of the Quran, the definitions of the divine attributes, or the existence of free will were actually the representatives of political trends and positions. There is no doubt that great thinkers developed their thought from simple intellectual curiosity and genuine desire to seek the truth. However, when a theological concept is summarized in a basic formula or slogan and spreads to the wider population of scholars and even laymen, the concept becomes a cliché on the one hand, and a political idea on the other. The process of simplifying a theological concept can lead to harassment and even physical violence directed at scholars. In al-Ma'mūn's (d. 218/833) infamous inquisition (*miḥnah*), the Abbasid government used a theological debate over the concept of the "createdness" of the Quran as a tool to impose its authority on the traditionalists. The repercussions of the *miḥnah*, namely the aggressive and often violent implementation of the formula *al-Qur'ān ghayr makhlūq* by Hanbali traditionalists, or the attack of the Hanbali mob on the Quran

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¹ Yaseen Noorani, "Heterotopia and the Wine Poem on the Early Islamic Culture," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36, no. 3 (2004): 358–59, and 365, n. 59.



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exegete and historian Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), are further examples. The pretext for the attack on al-Ṭabarī was his supposedly figurative interpretation of one of the so-called anthropomorphic verses in the Quran. Internal politics was more likely the reason for that severe attack.²

Another example of the relationship between theology and politics is the series of Damascene and Cairene trials to which the renowned scholar Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1328) was subjected, between 705/1306 and 707/1307. In Hanbali sources, these trials are referred to as ordeals, *miḥan*. The basis of these trials was theological, because they involved Ibn Taymīyah's hermeneutical approach toward the divine attributes and the anthropomorphic expressions in the Quran and the Hadith. The sources, however, reveal that personal and political rivalries were behind Ibn Taymīyah's trials. The struggle for power is clearly reflected in the reports on the trials. Theology was discussed in the trials, of course, but the subtext was the alternative to the religious establishment which Ibn Taymīyah offered to the masses of his time.³

Ibn Taymīyah's trials were formative events for his disciples and followers (the Taymīyan circle). The theological issues of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) and the divine attributes (*ṣifāt Allāh*) were indeed issues of contention, if not the major ones, between the Taymīyan circle and the religious establishment whose members followed the guidelines of Ashʿarī *kalām*. Ibn Taymīyah rejected the allegorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of the anthropomorphic verses, which the Ashʿarīs practiced with enthusiasm and self-conviction. Refuting this method and tagging it as foreign to the proper Islamic way of thinking, Ibn Taymīyah promoted a subtle and nuanced reading of the anthropomorphic expressions, a reading which his rivals perceived as merely literal.⁴ *Tashbīh*, or rather the accusation of *tashbīh* lev-

² A good and precise reading on the relationship between theology and politics is Ahmed El Shamsy, "The Social Construction of Orthodoxy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge, 2008), 97–117. On the attack of the Hanbalis on al-Ṭabarī, because of his so-called figurative explanation of Q. 17:79 "...your Lord may exalt you to an honorable station," see: Claude Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue et théologie en Islam* (Paris, 1990), 249–54. In translating the Quranic verses in this article, I consulted *The Koran with Parallel Arabic Text*, trans. N. J. Dawood (London, 1956; repr., 2000), unless otherwise indicated.

³ The prominent secondary sources on Ibn Taymīyah's trials are: Hasan Qasim Murad, "Ibn Taymiya on Trial: A Narrative Account of His Miḥan," *Islamic Studies* 18 (1979):1–32; Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taqī-d-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taimīya, canoniste hanbalite né à Harrān en 661/1262, mort à Damas en 728/1328* (Cairo, 1939), 125–39; Sherman A. Jackson, "Ibn Taymiyyah on Trial in Damascus," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 39, no. 1 (1994): 41–85; Donald P. Little, "The Historical and Historiographical Significance of the Detention of Ibn Taymiyya," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 3 (Jul. 1973): 311–27. Also very helpful is the timeline set by Yahya Michot in *Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule: Ibn Taymiyya* (Oxford, 2006), 156–60.

⁴ On Ibn Taymīyah's nuanced reading of the anthropomorphic expressions, see: Jackson, "Ibn Taymiyyah on Trial in Damascus"; Yasir Qadhi, "The 'Unleashed Thunderbolts' of Ibn Qayyim



eled by the Ashʿarīs against Ibn Taymīyah, ignited the anger of Ibn Taymīyah's followers and fueled their writings. One such work, written as a response to the trials and the theological controversy that accompanied them, is Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah's (d. 750/1350) *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah fī al-Intiṣār lil-Firqah al-Nājiyah* (Th sufficient and healing [poem] on the vindication of the saved sect, henceforth *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*), also known as *Al-Qaṣīdah al-Nūnīyah*.⁵

Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah was considered for years a versified creed reflecting the Taymīyan theological doctrines. However, by contextualizing previously neglected parts of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, I proved in a recent article that this work is actually a political treatise, in direct response to the accusations raised against Ibn Taymīyah by the Ashʿarī ulama of his times. These accusations particularly addressed Ibn Taymīyah's readings of the anthropomorphic texts in the Quran and the Hadith.⁶ In the current article, however, I will focus on the means Ibn al-Qayyim used in order to convey his position regarding the dispute between

al-Ġawziyyah: An Introductory Essay," in *A Scholar in the Shadow: Essays in the Legal and Theological Thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah*, ed. Caterina Bori and Livnat Holtzman, *Oriente Moderno* 90, no. 1 (2010): 135–49; Abdessamad Belhaj, "Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah et sa contribution à la rhétorique arabe" in *A Scholar in the Shadow*, 151–60; Livnat Holtzman, "Does God Really Laugh? Appropriate and Inappropriate Descriptions of God in Islamic Traditionalist Theology," in *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin, 2010), 165–200.

⁵ The text of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* used for the purpose of the present study is the accessible: 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), henceforth: *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996. This edition is generally reliable and fully vocalized. In addition to this edition, I extensively used the three most important commentaries on *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*: Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn ʿĪsā, *Tawdīh al-Maqāṣid wa-Taṣḥīḥ al-Qawāʿid fī Sharḥ Qaṣīdat al-Imām Ibn al-Qayyim al-Mawsūmah bi-al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah fī al-Intiṣār lil-Firqah al-Nājiyah* (2nd ed., Beirut, 1392/[1972]), henceforth: *Tawdīh al-Maqāṣid*; Muḥammad Khalīl Harrās, *Sharḥ al-Qaṣīdah al-Nūnīyah al-Musammāh al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah fī al-Intiṣār lil-Firqah al-Nājiyah lil-Imām Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah* (Cairo, 1424/2003), henceforth: *Sharḥ al-Qaṣīdah al-Nūnīyah*; and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah fī al-Intiṣār lil-Firqah al-Nājiyah*, ed. Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿArifī et al. (Mecca, 1428/[2007]), henceforth: *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ. The latter work contains 5842 verses, while the popular edition of 1996 contains only 5821 verses. Ibn ʿĪsā's interpretation is the most inspiring of the three commentaries, but his suggestions are often dismissed by his successors. See, for instance, his wonderful suggested reading of verse 2, which was refuted by the editor of his book, and ignored by Harrās and Bakr Abū Zayd. *Tawdīh al-Maqāṣid*, 1:38. For information and an analysis of these and other commentaries, see: Bakr ʿAbd Allāh Abū Zayd, *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah: Ḥayātuhu Āthāruhu Mawāriduhu* (2nd ed., Riyadh, 1423/[2002]), 289; *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 1:51–106 (authored by Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿArifī).

⁶ Livnat Holtzman, "Accused of Anthropomorphism: Ibn Taymiyya's *Miḥan* as Reflected in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's *al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*," in *Egypt and Syria under Mamluk Rule: Political, Social and Cultural Aspects*, ed. Amalia Levanoni (forthcoming). The Hebrew version of the article: "Let This Anthropomorphist Be Put to Trial": Ibn Taymiyya's *Miḥan* as Reflected in Ibn Qayyim al-



Ibn Taymīyah and the Ashʿarīs. Why did Ibn al-Qayyim choose the sophisticated vehicle of poetic expression in order to discuss the complex issue of anthropomorphism and divine attributes, when he could have more easily discussed these topics in prose? The answer lies both in the role poetry played in Ibn al-Qayyim's times, and in the text of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* itself. Therefore, this study first considers Ibn al-Qayyim's choice of poetry as the appropriate means to convey his viewpoint on the dispute between Ibn Taymīyah and the Ashʿarīs, then presents the structure and content of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* and analyzes its various parts. Through this approach, I assess the need that this poem satisfied, both for Ibn al-Qayyim and for his audience; I identify the emotional components of the poem; and, finally, I define the message *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* conveyed to the Taymīyan circle of students, scholars, and laymen.

The Poetry of the Ulama

Although *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, a magnificent poem of six thousand verses, is unique in its volume and ambitious agenda, the work is also a typical literary product of the Mamluk period. This challenging poem aims at surveying the views of every prominent trend and scholar in Islamic thought, polemicizing political rivals, and unfolding the Taymīyan agenda on the divine attributes. *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* cannot be properly evaluated without understanding the circumstances in which it appeared. I am not referring here to the historical background of Ibn Taymīyah's disputes with the Ashʿarīs and the events leading to his trials; rather, I am referring to the intense literary activity in Damascus and Cairo. In my opinion, this activity provides a better and more satisfactory explanation for the appearance of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* than any historical event, notwithstanding the importance of the historical context. The observations of Thomas Bauer, Everett K. Rowson, Salma Jayyusi, and Robert Irwin are fundamental for the reconstruction of the literary activity, and especially poetry, in the period. Ibn al-Qayyim's poem, as we will see, fits with these scholars' findings.

Though rich and diverse, Mamluk literature has largely failed to attract the attention of Western scholars. In his groundbreaking "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches," Thomas Bauer discusses Western research's dismissive view of this literature, a view whose origins go back to the nineteenth century. In a nutshell, Western researchers recognized the earlier greatness and glory of Arabic literature in "classical times," while describing Arabic literature of the post-Seljuk period as decadent, stagnant, imitative, worthless, and irrelevant.

Jawziyya's *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*," *The New East: Journal of the Middle East and Islamic Studies (Ha-Mizrach Ha-Chadash)* 53 (May 2014).



Bauer emphasizes that the fault was not in the literary texts themselves, but in the prejudiced ideology of Western scholars.⁷

Of course, the lack of appreciation for the literary products of Mamluk times began *in* Mamluk times, when literary critics dismissed their contemporaries' poetic output as inferior and decadent.⁸ However, Bauer's criticism of Western scholars is supported by the articles of Rowson, Irwin, and Jayyusi, who express a certain feeling of disappointment in literary work of the Mamluk period. Rowson, for instance, comparing Arabic literature of the Mamluk period with Greek literature of the Alexandrian Age, observes, "Authors worked under the burden of a rich canon of classical texts, which they revered, and which they diligently collected, classified, commented, criticized, and epitomized. By comparison, their own literary efforts, while certainly copious, have been seen as derivative, lifeless, and smelling altogether too much of the lamp."⁹ Similarly, Jayyusi accepts the precept that "the post-classical" age of Arabic poetry was one of decline. She judges that poetry in this period began "to lose its former zest and spirit."¹⁰ Robert Irwin refers to the feeling of literary antiquarianism that dominated Mamluk literature, and in particular the poetry written in the "post-classical periods." When a belletrist or poet of the Mamluk period wrote about courting beautiful slave girls or the pleasure of drinking wine in the morning, he was merely reproducing themes from Abbasid literature and not reflecting his own experience.¹¹ This lack of originality, says Irwin, as well as the artful and taxing devices of Mamluk-period works, are the reasons that "[t]hese sorts of productions have not survived well compared to the work of older poets."¹² Whether the poetry of the Mamluk period is decadent and inferior is a question that will not be resolved here. I will

⁷ Thomas Bauer, "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstanding and New Approaches," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 105–7, 112–16. Bauer pursued a similar line of argumentation in "Communication and Emotion: The Case of Ibn Nubātah's *Kindertotenlieder*," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7, [no. 1] (2003): 53–54, 74–75. In the introduction to the sixth volume of *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, Roger Allen examines the label "the period of decadence" that was assigned to the some-500 years between 1258 and 1798 by Western scholars. Roger Allen, "The Post-Classical Period: Parameters and Preliminaries," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, ed. Roger Allen and D. S. Richards (Cambridge, 2006), 1–8.

⁸ Robert Irwin, "Mamluk Literature," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7, [no. 1] (2003): 27, 29.

⁹ Everett K. Rowson, "An Alexandrian Age in Fourteenth-Century Damascus: Twin Commentaries on Two Celebrated Arabic Epistles," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7, [no. 1] (2003): 97.

¹⁰ Salma Khadra Jayyusi, "Arabic Poetry in the Post-Classical Age," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, 27. Bauer's dismissal of the term "post-classical" is well-taken. Thomas Bauer, "In Search of 'Post-Classical Literature': A Review Article," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2007): 137–67.

¹¹ Irwin, "Mamluk Literature," 9, 13.

¹² *Ibid.*, 13.



merely point out that, in spite of the fact that Bauer, on the one hand, and Rowson, Irwin, and Jayyusi on the other, stand for two opposing positions, they all agree that it was an extremely fertile era in terms of literary activity.

The Mamluk period was characterized by three major features. First, the number of literary works produced was overwhelming. Second, most of these works compiled, interpreted, and classified previous material. Third, the participation of the ulama in the literary sphere was conspicuous compared to previous periods in Arabic literary history.¹³ These new “religious poets” composed poems on topics relevant to their everyday occupations and social connections. Bauer mentions, among others, the rhymed *fatāwā* of ulama-poets. We may add theological treatises in verse as one of the religiously inclined genres of poetry that appeared in the Mamluk period.¹⁴ The vast and overwhelming poetical activity of the ulama was harshly criticized by literary critics, such as Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), who considered the ulama’s linguistic skills deficient and yearned for the appearance of professional poets.¹⁵ At any rate, the poetic activity of the ulama was termed *naẓm* (versification) rather than *shiʿr* (poetry), and their poetic products were often called—or demoted to the rank of—*manẓūmah* (didactic versification).¹⁶ There were, however, exceptional works like *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, which the biographers define as a *qaṣīdah*.¹⁷

Ibn al-Qayyim’s literary activity in general, and the composition of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* in particular, fit exactly into this picture of Mamluk literature. As a poem on theology, *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is a perfect example of what Thomas Bauer calls “the ulamaization of *adab*,” because it describes new topics of interest to the ulama. Ibn al-Qayyim, as a poet, represents the process which Bauer names “the *adab*ization of the ulama.”¹⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim’s training as a poet is a mystery. Since the biographers remain silent about this, we must deduce what we can from his literary works. He was obviously well read in poetry. A systematic

¹³ Bauer, “Communication and Emotion,” 62–63.

¹⁴ Livnat Holtzman, “The Dhimmī’s Question on Predetermination and the Ulama’s Six Responses: The Dynamics of Composing Polemical Didactic Poems in Mamluk Cairo and Damascus,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 16 (2012): 1–54.

¹⁵ Ibid., 21–22; Irwin, “Mamluk Literature,” 13.

¹⁶ 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, 1995), 103–17.

¹⁷ Zayn al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Rajab, *Kitāb al-Dhayl ‘alā Ṭabaqāt al-Hanābilah*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiḳī (Cairo, 1372/1953), 2:448, 450; Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, ed. Aḥmad al-Arnāʾūṭ and Turkī Muṣṭafā (Beirut, 1420/2000), 2:196. For more references to the biographical dictionaries and chronicles, see: *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 1:9.

¹⁸ Bauer, “Mamluk Literature,” 108–9.



scrutiny of the entire bulk of Ibn al-Qayyim's oeuvre reveals the extensive range of poetry with which he was familiar. Citing poems is a conspicuous trait of Ibn al-Qayyim's writing, and his *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn* is particularly abundant in poetry, some of which was penned by Ibn al-Qayyim himself.¹⁹

Ibn al-Qayyim was a copious and diligent writer. Modern scholarship, both Western and Arab, seems preoccupied with discussions of his "originality" versus his "reliance" on Ibn Taymīyah's works. These discussions, as a recent article demonstrates, are futile because the biographical data, not to mention the dozens of remarks scattered in his works, acknowledge Ibn al-Qayyim's debt to his master, while his own work proves that Ibn al-Qayyim pursued areas of interest alien to Ibn Taymīyah.²⁰ As textual evidence from his literary oeuvre and several biographical works show, Ibn al-Qayyim's literary output was a mixture of originality and imitation. Again, *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is a perfect example of this: although Ibn al-Qayyim perceived the poem as a mere abridgement of Ibn Taymīyah's theological works,²¹ the variety of theological topics it covered was unprecedented.²² Ibn al-Qayyim may have been inspired by the doctrinal *Al-Qaṣidah al-Nūniyah* (a poem in the *kāmil* meter dealing with the divine attributes and anthropomorphism) of the marginal Andalusī scholar 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Qaḥṭānī (d. 383/993), but Ibn al-Qayyim's *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is grander and much more elaborate than al-Qaḥṭānī's poem.²³

Nevertheless, Ibn al-Qayyim's admirable literary activity was typical of scholars of his times. Most of his works are voluminous monographs heavily relying on the works of previous generations, classifying them, and commenting on

¹⁹ Aḥmad Māhir Maḥmūd al-Baqrī, *Ibn al-Qayyim min Āthārihi al-ʿIlmīyah* (Alexandria, 1976), 201–2.

²⁰ Caterina Bori and Livnat Holtzman, "A Scholar in the Shadow," in *A Scholar in the Shadow*, 27–31.

²¹ See my "Accused of Anthropomorphism" for Ibn al-Qayyim's own avowal on the originality of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*. *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 269, verses 3657–58.

²² Bakr Abū Zayd includes *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* in a group of didactic poems which he defines as "doctrinal poems corresponding with the thought of the Salaf," *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 1:145.

²³ Ibn al-Qayyim inserted two verses by al-Qaḥṭānī in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*. In *Al-Kāfiyah*, Ibn al-Qayyim says: "A [scholar] who, without any fear, uttered truthful things composed such a poem, [in which he said] / that what is written in the Quranic codex by the hands of old and young scholars / is the word of God, its verses and letters. However, the ink and the fine parchment [of the Quran] are created." *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 82, verses 769–71. These verses were identified by Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Sayyid Aḥmad as verses by al-Qaḥṭānī. *Kifāyat al-Insān min al-Qaṣā'id al-Ghurar al-Ḥisān*, ed. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Sayyid Aḥmad (Riyadh, 1409/1989), 65. See also *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 2:236–37, n. 769.



them.²⁴ One of the several factors that make his writings attractive is his ability to produce a monograph from material scattered in many sources, thus creating definitive reference books which remain unique to the present time. Monographs such as *Kitāb al-Rūḥ* (the most comprehensive philosophical monograph in Arabic on the human spirit), *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma* (a compendium of Islamic laws regarding non-Muslims), *Shifā' al-'Alīl* (a definitive work on predetermination and free will), *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn* (a large-scale treatise on love), and *Madārij al-Sālikīn* (a commentary on an important Sufi manual) have been recognized by scholars as exceptional in their scope.²⁵ In sum, the diversity of topics Ibn al-Qayyim covers, his ability to make his ideas accessible and coherent, his reliance on other sources—all these factors make Ibn al-Qayyim an excellent representative of scholarly activity in the Mamluk period.²⁶

This is the framework in which Ibn al-Qayyim's *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* should be read and evaluated. It is first and foremost an attempt to gather, enumerate, classify, and explain all the known opinions of Muslim scholars on the issue of the divine attributes and the anthropomorphic expressions in the Quran and the Hadith. This is the backbone of the work, from which other theological issues emerge. Ibn al-Qayyim's choice of poetry as the literary vehicle for theology can be explained by the place of poetry within the ranks of the scholarly religious elite of his times. The prestige of poetry—a genre highly regarded in scholarly circles in Ibn al-Qayyim's time and in earlier periods—and the admiration that a good poem earned for its composer were enough to encourage a capable scholar to make the effort. In addition, there are didactic benefits to poetry; a poem circulates better than a work in prose because one can more easily learn it by heart.²⁷ This assumption is corroborated by the fact that Ibn al-Qayyim's *Al-Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalah 'alā al-Jahmīyah wa-al-Mu'aṭṭilah*, a work (in prose) which preceded *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, addresses almost the same topics as *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*.²⁸ In other words, dedicating a large-scale monograph in prose to the divine attributes and the polemic with the Ash'aris did not prevent Ibn al-Qayyim from com-

²⁴ For a description of most of Ibn al-Qayyim's literary oeuvre, see Birgit Krawietz, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah: His Life and Works," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (2006): 19–64.

²⁵ Livnat Holtzman, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah," in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 1350–1850*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart (Wiesbaden, 2009), 202–23.

²⁶ See the enthusiastic description of Ibn al-Qayyim's style in Bakr ibn 'Abd Allāh Abū Zayd, *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah: Ḥayātuhu, Āthāruhu, Mawāriduhu* (Riyadh, 1412/1991–92; 2nd ed. 1423/2002–3), 115–16.

²⁷ See my "The Dhimmi's Question," 19, 31.

²⁸ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Al-Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalah 'alā al-Jahmīyah wa-al-Mu'aṭṭilah*, ed. 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Dakhīl Allāh (Riyadh, 1418/1998). The *Ṣawā'iq*, which is mentioned in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, thus predates *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*. *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 156 (verses 1916–17). See n. 103 in my "Accused of Anthropomorphism."



posing a poem on the same issue. This suggests that there was another, more profound reason to write *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* than the mere wish to gain the admiration of his fellow ulama, or the desire to provide students with mnemonic devices. This reason can be found in the content of the poem.

At its core, *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is an attack on the religious establishment of the time, fueled by the traumatic events of Ibn Taymiyah's trials and his death while imprisoned in the citadel of Damascus. However, *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* also draws from Ibn al-Qayyim's personal experience. Ibn al-Qayyim met Ibn Taymiyah in 713/1313 upon Ibn Taymiyah's return to Damascus after his long imprisonment in Cairo. As a faithful disciple, Ibn al-Qayyim was very much involved in his master's polemics and confrontations with the Damascene ulama. The circumstances that led to Ibn al-Qayyim's own imprisonment in the citadel of Damascus for two years (between 726/1326 and 728/1328) are a bit vague. Both historians of the Mamluk period and contemporary researchers connected Ibn al-Qayyim's imprisonment to that of Ibn Taymiyah.²⁹ A recent study, however, suggests—on the basis of a close reading of the historian al-Jazari's (d. 739/1338) account of the events—that both Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn al-Qayyim were imprisoned for Ibn al-Qayyim's provocative behavior in Jerusalem, where he preached against the visitation of holy graves, including that of the Prophet Muḥammad. In other words, Ibn Taymiyah's last imprisonment was perhaps caused by Ibn al-Qayyim, and not vice versa.³⁰

Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah was composed, at an unknown date, against the backdrop of these events that obviously combined theology and politics. We may assume that poetry is a much safer vehicle than prose for an author who wishes to address highly sensitive political issues. The restrictions and conventions of a *qaṣīdah* enable a scholar to juggle between things bluntly stated and things subtly suggested. Indeed, attacks on rivals and the use of foul language are acceptable in a *qaṣīdah* but not welcomed or tolerated in prose. Moreover, it is more dangerous to attack one's rivals in prose because prose is more comprehensible and accessible, whereas poems are typically more difficult to decipher. Thus, focusing on the poetic devices Ibn al-Qayyim uses in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, rather than on his theological doctrines and formulas, is probably the best way to appreciate his

²⁹ Holtzman, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah," 211.

³⁰ See the introduction to Bori and Holtzman, *A Scholar in the Shadow*, 21. Caterina Bori's innovative reading of al-Jazari provides the first solid explanation of Ibn al-Qayyim's imprisonment with Ibn Taymiyah. Previous studies that mention Ibn al-Qayyim's imprisonment tend to be vague and incoherent. See, for instance, Henri Laoust, "Ibn Qayyim al-Djawziyya," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 8:821–22; Bakr Abū Zayd, *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah*, 70–71; or Krawietz, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah," 23.



efforts to address an explosive political issue in the guise of a rhymed theological treatise.

The Narrative Line and Structure of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*

In his 1976 study on Ibn al-Qayyim, Aḥmad al-Baqrī states that Ibn al-Qayyim “was able to pronounce whatever he wished either in prose or poetry.”³¹ Al-Baqrī adds: “Ibn al-Qayyim uttered an idea in poetry whenever this idea was related to human emotions. This way, the connection between the content [of his poem] to the eternal [human] emotions was bound to draw the reader to read the poem again and again.”³² In other words, Ibn al-Qayyim wrote poetry in order to invoke in his readers or listeners sentiments that would make them more contemplative and attentive to the religious message. Al-Baqrī’s observation is based on verses scattered in Ibn al-Qayyim’s other works; however, what he says applies also to *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*. Although al-Baqrī sees *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* merely as a poem dealing with theology, a close reading detects literary devices that were meant to invoke a wide range of emotions in its audience. This so-called theological work actually provides its audience with plenty of opportunities to feel melancholic, empathic, furious, frustrated, and so on. In this respect, *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is like any other poem, which first and foremost attempts to provide for the emotional needs of its composer and audience.³³

Ibn al-Qayyim composed *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* with careful consideration of the conventions of elite poetry. The poem was written in the catalectic form of the *kāmil* trimeter, which is defined by the omission of the last syllable of the second hemistich (*mutafā‘ilun-mutafā‘ilun-mutafā‘ilun// mutafā‘ilun-mutafā‘ilun-fa‘ilātun*).³⁴ Also, the same rhyme is maintained throughout the nearly six thousand verses of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*: the rhyme is loose (*qāfiyah muṭlaqah*); it is accompanied by a *ridf*, that is, the letter of prolongation *alif* precedes the rhyming letter *nūn* (hence the title *Al-Qaṣīdah al-Nūnīyah*); and the rhyme is *mutawātir*, that is, it contains one moving letter which intervenes between two quiescents (for example,

³¹ Al-Baqrī, *Ibn al-Qayyim*, 199.

³² Ibid. For an appreciation of Ibn al-Qayyim as a poet, see: ‘Abd al-‘Azīm ‘Abd al-Salām Sharaf al-Dīn, *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah: ‘Aṣruhu wa-Manhajuhu wa-Ārā’uhu fī al-Fiqh wa-al-‘Aqā’id wa-al-Taṣawwuf* (2nd ed. Cairo, 1387/1967), 76–81.

³³ See Bauer’s observation: “the immediate function of poetry for the individual, that is, to provide for her/his emotional needs,” Bauer, “Mamluk Literature,” 111.

³⁴ For the various forms of the *kāmil* meter, see: Al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrizī, *Kitāb al-Kāfi fī al-Arūd wa-al-Qawāfī*, ed. Al-Ḥassānī Ḥasan ‘Abd Allāh (Beirut, n.d.), 58–72, and the ever useful W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Cambridge, 1859, 1862; repr. 1997), 2:362–63.



burhāni, which is read *burhānī*, or *wa'l-qur'āni*, which is read *wa'l-qur'ānī*, etc.).³⁵ These features, although providing sufficient credentials of Ibn al-Qayyim's linguistic skills, are just one (technical) aspect of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*. The other, more important, aspect relates to the structure of the poem.

A classical *qaṣīdah* (as opposed to mere versification, *naẓm*) usually consists of three sections: the first is an amatory prelude (*nasīb*), in which the narrator addresses his beloved, laments her departure, or recalls the flirtations of his youth. A transitory verse, which changes the subject and the atmosphere (*takhalluṣ*), leads to the second part of the *qaṣīdah*, the *raḥīl*. In this part, the narrator describes the dangers of his journey and boasts of his bravery. The third part of the *qaṣīdah* is the *qaṣd* or *gharaḍ*. This is the core of the poem, because this part details the subject which motivated the narrator to recite his poem in the first place. It can describe the narrator's arrival at a destination after a long journey. It can also be a panegyric (*madḥ*), a lampoon (*hijā'*), self-glorification (*fakhr*), or elegy (*rithā'*), or a mixture of several themes. At any rate, it is the peak of the poem.³⁶ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* contains all three parts of the conventional *qaṣīdah*, but its unusual length makes it difficult to identify the demarcations between them. Further, *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is also divided into 193 thematic parts (*faṣl*, pl. *fuṣūl*). This external, obvious partition of the poem—made for didactic purposes—also disguises the inner, hidden partition of the poem into the three conventional parts of a *qaṣīdah*. However, the content of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* actually testifies to its tripartite structure. It is noteworthy that the narrator in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, who represents Ibn Taymiyyah's views, addresses a sympathetic audience, which he refers to as *Ahl al-Sunnah*, *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, or *Ahl al-Ithbāt* (people of the Sunnah, Hadith, or those who affirm God's attributes). This traditionalistic audience represents the Taymiyyan circle in its broader sense; that is, Ibn Taymiyyah's supporters among scholars and laymen.³⁷

The following section describes the three-part structure of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*: (a) *nasīb*, (b) *raḥīl*, and (c) *qaṣd*.

³⁵ For the relevant definitions of the rhymes, see Wright, *A Grammar*, 2:350–55, and al-Tibrizī, *Al-Kāfi*, 146–56.

³⁶ The literature in Arabic and English on the structure and contents of the classical *qaṣīdah* is vast and rich. For good introductions, see: F. Krenkow [G. Lecomte], "Qaṣīda," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 4:713–16; Abdulla El Tayib, "Pre-Islamic Poetry," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge, 1983), 27–113; and Shawqī Ḍayf, *Al-Fann wa-Madhāhibuhu fī al-Shi'r al-'Arabī* (6th ed. Cairo, 1976), 13–40.

³⁷ On *Ahl al-Ithbāt* in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, see my "Accused of Anthropomorphism."



(a) The *Nasīb*: Easily identified, the shortest part of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* looks like a typical amatory prelude.³⁸ The *nasīb* in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is abundant in motifs from classical poetry, which are meant to arouse a feeling of nostalgia and sweet melancholy in the audience: the distance between the lovers, the yearning, the bird cooing and lamenting, the slanderers—both men and women—who try to separate the lovers, and the nocturnal visitation of a female phantasm to the jailhouse.³⁹ The various terms that Ibn al-Qayyim uses here, for instance love (*maḥabbah*, verses 1, 10), passion (*hawā*), passionate love (*gharām*, verse 11), the re-union of lovers (*waṣl*, verse 3), and the suffering lover (*wālih*, verse 13), originated from classical poetry. Ibn al-Qayyim, who meticulously collected and studied the vocabulary of love in his great work *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn*, demonstrates here his deep familiarity with love poetry.⁴⁰ However, Ibn al-Qayyim's *nasīb* is neither erotic nor profane.⁴¹ Depicting three consecutive scenes, the *nasīb* actually deals with human love for God (*maḥabbah*). When read as an allegory, the theological nature of the *nasīb* becomes apparent, while the typical *nasīb* motifs turn out to be mere adornments. The possibilities hidden in the *nasīb* section of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* were not detected before, and so the reading suggested here is my own interpretation of the text.

The *nasīb* presents three scenes. The first scene (verses 1–12) is that of a court-house: the narrator is put on trial because of his love for God, a love from which he cannot be averted. The slanderers (characters who often appear in the *nasīb* parts of classical poems) try to separate the narrator and his love, but they fail. In the trial, the slanderers claim that love (*maḥabbah*) and aversion from love (*ṣudūd*) are the same. This sophistic yet absurd argumentation which they bring forth is not valid, as the narrator proves (verse 12). The judge indeed rules that the slan-

³⁸ The *nasīb* part (verses 1–39, *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 31–33) was identified as such by Ibn ʿIsā (*Tawḍīḥ al-Maqāṣid*, 1:83), Harrās (*Sharḥ al-Qaṣidah al-Nūniyah*, 1:25), and Abū Zayd (*Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 1:13).

³⁹ El-Tayib, “Pre-Islamic Poetry,” 43–52. A good and pleasurable way to acquaint oneself with the motifs and vocabulary of the *nasīb* is by reading *Bāb al-Nasīb* in Abū Tammām's (d. 232/846) *Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah*. Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Marzūqī (d. 421/1030), *Sharḥ Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah li-Abī Tammām*, ed. Gharīd al-Shaykh (Beirut, 1424/2003), 3:851–999.

⁴⁰ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn wa-Nuzhat al-Mushtāqīn*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Minshāwī (Al-Mansura, n.d.). A comprehensive study of Ibn al-Qayyim's love theory is: Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany, 1979), 92–181. A recent study of Ibn al-Qayyim's terminology of love is: Avivit Cohen, “Between ‘the Garden of Lovers’ and ‘the Censure of Profane Love’—A Comparative Study of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's and Ibn al-Jawzi's Theory of Love,” (in Hebrew) (unpublished M.A thesis, Bar-Ilan University, October 2010).

⁴¹ This is the observation of the three commentators on *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, who are anxious to defend the didactic and theological nature of the poem. *Tawḍīḥ al-Maqāṣid*, 1:38; *Sharḥ al-Qaṣidah al-Nūniyah*, 1:25; *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 1:13; 2:49, n. 1.



derers' case is invalid, and that the break-up between the lovers (the narrator and God) is wrong.⁴²

- 1 The sentence of love has fixed and unshaken pillars. Aversion from love cannot abolish love.⁴³
- 2 How is it possible to abolish love, when the Judge of goodness⁴⁴ ruled for it, and the two rivals agreed on the veracity of his ruling?
- 3 The witnesses came, testifying that this reunion of lovers was indeed genuine, and that it materialized in the place where charity resides.
- 4 Thus the powerful sentence of love was confirmed. Even the slanderers could not break this bond of love.
- 5 This is why the rebukers' opinion was nullified, its pillars collapsed.
- 6 The slanderers suddenly realized that their opinion was absolutely nullified.
- 7 They realized that their opinion was not in its place, and that it did not fulfill the required conditions [of logical argumentation]. Therefore, their opinion became null.
- 8 As a result, the Judge of goodness sealed the court-record, stating that it was wrong to give a verdict of solace and separation from love.
- 9 The judge then explained to you the absurdity of this sentence and its reversal. So, lend me your ears, you who have ears! ⁴⁵
- 10 The slanderers gave their sentence without having a clear proof. They stated that love and aversion from love were the same.
- 11 But this sentence is unjust. How can you compare passionate love to aversion from love? They are opposites!
- 12 How different are these two states! You may claim as much as you want that they co-exist, but the fact is that two opposites never co-exist.

In the second scene (verses 13–19), the narrator speaks to himself, as his monologue reflects his inner doubts. He is persuaded by the slanderers' views, and is

⁴² *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 31 (verses 1–12).

⁴³ Ibn al-Qayyim uses here the rhetorical figure of *taṣrīʿ*, that is, both hemistiches rhyme (*arkāni-yadāni*).

⁴⁴ "The Judge of goodness": *qāḍī al-ḥusn*. According to Bakr Abū Zayd, this is the human brain. *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 12:49, n. 2.

⁴⁵ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 31.



nearly tempted to break his bond of love to God, and exchange it with a position of turning away from this love. His soul feels that this move is wrong, but he ignores his soul (here depicted as a bird), condemning her to a miserable life, deprived of goodness and truth. In a sophisticated reversal of roles, the narrator rebukes himself for being tempted to leave God, whereas in the previous part the slanderers rebuked him for his genuine and true love for God.⁴⁶

- 13 Oh you miserable lover! A lover who attaches no importance
whatsoever to his soul, because he sells it out of sheer stupidity.
- 14 Are you selling the one thing that your soul desires, and replacing
it with aversion from love, chastisement, and separation?⁴⁷
- 15 Don't you know the attributes and the true value of what you sell?
Are you such a fool as to not know what is valuable?
- 16 Woe betide a heart, whose bird does not want to desert the branch-
es of a tree planted in the sand dune.
- 17 This bird keeps on cooing in the tree, but someone else—not she—
gets the fruits of the tree, which are actually close to her.
- 18 The bird keeps on crying, while the lover who wisely keeps his
connection [to God] laughs. The bird complains all the time, while
the lover is grateful.
- 19 But still, if pure beauty was fastened to the stars, this poor bird
would aspire to fly there.

The third scene (verses 20–39) takes place in the jailhouse. Here, the suffering narrator is visited at night by a female phantasm. Starting her nocturnal journey in Syria, the female visitor passes through prominent places along the pilgrimage route to Mecca, but she does not stop. She hurries to her destination, which is where the suffering prisoner—the narrator—resides. He is aware that the visitation is but a dream or a vision. The narrator listens attentively to his visitor's words, which bring him joy, and refute whatever he perceived as sheer truth in the past. The narrator, who twice reversed his doctrinal position, is obviously fascinated by the visitor's words; however, being suspicious and ill-fated, he threatens her by quoting a well-known verse: he says that if she lies to him, then she

⁴⁶ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 31–32 (verses 13–19).

⁴⁷ Chastisement and separation (*ta'dhib wa-hijrān*) are briefly mentioned in *Madārij al-Sālikīn* as a condemned Sufi approach. Ibn al-Qayyim quotes there two verses by Anonymous (a fool, according to Ibn al-Qayyim), who states: "Being chastised and being separated for me is better than being in the best relationship, because when we are in a relationship we are slaves to our fate, and when we are alone we are slaves of the Lord." Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, 2:40.



will be considered a liar. Verse 40, which is a continuance of the narrator's words, is a *takhalluṣ*, an elegant transition to the next part of the poem.⁴⁸

- 20 And what a beautiful visitor came at night! She feared neither the
spies of the amir nor the watchful eyes of the jailers.
- 21 She crossed the Land of Syria, heading towards Medina, the place
from which faith had arisen.
- 22 She went to Wādī al-ʿAqīq, and she crossed this meeting point not
as a pilgrim in a state of ritual consecration, but freely, without
anyone being able to stop her.
- 23 Then she went to Wādī al-Arāk, without intending or hoping to
see me.
- 24 And she went to ʿArafāt, and then Wādī Muḥassir, and Miná,
where she offered her sacrifice. And how many sacrifices did she
offer!
- 25 Then she went to Jamarāt—where the stone-throwing ceremony
takes place—then she headed to the Kaʿbah, the monument with
the covers and pillars.
- 26 There she made no circumambulation, kissed no black stone,
threw no pebbles in the stone-throwing ceremony, and ran be-
tween no hills, so she was in no special state of ritual consecration
of the two pilgrimages.
- 27 She went to the top of al-Ṣafā hill, and there she headed off to the
house of the agonizing prisoner, who is in love.
- 28 I wonder whether a guide lent her his clothes, and whether the
wind blew under her wings.
- 29 I swear, if this guide tried to replace her, he would not succeed.
- 30 If she went that night at the speed of the wind, she would not have
made it to Wādī Naʿmān. She would not have reached her destina-
tion by night.
- 31 But she went by herself; her guides were the stars Gemini and not
Taurus.⁴⁹
- 32 She went down to the watering place, to the plentiful wells of
tears. She need not go down with the sheep to their watering
place.

⁴⁸ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 32–33 (verses 20–40).

⁴⁹ For the identification of the stars *saʿd al-suʿūd* and *al-dabarān*, see: *al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 2:56, n. 31; Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (repr. Beirut, 1968), 3:847, 4:1361.



- 33 Instead of a she-camel, she mounted the back of her passion and
love. Instead of provisions, she took for her journey the memory
of her loved one, and the knowledge that their reunion was near.
- 34 She promised that she would visit me, and indeed she kept her
promise. Her visit took place when I closed my eyes.
- 35 Indeed she took the lover who longed for her by surprise, when
she drew the curtains and entered without asking for permission.
- 36 She unveiled her beautiful face, and said: "I couldn't resist seeing
you."
- 37 She told me something I thought was true. It was something of
which my eyes—a long time ago—deceived me.
- 38 I marveled at her words, I was overjoyed! I said eagerly, although
I was overtaken by this dream:
- 39 "If what you are telling me is a lie,⁵⁰ then you will be as guilty as
this deceitful liar,
- 40 This Jahm ibn Ṣafwān and his lot, who negated the attributes of
the Creator, the Benefactor."

The *nasīb* part of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is closely connected to the entire theme of the poem: it indeed addresses theology, not in a didactic but in a highly artistic fashion. The exterior layer of the *nasīb* elaborates on the doubts in the mind of a suffering prisoner, who sits in his cell after his trial. The prisoner contemplates his trial, in which the struggle between the authentic expression of God-man relations and the detachment between God and man, caused by the use of scholastic and rationalistic argumentations, was presented. Taking the external layer of the *nasīb* (a prisoner unjustly tried for his authentic love for God), it is possible to read the *nasīb* part as a poetical depiction of Ibn Taymīyah's *miḥan*. The elements in the *nasīb* seem to fit perfectly into the *miḥan* narrative: a man is put on trial by people who use sophistic arguments. He is found guilty and sent to a jailhouse that is situated away from Syria. Ibn Taymīyah's Damascene trials were indeed concluded by sending Ibn Taymīyah to Cairo, where he was sentenced and put

⁵⁰ "If what you are telling me is a lie" (*in kunti kādhibata 'ladhī ḥaddathtinī*) was identified by Bakr Abū Zayd as a verse by the poet Ḥassān ibn Thābit (death date unknown, sometime between 40/659 and 54/673). *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 2:58, n. 39. Oddly enough, this verse is taken from the *nasīb* part of Ḥassān ibn Thābit's poem, a poem whose main goal is to condemn al-Ḥārith ibn Thābit for fleeing from the battlefield in the battle of Badr. For a longer version of the poem, see: *Dīwān Ḥassān ibn Thābit*, ed. 'Abd A. Muḥannā (Beirut, 1414/1994), 213–15; the verse above is verse 11. For a shorter version, see Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmūrī (Beirut, 1410/1990), 2:356–57, and Ḥārith's reply thereafter. For a translation of the *Sīrah* version of the poem, see: Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (repr. Karachi, 2007), 345–46.



in detention in the citadel of Cairo.⁵¹ The only element which does not fit the narrative is the issue for which the narrator is put on trial. Ibn Taymiyah was accused of anthropomorphic readings of the Quran, and the love for God was never discussed in his trials. Still, one can connect the love of God, which the narrator expresses, to the traditionalistic point of view, while the sophistic attempt to rebut this love is the rationalistic point of view. In other words, the trial in the *nasīb* part presents the Taymiyan traditionalism put on trial by the rationalistic Ash'arīs.⁵²

Another possibility is to read the *nasīb* as reflecting Ibn al-Qayyim's own life experience. This reading corresponds with an autobiographical passage in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, in which Ibn al-Qayyim admits his past attraction to Ash'arī *kalām*, and expresses his gratitude to Ibn Taymiyah, who rescued him from it.⁵³ In the *nasīb* (verses 16–19), the narrator describes his soul as a miserable bird, who is unable to reach the sweet fruit in the top branches of the tree because she sticks to her place in the tree. The same metaphor appears in an autobiographical section in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*:

- 2271 Haven't you seen this bird, locked in the cage of destruction? Sitting between the branches of the tree, the female-mourners weep for her.
- 2272 Desperately seeking her salvation, this bird constantly crashes [against the walls of the cage]; the gap between the tree's branches is rapidly closing on her.
- 2273 This is the bird's fault, because she left the best fruits on the top branches of the tree,
- 2274 And went to seek for food in the dunghill, poking in the garbage and leftovers, eating insects and worms.
- 2275 By God, people! Listen to the advice of a compassionate brother who wishes to help you.

I have experienced this once, as I, too, was a bird, trapped in a snare.⁵⁴

Reading both passages—in the *nasīb* and the autobiographical passage—as complementing each another, transfers the reference to the love for God from a

⁵¹ Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule*, 158; Murad, "Ibn Taymiya on Trial", 13.

⁵² Ibn Taymiyah's rebuttal of the Ash'arī argumentations denying the possibility of man's love for God is analyzed by Joseph N. Bell. Bell, *Love Theory*, 74–91.

⁵³ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 180–81 (verses 2271–2284); Holtzman, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah," 209–10.

⁵⁴ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 180. The passage was previously published in Holtzman, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah," 209, and is quoted here with the permission of Harrassowitz Verlag, the publishers.



theological issue to a spiritual issue. In other words, Ibn al-Qayyim describes his inner doubts as a believer, whose love for God is genuine but who is lured to replace this love with the artificial intellectualism of Ashʿarī *kalām*. Hence, he feels miserable, until he is reminded of the true Islamic message by his night-visitor.

(b) The “*Raḥīl*”: The part which follows the *nasīb* in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is not thematically distinctive. The *takhalluṣ*, the transition towards the main motive of the *qaṣīdah*, is elegantly constructed by the poet, as part of the narrator’s words to the female visitor to his prison cell.

- 39 “If what you are telling me is a lie, then you will be as guilty as
this deceitful liar,
40 This Jahm ibn Ṣafwān and his lot, who negated the attributes of
the Creator, the Benefactor.”
41 They denied Him His heavens; they emptied the throne of the
[presence] of the Merciful.
42 They negated the word of the Glorious God. They determined that
this word was created.
43 They said: Our Lord does not possess the attributes of hearing and
seeing. He has neither face nor hands.⁵⁵

In this transitory section, Ibn al-Qayyim heads for the theological dispute. Although he does not start with the Ashʿarīs, but with the dubious historical figure of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (executed in 749),⁵⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim uses the views of Jahm and his alleged followers as a caricature of the Ashʿarī standpoint, which, in his view, denies God’s attributes. Several times in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, Ibn al-Qayyim uses the derogatory name Jahmīyah for Ashʿarīs and Muʿtazilis alike.⁵⁷

The so-called *raḥīl* section is first and foremost a programmatic speech of the narrator, addressed—at least in the beginning—to the female phantasm. As a didactic section of more than 4800 verses, the *raḥīl* deals with many theological issues, most of which revolve around the discussion of the divine attributes.

⁵⁵ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 33.

⁵⁶ William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973, repr. Oxford, 2002), 143–45.

⁵⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim describes the Jahmīyah as the proponents of the concept of the created Quran; hence they are the Muʿtazilah. *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 71–72 (verses 622–34). In a rather complex section of the poem, Ibn al-Qayyim refers to the Jahmīyah as the deniers of God’s aboveness and His sitting on the throne. However, in this section he seems to be more interested in the views of Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240). *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 99–102 (verses 1045–91). The Jahmīyah are compared to the Jews, who distorted the true meaning of the scriptures by using figurative interpretation. *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 156–57 (verses 1898–1920).



However, Ibn al-Qayyim's artistic efforts are also reflected in several sections of the *raḥīl*, especially in the frame story. He presents several armies (symbolizing different Islamic trends, including sects and heresies) arriving at a *majlis taḥkīm*, where an arbitration is about to take place. Each party presents its views—mostly on the matter of the divine attributes. However, the narrator comments on every speech, and his comments evolve into lengthy declarations and refutations (from verse 1045 onward), and so the frame-story is broken into many sections of a polemical nature. Perhaps defining the lion's share of the poem (verse 40 to verse 4914) as a *raḥīl* is a bit excessive; however, one cannot ignore the abundance of *raḥīl* motifs hidden in this part of the poem. One typical example is the description of a group of Mu'tazilīs and Ash'arīs arriving at the *majlis taḥkīm*. Their leader's description of the hardships of his journey could have been taken from any artistic *qaṣīdah*:

- 351 Another group came along. Their description [of the divine attributes] was similar to the [description of the previous group]; however, they added more things to the scales.
 352 [Their leader] said: Listen, O people. Stop amusing yourselves with false notions.
 353 I exhausted my she-camel, I have worn out my heart; I made my utmost efforts, and became fatigued.
 354 I looked up and down. I looked in front of me, and behind. I looked at my left and then at my right.
 355 Nobody directed me to Him, oh, no! Not a soul guided me to Him,
 356 Except for the Holders of Hadith. [They are people] whose teachings go back to the Quran.
 357 They said: The One you are looking for is above His worshippers, the sky and every other place.⁵⁸

The *raḥīl* also borrows other themes from the huge reservoir of Arabic poetry. For example, Ibn al-Qayyim presents a lecture of good advice (*waṣīyah*), addressed to a student who wishes to embark upon a debate with a tough rationalist rival. In this *waṣīyah*, ancient poems of advice echo.⁵⁹ The *waṣīyah* is closely connected to the message conveyed by the narrator in the *nasīb*: it warns its eager listeners not to embark on a debate—a battle, as he puts it—without the proper weapons. The debater should hold the Quran and the Sunnah in hand, and strike his rival,

⁵⁸ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 54.

⁵⁹ See, for example, the poem of 'Abdah ibn al-Ṭabīb (a *mukhaḍram* poet, who was still alive in 25/645) in the *Dīwān al-Mufaḍḍaliyāt*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamūd (Beirut, 1998), 136–39 (poem no. 27); al-Mufaḍḍal son of Muḥammad, *The Mufaḍḍaliyāt: An Anthology of Ancient Arabian Odes*, ed. and trans. Charles James Lyall (Oxford, 1918–21), 101–4.



the *Muʿaṭṭil* (a Muʿtazilī or an Ashʿarī, who denies the divine attributes) with “the sword of revelation,” and he should not use the senseless jabber of *kalām*.

The *waṣīyah* section (verses 188–260) is quite long and repetitive. The following verses give the core of the message. Added to them are verses 242–43, in which Ibn al-Qayyim refers to his own life experience.

- 188 O you—a man who seeks his salvation—come and listen to the
advice of an experienced man, who came to your rescue!
- 189 In all your affairs, make sure that you stick to revelation, and not
to the gold-embellished senseless jabber.
- 190 You should come to the rescue of the Quran and the prophetic
traditions, delivered by the Prophet, who was sent to bring them
to us.
- 191 Strike—as a warrior of jihad holding the sword of revelation—the
very tip of the fingers of those who deny the divine attributes!
- 192 Be truthful, determined, and devoted to God when you attack! Do
not be a coward!
- 193 Remain firm and patient under the flags of divine guidance. Know
that being hit in battle is the outcome of the Merciful’s will and
satisfaction.
- 194 Take the Quran and the irrefutable Prophetic traditions as your
weapon. Cry the cry for battle from the bottom of your brave
heart!⁶⁰
- [...]
- 204 Do not fear their great number. They are the flies and insects of
humanity. Are you afraid of flies?
- 205 You can distract them by provoking disputes between them, the
way the horseman distracts his horse when he ties a girth around
its belly.
- 206 When they attack you, do not be terrified; do not be a coward.
- 207 Stay put. Do not attack without your troops. This is not desirable
even for the brave man.
- 208 When you see the troops of Islam arrive with the Sultan,
- 209 You should enter their ranks; do not stand there all helpless, weak,
and afraid.
- 210 You should take off two pieces of garment, that whoever wears
them will be afflicted with disgraceful and humiliating death:

⁶⁰ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 43–44.



- 211 The garment of sophisticated ignorance and on top of it, the garment of ardent zeal. What miserable garments are they!⁶¹
- [...]
- 242 So proceed straight toward your opponents in the battle, not toward the weakest people in the sides. Bravery is when a man fights his equals in battle.
- 243 Listen to the advice of the experienced man, who has traveled a lot and knows what goes on in people's minds.⁶²

The various parts of the *raḥīl*, especially those which draw their scenes from classical Arabic poetry, succeed in expressing intense emotions of enmity and insult. The *waṣīyah* uses the entire arsenal of military motifs—the battlefield, flags, horses and their equipment, horsemen, surprise attack—to reconstruct the heroic scenes of the celebrated *qaṣā'id* of past generations.⁶³ Even the foul language used to encourage the warrior whom the narrator addresses is part of the long tradition of the poetical *hijā'*.⁶⁴ These scenes and motifs are, however, really codes designed not to depict an actual battlefield, but a metaphorical one: the battlefield of the theological debate, the *munāẓarah*. In sum, although the *raḥīl* draws forms and motifs from the rich Arabic poetical heritage, theology, and more specifically the Ash'arī-Taymīyan debate on anthropomorphism and Ibn Taymīyah's ordeals, remains its main goal.

(c) The *Qaṣd*: In the classical *qaṣīdah*, the eventful part of the *raḥīl* concludes with an arrival at a destination, literally or figuratively. The poets of the Umayyad court—al-Akḥṭal (d. 92/710), for example—often concluded their poems with a lengthy section of *madīḥ* (panegyric), in which they praised the caliph—their benefactor—in hopes of receiving material reward for their efforts. The poets elegantly glided from descriptions of their hair-raising adventures to depictions of the comforts of the city and the palace in which the caliph resided.⁶⁵

The same transition awaits the reader of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*. The heated and stormy description of battles, combined with violent attacks on Ash'arī *kalām* and other Islamic trends, is replaced by a calmer atmosphere—in fact, the calmest—as

⁶¹ Ibid., 44.

⁶² Ibid., 46.

⁶³ All these motifs are concentrated in Abū Tammām's *Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah*. See: Abū 'Alī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Marzūqī, *Sharḥ Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah li-Abī Tammām*, ed. Gharīd al-Shaykh (Beirut, 1424/2003), 1:19–554 (*bāb al-ḥamāsah*).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3:1000–1086 (*bāb al-hijā'*).

⁶⁵ [Al-Akḥṭal], *Dīwān al-Akḥṭal*, commentary by Rājī al-Asmar (Beirut, 1427/2006), 92–101 (poem no. 12).



the destination turns out to be paradise. This section of the poem (verses 4915–5721) contains vivid and delightful descriptions of paradise and its inhabitants, descriptions which heavily rely on relevant Hadith material. The ultimate reward that awaits the believers—the Taymīyan circle, no less—at the end of their difficult journey is the actual and physical sight of God (*ru'yat Allāh*, the vision of God).⁶⁶ The traditionalistic concept of seeing God's face was another bone of contention between the Taymīyan circle and the Ash'arīs, because the Ash'arīs interpreted *ru'yat Allāh* metaphorically. Ibn al-Qayyim's description of the groups arriving at paradise and seeing the face of God is his ultimate answer to the Ash'arīs.

5418 And they will see Him, praised be Him, above them. They will see Him with their own eyes, as clearly as they see the moon and the sun.

5419 This is specifically stated in a Prophetic hadith with multiple chains of transmission, whose veracity only a wicked person denies.

5420 The Quran so says, either directly or by way of implication; these are two ways of expression in the narrative thread of the Quran.

[...]

5428 Suffice it to say that God, praised be Him, described the faces [of the believers] in heaven as bright.

5429 And He also described them as looking, which undoubtedly means that they will look [at Him] using their own eyes.⁶⁷

Further scenes of the heavenly reward which awaits the Taymīyan circle are discussed below.

The Martyrological Narrative of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*

Martyrology—according to *The New Oxford American Dictionary*—is “the branch of history or literature that deals with the lives of martyrs.”⁶⁸ Taking this definition at face value, we are bound to admit that *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is not a martyrology; the narrative axis that starts in the *nasīb* and continues through the *rahil* and up to the *qaṣd* of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, however, is martyrological. The poem tells the story of true believers in their battle against evil. These believers,

⁶⁶ The concept of *ru'yat Allāh* is based on Q. 75:22–23 “On that day there shall be joyous faces, looking towards their Lord” (Dawood, 577), which was interpreted allegorically by the Mu'tazilis and Ash'arīs, and taken at face value by *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*. Daniel Gimaret, “Ru'yat Allāh,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 8:649.

⁶⁷ Cf. Q. 75:22–23.

⁶⁸ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth J. Jewell and Frank Abate (New York, 2001), 1049.



as depicted in the poem, stuck to their principles and did not let changes in public taste distract them from their goal: while the elite (the Ash'arīs, mainly) were lured by the charms of speculative theology, this group of the righteous adhered only to the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet and his followers. Standing for their principles caused suffering and hardships for the members of this group, but they will surely be compensated in the afterlife. This basic tale contains all the building blocks of a martyrological narrative: the story of the battle between good and evil⁶⁹ is concluded by the heavenly reward that awaits the righteous warriors.⁷⁰

As we have seen, Ibn al-Qayyim promises his audience that they will see God's face in heaven. This reward is indeed a prominent clause in traditionalistic professions of faith, from Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's (d. 241/855) onward. Ibn al-Qayyim himself discussed the concept of *ru'yat Allāh* in prose and poetry in *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn* and *Ḥādī al-Arwāḥ ilā Bilād al-Afrāḥ* (The leader of souls to the land of joys).⁷¹ However, the theme of believers in paradise provides Ibn al-Qayyim with an opportunity to use his skills to set up scenes combining the sacred and the profane; since these scenes are set in paradise the feeling of religious piety is maintained.

Most of the scenes of paradise are heavily indebted to the Quran and Hadith. Ibn al-Qayyim's ambition to elaborate on every detail of the huge reward that awaits the believers generates tedious and lengthy passages. His passages on heaven are actually inventory lists: dull and didactic. Even so, they are interesting because they demonstrate his familiarity with motifs and images drawn from classical poetry and reused in the poetry of his contemporaries.⁷² One example is the description of the wine in heaven, a drink that is promised to the believ-

⁶⁹ For an analysis of Islamic martyrology, see: Carl W. Ernst, "From Hagiography to Martyrology: Conflicting Testimonies to a Sufi Martyr of the Delhi Sultanate," *History of Religions* 24, no. 4 (May, 1985): 308–27.

⁷⁰ An enlightening reading on the heavenly reward that awaits martyrs in Hebrew and Latin martyrological narratives from the times of the Crusades is Shmuel Shepkaru, "To Die for God: Martyrs' Heaven in Hebrew and Latin Crusade Narratives," *Speculum* 77, no. 2 (Apr. 2002): 311–41 (esp. 313–23). Reading this article, one cannot overlook the striking resemblances between the heavenly rewards promised to Christian martyrs and what Ibn al-Qayyim promises for the martyrs of *Ahl al-Sunnah*.

⁷¹ The lengthy sixty-fifth chapter of *Ḥādī al-Arwāḥ* contains a thorough discussion on Quranic verses and hadiths. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Ḥādī al-Arwāḥ ilā Bilād al-Afrāḥ*, ed. Ḥāmid Aḥmad al-Tāhir (Cairo, 1423/2003), 309–67. The twenty-sixth chapter of *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn* is a sophisticated discussion on abandoning carnal love for the sake of the love of God. According to Ibn al-Qayyim, the chapter is meant for the sophisticated reader with the highest moral attributes. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn wa-Nuzhat al-Mushtāqīn* (Beirut, n.d.), 394.

⁷² Jayyusi, "Arabic Poetry," 36–37.



ers in the Quran and the Hadith. Ibn al-Qayyim describes the heavenly wine as depicted in the Quran:

- 5184 There [i.e., in heaven], they will be given pure nectar to drink; its last sips leave the odor of musk, that lingers. Its first sip is [as tasty as] its last sip.
- 5185 They will be given wine, delicious for its drinkers. It will neither dull their senses nor cause them sickness or discomfort.⁷³
- [...]
- 5189 They will drink from the fount named Salsabil, tempered with camphor. This is the beverage of the pious.
- 5190 This is the beverage of the righteous; however, the favored will have a second beverage.
- 5191 It is called Tasnīm. What they will drink is absolutely the best.⁷⁴ It is made only for the most favored, the ones specifically chosen by God.⁷⁵

Earthly wine, on the other hand, is depicted in derogatory terms, as causing drunkenness, loss of the mind, and illness.⁷⁶ Ibn Qayyim's illustrations in both cases, of heavenly and earthly wine, do not go beyond flat duplications of the Quran. Ibn al-Qayyim, it seems, cannot allow his imagination to recreate the taste and smell of wine. When it comes to carnal lust, however, Ibn al-Qayyim is freer in his poetic expression. An extremely lengthy section describes the houris, the beautiful virgins of paradise:⁷⁷

- 4915 O you, who wishes to ask the hand of the fair houris in marriage!
O you, who wishes to be intimate with them in the garden of the afterlife.

⁷³ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 368. Cf. verse 5184 to Q. 83: 25–26, and verse 5164 to Q. 37:46–47. In translating the Quranic expressions on wine to English, I consulted Dawood's translation of the Quran.

⁷⁴ *yudʿā bi-tasnīmīn, sanāmun shurbuhum*. Here Ibn al-Qayyim uses a *tawriyah* (double entendre), playing on the similarity between *tasnīm* (the name of the drink) and *sanām* (the hump of the camel, here used metaphorically for denoting a peak).

⁷⁵ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 368. Cf. verse 5189 to Q. 76:17–18, verse 5190 to Q. 83:28, and verse 5191 to Q. 83:27.

⁷⁶ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 368 (verses 5186–87).

⁷⁷ The beautiful houris appear in three sections in the poem. *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 347–49 (verses 4915–44), 371–80 (verses 5232–5386), 381–83 (verses 5387–5417). Parts of these sections appear in *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn* as one poem. *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn wa-Nuzhat al-Mushtāqīn* (Beirut, n.d.), 254–58.



- 4916 If only you knew who you wished to marry, you would offer her
your entire fortune!
- 4917 If you knew where she lived, you would rush to her, even if you
had to run on your head!
- 4918 I already described to you the road leading to her house. So if you
wish to unite with her, stop being slow and weak.
- 4919 Hurry up and quicken your paces; you will get there within the
hour.
- 4920 Then you will be able to make love passionately. Encourage your
soul by speaking about this forthcoming union. And while you
can, offer the bridal money.
- 4921 Consider [your entire lifetime] as the month of Ramaḍān, in which
you fast before you meet her. Consider the day of your union as
breaking the fast in ʿĪd al-Fiṭr.
- 4922 Sing her praises when you go to your journey. When you encoun-
ter terrifying events, remember that you long for her.
- 4923 Do not occupy your thoughts with the house of the old days, in
which you squandered your time in decadent amusements.

In spite of the erotic tone of this passage, Ibn al-Qayyim reminds his listeners that the road to paradise, and hence to the beautiful houris who reside there, passes through true piety and belief. The motif of the memories of past amusements, much used in classical poetry to invoke feelings of nostalgia in the audience, is used by Ibn al-Qayyim for a different purpose: he wishes to motivate his listeners to embrace the genuine traditionalist faith. According to Ibn al-Qayyim (the former sinner who held Ashʿarī views), there is no need to dwell on the glory of the past when the future of the true believer is much brighter.

In his description of the houris, Ibn al-Qayyim combines several sources. First and foremost his description relies on Hadith, the discussions of the early traditionalists, Quran exegetes, and lexicographers. A good example is the description of the houris' eyes (verse 5275), which is actually a dense versification of Ibn al-Qayyim's interpretation of the word *ḥūr*, leaning on the views of traditionalists like Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687–88) on the one hand, and the views of the lexicographers on the other.⁷⁸ However, the description of other body-parts of the houris is very much formed by the conventions of elite poetry: their cheeks are rosy, their kisses are sweet, they are lean but luscious.

- 5274 Now, listen to the description of the brides of paradise, and then
pick one for yourself, you knowledgeable one!

⁷⁸ Cf. *Ḥādī al-Arwāḥ*, 241.



- 5275 The white of the cornea of their eyes is contrasted with the black of the iris. They are the most beautiful women, perfect in their traits and qualities.
- 5276 They are beautiful to such a degree that whoever glances at them is confused by their beauty. The eye of the beholder is confused.
- 5277 When seeing them, the beholder says: "Praised be He who granted them with beauty and good deeds!"
- 5278 The beholder drinks from the cups of their beauty, until you see that he is indeed drunk.
- [...]
- 5287 Their cheeks are red; in their mouths are pearly teeth; their eyes are black; their limbs are feeble.
- 5288 When they smile, the splash of lightning comes out of their mouths, casting light on the ceiling and walls of the palace.
- 5289 We were told that when this luminous lightning appears, someone from paradise will ask about it,
- 5290 And he will get the response: "This is the light coming from the laughing mouth in the upper heaven, as you may as well see."
- 5291 By God! The one, who kisses that mouth, indeed receives—by that kiss—everything his heart desires.

The colorful and perhaps erotic description of the kisses of the houris is toned down by Ibn al-Qayyim's undoubted piety. His source in this case is an unreliable hadith that is also tagged as mere fabrication (*mawḍūʿ*); however, Ibn al-Qayyim considered this hadith good enough for his poem.⁷⁹ The tension between the didactic and the erotic remains throughout the passage:

- 5292 Her body is well-watered with the liquid of youth. She is like a shoot planted by the waters.
- 5293 When the waters of paradise go through her veins, she bears the most colorful fruits
- 5294 Such as roses, and apples, and pomegranates in one single tree. Praised be He, who planted this garden!
- 5295 Her figure is like a flexible branch; her beautiful legs are neither too long nor too short.

⁷⁹ The hadith, on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, quoted the Prophet as saying: "A splash of light appeared in the sky. They looked up, and lo and behold! The light comes out from the open mouth of a houri, laughing in the presence of her husband." *Sharḥ al-Qaṣīdah al-Nūnīyah*, 2:430, *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 2:988, n. 5306.



- 5296 Her thighs grow out of a nursery made of ivory. You might think that this nursery, her buttocks, is one of the hills in the sand-dunes.
- 5297 She is all made of enormous curves: her breasts are separated from her belly, and they are actually floating in a distance, not near her belly.⁸⁰
- 5298 No, all the houris are full-bosomed; their breasts are swelling and round, just like smooth pomegranates.

With the same detailed precision, Ibn al-Qayyim describes the houris' necks, cleavage, and ankles.⁸¹ One might think that Ibn al-Qayyim, in his anatomical descriptions, did not confine himself to religious texts and classical poetry, but allowed his imagination to go wild, particularly when reading a very blunt passage on the houris' genitalia, which leads to an elaborate description of sexual intercourse between a believer and a houri.⁸² The passage is, in fact, solidly based on Hadith material and the discussions of the early Quran exegetes,⁸³ though its bluntness exceeds the details provided by the Hadith. Commentators on *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, apart from Muḥammad Khalil Harrās, chose to skip this passage and not interpret it. Even Ibn al-Qayyim himself concludes the passage with an apology: "O God, please forgive my pen for exceeding the proper bounds" (verse 5321). On this, Harrās remarks: "The author sensed that his pen advanced too much and too far, and that he was too explicit about matters that should be left implicit."⁸⁴

There is nothing profane or obscene in Ibn al-Qayyim's descriptions of the carnal delights that await the believers in heaven. These sensual descriptions, as I

⁸⁰ This verse is paraphrased according to Harrās's interpretation. *Sharḥ al-Qaṣīdah al-Nūnīyah*, 2:431.

⁸¹ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 375 (verses 5299–5305).

⁸² Ibid., 375 (verses 5306–20). Cf. *Ḥādī al-Arwāḥ*, 239–42 (the description of the houris' genital organs), 262–65 (the description of the sexual intercourse between the houris and the believers). I believe—although the matter should be further checked thoroughly—that Ibn al-Qayyim's description of the houris' genital organs is quite exceptional. Franz Rosenthal's 1987 article which refers to several prominent Islamic works on carnal love in paradise, like Ibn al-Qayyim's *Ḥādī al-Arwāḥ* and *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn*, does not mention any such description in the works he cites. Franz Rosenthal, "Reflections on Love in Paradise," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guilford, CT, 1987), 247–54. See also Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany, 1981; repr. New York, 2002), 147–50, 158–68.

⁸³ For references to relevant Hadith literature and Quran exegeses, see: A. J. Wensinck [Ch. Pelat], "Hūr," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 3:581–82; Maher Jarrar, "Houris," *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden, 2001), 2:456.

⁸⁴ *Sharḥ al-Qaṣīdah al-Nūnīyah*, 2:434.



said before, are drawn from religious literature. However, Ibn al-Qayyim chooses to conclude *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* with a more didactic tone. First, he addresses his listeners with another *waṣīyah* containing a petty description of four archetypical enemies of the believer (verses 5722–5777), and demanding that believers fight for their beliefs with every means they have (verses 5778–5780). Then he puts in the mouths of the true believers a prayer (verses 5780–5821), in which they ask God to protect the Quran and the Prophet. The prayer will be discussed below.

However, the description of the heavenly reward is but one—albeit central—ingredient of the martyrological narrative, and indeed it comes at the end of the poem. What precedes this description is a thorough and systematic process of psychological manipulations on the part of Ibn al-Qayyim, which are meant to arouse a wide range of emotions in a receptive audience, inciting them to act. The melancholic atmosphere of the *nasīb* transfers into a series of rhythmic attacks on the Ashʿarīs. *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is a raging poem: its militant atmosphere, occasional foul language, and determined attacks on the Ashʿarīs all combine to create a piece that is much more than a versified creed or a mere polemical treatise. The “emotional baggage”—if we may borrow a contemporary term—invested in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is tremendous. Ibn al-Qayyim, who had his share of *miḥan* (of which his listeners were well-aware), weaves the martyrological narrative from three basic emotions: insult, fury, and frustration. Alongside these, he emphasizes the importance of perseverance, acceptance—a state accomplished after completing a process of rationalization—and self-pride. By skillfully expressing these emotions, Ibn al-Qayyim nurtures the martyrological narrative, and leads his captive audience to the conclusion that an action against the Ashʿarīs is inevitable. At this point, the description of paradise and the carnal pleasures awaiting the believers is presented as the peak of the narrative. The process of propagandizing for an attack on the Ashʿarīs is successfully concluded. The listeners become “we”—an elect and highly motivated community, self-acknowledged and determined.⁸⁵

The following verses demonstrate Ibn al-Qayyim’s rhetorical strategy. They appear in three consecutive passages.⁸⁶ Dealing with the accusations of anthropomorphism addressed by the Ashʿarīs to the Taymīyan circle (referred to here as *Ahl al-Sunnah*), these passages reflect a process which the narrator undergoes

⁸⁵ “The martyrological narrative textually interprets the act of martyrdom to be one supportive of order, community, and ideology. Martyrs’ accounts are sanitized and contextualized by the incorporation of doctrine and propaganda in order to legitimate, support, and transmit the ideology of the persecuted faction.” Nikki Shepardson, “Gender and the Rhetoric of Martyrdom in Jean Crespin’s ‘Histoire des vrais tesmoins,’” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 158.

⁸⁶ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 182–87 (verses 2302–75).



and which his audience undergoes with him: the passive sense of insult ripens to an aggressive open call for an active attack. First, the narrative is dominated by insult, a sense which is nurtured by the Ash'arīs' false accusations of anthropomorphism addressed to *Ahl al-Sunnah*. The arguments in this passage are fairly rational and balanced. A direct rejoinder to the Ash'arī accusations, they show a desire to persuade the accusers that their accusations are false, and to convince them to reverse their misjudgment. Gradually, the sense of insult grows into fury, which is probably the dominant emotion in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*. Fury finds its many expressions in foul language and accusations of heresy, all of which are addressed to the Ash'arīs. The shift from insult to fury is a shift from passivity to activity. Ibn al-Qayyim's own ordeals and his hatred of the Ash'arīs charge the text with another conspicuous trait: apart from addressing the collective accusation of anthropomorphism addressed to the Taymīyan circle, the atmosphere is heated by the use of anaphora (verses 2365–68). The rhythm of the recitation accelerates, the tone of the reciter becomes urgent and high, and the charged message reflecting Ibn al-Qayyim's personal experience and feelings explodes in the face of his prospective audiences—the Taymīyan circle, first and foremost, but also the Ash'arīs themselves. As the text progresses, it is evident that Ibn al-Qayyim adopts for himself the definition of an anthropomorphist instead of refuting Ash'arī accusations of anthropomorphism. The text reveals the depths of insult that Ibn al-Qayyim feels, as well as his perseverance, acceptance, and self-pride.

One cannot ignore the sarcasm and insult in Ibn al-Qayyim's tone when he willingly embraces the derogatory name anthropomorphist (*hashwī*).⁸⁷ The depths of sarcasm and self-insult are demonstrated in a passage in which Ibn al-Qayyim addresses this name, charging it with a *double entendre* (*tawriyah*, another esteemed rhetorical device). *Hashw* literally means “to stuff” and [worthless] “stuffing,” and figuratively means “something of little worth.” Rationalist thinkers referred to traditionalists as *hashw*, *hashwī* (pl. *hashwīyah*), meaning scholars of little worth and anthropomorphists. In the following passage, Ibn al-Qayyim juggles between the literal and the metaphorical meanings of *hashwī*, using several derivatives, demonstrating his sarcasm:

⁸⁷ In his unsurpassed article of 1934, A. S. Halkin defines *hashwīyah* as “a vague term of insult” closely connected to the Hanbalis and meant to denote “an ignorant, reactionary lot who grossly exaggerated anthropomorphism and were receptive enough to accept any fantastic belief or superstition.” A. S. Halkin, “The Hashwiyya,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 54, no. 1 (1934): 12, 2. See also “Hashwiya (Hasawiyya, Hushwiyya, or Ahl al-Hashw),” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 3:269.



- 2302 One of the curiosities is that they [i.e., the Ash‘arīs] call the people who follow divine revelation—whether Prophetic hadiths or Quranic verses
- 2303 By the name of *hashwīyah*. By that name they refer to people whose existence is worthless (*hashw fī al-wujūd*), people who are waste products of the human race.
- 2304 The ignorant among them believe that the *hashwīyah* “stuffed” (*hashaw*) the Lord of all beings into the beings themselves,
- 2305 Because they [i.e., the *hashwīyah*] say that the Lord, to Him belong majesty and rule, is “above the beings” and “in the sky.”
- 2306 These asses thought that “in” stands for an accusative of place, meaning that the All-Compassionate is confined to one place.
- 2307 By God! Nothing like it was ever heard from any sect in any time.
- 2308 Do not defame the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* with this notion. This is not their view. May evil befall the slanderer!
- 2309 Indeed, they believe that the upper sky is [unfolded] in the palm of the Creator of all beings
- 2310 Like a mustard seed in the palm of someone who keeps it. God the Sovereign is the Sublime!
- 2311 Do you think, then, that He is the confined one—or is the sky confined?
- 2312 How many times did you call [us] anthropomorphists and *hashwīyah*! This defamation is never concealed from the eyes of the All-Merciful.
- 2313 Hear me out, ye people! If the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet indeed express this “stuffed” view, then you may as well testify
- 2314 That we are, thanks to our Lord, pure *hashwīyah*. We do not deny it, and we do not hide it.
- 2315 Do you know who among your shaykhs used this [derogatory] name a long time ago?
- 2316 [The Mu‘tazilī ‘Amr] ibn ‘Ubayd called ‘Abd Allāh, the son of the caliph, by this name. The same ‘Abd Allāh who drove Satan away!⁸⁸
- 2317 So, indeed you are the successors of Ibn ‘Ubayd, just as [*Ahl al-Ḥadīth*] are the successors of ‘Abd Allāh. How is it possible to compare between these two inheritances?
- 2318 Do you know who is worthy of this name? Do you know for whom [the name *hashwīyah*] exactly fits?

⁸⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim refers here to ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd (d. 144/761), one of the first of the Mu‘tazilah, who described ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar (d. 73/693), the son of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, as *hashwī*. See references to primary sources in: *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 2:575–76, n. 2328.



- 2319 This is the one who stuffs notebooks and brains with undesired innovative notions that contradict the obligating content of the Quran.
- 2320 This is the real *hashwī*! Not *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, who are leaders of faith and Islam!
- 2321 They drew water from the sweet springs of the Prophetic traditions, not from the garbage of these “thinking brains”!
- 2322 However, you drew water from the filthy Qallūṭ River, which carries all the filth, dirt, and squalor in its waters!⁸⁹
- [...]
- 2341 Indeed we are anthropomorphists, praised be the Lord, because we do not negate the attributes of the Creator, the Merciful.
- 2342 We swear that none of us has said that God is a body (*jism*), you slanderers!
- [...]
- 2360 Woe unto you, who goes down to the sewage canal to draw water! If only you saw the filth on your lips and teeth!
- 2361 If only you saw the filthy marks in your heart, when you get yourself ready to perform your deeds and the rituals of Islam!
- 2362 If going down to this filthy source of water agrees with you, then all this filth agrees with you. Why does this stinking source of water please you?
- 2363 I advise you to cleanse your mouth from your wicked filthy words.
- 2364 Go ahead, abuse the *hashwī*! Abuse the “stuffed” people of religion, the people of the Quran, the Hadith, and faith!
- 2365 Welcome, O “stuffed” people of the right path. Others are the “stuffed” people of the wrong path, and there is no comparison between the two groups.
- 2366 Welcome, O “stuffed” people who hold the absolute certain knowledge of the truth. Others are the “stuffed” people who have doubts. The two groups are not equal twins.
- 2367 Welcome, O “stuffed” people who sit in the mosques. Others are the “stuffed” people who sit in public lavatories. How can you compare the two?
- 2368 Welcome, O “stuffed” people of paradise! Others are the “stuffed” people of hell. Are the two groups equal?⁹⁰

⁸⁹ For the identification of the Qallūṭ River, see *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 2:576, n. 2334.

⁹⁰ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 182–87 (verses 2302–75).



The sense of frustration which accompanies the various parts of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is conspicuous especially when Ibn al-Qayyim relates the roots of the theological dispute between *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* and the Ashʿarīs. Ibn al-Qayyim depicts futile trials to explain his—and *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*’s—position to the Ashʿarīs. Armed with self-persuasion and a strong feeling of inner justice, Ibn al-Qayyim explains that his theological position is identical to that of the Prophet and the Salaf. The unbridgeable gap between Ibn al-Qayyim and the Ashʿarīs widens because they use two different sets of language: his the straightforward language of the *Ḥadīth*; theirs the tortuous language of the *kalām*. He masters their language, they belittle and reject his. In verses 3818–19, Ibn al-Qayyim hints that the Ashʿarīs are heretics: their rejection of the sacred texts and their use of allegorical interpretation connect them with the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) in the Prophet’s times.

- 3810 O people! You know that the animosity between us is rooted in events that happened a long time ago.
 3811 We rely on the Quran and the Righteous Tradition which interprets the Quran.
 3812 We also rely on our pure intellect and the natural disposition [in which] the All-Compassionate [created] humans, before they altered it.
 3813 These are four inseparable principles; each of them equally and indiscriminately affirms the other and corroborates it.
 3814 By God! According to what you constantly declare, these four principles never affirm one another.
 3815 Because you claim: “What is perceived by the intellect contradicts what the Quran and the Hadith tell us.
 3816 Therefore, we give precedence to what our intellect perceives. And as for the teachings of the Quran and the Hadith—we freely use various devices of allegorical interpretation [of the texts].
 3817 When we are unable to handle the text, we toss it aside, ascribing no importance to the text whatsoever. Our only intention is to be amiable.”
 3818 Indeed, in so doing you follow your ancestors. When they were urged to follow the Quran,
 3819 they turned away. When calamity befell them, they swore: “Our only desire is conciliation and amity.”⁹¹

⁹¹ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 279 (verses 3810–19). What echoes in verse 3819 is Q. 4:61–62: “When they are told: ‘Come to be judged by that which God has revealed and by the Apostle,’ you see the hypocrites turn a deaf ear to you. But how would it be if one disaster befell them on account of what their hands committed? They would come to you swearing by God that they desired nothing but amity and conciliation.”



Insult, fury, and frustration are interwoven in a lengthy piece of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* (divided into several parts) that recounts the chain of sufferings of *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* throughout history, a chain in which Ibn Taymīyah's ordeals are but a link. Ibn al-Qayyim presents a schematic inventory of the inner polemic and the civil strife within "Islam"; in other words, Ibn al-Qayyim lists the defining (negative) events in the history of Islam, from the assassination of the caliph 'Uthmān (d. 35/655), through the *miḥnah* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, up to the *miḥan* of Ibn Taymīyah. Oddly enough, Ibn al-Qayyim sees all these (political) events as "the crimes of figurative interpretation" (*jināyat al-ta'wīl*), or, as Harrās puts it, "[Ibn al-Qayyim] determines here that the root of all calamities that befell Islam is *ta'wīl*, which is actually a distortion of the texts and an apostasy."⁹² By *ta'wīl* and elsewhere by *ṭāghūt*,⁹³ Ibn al-Qayyim refers to the rationalistic, and hence foreign, approaches of Ash'arī thought. Much can be argued against Ibn al-Qayyim's interpretation of Islamic history, but the fact is that while enumerating milestones in Islamic history and placing them—as crimes committed in the name of *ta'wīl*—on the same historical level, Ibn al-Qayyim gains an incredible rhetorical leverage. This leverage is achieved by a complete harmony between form and content: the compelling rhythm of the text and the use of anaphoras combined with the flow of detailed calamities, one after the other, are rhetorical devices that increase animosity against the Ash'arīs in the eyes of his potentially sympathetic audience.

In the following verses, Ibn al-Qayyim does not refer to the Ash'arīs, but rather to sectarian groups in Islamic history (the Khawārij, the Rawāfiḍ, and the Mu'tazilah). The Ash'arīs, in spite of the fact that they were not a sect but the leading trend in Sunni Islam, if not the very essence of Sunni Islam, are depicted by Ibn al-Qayyim as following in the footsteps of preceding sects, the Mu'tazilah especially, by harassing *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*.

1757 Moreover, the root of every calamity that befell Islam came from *ta'wīl*. *Ta'wīl* distorts the holy texts. *Ta'wīl* causes the spreading of lies.

1758 *Ta'wīl* divided Islam into seventy-three sects.⁹⁴ There are many evident proofs for that.

⁹² Sharḥ al-Qaṣīdah al-Nūniyah, 1:308.

⁹³ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 275–278 (verses 3758–3809).

⁹⁴ From which seventy-two are heretical sects, and only one—*al-firqah al-nājiyah*—is saved. The tradition, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah (d. ca. 57/678), states: "The Messenger of God said: the Jews were divided into seventy-one or seventy-two sects. The Christians were divided into seventy-one or seventy-two sects. My nation will be divided into seventy-three sects." For a collection of the various versions of this tradition, see: Abū Bakr al-Ājurri (d. 360/971), *Kitāb*



- 1759 *Ta'wīl* assassinated the caliph [ʿUthmān], who was responsible for the collection of the *Quran*, who was the possessor of the two lights,⁹⁵ a man of virtues.
- 1760 *Ta'wīl* assassinated the caliph after him; I of course refer to ʿAlī, the slayer of his opponents in the battlefield.
- 1761 *Ta'wīl* slew al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī and his family. Because of *ta'wīl*, their flesh was cut to pieces.
- 1762 Because of *ta'wīl*, the sanctity of the city of Medina was desecrated in the battle of al-Ḥarraḥ.⁹⁶
- 1763 The blood flooded [in the city] as if it was the Feast of Immolation.
- 1764 Because of *ta'wīl*, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf shed blood and slew the pious believer and the adherent of the *Quran*.
- 1765 Because of *ta'wīl*, the soldiers of the hostile al-Ḥajjāj did in Mecca whatever they did.
- 1766 *Ta'wīl* caused the rise of the Khawārij. *Ta'wīl* also caused the appearance of those ugly beasts, the Rawāfiḍ.
- 1767 Because of *ta'wīl*, the Rawāfiḍ brutally cursed the chosen people after the Prophet, and slandered them.
- 1768 Because of *ta'wīl*, the tyrants drew their swords, thinking that they were doing the right thing.
- 1769 Because of *ta'wīl*, the Muʿtazilah came up with ideas that weakened the strength of faith.
- 1770 Because of *ta'wīl*, they claimed that God's word is a created being.
- 1771 Because of *ta'wīl*, they denied the existence of divine predetermination. By so stating, they resembled the Zoroastrians (*Majūs*), the worshippers of fire.
- 1772 Because of *ta'wīl*, they stated that the grave sinners are bound to stay forever in hell like the idolaters.
- 1773 Because of *ta'wīl*, they completely denied the intercession of the Prophet, the Chosen.
- 1774 Because of *ta'wīl*, the Imām al-Shaybānī [Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal], the most righteous man of *Ahl al-Sunnah*, was flogged by their whips.⁹⁷

al-Sharīʿah (Beirut, 1421/2000), 16–20. For a discussion on the importance of the tradition of the saved sect, see Watt, *The Formative Period*, 2–3, 326, n. 4.

⁹⁵ *Dhū al-nurayn* is an epithet given to the caliph ʿUthmān for being the husband of Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthūm, the Prophet's two daughters. *Sharḥ al-Qaṣīdah al-Nūnīyah*, 1:309.

⁹⁶ The battle of 63/683, between Yazid ibn Muʿawiyah and the rebellious people of Medina. L. Vecchia Vaglieri, "al-Ḥarra," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 3:226.

⁹⁷ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 147–48 (verses 1757–74).



The description of the chain of disasters that befell Islam is a part of Ibn al-Qayyim's rationalization for his animosity against the Ash'arīs. The Ash'arī use of figurative interpretation and their rejection of the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Hadith make them the successors of sects deviating from true Islam.

- 2179 [Their methods of interpretation] caused enmity between us. Because of this, we are their adversaries.
 2180 They go astray because of their stupid reasoning, while we stick to the Quran.
 2181 Our methods contradict theirs. The two cannot walk together, ever.
 2182 We refuse to profess the convictions and lies that they profess.
 2183 We dismiss their views. We attach no importance to their views. We are satisfied with the teachings of the Prophet and the precise verses (*muḥkam*) of the Quran.
 2184 Whoever is not satisfied with these two, God will not protect him from the calamities of time.
 2185 Whoever does not choose these two as his cure, God will never bring cure to his heart and body.
 2186 Whoever has no use for these two, the Lord of the throne will condemn him to death and deprivation.
 2187 Whoever is not guided by these two, God will not guide him to the paths of truth and faith.⁹⁸

However, demonizing the Ash'arīs and describing their brutality is the most effective element in the process of rationalizing the animosity against them. In various sections of the poem, the description of the Ash'arīs' brutality towards *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, or "us," often deteriorates to simple defamation:

- 2188 We argue only with eminent scholars and not with these people, who are the lowest of the lowest and despicable bugs.
 2189 They are the filth of humanity, pure garbage, rotten corpses, and ugly creatures.
 2190 These are people who, because of their heresy, animosity, and slanders, demanded the blood of true scholars.
 2191 They loathe *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, because they despise the Sunnah and the Quran.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 174–75 (verses 2179–87).



- 2192 Their slander is their food, in which they delight. I wish that God would cut their throats!⁹⁹

The Message of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*

Insult, fury, and frustration are crystallized in *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* into two positive emotions for the Taymīyan circle: self-pride—or a sense of community—and hope for a better future. These are mostly reflected in the advanced parts of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, and will be demonstrated here by three representative sections. All of these sections have one common denominator: they project a great deal of certainty that a bright future for the true believers—*Ahl al-Ḥadīth* or the Taymīyan circle—will indeed come to pass.

The sense of self-pride is interwoven throughout the discourse of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, and it reaches its peak in a prayer, a pledge that *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* address to God. Ibn al-Qayyim now names them the *Muthbitūn*. This name is certainly a variation of *Ahl al-Ithbāt*, meaning “the affirmers of God’s attributes,” but it can also denote “the Followers of the *Muthbit*.” In the introduction of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, Ibn al-Qayyim refers to Ibn Taymīyah as the *Muthbit*, the affirmer, hence the *Muthbitūn* are the followers of Ibn Taymīyah.¹⁰⁰ The prayer of the *Muthbitūn* is soaked in Quranic terminology and allusions to Quranic verses. Although the prayer is tagged as a collective address of the *Muthbitūn*, it is in fact a prayer of the individual. In its first half (verses 2789–2801) the individual humbly asks God to open his heart to the Quranic message; the second half (verses 2802–17), however, is a request to annihilate the enemies of the *Muthbitūn*. Here, as in previous passages, Ibn al-Qayyim’s personal life-experience as a reformed rationalist is reflected.

- 2789 O Protector of Islam! O Protector of the traditions that are attributed to the one who was sent to bring the Quran!
- 2790 O You who are the apparent truth! Your sayings are also an apparent truth! And so are the promises to meet You [in the hereafter]! Your Messenger is also an apparent truth!
- 2791 Open the breast of every believer for the reception of your religion. Open their breasts widely, so they reach the summits of belief.
- 2792 Let their hearts be led by the Quran and not by what the slanderers say.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 175 (verses 2188–92).

¹⁰⁰ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 15–29. For an analysis of the introduction, see my “Accused of Anthropomorphism.”



- 2793 Let the Party of the Right Path win with the help of the Quran.
Annihilate, by the power of the Quran, the Party of the Straying
Path and the Supporters of Satan.
- 2794 By the power of the Quran, revive the one who wishes to revive
the Quran. By the power of the Quran, protect the Quran from
the slanderer who uses snares and tricks.
- 2795 Decapitate the People of Deviation, those who replace [the Quran],
those who believe its teachings are false, those who are tyrants.
- 2796 I do solemnly swear by the grace that You granted me, and by my
heart which You made as a vessel receiving the Quran;
- 2797 And by the words that You wrote on my heart, ordering me to
follow the Right Path—and indeed in my heart I read the lines of
faith;
- 2798 And by the fact that You pulled me out from the well of the People
of False Convictions,¹⁰¹ when You threw at my rescue the ropes of
the precise verses of the Quran;
- 2799 And by the fact that You let me drink the sweet water from the
spring, which is accessible to every thirsty man;
- 2800 And by the fact that You protected me from drinking the water
underneath the filthy layer of false convictions and distorted
minds;
- 2801 And by the fact that You guarded me from the tests You put to
those who passed judgment on You, slandering You.
- 2802 They tossed Your book behind their backs, and clung to the deco-
rated and senseless jabber.
- 2803 And by the fact that You showed me the undesired, vain, and var-
nished innovations, that Satan plants in the heart of the human
being.
- 2804 Satan engraves [and decorates] these things, just like the artists,
who cover the engraving with paint.
- 2805 The deceived thinks that these things are the truth, when actually
they are phantoms of water in the desert.
- 2806 By all these I do solemnly swear that I will fight Your enemies, as
long as You allow me to do so. Fighting them will be my habit.
- 2807 I will disgrace them and humiliate them publicly. Using my
tongue, I will tear their skin apart.
- 2808 Using the Quran, I will reveal their secrets, those secrets which
were concealed from the weak.

¹⁰¹ This reading follows Bakr Abū Zayd's version, who reads *bi'r aṣḥāb al-hawā*. *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 2:639. The common version, *ḥubb aṣḥāb al-hawā*, is indeed rather obscure.



- 2809 I will follow them wherever they go. I will follow them, as the proverb goes, as far as Abadan.
- 2810 I will stone them with the milestones of divine guidance. I will stone them with piercing shooting stars.
- 2811 I will lie in wait, observing their tricks. I will besiege them everywhere.
- 2812 I will make their flesh and blood the greatest sacrifice, in Your day of victory.
- 2813 I will send them fearless troops, who never escape the battlefield.
- 2814 I will send the soldiers of both revelations—the Quran and the Sunnah. The soldiers of the natural disposition of Islam (*fiṭrah*). The soldiers fighting for the teachings of the intellect and the teachings of the scriptures. The soldiers of good deeds.
- 2815 I will do that—until every reasonable man will understand, who [among us] is more worthy of being considered a person whose conduct is ruled by both intellect and the Quran?
- 2816 I will seek advice in God, then in His messenger, His book, and the laws of true faith.
- 2817 If my Lord so wishes, all this will come true. If He does not wish so, then the ruling is His, the All-Merciful.¹⁰²

Ibn al-Qayyim plays here in two different fields, the allegorical and the literal. By stressing that he will fight his enemies using the Quran, his wits, and his tongue, Ibn al-Qayyim supposedly presents an allegory for a theological debate. However, the violent air of the prayer is striking: although the narrator describes himself as using metaphorical weapons (Quran, words, and good deeds), the outcome does not seem to be metaphorical at all, as the enemy's flesh and blood are presented as sacrifices for God (verse 2812). Ibn al-Qayyim, who so resents the use of allegory when it comes to interpreting the Quran, by all means uses allegory in his poetry, even though the so-called allegorical expressions of flesh, blood, and death in the battlefield can also be taken literally.

In a passage in which he enumerates Ibn Taymiyah's prominent writings, and wishes to avenge the *miḥan* which his enemies put him through, Ibn al-Qayyim expresses an open death wish for the Ash'arīs. Again, this is an allegory, stating that the only way to defeat the Ash'arīs is by reading Ibn Taymiyah's writings. In other words, aside from the Quran and the Sunnah, Ibn Taymiyah's writings are the ultimate weapon against the Ash'arīs. Here, as in the previous passage, the metaphorical battlefield is the theological debate, but the many details of the Ash'arīs' metaphorical destruction form a three-dimensional picture of physical

¹⁰² *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 213–14 (verses 2789–2817).



suffering and actual defeat. Ibn al-Qayyim toils a great deal to construct the scene of the Ash'arīs' defeat, which—it is safe to assume—gave a great deal of pleasure to his audience: just as the Ash'arīs divested God from His attributes, they will be divested from their human traits in the battlefield (verse 3630). The passage below certainly amplifies the undertone in other parts of *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, and enhances the assumption that *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is first and foremost a piece of Hanbali martyrology, drawing in part from Ibn al-Qayyim's own life-experience, but mostly from the harsh experience of Ibn Taymīyah.

- 3627 If you wish to witness the death of the remnants of the People of *Ta'ṭīl* and heresy [the Mu'tazilah and Ash'ariyah, who deny the divine attributes];
- 3628 If you wish to see them as prisoners in very poor condition, their hands tied to their beards;
- 3629 If you wish to see them as targets of the lances, while no horseman who is capable of throwing a lance is left in their midst;
- 3630 If you wish to see them when the swords catch them, divesting them from their human qualities and the oaths they have taken;
- 3631 If you wish to see them abandoning the Quran and the Sunnah, forsaking their sound mind and the requirements of the Quran;
- 3632 If you wish to see them become a laughingstock and a source of mockery—remember how often they mocked true faith—;
- 3633 If you wish to see their residences deserted, remaining in such a condition for a very long time, with the help of God Almighty;
- 3634 If you wish to see their houses deserted, their community scattered, so even two of them will never meet together again;
- 3635 If you wish to see the Merciful divest their hearts of every knowledge and true belief,
- 3636 Because they divested the Merciful of His attributes. They even claimed that the throne is empty of the presence of the Merciful.
- 3637 They denied the existence of speech in God. They denied the existence of His attributes of perfection, because they were ignorant and slanderers.
- 3638 If you wish to see all that, then I suggest that you dedicate your time to read the writings of the imam, the shaykh of existence, the scholar of divine knowledge.
- 3639 I of course refer to Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad, this ocean whose knowledge encompasses every creek, and bay, and canal.
- [verses 3640–67 list various works by Ibn Taymīyah]



- 3668 [In these works, Ibn Taymīyah] helped God, His religion, the
 Quran, and the Prophet, using the sword and the scripture.
- 3669 [Ibn Taymīyah] humiliated them by revealing their ignorance. He
 demonstrated inconsistency in their thought throughout the ages.
- 3670 By God! He threw them under the shoes of the People of Truth.
 Before that, they were walking with crowns.
- 3671 He threw them to the bottom of the pit. Before that, they were
 considered the luminaries of many a town.
- 3672 Isn't it a wonder that by using their weapon [of speculative theol-
 ogy] he managed to bring about their fall and ruin?
- 3673 For years, they were holding our forelocks in their fists. However,
 all they managed to get from us is but one tortured prisoner.
- 3674 But then we held their forelocks in our fists. However, they re-
 ceived from us a rope for [their] rescue.
- 3675 And so, by the grace of God, their kings became slaves for the sup-
 porters of the Prophet.
- 3676 Their troops, who formerly attacked the armies of faith, were now
 led [from the battlefield as prisoners].
- 3677 A man who has knowledge of what the two groups were saying
 about God already knows all that I told you above.
- 3678 Stupid and sluggish talk, feeble arguments—we deserted them.
 But that is not the case with you [because you clung to them].
 Using sluggish talk and lacking sluggish talk are two—very differ-
 ent—things.¹⁰³

The third passage presents another feature in the martyrological narrative: that of hope and recompense. In the *qaṣd* section, Ibn al-Qayyim promises the true *Ahl al-Sunnah*, those who were afflicted by the harassment of the Ash'arīs, the reward of paradise and its delights, and the seeing of God's face. Although the *qaṣd* section ends with a festive and decorated praise of God (verses 5778–80), it actually reflects the conflict between the Taymīyan circle and the Ash'arīs at its utmost. At first sight, this *grand finale* embroidered with rhetorical repetitions is a *madiḥ*, a panegyric poem: it is recited in unison by the righteous Hanbalis or *Ahl al-Sunnah*. The recitation in unison as well as the frequent use of anaphoras ("By the truth of..." [*wa-bi-ḥaqqi*] in verses 5782–85, "O my God" [*yā Rabbi*] in verses 5797–5803, and so forth) give the illusion of a liturgical piece, conveying gratitude, glory, and genuine religious expression. However, the *grand finale* relates a different message: it wishes death for the Ash'arīs, and along the way mentions the Sufis as devious rivals of *Ahl al-Sunnah*. The Ash'arīs and Sufis are not separate

¹⁰³ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 267–70 (verses 3627–78).



groups here: the Damascene and the Cairene elite embraced the monist teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī to a certain degree, so the critique here is again directed at the Ashʿarī ulama.¹⁰⁴ In spite of its grandeur, the following passage is dominated by a highly emotional atmosphere, thus giving the imploring an urgent and intensified nature:

- 5780 O Defender of faith! [we implore You]
 5781 By the life of Your face! You are the most generous when You accede to our requests! By the light of Your face, O Glorious One!
 5782 By the truth of Your grace which You granted without asking anything in return!
 5783 By the truth of Your mercy which encompasses all the creatures, the beneficent as well as the evil ones!
 5784 By the truth of Your beautiful names, which are meant to praise the All-Merciful!
 5785 By the truth of Your praise, a praise which encompasses all beings, but for You, the Creator of all beings, it is many times as much.
 5786 Because You are God, *Allāh*, *Ilāh*, and *al-Ḥaqq*, the One that all creatures worship, the One who is sacred, there is no other [but You].
 5787 Oh, no! Every worshipped deity besides You, from below Your throne down to the lower earth, is untrue and void.
 5788 In You we take refuge, in You we seek protection. You help the bewildered and the worried.
 5789 Who besides You hears the needy and accedes to his request in times of hardship?
 5790 We turn to You because there is something we wish for, and we hope it pleases You. Whoever wishes for it is worthy of Your help.
 5791 So please, determine that [this wish] is a part of the graces You bestowed amply upon us all the time.
 5792 [We wish] that You would help the Quran, the Prophet, and the divine religion which You brought down by the Decisive Proof (*burhān*).

¹⁰⁴ The monist inclination of the elite is well reflected in ʿAbd Allāh ibn Taymīyah's testimony on the Damascene trials, where he describes the ulama preparing for the confrontation with Ibn Taymīyah by reading Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*. See: the letter of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Taymīyah to his brother, Zayn al-Dīn, in: Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymīyah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad Qāsim and Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad Qāsim (Medina, 1425/2005), 3:131.



- 5793 You chose Your religion; You picked the chosen one from among humankind to establish this religion.
- 5794 This was the religion which You chose for this human being who most pleased You. It is the most precious of all religions.
- 5795 Grant Your messenger, who was sent to bring the monotheist religion, help and succor, and humor him.
- 5796 Help him by granting Him precious victory, as You helped him throughout the ages.
- 5797 O God! Help the better of the two parties to overcome the party of the straying and the soldiers of Satan.
- 5798 O God! Please sacrifice the evil between the two parties for the sake of the chosen ones, the soldiers of the *Quran*.
- 5799 O God! Make your victorious party compassionate, full of love and care for each other.
- 5800 O God! Protect them from undesired innovations that infiltrated our religion throughout the ages.
- 5801 O God! Keep them away from the [Sufi] brotherhoods (*ṭarā'iq*), the roads of which lead to hell!
- 5802 O God! Guide them with the light of inspiration, so they will arrive at You, and gain the prize of [inhabiting] paradise!
- 5803 O God! Help them and lead them to victory! Protect them from the temptations of the tempter!
- 5804 Lead them to victory, O God, with the help of the *Quran* that You brought down.
- 5805 O God! They are the foreigners, who seek refuge in You. You are the Benefactor!
- 5806 O God! For Your sake they fought with their fellow men, except the righteous.
- 5807 Although they were needy, they departed from their closest friends only to please the Compassionate.
- 5808 They were pleased with Your protection. Whoever wins Your protection is utterly secured and confident.
- 5809 They were pleased with Your Revelation. They were not pleased with anything other than Your Revelation. They were not pleased with people who present senseless notions.
- 5810 O God, strengthen their faith. Make them guides for the lost and bewildered.
- 5811 Let the Soldiers of Affirmation (*ʿAsākir al-Ithbāt*), who are the people of truth and knowledge, overcome the party of the deniers [of the divine attributes]!



- 5812 Bring supporters for *Ahl al-Sunnah*! Help them any time!
 5813 Make them leaders of the pious! Provide them with patience and absolute certainty.
 5814 They will be guided by Your command, not by what some people invented and not by the enmity they preach for.
 5815 Strengthen them by Your truth. Lead them to victory. You have governance.
 5816 Forgive their sins. Make them do right. You always forgive readily.
 5817 All praises are meant for You. Your praise never perishes.
 5818 Your praise fills the skies and the earth. Moreover, every existent and every possibility in its utmost degree
 5819 Is the outcome of Your creative will. Behind all that [You created] lies everlasting and eternal praise.
 5820 Bless Your prophet and grant him the most noble prayers and salvation! Grant him Your perfect approval.
 5821 Bestow Your blessings upon his companions and successors.¹⁰⁵

Did *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* reach a large audience, or did its message to the Taymīyan circle remain hidden between its numerous verses? *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* was a popular text, recited by Ibn al-Qayyim himself to an enthusiastic audience.¹⁰⁶ The number of glosses written on the poem also indicates its importance in the eyes of later generations.¹⁰⁷ Today, however, the persistence of its presentation as a Taymīyan or Salafi creed in verse sterilizes the poem of its emotional components and colors it as yet another dull theological work on the divine attributes.

Conclusion

Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah, a multi-layered poem of outstanding volume, was composed as a response to the formative events of the Taymīyan circle, that is, Ibn Taymīyah's *miḥan*. *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* is labeled as a theological-polemical work on the divine attributes and anthropomorphism, written in verse for didactic and mnemonic purposes. However, Ibn al-Qayyim composed the poem in

¹⁰⁵ *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 1996, 408–10.

¹⁰⁶ See the introduction to Bori and Holtzman, *A Scholar in the Shadow*, 25. Several unknown findings about *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*'s proliferation in Damascus will be presented in my "Tashbīh, Ḥashwiyya, and Takfīr: Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī's Counterattack on the Later Ḥanbalis," in Holtzmann, *Defining Anthropomorphism: The Challenge of Islamic Fundamentalism* (Edinburgh, forthcoming).

¹⁰⁷ For a thorough survey of glosses, some of which are still in manuscript, see: *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* BAZ, 1:51–106.



order to satisfy various emotional and probably social needs of Ibn Taymīyah's followers—whether educated or laymen. *Al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah* helped these people reshape and strengthen their communal identity by telling (or reciting) a martyrological narrative. According to this narrative, the followers of Ibn Taymīyah are the successors of previous generations of adherents to the Quran and the Sunnah, who suffered a great deal at the hands of the intellectual elite. The last round of the battle between the adherents of the Quran and Sunnah—the traditionalists—and the rationalistic elite was the *miḥan* of Ibn Taymīyah. The battle between good and evil is not yet concluded, but the poem promises its audience that victory awaits, and in any case, the brave warriors of the Quran will receive their full recompense in the afterlife.

Ibn al-Qayyim uses the vehicle of the highly artistic *qaṣīdah* to its fullest: he succeeds in expressing such a wide range of emotions throughout this so-called “Taymīyan creed in verse” by skillfully using various rhetorical and poetical devices that the artistic value of the poem can no longer be dismissed. All these devices are invested in the goal of arousing in the audience a sense of self-victimization. The martyrological narrative overshadows to some degree the theological aspects or layers of the poem; however, these aspects are indeed the lion's share of the poem, and should not be neglected. Ibn al-Qayyim's success in building a poem in the guise of a theological treatise, which hides between its lines the kind of verses that are meant to unite individuals into a community facing a mighty enemy, is indeed impressive. The reception of the poem in Ibn al-Qayyim's times and after is the matter for a different line of investigation.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ See my “*Tashbih*, *Ḥashwiyya*, and *Takfir*.”

