Ibn Taymiyya’s Methodology Regarding his Sources. Reading, Selection and Use
Preliminary Study and Perspectives

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Abstract  Over the past two decades, the growing number of works on Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) has confirmed the ever-growing interest of scholars in the famous Ḥanbalī theologian of Damascus, who is undeniably one of the most studied and well-known medieval Muslim theologians. In addition to the diversity of the subjects covered, the analysis of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings demonstrates the author’s vast erudition and his argumentation methodology, which was both efficient and complex. Even though he has been the subject of research in both the Arab world and Western scholarship, grey areas remain regarding what can be called Ibn Taymiyya’s source methodology. Based on a close reading of a sample of the Ḥanbalī theologian’s writings, this article attempts to provide some preliminary information on Ibn Taymiyya’s way of reading, selection and use of sources in his argumentation methodology. Far from being an exhaustive study that would require a complete analysis of the Ḥanbalī scholar’s work, this article aims to be a preliminary study to suggest analytical and research perspectives.


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1 Introduction

Ibn Taymiyya is undeniably one of the most studied medieval Muslim theologians and one who raises the most interest among researchers both in the Arab world and in the West. This is due to his numerous works on a wide range of subjects, in which a rich and complex writing still influences to a certain extent contemporary Islam. As a result, Ibn Taymiyya is more often (mis)quoted than understood.¹

The flowering of works over the last two decades has broadened our knowledge of the theologian’s work and thought including his position in matters of dogma, Sufism, logic, philosophy, politics but also the later reception of his writings and principles. However, the significant number of works on Ibn Taymiyya is still insufficient to hope to propose a definitive introduction to his thought and writings.² Ibn Taymiyya’s enormous body of work was due to his vast erudition that came from the study and knowledge of a corpus of sources as wide as they were varied, just like the diversity of the subjects he dealt with in depth. In his writings, Ibn Taymiyya quoted jurists, theologians, exeges, muḥaddītūn, Sufi masters, philosophers, historians – whether he liked them or not – and their works, sometimes to support his opinion and elsewhere to criticise and refute the views of his opponents. The fact that Ibn Taymiyya used such a corpus of sources confirms his “intellectual independence”.³ It is also because of his views and his profound knowledge of Aristotelian logic, Greek philosophy and kalām, but also because all these elements influenced his methodology, that Ibn Taymiyya was criticised by some traditionalists, including the Ḥanbalīs and other scholars from his circle like al-Dahabī.⁴

One only needs to read Ibn Taymiyya’s *magnum opus* Darʾ al-taʿāruḍ to be made aware of his vast erudition, which many of his contemporaries acknowledged, whether they were close to him or adversaries, an erudition before which, in the words of Yahya Michot, “on ne peut rester que pantois”.⁵ Recently, Carl Sharif El-Tobgui has shown that the Darʾ al-taʿāruḍ:

reveals a broadly coherent system of thought that draws on diverse intellectual resources. Ibn Taymiyya synthesized these resources and, combining them with his own unique contributions, created an approach to the question of reason and revelation that stands

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¹ Rapoport, Shahab 2010, 4; Michot 2020b.
² Rapoport, Shahab 2010, 5; Michot 2020a, VI-VII.
³ Anjum 2012, 184; El-Tobgui 2019, 87-93.
⁵ Michot 2000, 599.
in marked contrast to previously articulated approaches. Through this ambitious undertaking, Ibn Taymiyya develops views and arguments that have implications for fields ranging from the interpretation of scripture to ontology, epistemology, and the theory of language.\(^6\)

It is true that Ibn Taymiyya’s rather dry writing style, as well as his repetitive digressions and tangled discussions that overshadow the internal structure of his arguments, coupled with an uninterrupted flow of detailed information and quotations, often make his writings difficult to read – the level of difficulty varying from work to work. However, despite these difficulties, one can analyse Ibn Taymiyya’s discursive strategy and some of these aspects have already been studied.

In his book *Ibn Taymiyya: hayātu-hu*, Muḥammad Abū Zahra (d. 1974) highlighted Ibn Taymiyya’s writing *manhaǧ* in *tafsīr*, issues related to dogma, jurisprudence and Sufism. For Muḥammad Abū Zahra, his *manhaǧ* was the same regardless of the field.\(^7\) In an important contribution, Ibrāhīm ʿUqaylī was interested in the importance given to revelation, reason and the Arabic language itself in Ibn Taymiyya’s *manhaǧ*.\(^8\) The Arabic language as a reasoning tool in Ibn Taymiyya was later analysed in detail by Hādī Aḥmad Farḥān al-Šāǧirī\(^9\) and then ‘Abd al-Allāh b. Nāfī’ al-Daḡānī.\(^10\) In 1999, the book *Manhaǧ šayḫ al-Islām* by ‘Abd Allāh b. Muhammad b. Saʿd al-Ḥaḡīlī attempted to highlight the various aspects of Ibn Taymiyya’s written output, the historical context, the number of writings, the date and place of production.\(^11\) Finally, other aspects of Ibn Taymiyya’s *manhaǧ* have been studied, like the issue of *takfīr*,*\(^12\) dogma,\(^13\) innovations (*bidaʿ*)\(^14\) or even knowledge in general.\(^15\)

Undeniably, Ibn Taymiyya’s argumentation strategy in the fields of philosophy and rationalism, particularly in his *Darʿ al-taʿārūd*, attracted much scholarly interest and fostered a substantial scientif-

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\(^6\) El-Tobgui 2019, 4-5.
\(^7\) Abū Zahra 1991, 180-1.
\(^8\) ʿUqaylī 1994, 109-76.
\(^12\) al-Mišʿabī 1997.
\(^13\) al-Barīkān 2004.
\(^14\) al-Muqrin 2014.
\(^15\) al-Daḡānī 2014.
ic output to this day. Following Syed Nomanul Haq, Nadjet Zouggar pointed out that the digressions that characterise Ibn Taymiyya’s writing style allowed him to discuss various topics and were in a way “dans le champ du kalām auquel il refusait pourtant d’appartenir”. The idea of a Taymiyyan kalām would however certainly deserve further investigation.

While Ibn Taymiyya was an important historical source for his time, he also knew how to use history in his argumentation strategy in order to corroborate his religious arguments as Sa’d b. Mūsā al-Mūsā and Daniella Talmon-Heller have demonstrated. Geography was not left out. In her article, Zayde Antrim highlighted Ibn Taymiyya’s “discourse of place” concerning the Šām region. He highlighted the region’s merits and history to encourage the Mamlūks to defend it as the territory of Islam against the danger of Mongol invasion.

The complexity of Ibn Taymiyya’s argumentation methodology and discursive strategy should not obscure the fact that he was also capable of simplifying particularly sibylline theological subjects for the sake of the popular masses.

While all these works provide insight into Ibn Taymiyya’s argumentation methodology and discursive strategy, his source methodology is less well known. This paper intends to explore this issue in further depth. I mean by source methodology how Ibn Taymiyya, on the one hand, selected, read his sources and dealt with them, on the other, how he integrated them into his argumentation strategy. This is not an exhaustive study of Ibn Taymiyya’s source methodology based on a complete analysis of all his works, which would require a collective effort as with so many other aspects of Ibn Taymiyya’s thought and writing methodology. This article is a preliminary study to suggest analytical perspectives and provide initial findings.


17 In the preface of the book Ibn Taymiyya and His Times, Syed Nomanul Haq already questioned whether Ibn Taymiyya should be considered a philosopher or a neo-mutakallim. Rapoport, Shahab 2010, IX.

18 Zouggar 2010, 198.


22 Bori 2013, 78-80; 2018, 301-2.
based on the examination of a selection of passages taken from different works among the writings of the Ḥanbali theologian and dealing with various subjects. These thoughts, which came to light on reading some of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings, will be further developed at a later date by analysing some of his other writings.

2 The Texts

This study is based on five of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings: al-Fatwā al-ḥamawiyya (The Fatwā for the People of Hama), al-Istiqāma (The Rightness), Iqtiḍā’ al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm li-muḥālafat aṣḥāb al-Ǧahīm (The Necessity of the Straight Path in Distinction from the People of Hell), al-Ǧawāb al-bāhir fī zuwwār al-maqābir (The Outshining Answer About the Visitors of Graves) and al-Ịḥnā’iyya (The Iḥnā’īs [title referring pejoratively to the Mālikī Taqī al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Iḥnāʿi]).

Written in 698/1298, the Fatwā al-ḥamawiyya was Ibn Taymiyya’s response to a question by inhabitants of the city of Hama about the verses and ḥadīṯs mentioning names and attributes of God.23 This fatwā by Ibn Taymiyya, in the form of a treatise, was not to the liking of the Ašʿarī ʿulamāʾ and followers of the kalām, some of whom tried to have him judged and condemned.24 The second work is al-Istiqāma, probably written between the years 708-09/1308-09 during his incarceration in Egypt.25 In al-Istiqāma, Ibn Taymiyya emphasised the need to follow the right and just path with regard to the divine names and attributes as well as the oneness of God via the observance of the precepts of the Qurʾān and the Sunna in order to avoid in fine any innovation.26 One of the characteristics of the book is that most of it was actually a commentary on Abū al-Qāsim al-Qušayrī’s Risāla (d. 465/1072-73).27 Ibn Taymiyya acknowledged that this work contained much that was good and true but it “lacks the path fol-

23 The verses concerned are as follows: S20/V5; S57/V4; S41/V11. For the ḥadīṯs: “Verily, the hearts of all the sons of Adam are between the two fingers out of the fingers of the Most Gracious” (Al-Ǧabbār will put his Foot in the fire of Hell). Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 61-2 (if not otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author). According to Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, Ibn Taymiyya’s student and biographer, there are two fatawā // fatwā-s al-ḥamawiyya: a small one (suġrā) and a large one (kubrā). Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 16.
26 Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 35.
27 On al-Qušayrī, his work and thought see Chiabotti 2008-09; 2013a; 2013b; 2014; 2016.
owed by the majority of the awliyā’ of God”. 28 Al-Istiqāma showcased the importance of tasawwuf as a spiritual path, bringing one closer to God and Ibn Taymiyya’s interest in it. Al-Istiqāma is in itself another argument refuting the false accusation that Ibn Taymiyya was staunchly anti-Sufi. 29

In the Iqtiḍā’ al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm li-muḫālafat aṣḥāb al-Ǧaḥīm, written around 715/1315-16, 30 the third writing selected from his corpus, Ibn Taymiyya dealt with “a very important rule among the rules of šaṭī’a”, 31 the danger of imitating the People of the Book or polytheists in their practices. These included, for instance, going on pilgrimage to visit the tombs or mausoleums of saints or prophets, or celebrating non-Islamic festivals in the company of infidels and polytheists.

The last two works of Ibn Taymiyya I have selected for this study are al-Ǧawāb al-bāhir fī zuwwār al-maqābir and al-Iḫnāʾiyya, both of which concern visiting the tombs. 32 In his Ġawāb al-bāhir, Ibn Taymiyya defends the following position: it is possible to visit graves (even those of non-believers in order to remember the dead) as the Sunna authorises (ziyāra šarʿiyya) and avoiding introducing into this practice innovations (ziyāra bidʿiyya) that can lead the Muslim to the širk (polytheism/associationism) particularly through the veneration of the dead or imploiring their help and/or intercession. The other important point that Ibn Taymiyya emphasises is the prohibition to travel to visit the tombs of the saints and prophets according to his inter-

29 The ill-established hypothesis that Ibn Taymiyya was a stubborn opponent to Sufism no longer holds as Henri Laoust, George Makdisi, Thomas Homerin and more recently Assef Qays clearly demonstrated his links with al-tasawwuf especially with al-Qādiriyya Ḥanbali brotherhood. Laoust 1960, 35; Laoust 1962, 33; Makdisi 1973, 118-29; Homerin 1985; Assef 2012. In reality, Ibn Taymiyya only strongly condemned certain practices such as samāʿ which he considered an innovation to which he was vehemently opposed in contrast to al-Ǧazālī who considered it licit on condition that certain rules were strictly observed: Ibn Taymiyya 1991. See also Michot 1988; Ibn Taymiyya 2001. The words of Carl Sharif al-Tobgui in his recent book sum up the issue quite well: “Ibn Taymiyya’s reputation for being implacably anti-Sufi is inaccurate and misleading when indiscriminately generalized, but it is not entirely without foundation as he was indeed staunchly - and very vocally - opposed to discrete ideas and practices that were widely associated with Sufism in his day. For Ibn Taymiyya’s critiques of such aspects of contemporary Sufism, critiques that are responsible not only for the stereotype we have inherited of him today but also for a considerable amount of the opposition and tribulations he faced in his own day” (El-Tobgui 2019, 88 fn. 32).
30 Estimate made from the copy that was originally kept at Chester Beatty Library but was later purchased by al-Imām Muhammad b. Saʿūd University. Nowadays, the manuscript is conserved at the Central Library of Riyadh under the number 4160. Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 18, 20.
31 Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 51.
32 In addition to al-Ǧawāb and al-Iḫnāʾiyya, see Ibn Taymiyya 2001b, vol. 14, t. 27. See also Ibn Taymiyya 2007, 131-7. For more information see Taylor 1999, 179-94; Olesen 1991; Munt 2014, 227-51; Berriah, forthcoming.
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Interpretation of the hadīth: “No travel except to one of the three mosques: the mosque al-Ḥarām (Mecca), this mosque which is mine (Medina) and the mosque al-Aqṣā (Jerusalem).” Ibn Taymiyya considered travelling to visit the tombs of the prophets and saints as an innovation since it was neither encouraged by the Prophet nor even practised by the Companions except for very rare exceptions. Moreover, this innovative practice is dangerous since such visits can, over time, turn into a kind of pilgrimage like those of the Christians. For Ibn Taymiyya, whoever goes to Medina must go there with the intention (al-niyya) of praying in accordance with the hadīth quoted above and not with the intention of visiting the Prophet’s tomb. The same applies to Jerusalem with the al-Aqṣā mosque and the tombs of the prophets present in the area. In his voluminous al-Iḫnāʾiyya, written during his last stay in prison in Damascus, Ibn Taymiyya, on the one hand, retorts to the accusations of the Mālikī qāḍī al-quḍāt Taqī al-Dīn Abū Bakr al-Iḫnāʾī (d. 750-751/1350-51) against him and, on the other hand, refutes the latter’s positions which encourage visiting the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad, other prophets and saints in general. Ibn Taymiyya takes up the arguments already present in his Gawāb al-bāhir which he develops further while bringing in new ones.

In addition to Ibn Taymiyya’s writings, I also make use of contemporary chroniclers of the Ḥanbalī šayḫ of Damascus as well as his biographies when necessary.

3 Opinions of the Companions

After the Qurʾān and the Sunna, the opinions of the Prophet’s Companions constitute the third source of reference in Islam, both for dogmatic issues, belief/creed and Muslim law with differences in their consideration according to the Sunni madhabs. It is true that the opinions of the Companions, and to a lesser extent those of the Successors (tābiʿūn), are of particular importance to Imam Aḥmad.

Like the founder of his formative madhab, Ibn Taymiyya quoted extensively the so-called al-salaf (ancestors or predecessors) or al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ (pious predecessors) in his arguments, especially the Com-

33 Narrated from Abū Hurayra, reported by al-Nasāʾī in his Sunan (https://sunnah.com/nasai:760).
34 Ibn Taymiyya 2011a, 110, 137-41, 144, 150, 252-3, 264, 266, 300, 365-6.
36 Concept referring to the first three generations of Islam which is supported by several hadīths. Among the best known is that reported by al-Buḫārī, according to ʿImrān b. al-Ḥusayn, the Prophet said: “The best people are those of my century, then those of the next two centuries”.
What interests us here is how Ibn Taymiyya chose the opinions of the Companions and quoted them to support his ideas as well as to refute those of his opponents. While it is not possible to carry out a complete analysis of Ibn Taymiyya’s works, we will focus on two themes that he dealt with in two of his works: the first concerns the visitation of the tomb of the Prophet, the prophets and the saints in general. This is one of the topics on which Ibn Taymiyya wrote extensively, especially towards the end of his life, and for which he repeatedly used the opinions of the Companions. The second theme deals with the merit of Arabs over other peoples and of the Arabic language over other languages. Initially, Ibn Taymiyya approached the subject through a sociological prism before ‘Islamising’ it by inserting it into religious discourse.

The examination of these two themes will allow us to compare Ibn Taymiyya’s use of the Opinions of the Companions. Of course, the results presented here are only preliminary and far from definitive; they will be supplemented by further analyses.

3.1 Pre-Eminence According to Merit and ǧumhūr al-ṣaḥāba as a Selection Criterion

The last major polemic initiated by Ibn Taymiyya in his writings concerned the ziyārāt. Scholars have seen Ibn Qayyim al-Ǧawziyya (d. 751/1350) as the trigger for this controversy. The works and letters Ibn Taymiyya wrote during his last term of imprisonment reveals the extent of the polemic, its violence as well as the animosity of his opponents towards him, especially the Mālikī Abū Bakr al-Iḥnāʾī. In fact, his supporters and their opponents kept it going, with Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343) and others even later.

When writing on the visitation of tombs, Ibn Taymiyya called tirelessly on the Opinions of the Companions quoting them to support his statements and deconstruct the discourse of his opponents. One of his chief arguments, which he often insisted upon in his various writings, is that no Companion from the time of the Rāšidūn caliphs or later rulers made journeys for the sole purpose of visiting the tomb of a prophet or a saint. The Companions who travelled to Jerusalem went there to pray in the al-Aqṣā Mosque, the third mosque after that

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37 For example, on the fiṭra see Holtzman 2010, 163-88. See also Anjum 2012, 215-32.
38 Berriah, forthcoming.
39 Berriah, forthcoming. See also El-Rouayheb 2010, 288-95.
of Mecca and Medina for which the Prophet authorised the journey.\textsuperscript{40} According to Ibn Taymiyya, none of the Companions who travelled to Jerusalem visited the tomb of Abraham.\textsuperscript{41}

Not all the opinions of the Companions were of equal value for Ibn Taymiyya and he ranked them by merit. The four Rāšidūn caliphs, Abū Bakr (d. 13/634), ʿUmar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), ʿUtmān b. ʿAffān (d. 35/656) and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) occupied, in regnal order, the first places. This position was supported by several hadīṭs, the best known of which was that reported by Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmīzī according to Abū Naǧīḥ al-ʿIrbāḍ b. Sāriya.\textsuperscript{42} In his Rafʿ al-malām ʿan aʾimmat al-aʿlām, Ibn Taymiyya stated that the Rāšidūn caliphs were the most knowledgeable about the Prophetic Sunna, especially Abū Bakr who was most often in the company of the Prophet, then came the turn of ʿUmar.\textsuperscript{43} Then came the “ten promised to Paradise” (al-ʿašara al-mubaššarīn bi-l-ǧanna),\textsuperscript{44} followed by precedence in conversion, the Hijra, participation in the first battles of Badr, Uḥud, etc.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{40} Ahmad, al-Buḫārī, Muslim and others reported from Abū Hurayra:

\begin{quote}
لا تشد الرحال إلا إلى ثلاثة مساجد المسﺠد الحرام، ومسﺠد الرسول صلى الله ﻋليه وسلم، ومسجد الأقصى
\end{quote}

(No travel except to one of the three mosques: the mosque al-Ḥarām [Mecca], the mosque of the Prophet [Medina] and the mosque of al-Aqṣā [Jerusalem]).

\textsuperscript{41} For a quotation of this argument see Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 195.

\textsuperscript{42} It is also quoted by al-Nawawī in his Fourteen hadīṭs: “I advise you to fear Allah, listen, and obey, even if an Abyssinian slave is put in charge of you. Whoever lives after me will see many conflicts. You must adhere to my Sunna and the Sunna of the righteous, guided successors. Hold firmly to it as if biting with your molar teeth. Beware of newly invented matters, for every new matter is an innovation and every innovation is misguidance” (translated by Sunnah.com, https://sunnah.com/nawawi).

\textsuperscript{43} Ibn Taymiyya 1992-93, 10. Ibn Taymiyya always quotes the opinion of each of the four caliphs in the chronological order of their reign, which also corresponds to their merits. See 11, 16-17.


\textsuperscript{45} In his Ġawāb al-bāhir fī zuwwār al-maqābir, Ibn Taymiyya indicates this ranking of the Companions according to their merits by reporting a dispute that broke out between the two Companions ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf and Ḥālid b. al-Walīd: “He [the Prophet] said in an authentic hadīṭ: ‘Do not insult my companions, by the one who has my soul in his hands, if one of you gives in alms the equivalent of Mount Uḥud in gold, it would not reach the [amount] of the mudd of one of them or even half of it.’” This was said to Ḥālid b. al-Walīd when he quarrelled with ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf because the latter was among the early converts, those who spent well before al-Fatḥ [the conquest of Mecca], who fought, and the fatḥ referred to here is the pact of Ḥudaybiyya. Ḥālid, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ and ʿUtmān b. Ṭalḥa converted during the truce following al-Ḥudaybiyya and before the capture of Mecca. They were among the muḥāջirūn followers and not like the original muḥā葡京ūn. As for those who converted in the year of the capture of Mecca, they are not considered muḥā葡京ūn because there was no hiǧra after the capture of Mecca. Those who converted from among the inhabitants of Mecca are called al-ṭulaqāʾ because the Prophet let them go in peace after the capture of the city by arms in the image that the prisoner of war is released” (Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 260-1).
Ibn Taymiyya put forward this pre-eminence of the Rāšidūn caliphs in several passages. According to him, during the reigns of the four Rāšidūn caliphs, the Companions who travelled and stayed in Medina, when they had finished praying behind the caliph who occupied the place of imam, would either greet the latter and keep him company for some time, or leave the mosque, or else they remained seated in the mosque while making dikr (the remembrance of God). In any case, and Ibn Taymiyya insisted on this point, there was no account according to which the Companions visited the Prophet’s grave. Saying the tašliyya (uttering the salutation over the Prophet) in the tašahhud in prayer or outside of it, was the practice that the Prophet had recommended for himself and was therefore far more meritorious.

Similarly, in response to those who considered that the mosque in Medina had more merit since it enshrined the Prophet’s tomb, Ibn Taymiyya argued that the Prophet’s mosque in Medina already had more merit at the time of the Rāšidūn caliphs before it included his tomb for one good reason: that era had more merit – because closer to the time of the Prophet – than later times when the expansion of the mosque was carried out by integrating the Prophet’s tomb within its walls.

The proponents of visiting the Prophet’s grave relied, among other things, on a narrative that ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar b. al-Ḫaṭṭāb, one of the most illustrious Companions and considered to be among the most learned, used to go to the Prophet’s grave after returning from a journey to visit the Prophet as well as Abū Bakr and his father, ʿUmar,

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46 The tašahhud is the part of the Muslim prayer where the person kneels facing the qibla after two rounds of prayer (rakʿāt), holding out the index finger of the right hand, leaving it either motionless or performing with slight circular movements to the right. At this point, the believer utters a formulation glorifying and praising God, greeting the Prophet followed by the two attestations of faith. The second tašahhud, which closes the prayer, is performed before the taslīm. In this second tašahhud, an invocation of blessings and peace upon the Prophet Muḥammad and Abraham is added. This invocation is known as the tašliyya. Sābiq 2009, 119-23.

47 Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 205, 258-9; see also 277 et 292. For Ibn Taymiyya, the devil did not try to trick the Companions by making them hear some voice that would make them believe that the Prophet had responded to their greeting or had spoken to them from his grave, a belief and superstition that came after the Companions. Nothing is reported about the Companions in this regard, which makes them a reliable and fundamental source for Ibn Taymiyya regarding the visit to the Prophet’s tomb. Ibn Taymiyya, Ğawāb al-bāḥir, 260-1. In his book The Holy City of Medina, Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia, Harry Munt states that a kind of “pilgrimage” existed in Medina from the second/eighth century onwards, which consisted of visiting sites related to the Prophetic story. However, it was not until the fourth/tenth century that the visit to the Prophet’s tomb became increasingly popular and can be considered ritual. Munt 2014, 141-3.

48 Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 304.
Ibn Taymiyya at no point questioned the veracity of this account of Ibn ‘Umar’s well-known practice. To refute the opinion of his opponents, Ibn Taymiyya initially invoked the ǧumhūr al-ṣaḥāba (the majority opinion of the Companions) to show that the case of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar was, in fact, an exception among the majority of the Companions for whom there was no testimony attesting to this practice. Later in his al-Ǧawāb al-bāhir, he mentions another practice of Ibn ‘Umar which was also considered to be an exception. It was reported that he sought to pray in the exact location where the Prophet had prayed in the Medina mosque in order to pray there in turn. This practice of Ibn ‘Umar could be seen as, implicitly, seeking some baraka (blessing) from the Prophet in the locations where the latter had prayed. To show that this practice was an exception, that it was not in line with the Sunna and that it was not to be followed, Ibn Taymiyya summoned both the ǧumhūr al-ṣaḥāba as well as the pre-eminence of the Rāšidūn caliphs:

and one should not take this practice of Ibn ‘Umar [that of coming to visit the Prophet’s grave] as an example or touching by brushing with one’s hand [tamassuḥ] the place he [the Prophet] occupied on the minbar or even seeking to pray at the places where he [the Prophet] prayed because Ibn ‘Umar liked to pray at these places while the majority of the Companions [ǧumhūr al-ṣaḥāba] did not like to do this but instead they liked what he [the Prophet] liked, that is, to pray wherever one was when the hour of prayer arrived. His father, ‘Umar b. al-Ḫaṭṭāb forbade seeking out these places to pray and he said, ‘Surely those who preceded you perished because of this; they took the footsteps and relics [ātār] of their prophets as places of worship. Let him who is in a place at the time when the hour of prayer has arrived, let him pray there, or else let him go!’

49 Abū Bakr to the right, ‘Umar to the left.
50 Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 276, 282-3.
51 Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 295-6. For another account of ‘Umar’s disapproval of praying in a place because the Prophet had prayed there see 304.
In this and other passages, Ibn Taymiyya relied on the opinion of one of the Rāšidūn caliphs, in this case that of ʿUmar who is none other than the father of ʿAbd Allāh. Since the father’s position and merit was superior to that of the son, so were his opinions, sayings and practices. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya ended his argument by explaining that this pre-eminence of ʿUmar in merit, supported by the words of the Prophet, meant that one had to follow him, before his son ʿAbd Allāh, despite the latter’s merits, which were certainly numerous, but lesser:

And ʿUmar enjoined upon them [the Companions and Muslims] what the Prophet taught them [ṣanānahu la-hum] and ʿUmar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb was one of the Rāšidūn caliphs for whom we were ordered to follow the traditions [ṣunnati-him]. And he [ʿUmar] has a peculiarity in this from the fact that he and Abū Bakr are to be taken as an example since he [the Prophet] said: ‘take as an example the two who are after me: Abū Bakr and ʿUmar’. Taking [someone] as an example is superior to following a tradition.53

This criterion of merit also applied to less illustrious Companions. Ibn Taymiyya reported the discussion between Abū Hurayra, one of the greatest narrators of ḥadīth, and Abū Baṣra al-Ġifārī about visiting Mount Ṭūr:

And it is according to him [the Prophet], in the two Ṣaḥīḥs, that he [the Prophet] said: ‘One does not undertake a journey except for three mosques: the holy mosque [Mecca], this mosque which is mine [Medina] and the mosque al-Aqṣā [Jerusalem]’. So much so that Abū Hurayra travelled to Mount Ṭūr where God spoke to Moses b. ʿImrān – upon him be Peace – and that Abū Baṣra al-Ġifārī said to him, ‘How I wish I had joined you before you left. I heard the Prophet of God – may the prayers and salvation of God be upon him – say: ‘One does not use a mount [for travelling] except for
three mosques: the Holy Mosque, this mosque which is mine [Medina] and the al-Aqṣā Mosque [Jerusalem].

While he was not among the best-known Companions, Abū Baṣra al-Ġifārī was the son of Baṣra b. Abī Baṣra b. Waqqāṣ who was himself a Companion of the Prophet. Abū Baṣra al-Ġifārī was raised in the Muslim religion. As for Abū Hurayra, Muslim historians and biographers reported that he converted only late, in year 7 of the Hijra. In addition, as the passage indicates, Abū Baṣra al-Ġifārī was one of the transmitters of the hadīt about the only permission to travel to the three mosques for the purpose of worship that Abū Hurayra would later relate. It is this hadīt that formed the pillar on which Ibn Taymiyya’s argument about the visitation of graves rested throughout the controversy. Although not explicit in the quoted passage, Abū Baṣra al-Ġifārī’s remark to Abū Hurayra shows implicitly the precedence of the former over the latter, justified by the primacy of his conversion to Islam. On the subject of the expansion of the Medina mosque carried out during the reign of ʿUṭmān, Ibn Taymiyya again invoked both the criterion of precedence of the Companions according to their merits, in this case with the character of ʿUmar, as well as that of the ǧumhūr al-ṣaḥāba:

and many of the Companions and Successors hated what ʿUṭmān – may God be pleased with him – did by building the mosque with stone, plaster and teak wood, and hated even more what al-Walīd [d. 96/715] did [in the matter of works]. As for ʿUmar – may God be pleased with him – he enlarged the mosque using the same materials already present in its [original] construction namely: mud bricks, its pillars with trunks and its roof with palm branches. It has not been reported that anyone [among the Companions] disliked what ʿUmar did but rather the disagreement was about what ʿUṭmān and al-Walīd did.

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54 Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 189-90.
55 Some versions state that Abū Hurayra was present (ṣahīda) at Ḥaybar’s expedition although it is not known whether he fought or not. According to other versions, Abū Hurayra arrived in Medina after the Prophet had gone on an expedition against Ḥaybar. Ibn Sa’d 2001, 5: 232-3; Ibn al-ʿAtîr 2012, 1412.
Although the material used for the work carried out by the third caliph ʿUṭmān was of better quality and far stronger than that used under ʿUmar, the latter’s work on the Medina mosque was considered to be better by Ibn Taymiyya for two reasons: ʿUmar used the same type of material constituting the initial structure of the mosque. Although Ibn Taymiyya did not directly mention the Prophet here, ʿUmar seemed to be presented as imitating the Prophet, the best of men, in his choice of building materials for the mosque; second reason: according to Ibn Taymiyya there was no account of a Companion criticising ʿUmar’s expansion work unlike those of ʿUṭmān and al-Walīd. Therefore, the lack of criticism of ʿUmar’s works by Companions seemed to stand for Ibn Taymiyya as an approval of the latter towards ʿUmar’s works. Although the works of ʿUṭmān and al-Walīd made the building stronger, enlarged it and thus allowed more believers to come and pray in the mosque, Ibn Taymiyya considered the quality of the works not in terms of their material result, but according to the time, rank and merits of the one who ordered them, all echoing the Prophetic ḥadīth. This dual recourse to the Companions as a source, a use that was both vertical (criterion of precedence according to merit) and horizontal (majority of the Companions) was a fairly effective method to refute the opinions of opponents who relied on isolated opinions and/or practices of illustrious Companions. By quoting the opinion of a more illustrious Companion and then the ǧumhūr al-ṣaḥāba (majority of the Companions), Ibn Taymiyya made it very difficult for any counter-argument to be made even on the basis of Companions’ opinions. Ibn Taymiyya really stands out due to the frequency with which he used this dual criterion. Further analysis of his other writings would confirm this trend. In the following lines, I will try to show that Ibn Taymiyya did not always follow this methodology scrupulously in referring to the Companions and that he proceeded in a different way depending on the subject matter.
3.2 Relevance of the Source at the Expense of Its Pre-Eminence

In his *Iqtida’ al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, Ibn Taymiyya devoted about thirty pages to the question of Arabness, the merits of Arabs and the Arabic language, approaching the subject through a religious and, to a lesser extent, sociological and cultural prism.\(^{57}\) By way of introduction, Ibn Taymiyya offered an interesting ‘ḥaldūnian’ sociological analysis of the different peoples before Ibn Ḫaldūn, each of whom had two components: nomadic living in the *bādiyya* (steppe/desert) and sedentary living in the *ḥadāra* (city/town).\(^{58}\)

At the beginning of his argument, Ibn Taymiyya reported two sayings attributed to Salmān al-Fārisī (d. 33/654) followed by one by ʿUmar b. al-Ḫaṭṭāb to show the superiority of Arabs and the Arabic language over non-Arabs.\(^{59}\) Given the manner, seen above, in which Ibn Taymiyya used the Companions, one would have expected ʿUmar, the second *Rāšidūn* caliph, to be cited before Salmān since he occupies a higher rank as having the most merits in the Sunni tradition. However, Salmān was cited before ʿUmar. But why quote the latter when words attributed to the second Caliph of Islam and other more illustrious Companions following the example of ʿAlī, about the importance of the Arabic language and Arabism were well-known?

The choice of quoting Salmān before ʿUmar was due to Ibn Taymiyya’s need to build a more relevant and compelling argument. Salmān was of Persian origin and his testimony in favour of the Arabs constituted a stronger, more ‘hard-hitting’ argument than that of an Arab ʿUmar from the Quraysh. Here, the criterion for selecting sources was no longer precedence and merit but relevance. The word of a non-Arab Companion who lived among the Arabs and who defended Arabness was a far more relevant testimony than that of one of the most illustrious Arab Companions.

Ibn Taymiyya followed the same method when highlighting the merits of Muslim Persians, particularly those of Isfahan from where the Companion Salmān al-Fārisī was said to be originated.\(^{60}\) Ibn Taymiyya reported the words of the one who was considered the best of the Successors, and who was an Arab, Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib who praised the merits of the Muslim Persians, especially those of Isfahan. Ibn Taymiyya’s choice to devote a section to the merits of the

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\(^{57}\) Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 250-71.

\(^{58}\) Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 250. In the introduction to his recently published collection of articles, Yahya Michot wrote: “Parfois, j’ai pu constater chez lui des accents trahissant un intérêt qu’on qualifierait aujourd’hui de sociologique. Ibn Taymiyya précurseur d’Ibn Khaldūn ? La question mériterait une étude en bonne et due forme”. Michot 2020a, VI.

\(^{59}\) Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 265-6.

\(^{60}\) Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 270; Ibn Sa’d 2001, 4: 69. Ibn al-Atīr reports that he may also have come from the city of Rāmahurμuz in Ḫūzistān. Ibn al-Atīr 2012, 499-500.
Persians was not insignificant since there were many great tābiʿūn and tābiʿ tābiʿīn (Successors) of Persian origin who were students of the Companions and transmitters of their opinions such as ʿIkrima, the mawlā of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās. As these few elements show, Ibn Taymiyya’s selection and use of the opinions of the Companions and Successors was not only based on the criterion of merit but also on the relevance of his argument and to ensure his discursive strategy was more effective.

4 Use Your Opponent’s Corpus of Texts

4.1 Capacity to Use the Opponent’s Corpus

Certainly, one of the characteristics of Ibn Taymiyya’s source methodology was his ability to use his opponent’s sources at his own advantage. This could only be carried out by someone who had a good knowledge of his opponent’s corpus. The writings that probably best highlight Ibn Taymiyya’s use of his opponents’ sources in order to deconstruct their discourse were probably those on the visitation of tombs, particularly his Ġawāb al-bāḥir and al-Iḫnāʾiyya. Composed at the very end of his life, the latter were the culmination of Ibn Taymiyya’s art, having reached the peak of his erudition, which fed into a solid and effective argumentation methodology built up over a lifetime of writing, discussion, debate and polemics.

It was after receiving a copy of the text of the Mālikī qāḍī Taqī al-Dīn Abū Bakr al-Iḫnāʾī that Ibn Taymiyya responded to the latter’s very virulent criticisms and false accusations in a work that he would entitle after his opponent’s name. In al-Iḫnāʾiyya, Ibn Taymiyya reviewed each of al-Iḫnāʾī’s criticisms and remarks point by point, refuting them and deconstructing his discourse on the basis of arguments and information of all kinds drawn from a large and varied body of sources.

In addition to the verses of the Qurʾān, the ḥadīṯs, and the words of the Companions and Successors that he cited in a jumble, Ibn Taymiyya relied very frequently on the Mālikī corpus. This phenomenon is already observable in his Ġawāb al-bāḥir, but in al-Iḫnāʾiyya the fre-

61 Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 269-70.
62 He is said to have started writing at a fairly early age, in his early twenties. Al-Ḥāǧīlī 1999, 16-17.
63 For more information about this polemic see Berriah, forthcoming.
64 In particular, pointing out the weak, deficient and fabricated nature of the ḥadīṯs referred to by al-Iḫnāʾī encouraging the visit to the Prophet’s tomb. Ibn Taymiyya 2011a, 110, 137-41, 144, 150, 252-3, 264, 266, 300, 365-6. See also Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 509; 1997, 81-3.
quency is higher and the process more obvious. Why did Ibn Taymiyya quote Mālikī scholars and not Ḥanbalī, those of his formative madhab? We know that he wrote a book extolling the merits of Imam Mālik’s school entitled, Taṣfīl madhab Mālik wa ahl al-Madīna wa-ṣīḥat usūli-hi. But the primary reason for selecting the rich Mālikī corpus on the visitation of graves was not Ibn Taymiyya’s respect and admiration for Imam Mālik, but rather because his opponent Tāqī al-Dīn al-Iḫnāʾī was the qaḍī al-qūdāt of the Mālikis.

To support his positions and refute those of al-Iḫnāʾī, Ibn Taymiyya repeatedly quoted, in addition to Imam Mālik, the various Mālikī authorities who shared his own position on the ziyārāt: the qaḍī Ibn al-Qāsim (d. 191/806) and his Mudawwana, Ismāʿīl b. Ishaq (d. 282/896) and his al-Mabsūṭ, the qaḍī ‘Īyāḍ (d. 544/1149), the qaḍī ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Baḡdādī (d. 422/1031), Abū al-Qāsim b. al-Ǧallāb (d. 378/989), Muḥammad b. al-Mawwāz (d. 269/875), ‘Abd al-Šamad b. Baṣīr al-Tanūḫī (d. first half of the sixth/twelfth century) and ‘Abd Allāh b. Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996) among others.

By building his argument on reading texts from his opponent’s madhab, Ibn Taymiyya deconstructed the latter’s discourse and discredited it. Compared to the Mālikī ulamāʾ, Ibn Taymiyya quoted few Ḥanbalī and even refuted some of their positions. In doing so, Ibn Taymiyya showed on the one hand that his position on the issue was the same as those of Imam Mālik and the leading Mālikī authorities. On the other hand, he highlighted the opposition between the positions of his opponent al-Iḫnāʾī and those held by eminent scholars belonging to his own madhab. The image of an al-Iḫnāʾī who was not a ‘good’ Mālikī or, even worse, who did not know his madhab well, while he was its most illustrious representative by virtue of his high position of qaḍī al-qūdāt, seemed to be Ibn Taymiyya’s methodological trademark. It should be noted that several Mālikī ulamāʾ living in Damascus supported Ibn Taymiyya during his incarceration. They wrote a letter confirming that his opinion on the ziyārāt was

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67 As the authentication of ḥadīṯ by Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ġanī al-Maqdisī (d. 600/1203) advocating the ziyārāt, Ibn Taymiyya only cites the kunya and nisba which is the same for ‘Abd al-Ǧanī and his cousin Muwaffaq al-Dīn, better known as Ibn Qudāma’. The former was a ḥadīṯ scholar. Ibn Taymiyya 2011a, 143. See also al-Matroudi 2006, 97. On Ibn Taymiyya’s criticism of Ḥanbalī scholars see al-Matroudi 2006, 92-128, 172-85; Bori 2010, 33-6.

68 Ibn Taymiyya 2011a, 184.
not in opposition to the šari‘a.\textsuperscript{69} This wide-ranging selection from the Mālikī corpus by Ibn Taymiyya and the way he used it showed his deep knowledge of the Mālikī madhab, as if he had been a Mālikī. In fact, an analysis of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings demonstrates his erudition in all the madhabs and a great respect for each of the founders of the four schools of law.\textsuperscript{70} However, it seems that, with the exception of the Ḥanbalī madhab, Ibn Taymiyya’s expertise in the Mālikī madhab was superior to the others, for he considered it to be the most accurate in matters of uṣūl.\textsuperscript{71} All these elements, to which we could add others, show that Ibn Taymiyya, by the end of his life, had become, as was already the case in the field of heresiography, an expert in the madhabs, as mentioned by his contemporaries and biographers.\textsuperscript{72}

I would like to take this opportunity to add a few remarks on a point related to Ibn Taymiyya’s reading his sources and dealing with them. Ibn Taymiyya remained faithful to the Ḥanbalī school of law, favouring the approach of the people of ḥadīth over that of the people of opinion (al-ra‘y).\textsuperscript{73} In his recent book, Carl Sharif El-Tobgui writes:

Despite his intellectual independence, Ibn Taymiyya maintained his affiliation with the Ḥanbalī school throughout his life, an affiliation that implied as much a theological outlook as an approach to law and legal theory.\textsuperscript{74}

While one cannot but agree with these statements, a close examination of some of his writings like al-Ǧawāb al-bāhir and al-Iḫnāʾiyya, shows that, at the end of his life, Ibn Taymiyya no longer wanted to put forward his affiliation to Hanbalism in his arguments, or at the very least did not find it necessary.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥādī 2002, 278-84.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibn Taymiyya 2006, 33-80; al-Matroudi 2006, 43.
\textsuperscript{73} al-Matroudi 2006, 41-4.
\textsuperscript{74} El-Tobgui 2019, 88.
4.2 Circulation Across the Madhabs and Independence from the Madhabs

The contents of al-Ǧawāb al-bāhir and al-Iḫnāʾiyya testify to the high degree of scholarship and mastery achieved by Ibn Taymiyya in the knowledge of the madhabs. As we have seen, Ibn Taymiyya quoted extensively from the Mālikī ʿulamāʾ to refute the positions of Abū Bakr al-Iḫnāʾī on visiting the graves. He did the same with the ʿulamāʾ of the other madhabs, whether of law or thought, quoting, discussing and commenting on their opinions as if he was affiliated with each of them although it was known that he opposed the four official madhabs on several points of jurisprudence (masāʾil fiqhiyya). I think it is possible to speak of pluri-madhhab referencing use in Ibn Taymiyya.

This can certainly be explained, in our case-study, by pragmatic reasons linked to the polemic and by a concern to effectively refute and deconstruct the discourse of his opponents with relevant arguments. But there is more: combined with other examples that cannot be discussed here, this pluri-madhhab referencing can be read as Ibn Taymiyya’s willingness to ‘circulate’ between the madhabs, to use their respective corpus when and how he saw fit. This ‘intellectual independence’ of Ibn Taymiyya from the madhabs is confirmed by many of his students and biographers.

Although Ibn Taymiyya was trained as a Hanbali from his youth, he was not always careful to emphasise his membership of the madhab and to identify himself with it in his positions. Let us keep in mind that Ibn Taymiyya, besides eliciting criticism from other Ḥanbalis, also criticised the methods and opinions of several great Ḥanbalī scholars such as Abū Bakr al-Ḥallāl (d. 311/923), or Abū Yaʿlā (d. 458/1066) to name but a few, just as he criticised some of the principles of the Ḥanbali madhab including some that he considered to be innovations (bidaʿ). Caterina Bori suggests “that Ibn Taymiyah’s detachment from the authority of the four madhab-s and his challenge to judicial authority became socially and politically inconvenient at some point, as his death in prison shows.”

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77 Bori 2010, 33-6.


79 al-Matroudi 2006, 92-8. For what he considers to be erroneous rules in the madhab (ġalat), see also 107-15. For some madhab rules that he refutes, see 122-5.

80 Bori 2009, 67.
His independence from the madhabs was well-known, especially towards the end of his life, when he sometimes seemed to place himself above the madhabs, wishing maybe to detach himself from them for certain issues. The example of his two works on visiting the tombs are noteworthy in this respect. Let us recall in passing that Ibn Taymiyya wrote an epistle on the abandonment of taqīd in which he said that there was no need to follow the opinions of the four schools.\textsuperscript{81}

How can this circulation across the madhabs be explained? First of all, it is the result of a long intellectual journey and a solid expertise in the madhabs. But above all, it is motivated by Ibn Taymiyya’s primary concern to protect the principle of tawḥīd against all deviant practices that could lead to the širk (polytheism/associationism), a leitmotiv that he hammers tirelessly in his writings. This desire to defend the Islamic creed of divine uniqueness, the spread of heterodox practices and beliefs that can lead the believer to the širk explains why Ibn Taymiyya devoted most of his writings to issues related to dogma and belief.\textsuperscript{82} For Ibn Taymiyya, the search for the truth, the need to protect the tawḥīd, the interest of Muslims and not that of a madhab or a school of thought, are the most important things.\textsuperscript{83} Despite his admiration for Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyya

\textsuperscript{81} Ibn Taymiyya 1988.

\textsuperscript{82} “He [Ibn Taymiyya] - May God be pleased with him - has written a great deal on the founding principles [uṣūl] in addition to other sciences. I asked him about the reason for this and to write me a text on law, which would group his choices and preferences so that he would serve as a support ['umdā] for giving fatwās. He replied: ‘concerning the branches [al-furūʿ] the matter is simple. If a Muslim follows and applies [qalla-da] the opinions of one of the ‘ulamā’ who is authoritative, then he is allowed to practice his religion based on his words [of the scholar] and for what he is not certain that this scholar made a mistake. As for the founding principles of religion [uṣūl], I have seen people of innovation, bewilderment and passions like followers of philosophy, bāṭiniyya, heretics [malāḥida], supporters of the unity of existence [wabdat al-wuǧūd], Dahriyya, Qadariyya, Usayyirīs, Ğaḥmiyya, Ḥulūliyya, those who refute divine Names and Attributes [al-muʿaṭṭila], anthropomorphists [al-muǧassima wa-l-mušabbiba], the supporters of al-Rawāndī, those of Kullāb, the Sulamiyya and others among the people of innovation [...] and it was clear that many of them sought to nullify the sacred šarīʿa of Prophet Muhammad, which prevails over all other legislations, and that they put people in doubt regarding the founding principles of their religion [uṣūl dīni-him]. This is why from what I have heard or seen, it is rare that the one who opposes the Book and the Sunna and is favourable to their words does not become a zindiq or has no longer the certainty [yaqīn] about his religion and belief. When I saw this situation, it seemed obvious to me that it was up to anyone who had the capacity to combat these ambiguities, these trivialities, to refute their arguments and errors, to strive to expose their vile and low character as well as the falsity of their evidence in order to defend the religion of pure monotheism and the authentic and illustrious prophetic tradition”. Al-Bazzār 1976, 33-5. See also al-Ḥaǧīlī 1999, 37-43. Nevertheless, he devoted several writings to jurisprudence (al-fiqh) and the foundations of jurisprudence (uṣūl al-fiqh). Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12b/1433; Ibn Rušayyiq 2001-02/1422H, 306-9. See also al-Matroudi 2006, 23-9; Rapoport 2010; al-ʿUṭayšān 1999; ʿUlwān 2000; al-Barīkān 2004; Abū Zahra 1991, 350-65, 378-405.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibn Taymiyya 2011a, 11, 243, 276-82, 286, 451, 466, 468-72.
did not follow him blindly. Conversely, he had great respect for all muǧtahids since they would be rewarded for their reasoning even if they were wrong in their thinking and judgement. George Makdisi summarised very well Ibn Taymiyya’s understanding of the schools of law and thought: “chaque groupe n’a de mérite en islam que dans la mesure où il s’est fait le défenseur de la foi islamique”.

Finally, Ibn Taymiyya’s circulation across the madhabs and independence from the madhabs lead to another question – raised by several scholars – namely that of Ibn Taymiyya’s level of iǧtihād but which will not be addressed here.

4.3 Ambivalence in Ibn Taymiyya’s Treatment of the Writings of Ašʿarī mutakallimūn Authors

Ibn Taymiyya’s critical stance on certain points of the Ašʿarī doctrine, particularly with regard to the Ašʿarite scholars who followed the kalām, is becoming better known thanks to recent scholarship. Despite his disagreements and criticisms, Ibn Taymiyya still acknowledged that the Ašʿarī scholars had produced many good results. Some of their interpretations of the Divine Names and Attributes were correct, despite the influence of Ǧahmite and Muʿtazilite

84 al-Matroudi 2006, 45.
87 The question is whether or not Ibn Taymiyya should or could be considered a muḫtaḥid muṭlaq. For many of his biographers and students, there is no doubt that Ibn Taymiyya was a muḫtaḥid. Some of them, such as Ibn Qayyim al-Ǧawziyya, al-Birzālī, Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, al-Bazzār and Ibn Katīr had much admiration for their šayḫ, which may explain the praise. Others such as Ṣâms al-Dīn al-Dahabī did not share all his views and even seem to have distanced themselves from the šayḫ for various reasons. Despite this, for al-Dahabī, Ibn Taymiyya reached the level of muḫtaḥid muṭlaq. His greatest opponents of the Ašʿarī school among his contemporaries such as Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), Ibn Zamākānī (d. 727/1327) or other later ‘ulamāʾ such as Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqālānī (d. 852/1449), in spite of their virulent criticism, acknowledged his immense scholarship. The laudatory remarks, reported by al-Dahabī, allegedly made by Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd (d. 702/1302) about Ibn Taymiyya, constitute one of the most important testimonies in his favour. Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd was a pupil of the famous ʿIzz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz b. Ṣaḥb al-Salām and successor of Ibn Bint al-Azz as al-Ṣāḥī qāḍī al-quṭāt. According to Tāǧ al-Dīn al-Sukkī (d. 771/1370), the ‘ulamāʾ did not disagree that Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd was considered the muḫaddid of the seventh/thirteenth century. As will be clear, the question of Ibn Taymiyya’s level of iǧtihād is still far from being decided.

thought. To better refute the views of his opponents, Ibn Taymiyya does not hesitate to quote and incorporate Ašʿarite authors and their works into his argument: the *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa iḫtilāf al-musallīn* of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ašʿarī (d. 324/936) about the ‘isma (impeccability/infallibility) of the Prophet especially in his *Minhāǧ al-Sunna*; the *Tahāfūt* of al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) in his *Radd ‘alā al-Mantiqiyyīn* and other writings; he took up some of the positions of Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) whom he contrasted with other positions of al-Ġazālī on the issue of the priority of reason over revelation, just as he found inspiration in the structure of the arguments from some of al-Ġazālī’s works, like *Masāʾil al-ḫamsūn* and *Taʾsīs al-taqdīs*.

In his *al-Iḫnāʾiyya*, in addition to Mālikī scholars, Ibn Taymiyya quoted famous Ašʿarī scholars such as Abū Muḥammad al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ḡazālī (d. 505/1111) and Abū Zakariyyāʾ al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) to corroborate his statements even though this did not prevent him from criticising these same authors elsewhere and disagreeing with them on various issues. This ambivalent method of Ibn Taymiyya in dealing with Ašʿarī authors by criticising them on the one hand, and using them to refute other opponents on the other, comes out quite well in his *al-Fatwā al-ḥamawiyya al-kubrā*.

At the beginning of his *fatwā*, Ibn Taymiyya criticised the position of the *mutakallimūn* who considered the ḥalaf to be more learned than the salaf. To show the vain nature of the practice of kalām, Ibn Taymiyya reported words that he attributed to great *mutakallimūn* such as Abū al-Fatḥ al-Šahrastānī (d. 548/1153), Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī or

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89 For Ibn Taymiyya the interpretations found in the *Taʾsīs al-taqdīs* of Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in Abū al-Wafāʾ b. Ḥaḍīl as well as in Abū Hamīd al-Ḡazālī are those of Bišr b. Ǧiyā al-Marīsī who, according to Ibn Taymiyya, was implied in the spread of the doctrine of taʿṭīl al-ṣifāt (denial of divine attributes) of the Ǧahmiyya. Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 86-7.

90 Zouggar 2011, 84-5.


94 Generic term for the generations following the *salaf*. In other words, from the third/tenth century onwards.

95 Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 68. In his *Rafʿ al-malām*, Ibn Taymiyya writes:

"كُلُوا كَأنَا أَعْلَمُ الأَيْمَةَ وَأُفَلُّهَا، وَأَنَا أَقْلُهَا، فَمَنْ بِمَعِنِّي أَفْقُهُ " (1992-93, 17-18)
Abū al-Maʿālī al-Ǧuwaynī, who were said to have expressed, at the end of their lives, their doubts, their remorse, their dissatisfaction - for some of them even their repentance – for not having succeeded in finding the ‘way’ despite they made great efforts, implicitly by practising the kalām. As usual, Ibn Taymiyya left the best argument for last and quoted a saying he attributed to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ǧazālī:

أكثر الناس شكاً عند الموت أصحاب الكلام.

The people most prone to doubts when death presents itself to them are the people of the kalām.

Ibn Taymiyya presented the saying he attributed to al-Ǧazālī as an acknowledgement, a kind of mea culpa of these mutakallimūn for practising kalām and considering it the way forward. Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiyya’s criticism would not prevent him from using, later in the fatwā, these same authors and other Ašʿarīs to corroborate his opinion on the ‘uluww (height, altitude) of God who was on his throne, the latter situated above the seven heavens. Ibn Taymiyya quoted the Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn of Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ašʿarī (d. 324/936) and the Kitāb al-asmā’ wa al-ṣifāt of Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066).

Further on, Ibn Taymiyya defended the idea that the term al-istiwā’ in verse 5 of Sura 20 could not be interpreted and refuted the interpretation of the term yad as niʿma (benefit). To support his position, he quoted once again Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ašʿarī and his work al-Ibāna as well as the Mālikī qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Baqillānī (d. 402/1013) – with his work also titled al-Ibāna – the best Ašʿarī mutakallim who existed according to Ibn Taymiyya. A little further he used the words of al-Baqillānī to refute the belief that God, by virtue of His Being, was

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96 It is the case for Faṣr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.
97 Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 68-70.
98 Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 70.
99 Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 127-37. It is on this last point that several Ašʿarī scholars have accused Ibn Taymiyya of anthropomorphism. This accusation is based on the following syllogism: if God is attributed a direction (in this case al-ʿuluw), this amounts to saying that He is therefore contained in a space and only a body can be contained in a space. God cannot therefore have a direction as is asserted in the Muršida of Muḥammad b. Tūmart (d. 524/1130), often, and wrongly, attributed to Ibn ʿAsākir, one of the reference texts of the Ašʿarī belief: “ليس له قبل ولا بعد ولا فوق ولا تحت ولا يمين ولا شمال ولا أمام ولا خلف.” (al-Qāḍī 1999, 31-2, 46). In another version, we find: "لا تحويه الجهات السبع كسائر المبتدعات".
100 Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 186, 190.
103 Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 203.
Ibn Taymiyya concluded his line of reasoning with his most relevant argument, namely a passage from the *Risāla al-nizāmiyya* of Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Ǧuwaynī (d. 478/1085) in which the author explicitly stated that the best path to follow regarding the interpretation of divine names and attributes was that of the *salaf*.

These few examples illustrate this ambivalent attitude of Ibn Taymiyya's towards certain Ašʿari-*mutakallimūn* ulamas: on the one hand, refuting some of their opinions, on the other hand, integrating them into his discursive strategy and using them to refute the opinions and arguments of other opponents. Ibn Taymiyya did not shy from this ambivalent use of the texts of the *mutakallimūn* to support his theses. On the contrary, shortly before the end of his *fatwā*, Ibn Taymiyya explained in no uncertain terms why he quoted them:

And his [Abū Bakr al-Baqillānī’s] sayings and similar sayings of others among the *mutakallimūn* on this subject are numerous for anyone who wants to know them. And certainly, we could have been content only with the Qurʾān, the Sunna, the traditions of the *salaf* and dispensed with reporting their [the *mutakallimūn*’s] sayings. But the main thing is that God grants the servant’s wisdom and faith to have reason and religion so that he can understand and profess religion. Thereafter, the light of the Qurʾān and Sunna will suffice for him and he will not need anything else. Nevertheless, most people have become affiliates of certain groups of *mutakallimūn* for whom they have a good opinion at the expense of others. They are convinced that they [the *mutakallimūn*] have achieved in this regard what no one has done apart from them and that even if one were to come to them with a verse, they will not follow it until one of their [the *mutakallimūn*’s] words is presented to them.

There is no denying that Ibn Taymiyya exhibits a certain transparency and intellectual honesty in this passage. Nevertheless, on careful examination it also turns out to be yet another argument against the *mutakallimūn*: by explaining that he used the words of *mutakallimūn*...
to speak to those who follow the kalām, Ibn Taymiyya showed on the one hand that he held the same opinion as the earlier great šuyūḥ mutakallimin on crucial points relating to dogma and that on the other hand, the proponents of the over-interpretation of divine names and attributes among the neo-mutakallimin were innovators. This process was quite similar to that employed in al-Iḫnāʾī’s refutation of the visitation of the tombs with the use of Mālikī-Ašʿarī sources; or that of al-Qušayrī, regarding the kalām as the path of the great Sufi masters, with the use of a Sufi corpus.

5 Rigour and Criticism in the Reading of Sources

In addition to transparency in his choice to use mutakallimin authors in his Fatwā al-hamawiyya al-kubrā, a certain rigour in the reading, treatment and validation of texts which are used as sources seems to emerge from the analysis of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings. Given the impossibility of conducting an in-depth analysis of Ibn Taymiyya’s entire output, I will limit myself to his work entitled al-Istiqāma. One of Ibn Taymiyya’s criteria of source validation that recurred quite often in this work was isnād (chain of transmission). Although less well known and less presented as a muḥaddīt, Ibn Taymiyya was competent in the science of hadīṯ and the so-called science of narrators (ʿilm al-riḡāl). He emphasised the importance of the isnād and lamented that in his time, “many among the servants did not memorise the hadīṯ or their isnād and consequently, there were many errors made in both the isnād and the matn [text] of the hadīṯ”. Ibn Taymiyya sifted through the passages of al-Qušayrī’s Risāla with particular attention to those in which the author reported the sayings attributed to different Sufi masters, validating them or not after analysis of the isnād.

Al-Qušayrī reported that Dū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī was said to have been asked about verse 5 sura 20 and replied that God confirms His Being there and refutes any place for Him. God exists by His Be-

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107 On Ibn Taymiyya’s position on the different types of interpretations see Zouggar 2010, 198-204.
110 His full name Abū al-Fayḍ Tawbān b. Ibrāhīm, born in Aḫmīm in Egypt in 179/796. Great Sufi scholar and master who died in Egypt in 245/859. For more information see Chiabotti, Orfali 2016, 90-127.
111 “The Most Merciful [who is] above the Throne established”.
ing and things exist by His command (ḥukm) and as He Wills.\textsuperscript{112} But for Ibn Taymiyya, the problem of the isnād arose already before analysing its content:

I say: he [al-Qušayrī] does not cite any isnād going back to Dū al-Nūn for this saying. In these books, there are many stories/anecdotes reported with an isnād that has nothing true. So, what about this evil saying reported without an isnād which makes one attribute to šuyūḥ something a reasonable person would not say. This word has nothing to do with the verse, on the contrary it opposes it. This verse does not in any way refer to the affirmation [ibtāt] of the Being of God [dāti-hi] or even to the refutation that it is contained in a place. So how can this verse be explained in this way?! When it says 'that He exists by His Being and things exist by His command [ḥukm]', it is a word of Truth but this is not the meaning of this verse.\textsuperscript{113}

Further on, we find this same problem of the isnād concerning a saying which al-Qušayrī attributed to Dū al-Nūn and according to which he praised the merits of the beautiful voice and the samāʾ which pushes and directs hearts towards the truth (al-ḥaqq).\textsuperscript{114} For Ibn Taymiyya:

This saying has no isnād going back to Dū al-Nūn but he [al-Qušayrī] reports it without quoting its main narrator [arsala-hu ırsālan].\textsuperscript{115} Many of what he reports in this book are actually false words that are

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\textsuperscript{112} Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 150. This position echoes what is also found in the Muršida:

\textsuperscript{113} Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 151.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 275.

\textsuperscript{115} Although it is not a prophetic ḥadīṯ, Ibn Taymiyya treats this ḥadīṯ (narrative) attributed to Dū al-Nūn using the nomenclature of ḥadīṯ scholarship. By the expression ırsālan Ibn Taymiyya refers to the mursal ḥadīṯ, characterised by the lack of the last person to hear the ḥadīṯ directly from the Prophet.
Ibn Taymiyya went on to highlight the phenomenon of attributing false and misleading words to the most illustrious šuyūḫ and ‘ulamāʾ for the purpose of legitimising a particular belief or innovative practice:

And among the most numerous lies are those about the famous šuyūḫ and we have seen and heard what only God is able to count. And Abū al-Qāsim despite his erudition and his reported versions with an isnād, in his book al-Risāla, there is a significant portion of the false narratives about which there is no need to polemicise for the one who has a minimum of knowledge of the reality of the narratives that are reported about them [the šuyūḫ].

Ibn Taymiyya did not merely note the absence of the isnād or criticise its authenticity. In the discussion that concerns us, Ibn Taymiyya cited the texts in which, according to him, many stories and narrations related to the samāʾ were found:

As for the one who supports, with an isnād, narrations related to the samāʾ then most of the time he uses two works: the book al-Lamʿ by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāǧ which reports after Abū Ḥātim al-Siġistānī, after Abū Naṣr, after ʿAbd Allāh bin ʿAlī al-Ṭūsī, and also reports from Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tamīmī; the book al-Samāʾ of Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī that he heard from him directly.

Ibn Taymiyya was ardently opposed to singing, which he considered a perversion and a danger for the heart. Although he was an enthusiast for warrior arts like furūṣiyā, Ibn Taymiyya had no taste for military music, a military practice for which there is no trace either

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118 Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 276.
in the Prophet or the salaf. But it was above all the samāʿ practised by some mutasawwīfā with all the turpitudes and perversions committed therein that he strongly denounced and condemned. However, Ibn Taymiyya’s position on the samāʿ should in no way be taken as a condemnation of Sufism as such or of the brotherhoods as has already been well demonstrated by several scholars.

In other passages of his al-Istiqāma, Ibn Taymiyya pointed out the absence of isnād which was one of the first criteria - if not the first - for validating a reported saying even before analysing its content. Even for a saying that he considered good, Ibn Taymiyya did not fail to point out the absence or lack of knowledge of the isnād. Like a muhaddit, Ibn Taymiyya analysed in depth the isnāds quoted by al-Qušayrī and did not hesitate to point out when one of the narrators was unknown:


120 According to Ibn Taymiyya, the origin of the military music would come from Persian kings. This tradition would have spread through the conquests of the Persian armies during Antiquity. Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 238. For Ibn Taymiyya, the Prophetic tradition at war is "خفض الصوت". Poetry is acceptable for motivating and exciting the combatants’ ardour to fight. Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 238, 242, 279. For more information see Michot 2016, 8-10 and Frenkel 2018, 5-12. It should be noted that for some ‘ulamāʾ music could be a psychological weapon in the service of Muslims. For the Ḥanāfī Badr al-‘Aynī (d. 855/1451), banging the drum was allowed in the context of war to gather the fighters and as a signal for combat readiness. Although it is detestable (makrūh) to use bells (al-aǧrās) in the territory of Dār al-ḥarb to avoid detection by the enemy, there is no harm in hanging them on the horse harness for frightening the enemy before the fight. Al-‘Aynī 2014, 1: 452-3.

121 In many passages of his writings, Ibn Taymiyya denounces the contemplation and penchant for hairless young people in the circles of samāʿ. See also Pouzet 1963, 132; Homerin 1985, 226 fn. 32; Berriah 2020.

122 See fn. 30.

123 Here are just a few examples. Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 157-8.

124 (And this saying is a good saying even if its isnād is not known) (Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 379).
I say, ‘this story has in its isnād someone whose degree of trust [ḥāl] is not known and even if it is true that this saying is from Abū Sa‘īd al-Ḥarrāz, it does not mean that closeness to God is achieved only by this means’.  

One might think that Ibn Taymiyya raised this criterion of a narrator’s lack of knowledge in the isnād to protect the reputation of Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulami, a great Sufi šayḥ whom he greatly revered and whom he quoted extensively in his writings. Yet, Ibn Taymiyya also raised the problem of isnād and was equally dubious about a saying on divine attributes that al-Qušayrī attributed to al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr, better known as al-Ḥallāḏ, and whose reputation as a misguided person, heretic and even apostate was well known and which Ibn Taymiyya did not forget to mention.  

Regarding the words of al-Ḥallāḏ, Ibn Taymiyya wrote:

Is this saying – and God is more Knowledgeable – really from al-Ḥallāḏ or not? In the isnād there is a narrator whose degree of trust [ḥālu-hu] I do not know and I have seen many things attributed to al-Ḥallāḏ in books, epistles and statements when they are lies without any doubt, even though it is true that in many other sayings attested to be those of al-Ḥallāḏ, there is corruption, disorder and disruption.

We must acknowledge here a certain rigour and objectivity on the part of Ibn Taymiyya, which were not always present, if we take into consideration the criticisms he made of al-Ḥallāḏ in other fatwās.

It is clear that no matter which author al-Qušayrī attributed a saying to, whether he was appreciated or not by Ibn Taymiyya, the isnād was the first element to be analysed. This way of proceeding was later confirmed when Ibn Taymiyya expressed doubts about the isnād of a saying he considered to be ‘good’ and which was attributed to al-

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125 Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 154. See page 158 for another example of criticism of the absence of an isnād.

126 Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 106.


128 See for example the false accusations against Rašīd al-Dīn, highlighted by Michot 1995.

129 Massignon 1975. Nevertheless, he agrees on several points with al-Ḥallāḏ and his perception of al-Ḥallāḏ and his creed seems to have evolved over time. See Michot 2007.
Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyāḍ (d. 187/803), a famous Sufi šayḫ whom he particularly liked.\textsuperscript{130} For some sayings reported by al-Qušayrī from Sufi masters, Ibn Taymiyya did not limit himself to refuting the authenticity of the isnād but made corrections and clarifications. This is the case with a saying attributed to Sahl b. ‘Abd Allāh about the created character of the letters of the Qurʾān:

\begin{quote}
له كلام ليس له إسناد عن سهل، ولكلام سهل بن عبد الله وأصحابه في السنة والصفات والقرآن أشهر من أن يذكر هنا.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
هذا الكلام ليس له إسناد عن سهل، ولكلام سهل بن عبد الله وأصحابه في السنة والصفات والقرآن أشهر من أن يذكر هنا.
\end{quote}

Ibn Taymiyya’s methodological process demonstrates both a scientific rigour and a vast erudition, which were unanimously accepted by his contemporaries, whether those in his circle or his fiercest opponents.

6 Conclusion

The analysis of a sample of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings has shed light on some aspects of his source methodology. Of course, these results are only preliminary and, given the limited corpus, need to be completed. The example of the visit to the tombs shows how Ibn Taymiyya used the Companions in order to disprove his opponents who based their arguments on the opinion or word of a Companion. In the first instance, Ibn Taymiyya invoked the authority of a Companion who

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 377.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 163.
\end{itemize}
was higher in the ranking of merits. If it was an isolated opinion as in the case of Ibn ‘Umar, Ibn Taymiyya opposed it in a second step to the ġumhūr al-ṣaḥāba (majority of the Companions).

Ibn Taymiyya did not follow this methodology in every case. Depending on the subject matter, the relevance of the word reported by the Companion could prevail over the order of merit of the Companions. Thus, Ibn Taymiyya gave priority to the word of Salmān al-Fi‘risī over that of ‘Umar, the second caliph of Islam and who occupied the second place in the ranking of the Companions in the Sunni tradition, on the subject of the superiority of the Arabs and the merits of Arabness since it made his argument more relevant and effective.

The examination of the Ġawāb al-bāhir and al-Iḫnāʾiyya, writings dealing with the visitation of graves, showed Ibn Taymiyya’s ability to use to his advantage, thanks to his vast erudition and sound knowledge of the different madhab and schools of thought, the sources of his opponents regardless of their madhab of affiliation. Ibn Taymiyya built his arguments on sources from his opponent’s madhab and used it against him to deconstruct his discourse and discredit him. His expertise in the madhab in general, and the Mālikī madhab in particular, allowed him to discuss and quote the opinions of the ‘ulamā’ of the different madhab as he wished. Although he was attached to the Ḥanbali madhab and admired its founder, it would seem that Ibn Taymiyya was not concerned with necessarily appearing to be a Ḥanbali scholar and/or ensuring that the opinions of the scholars affiliated with his madhab prevailed, particularly towards the end of his life. This pluri-madhab referencing and selection of sources, which he practiced at the end of his life, was the result of both his expertise in the madhab and a long intellectual journey. It was a further indicator of his independence from the madhab, an independence that was evident in his later writings: Ibn Taymiyya wanted to place himself above the madhab, to detach himself from them in the treatment of certain issues because quite simply the struggle to defend his conception of orthodoxy went beyond the madhab and concerned all Muslims without distinction. In line with the work of other scholars, the passages analysed in this study confirm Ibn Taymiyya’s ambivalent attitude towards certain Ašʿarī-mutakallimūn ‘ulamā’: on the one hand, he criticised them and disagreed with them on several points, on the other hand, he did not hesitate to use them against his opponents.

The examination of other writings of Ibn Taymiyya would allow us to potentially corroborate these results but, above all, bring new elements regarding his source methodology, which remains to be studied in depth as well as the idea of a Taymiyyan kalām.
Authors as Readers in the Mamlūk Period and Beyond, 45-82

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