

# 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.

**Keywords** Way of reading texts. Source methodology. Companions. *ḡumhūr al-ṣaḥāba*. Intellectual independence. Pluri-*madhhab* referencing. Aš'arī. *Mutakallimūn*. *Isnād*.

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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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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, exegetes, *muḥaddithūn*, 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”.<sup>3</sup> 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-Ḍahabī.<sup>4</sup>

One only needs to read Ibn Taymiyya's *magnum opus Dar' al-ta'arūḍ* 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”.<sup>5</sup> Recently, Carl Sharif El-Tobgui has shown that the *Dar' al-ta'arūḍ*:

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

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.

4 Bori 2010, 35-9; al-Matroudi 2006, 20-3; Michot 2000, 600; Von Kügelgen 2013, 257-8.

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.<sup>6</sup>

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: ḥayātu-hu*, Muḥammad Abū Zahra (d. 1974) highlighted Ibn Taymiyya's writing *manhağ* in *tafsīr*, issues related to dogma, jurisprudence and Sufism. For Muḥammad Abū Zahra, his *manhağ* was the same regardless of the field.<sup>7</sup> In an important contribution, Ibrāhīm 'Uqaylī was interested in the importance given to revelation, reason and the Arabic language itself in Ibn Taymiyya's *manhağ*.<sup>8</sup> The Arabic language as a reasoning tool in Ibn Taymiyya was later analysed in detail by Hādī Aḥmad Farḥān al-Şāğirī<sup>9</sup> and then 'Abd al-Allāh b. Nāfi' al-Da'ğānī.<sup>10</sup> In 1999, the book *Manhağ ṣayḥ al-Islām* by 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Sa'd al-Ḥağīlī 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.<sup>11</sup> Finally, other aspects of Ibn Taymiyya's *manhağ* have been studied, like the issue of *takfīr*,<sup>12</sup> dogma,<sup>13</sup> innovations (*bida'*)<sup>14</sup> or even knowledge in general.<sup>15</sup>

Undeniably, Ibn Taymiyya's argumentation strategy in the fields of philosophy and rationalism, particularly in his *Dar' al-ta'āruḍ*, attracted much scholarly interest and fostered a substantial scientific

6 El-Tobgui 2019, 4-5.

7 Abū Zahra 1991, 180-1.

8 'Uqaylī 1994, 109-76.

9 al-Şāğirī 2001, 347-488.

10 al-Da'ğānī 2014, 537-649.

11 al-Ḥağīlī 1999.

12 al-Miṣ'abī 1997.

13 al-Barīkān 2004.

14 al-Muqrīn 2014.

15 al-Da'ğānī 2014.

ic output to this day.<sup>16</sup> Following Syed Nomanul Haq,<sup>17</sup> 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".<sup>18</sup> The idea of a Taymiyyan *kalām* would however certainly deserve further investigation.

While Ibn Taymiyya was an important historical source for his time,<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

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

**16** Michel 1983; Abrahamov 1992; Heer 1993. See the introductions of Yahya Michot's translations: Michot 2000; 2003; El Omari 2010; Zouggar 2010; Anjum 2012, 196-227, partic. 196-215; Von Kügelgen 2013, 277-328; Vassalou 2016, 229-41; Griffel 2018; Hoover 2018a; Hoover, Mahajneh 2018b; El-Tobgui 2019, 132-299; Hoover 2019a. Among the main elements of Ibn Taymiyya's anti-philosophical argument, for instance that of "l'èse-prophétie" and the foreign origin of this science, see: Zouggar 2020, 91-2; 2010, 198. Ibn Taymiyya highlights "l'atteinte à l'institution de la prophétie et en particulier à la personne du prophète. C'est un argument plus accessible au commun des croyants et donc, plus efficace pour compromettre les philosophes" (Zouggar 2020, 99).

**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 neomutakallim. Rapoport, Shahab 2010, IX.

**18** Zouggar 2010, 198.

**19** Michot 1995.

**20** Talmon-Heller 2019, 232-41, 243-50; al-Mūsā 2010, 12-17, 25.

**21** Antrim 2014-15, 92-100.

**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 Ḥanbalī 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), *Iqtidā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm li-muḥālafat aṣḥāb al-Ġaḥīm* (The Necessity of the Straight Path in Distinction from the People of Hell), *al-Ġawāb al-bāhir fī zuwwār al-maqābir* (The Outshining Answer About the Visitors of Graves) and *al-Iḥnā'iyya* (The Iḥnā'īs [title referring pejoratively to the Mālikī Taqī al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Iḥnā'ī]).

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 *ḥadīṭs* mentioning names and attributes of God.<sup>23</sup> This *fatwā* by Ibn Taymiyya, in the form of a treatise, was not to the liking of the Aṣ'arī 'ulamā' and followers of the *kalām*, some of whom tried to have him judged and condemned.<sup>24</sup> The second work is *al-Istiqāma*, probably written between the years 708-09/1308-09 during his incarceration in Egypt.<sup>25</sup> 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 Qur'ān and the Sunna in order to avoid *in fine* any innovation.<sup>26</sup> One of the characteristics of the book is that most of it was actually a commentary on Abū al-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī's *Risāla* (d. 465/1072-73).<sup>27</sup> Ibn Taymiyya acknowledged that this work contained much that was good and true but it "lacks the path fol-

<sup>23</sup> The verses concerned are as follows: S20/V5; S57/V4; S41/V11.

For the *ḥadīṭs*: "أَنَّ قُلُوبَ بَنِي آدَمَ بَيْنَ إصْبَعَيْنِ مِنْ أَصَابِعِ الرَّحْمَنِ" (Verily, the hearts of all the sons of Adam are between the two fingers out of the fingers of the Most Gracious); "يَضَعُ الْجَبَّارُ قَدَمَهُ فِي النَّارِ" (Al-Ġabbār 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.

<sup>24</sup> Laoust 1960, 15-16; Hoover 2019b, 10-11. On Ibn Taymiyya's imprisonments, see Little 1973; Murad 1979; Jackson 1994.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 35.

<sup>27</sup> On al-Quṣayrī, his work and thought see Chiabotti 2008-09; 2013a; 2013b; 2014; 2016.

lowed by the majority of the *awliyā'* of God".<sup>28</sup> *Al-Istiqāma* showcased the importance of *taṣawwuf* 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.<sup>29</sup>

In the *Iqtidā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm li-muḥālafat aṣḥāb al-Ġaḥīm*, written around 715/1315-16,<sup>30</sup> the third writing selected from his corpus, Ibn Taymiyya dealt with "a very important rule among the rules of *ṣarī'a*",<sup>31</sup> 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-Ġawāb al-bāhir fī zuwwār al-maqābir* and *al-Iḥnā'iyya*, both of which concern visiting the tombs.<sup>32</sup> 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 ṣar'iyya*) and avoiding introducing into this practice innovations (*ziyāra bid'iyya*) that can lead the Muslim to the *ṣirk* (polytheism/associationism) particularly through the veneration of the dead or imploring 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-

28 "ولكن فيه نقص عن طريقة أكثر أولياء الله.", Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 89.

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-taṣawwuf* especially with al-Qādiriyya Ḥanbalī 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 *samā'* which he considered an innovation to which he was vehemently opposed in contrast to al-Ġazālī 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 Muḥammad b. Sa'ūd 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-Ġawāb* and *al-Iḥnā'iyya*, 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.

pretation of the *ḥadīth*: “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)”.<sup>33</sup> 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 *ḥadīth* 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-Iḥnā'iyya*, written during his last stay in prison in Damascus, Ibn Taymiyya, on the one hand, retorts to the accusations of the Mālikī *qādī al-quḍāt* Taqī al-Dīn Abū Bakr al-Iḥnā'ī (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 *Ġawāb al-bāhir* which he develops further while bringing in new ones.<sup>34</sup>

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

### 3 Opinions of the Companions

After the Qur'ān 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 *maḏhabs*. It is true that the opinions of the Companions, and to a lesser extent those of the Successors (*tābi'ūn*), are of particular importance to Imam Aḥmad.<sup>35</sup>

Like the founder of his formative *maḏhab*, Ibn Taymiyya quoted extensively the so-called *al-salaf* (ancestors or predecessors) or *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (pious predecessors)<sup>36</sup> in his arguments, especially the Com-

<sup>33</sup> Narrated from Abū Hurayra, reported by al-Nasā'ī in his *Sunan* (<https://sunnah.com/nasai:700>).

<sup>34</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2011a, 110, 137-41, 144, 150, 252-3, 264, 266, 300, 365-6.

<sup>35</sup> Abū Zahra 1947, 284-99; al-Matroudi 2006, 33-4, 41.

<sup>36</sup> Concept referring to the first three generations of Islam which is supported by several *ḥadīths*. Among the best known is that reported by al-Buḥārī, according to 'Imrān b. al-Ḥusayn, the Prophet said: “The best people are those of my century, then those of the next two centuries”.

panions of the Prophet.<sup>37</sup> 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 *ḡumhūr 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-Ġawziyya (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-Iḥnā'ī.<sup>38</sup> In fact, his supporters and their opponents kept it going, with Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343) and others even later.<sup>39</sup>

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

<sup>37</sup> For example, on the *fiṭra* see Holtzman 2010, 163-88. See also Anjum 2012, 215-32.

<sup>38</sup> Berriah, forthcoming.

<sup>39</sup> Berriah, forthcoming. See also El-Rouayheb 2010, 288-95.



of Mecca and Medina for which the Prophet authorised the journey.<sup>40</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, none of the Companions who travelled to Jerusalem visited the tomb of Abraham.<sup>41</sup>

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), 'Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), 'Uṭmān b. 'Affān (d. 35/656) and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) occupied, in regnal order, the first places. This position was supported by several *ḥadīṭs*, the best known of which was that reported by Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidī according to Abū Naḡīḥ al-'Irbād b. Sāriya.<sup>42</sup> In his *Raf' al-malām 'an a'immat al-a'lām*, 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 'Umar.<sup>43</sup> Then came the "ten promised to Paradise" (*al-'ašara al-mubaššarīn bi-l-ḡanna*),<sup>44</sup> followed by precedence in conversion, the Hijra, participation in the first battles of Badr, Uḥud, etc.<sup>45</sup>

40 Aḥmad, al-Buḥārī, Muslim and others reported from Abū Hurayra:

"لا تشد الرحال إلا إلى ثلاثة مساجد المسجد الحرام، ومسجد الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم، ومسجد الأقصى." (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]).

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

42 It is also quoted by al-Nawawī in his *Fourteen ḥadīṭs*: "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/nawawī40>).

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.

44 Abū Bakr, 'Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb, 'Uṭmān b. 'Affān, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Ṭalḥa b. 'Ubayd Allāh, Zubayr b. al-'Awwām, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf, Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ, Abū 'Ubayda b. al-Ḡarrāḥ, Sa'īd b. Zayd.

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 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf and Ḥālid b. al-Walid: "He [the Prophet] said in an authentic *ḥadīṭ*: '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-Walid when he quarrelled with 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf because the latter was among the early converts, those who spent well before *al-Faṭḥ* [the conquest of Mecca], who fought, and the *faṭḥ* referred to here is the pact of Ḥudaybiyya. Ḥālid, 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ and 'Uṭmān b. Ṭalḥa converted during the truce following al-Ḥudaybiyya and before the capture of Mecca. They were among the *muhāḡirūn* followers and not like the original *muhāḡirūn*. As for those who converted in the year of the capture of Mecca, they are not considered *muhāḡirūn* because there was no *hiḡra* after the capture of Mecca. Those who converted from among the inhabitants of Mecca are called *al-ṭulaqā'* 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 *ḍikr* (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 *taṣliyya* (uttering the salutation over the Prophet) in the *taṣāhhud* in prayer<sup>46</sup> or outside of it, was the practice that the Prophet had recommended for himself and was therefore far more meritorious.<sup>47</sup>

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.<sup>48</sup>

The proponents of visiting the Prophet's grave relied, among other things, on a narrative that 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb, 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, 'Umar,

<sup>46</sup> The *taṣāhhud* is the part of the Muslim prayer where the person kneels facing the *qibla* after two rounds of prayer (*rak'āt*), 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 *taṣāhhud*, which closes the prayer, is performed before the *taslīm*. In this second *taṣāhhud*, an invocation of blessings and peace upon the Prophet Muḥammad and Abraham is added. This invocation is known as the *taṣliyya*. Sābiq 2009, 119-23.

<sup>47</sup> 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, *Ġawāb al-bāhir*, 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.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 304.

both of whom were placed on either side of the Prophet's grave.<sup>49</sup> 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 *ḡumhūr 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.<sup>50</sup>

Later in his *al-Ḡawāb 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 *ḡumhūr al-ṣaḥāba* as well as the pre-eminence of the *Rāšidūn* caliphs:

ولم يأخذ في هذا بفعل ابن عمر، كما لم يأخذ بفعله في التمسح بمقعده على المنبر، ولا باستحباب قصد الأماكن التي صلى فيها؛ لكون الصلاة أدركته فيها، فكان ابن عمر يستحبُّ قصدَها للصلاة فيها، وكان جمهور الصحابة لا يستحبون ذلك، بل يستحبون ما كان - صلى الله عليه وسلم - يستحبُّه، وهو أن يصلي حيث أدركته الصلاة، وكان أبوه عمر بن الخطاب ينهى من يقصدها للصلاة فيها، ويقول: "إنما هلك من كان قبلكم بهذا؛ فإنهم اتخذوا آثار أنبيائهم مساجد، من أدركته الصلاة فيه فليصل، وإلا فليذهب".

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 [*ḡumhūr 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-Ḥaṭṭāb 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!'<sup>51</sup>

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 'Umar who is none other than the father of 'Abd 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 'Umar in merit, supported by the words of the Prophet, meant that one had to follow him,<sup>52</sup> before his son 'Abd Allāh, despite the latter's merits, which were certainly numerous, but lesser:

فأمرهم عمر بن الخطاب بما سته لهم النبي - صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - ؛ إذ كان عمر بن الخطاب من الخلفاء الراشدين، الذين أمرنا بالتباع سنتهم، وله خصوص الأمر [بإقتداء به] وبأبي بكر؛ حيث قال: "أقتدوا باللذين من بعدي: أبي بكر وعمر"، فالأمر بالاقتداء أرفع من الأمر بالسُّنة؛ كما قد بسط في مواضع.

And 'Umar enjoined upon them [the Companions and Muslims] what the Prophet taught them [*sanna-hu la-hum*] and 'Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb was one of the *Rāšidūn* caliphs for whom we were ordered to follow the traditions [*sunnati-him*]. And he ['Umar] 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 'Umar'. Taking [someone] as an example is superior to following a tradition.<sup>53</sup>

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:

وقد ثبت عنه في "الصحیحين" أنه قال: "لا تُشَدُّ الرِّحَالُ إِلَّا إِلَى ثَلَاثَةِ مَسَاجِدَ: الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ، وَمَسْجِدِي هَذَا، وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى." حتى إن أبا هريرة سافر إلى الطُّور الذي كلم الله عليه موسى بن عمران، فقال له أبو بصرة الغفاري: "لو أدركتُك قبل أن تخرج، لما خرجت؛ سمعت رسول الله - صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - يقول: "لا تُعْمَلُ الحَطِيُّ إِلَّا إِلَى ثَلَاثَةِ مَسَاجِدَ: الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ، وَمَسْجِدِي هَذَا، وَمَسْجِدِ بَيْتِ الْمَقْدِسِ".

And it is according to him [the Prophet], in the two *Ṣaḥīḥs*, that he [the Prophet] said: 'One does not undertake a journey except to 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. 'Imrān - 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

<sup>52</sup> On 'Umar's authority see Hakim 2008; 2009a; 2009b. I thank Hassan Bouali for his precious remarks and these references.

<sup>53</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 296.

three mosques: the Holy Mosque, this mosque which is mine [Medina] and the al-Aqṣā Mosque [Jerusalem].<sup>54</sup>

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.<sup>55</sup> In addition, as the passage indicates, Abū Baṣra al-Ġifārī was one of the transmitters of the *ḥadīth* about the only permission to travel to the three mosques for the purpose of worship that Abū Hurayra would later relate. It is this *ḥadīth* 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 'Uṭmān, Ibn Taymiyya again invoked both the criterion of precedence of the Companions according to their merits, in this case with the character of 'Umar, as well as that of the *ḡumhūr al-ṣaḥāba*:

وقد كره كثير من الصحابة والتابعين ما فعله عثمان من بناء المسجد بالحجارة والقَصَّة والسَّج، وهؤلاء لما فعله الوليد أكرهه، وأما عمر فإنه وسَّعه، لكن بناءه على ما كان من بنائه من اللبن، وعمده جذوع النخل، وسقفه الجريد، ولم يُنقل أنَّ أحداً كره ما فعل عمر، وإنما وقع النزاع فيما فعله عثمان والوليد.

and many of the Companions and Successors hated what 'Uṭmān – 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 'Umar – 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 'Umar did but rather the disagreement was about what 'Uṭmān and al-Walīd did.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 189-90.

<sup>55</sup> Some versions state that Abū Hurayra was present (*ṣahīd*) 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-Aṭīr 2012, 1412.

<sup>56</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 298. At the end of his *al-Iḥnā'iyya*, Ibn Taymiyya offers a history of the expansion of the mosque and its various stages. Ibn Taymiyya 2011a, 123, 311-33. See also Ibn Taymiyya 2011-12a/1433H, 175-6, 275; Ibn Taymiyya 1997, 66.

Although the material used for the work carried out by the third caliph 'Uṭmān was of better quality and far stronger than that used under 'Umar, the latter's work on the Medina mosque was considered to be better by Ibn Taymiyya for two reasons: 'Umar used the same type of material constituting the initial structure of the mosque. Although Ibn Taymiyya did not directly mention the Prophet here, 'Umar 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 'Umar's expansion work unlike those of 'Uṭmān and al-Walīd. Therefore, the lack of criticism of 'Umar's works by Companions seemed to stand for Ibn Taymiyya as an approval of the latter towards 'Umar's works. Although the works of 'Uṭmān 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 *ḥadīths*. 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 *ḡumhūr 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.<sup>57</sup> By way of introduction, Ibn Taymiyya offered an interesting 'ḥaldūnian' sociological analysis of the different peoples before Ibn Ḥaldūn, each of whom had two components: nomadic living in the *bādiyya* (steppe/desert) and sedentary living in the *ḥaḍāra* (city/town).<sup>58</sup>

At the beginning of his argument, Ibn Taymiyya reported two sayings attributed to Salmān al-Fārisī (d. 33/654) followed by one by 'Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb to show the superiority of Arabs and the Arabic language over non-Arabs.<sup>59</sup> Given the manner, seen above, in which Ibn Taymiyya used the Companions, one would have expected 'Umar, 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 'Umar. But why quote the latter when words attributed to the second Caliph of Islam and other more illustrious Companions following the example of 'Alī, about the importance of the Arabic language and Arabism were well-known?

The choice of quoting Salmān before 'Umar 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 'Umar 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.<sup>60</sup> Ibn Taymiyya reported the words of the one who was considered the best of the Successors, and who was an Arab, Sa'īd 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

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 250-71.

<sup>58</sup> 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.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 265-6.

<sup>60</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 270; Ibn Sa'd 2001, 4: 69. Ibn al-Aṭīr reports that he may also have come from the city of Rāmāhurmuz in Ḥūzistān. Ibn al-Aṭīr 2012, 499-500.

Persians was not insignificant since there were many great *tābi'ūn* and *tābi' tābi'īn* (Successors) of Persian origin who were students of the Companions and transmitters of their opinions such as 'Ikrima, the *mawlā* of 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās.<sup>61</sup>

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-bāhir* and *al-Iḥnā'iyya*. 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.<sup>62</sup>

It was after receiving a copy of the text of the Mālikī *qāḍī* Taqī al-Dīn Abū Bakr al-Iḥnā'ī 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.<sup>63</sup> In *al-Iḥnā'iyya*, Ibn Taymiyya reviewed each of al-Iḥnā'ī'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.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to the verses of the Qur'ān, the *ḥadīths*, 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-bāhir*, but in *al-Iḥnā'iyya* the fre-

<sup>61</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2003, 269-70.

<sup>62</sup> He is said to have started writing at a fairly early age, in his early twenties. Al-Ḥaḡīlī 1999, 16-17.

<sup>63</sup> For more information about this polemic see Berriah, forthcoming.

<sup>64</sup> In particular, pointing out the weak, deficient and fabricated nature of the *ḥadīths* referred to by al-Iḥnā'ī 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 *maḏhab*? We know that he wrote a book extolling the merits of Imam Mālik's school entitled, *Tafḍīl maḏhab Mālik wa ahl al-Madīna wa-ṣiḥḥat uṣūli-hi*.<sup>65</sup> 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-Iḥnā'ī was the *qāḍī al-quḍāt* of the Mālikīs.

To support his positions and refute those of al-Iḥnā'ī, Ibn Taymiyya repeatedly quoted, in addition to Imam Mālik, the various Mālikī authorities who shared his own position on the *ziyārāt*: the *qāḍī* Ibn al-Qāsim (d. 191/806) and his *Mudawwana*, Ismā'īl b. Iṣḥāq (d. 282/896) and his *al-Mabsūṭ*, the *qāḍī* 'Iyād (d. 544/1149), the *qāḍī* 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Baḡdādī (d. 422/1031), Abū al-Qāsim b. al-Ġallāb (d. 378/989), Muḥammad b. al-Mawwāz (d. 269/875), 'Abd al-Ṣamad b. Bašīr al-Tanūḥī (d. first half of the sixth/twelfth century) and 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996) among others.<sup>66</sup>

By building his argument on reading texts from his opponent's *maḏhab*, Ibn Taymiyya deconstructed the latter's discourse and discredited it. Compared to the Mālikī '*ulamā*', Ibn Taymiyya quoted few Ḥanbalī and even refuted some of their positions.<sup>67</sup> 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-Iḥnā'ī and those held by eminent scholars belonging to his own *maḏhab*. The image of an al-Iḥnā'ī who was not a 'good' Mālikī or, even worse, who did not know his *maḏhab* well, while he was its most illustrious representative by virtue of his high position of *qāḍī al-quḍāt*, seemed to be Ibn Taymiyya's methodological trademark.<sup>68</sup> It should be noted that several Mālikī '*ulamā*' living in Damascus supported Ibn Taymiyya during his incarceration. They wrote a letter confirming that his opinion on the *ziyārāt* was

<sup>65</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2006; Ibn Ruṣayyiq 2001-02/1422H, 308. When Ibn Taymiyya speaks about *Ahl al-Madīna*, he refers to *Ahl al-ḥadīṭ* and the generations living in Medina before Mālik. When he evokes the *maḏhab* of Mālik, Ibn Taymiyya means the period in which Imam Mālik lived. al-Matroudi 2006, 42-4.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2011a, 156-9, 170-4, 218, 222-3, 227, 230, 257, 270, 288, 340, 352-5, 360, 406-9, 431.

<sup>67</sup> As the authentication of *ḥadīṭs* by Abū Muḥammad 'Abd 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-Ġanī and his cousin Muwaffaq al-Dīn, better known as Ibn Qudāma'. The former was a *ḥadīṭ* 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.

<sup>68</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2011a, 184.

not in opposition to the *šarī'a*.<sup>69</sup> This wide-ranging selection from the Mālikī corpus by Ibn Taymiyya and the way he used it showed his deep knowledge of the Mālikī *maḏhab*, as if he had been a Mālikī. In fact, an analysis of Ibn Taymiyya's writings demonstrates his erudition in all the *maḏhabs* and a great respect for each of the founders of the four schools of law.<sup>70</sup> However, it seems that, with the exception of the Ḥanbalī *maḏhab*, Ibn Taymiyya's expertise in the Mālikī *maḏhab* was superior to the others, for he considered it to be the most accurate in matters of *uṣūl*.<sup>71</sup> 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 *maḏhabs*, as mentioned by his contemporaries and biographers.<sup>72</sup>

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 *ḥadīṭ* over that of the people of opinion (*al-ra'y*).<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup>

While one cannot but agree with these statements, a close examination of some of his writings like *al-Ġawāb al-bāhir* and *al-Iḥnā'iyya*, 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.

<sup>69</sup> Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥādī 2002, 278-84.

<sup>70</sup> According to Ibn Rušayyiq, Ibn Taymiyya composed a treatise on the merits and virtues of each of the four founders of the *maḏhabs* (Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, al-Šāfi'ī, and Ibn Ḥanbal). Ibn Rušayyiq 2001-02/1422H, 306; Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥādī 2002, 49.

<sup>71</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2006, 33-80; al-Matroudi 2006, 43.

<sup>72</sup> Al-Dahabī 2001-02/1422H, 268-72; al-Bazzār 1976, 25, 335; al-'Umarī 2001-02/1422H, 313; Ibn Kaṭīr 1998, 18: 298.

<sup>73</sup> al-Matroudi 2006, 41-4.

<sup>74</sup> El-Tobgui 2019, 88.

## 4.2 Circulation Across the *Maḏhabs* and Independence from the *Maḏhabs*

The contents of *al-Ġawāb al-bāhir* and *al-Iḥnā'iyya* testify to the high degree of scholarship and mastery achieved by Ibn Taymiyya in the knowledge of the *maḏhabs*. As we have seen, Ibn Taymiyya quoted extensively from the Mālikī '*ulamā*' to refute the positions of Abū Bakr al-Iḥnā'ī on visiting the graves. He did the same with the '*ulamā*' of the other *maḏhabs*, 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 *maḏhabs* on several points of jurisprudence (*masā'il fiqhīyya*).<sup>75</sup> I think it is possible to speak of pluri-*maḏhab* 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-*maḏhab* referencing can be read as Ibn Taymiyya's willingness to 'circulate' between the *maḏhabs*, to use their respective corpus when and how he saw fit. This 'intellectual independence' of Ibn Taymiyya from the *maḏhabs* is confirmed by many of his students and biographers.<sup>76</sup>

Although Ibn Taymiyya was trained as a Ḥanbalī from his youth, he was not always careful to emphasise his membership of the *maḏhab* and to identify himself with it in his positions. Let us keep in mind that Ibn Taymiyya, besides eliciting criticism from other Ḥanbalīs,<sup>77</sup> also criticised the methods and opinions of several great Ḥanbalī scholars such as Abū Bakr al-Ḥallāl (d. 311/923), or Abū Ya'lā (d. 458/1066) to name but a few,<sup>78</sup> just as he criticised some of the principles of the Ḥanbalī *maḏhab* including some that he considered to be innovations (*bida'*).<sup>79</sup> Caterina Bori suggests "that Ibn Taymīyah's detachment from the authority of the four *maḏhab*-s and his challenge to judicial authority became socially and politically inconvenient at some point, as his death in prison shows".<sup>80</sup>

<sup>75</sup> One of the best-known examples is his *fatwā* on the oath of divorce. See Rapoport 2005, 94-105; al-Matroudi 2006, 172-85; Baugh 2013, 181-96.

<sup>76</sup> Al-Ḍahabī 2001-02/1422H, 267; Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī 2002, 251; Ibn Kaṭīr 1998, 18: 298-9; al-'Umārī 2001-02/1422H, 313; Ibn al-Wardī 2001-02/1422H, 332; al-Ṣafadī 2001-02/1422H, 347. See also Abū Zahra 1971, 81; al-Ḥaḡīlī 1999, 33.

<sup>77</sup> Bori 2010, 33-6.

<sup>78</sup> al-Matroudi 2006, 56-7.

<sup>79</sup> al-Matroudi 2006, 92-8. For what he considers to be erroneous rules in the *maḏhab* (*ḡalat*), see also 107-15. For some *maḏhab* rules that he refutes, see 122-5.

<sup>80</sup> Bori 2009, 67.

His independence from the *maḏhabs* was well-known, especially towards the end of his life, when he sometimes seemed to place himself above the *maḏhabs*, 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 *taqlīd* in which he said that there was no need to follow the opinions of the four schools.<sup>81</sup>

How can this circulation across the *maḏhabs* be explained? First of all, it is the result of a long intellectual journey and a solid expertise in the *maḏhabs*. 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.<sup>82</sup> For Ibn Taymiyya, the search for the truth, the need to protect the *tawḥīd*, the interest of Muslims and not that of a *maḏhab* or a school of thought, are the most important things.<sup>83</sup> Despite his admiration for Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyya

81 Ibn Taymiyya 1988.

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 [*umda*] for giving *fatwās*. He replied: 'concerning the branches [*al-furū'*] the matter is simple. If a Muslim follows and applies [*qallada*] 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 [*waḥdat al-wuḡūd*], Dahriyya, Qadariyya, Nuṣayris, Ḡahmiyya, Ḥulūliyya, those who refute divine Names and Attributes [*al-mu'aṭṭila*], anthropomorphists [*al-muḡassima wa-l-muṣabbiḥa*], 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 *ṣarī'a* of Prophet Muḥammad, 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 *zindīq* 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-Ḥaḡīlī 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 Ruṣayyiq 2001-02/1422H, 306-9. See also al-Matroudi 2006, 23-9; Rapoport 2010; al-'Utayṣān 1999; 'Ulwan 2000; al-Barikān 2004; Abū Zahra 1991, 350-65, 378-405.

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 *muğtahids* since they would be rewarded for their reasoning even if they were wrong in their thinking and judgement.<sup>84</sup> 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".<sup>85</sup>

Finally, Ibn Taymiyya's circulation across the *madhabs* and independence from the *madhabs* lead to another question – raised by several scholars<sup>86</sup> – namely that of Ibn Taymiyya's level of *iğtihād* but which will not be addressed here.<sup>87</sup>

### 4.3 Ambivalence in Ibn Taymiyya's Treatment of the Writings of Aš'arī *mutakallimūn* Authors

Ibn Taymiyya's critical stance on certain points of the Aš'arī doctrine, particularly with regard to the Aš'arīte scholars who followed the *kalām*, is becoming better known thanks to recent scholarship.<sup>88</sup> Despite his disagreements and criticisms, Ibn Taymiyya still acknowledged that the Aš'arī scholars had produced many good results. Some of their interpretations of the Divine Names and Attributes were correct, despite the influence of Ğahmite and Mu'tazilite

<sup>84</sup> al-Matroudi 2006, 45.

<sup>85</sup> Makdisi 1983, 65.

<sup>86</sup> For Muḥammad Abū Zahra, Ibn Taymiyya is a *muğtahid muntasib* in the Ḥanbalī *madhab*. Abū Zahra 1991, 347-8, 372-8, in particular 375-8. For al-Matroudi, Ibn Taymiyya should be considered a *muğtahid muṭlaq* but who wanted to depend on Imam Aḥmad's sources. al-Matroudi 2006, 21-2, 49-54 in particular 54. See also Rahāl 2002.

<sup>87</sup> The question is whether or not Ibn Taymiyya should or could be considered a *muğtahid muṭlaq*. For many of his biographers and students, there is no doubt that Ibn Taymiyya was a *muğtahid*. Some of them, such as Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya, al-Birzālī, Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, al-Bazzār and Ibn Kaṭīr had much admiration for their *ṣayḥ*, which may explain the praise. Others such as Šams al-Dīn al-Ḍahabī did not share all his views and even seem to have distanced themselves from the *ṣayḥ* for various reasons. Despite this, for al-Ḍahabī, Ibn Taymiyya reached the level of *muğtahid muṭlaq*. His greatest opponents of the Aš'arī school among his contemporaries such as Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), Ibn Zamlakānī (d. 727/1327) or other later '*ulamā'* such as Ibn Ḥaġar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), in spite of their virulent criticism, acknowledged his immense scholarship. The laudatory remarks, reported by al-Ḍahabī, allegedly made by Ibn Daqīq al-'Īd (d. 702/1302) about Ibn Taymiyya, constitute one of the most important testimonies in his favour. Ibn Daqīq al-'Īd was a pupil of the famous 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz b. 'Abd al-Salām and successor of Ibn Bint al-'A'azz as al-Šāfi'ī *qāḍī al-quḍāt*. According to Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), the '*ulamā'* did not disagree that Ibn Daqīq al-'Īd was considered the *muğaddid* of the seventh/thirteenth century. As will be clear, the question of Ibn Taymiyya's level of *iğtihād* is still far from being decided.

<sup>88</sup> Al-Maḥmūd 1995; El Omari 2010; Anjum 2012, 189-95; Griffel 2018; Hoover 2020.

thought.<sup>89</sup> To better refute the views of his opponents, Ibn Taymiyya does not hesitate to quote and incorporate Aš'arite authors and their works into his argument: the *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa iḥtilāf al-muṣallīn* of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Aš'arī (d. 324/936) about the 'iṣma (impeccability/infallibility) of the Prophet especially in his *Minhāğ al-Sunna*;<sup>90</sup> the *Tahāfūt* of al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) in his *Radd 'alā al-Mantiqiyyīn* and other writings;<sup>91</sup> he took up some of the positions of Faḥr 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 *Masā'il al-ḥamsūn* and *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs*.<sup>92</sup>

In his *al-Iḥnā'iyya*, in addition to Mālikī scholars, Ibn Taymiyya quoted famous Aš'arī scholars such as Abū Muḥammad al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), Abū Ḥamid al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) and Abū Zakariyyā 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.<sup>93</sup> This ambivalent method of Ibn Taymiyya in dealing with Aš'arī 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*<sup>94</sup> to be more learned than the *salaf*.<sup>95</sup> To show the vain nature of the practice of *kalām*, Ibn Taymiyya reported words that he attributed to great *mutakallimūn* such as Abū al-Faḥr al-Šahrastānī (d. 548/1153), Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī or

<sup>89</sup> For Ibn Taymiyya the interpretations found in the *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs* of Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in Abū al-Wafā' b. 'Aqīl as well as in Abū Ḥamid al-Ġazālī are those of Bišr b. Giyāṭ al-Marīsī who, according to Ibn Taymiyya, was implied in the spread of the doctrine of *ta'tīl al-sifāt* (denial of divine attributes) of the Ġahmiyya. Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 86-7.

<sup>90</sup> Zouggar 2011, 84-5.

<sup>91</sup> Zouggar 2020, 95. On the *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-islām wa-l-zandaqa*, another work by al-Ġazālī refuting philosophy but little known see fn. 54, 99-100. On al-Ġazālī and philosophy see also Griffel 2004, 101-44. On the points of convergence of Ibn Taymiyya with al-Ġazālī concerning reason and revelation see Griffel 2018, 14, 21-7, 38. Ibn Taymiyya explicitly acknowledges the fame of the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*: Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 83. On the *ṣaṭḥ* in some Sufī groups, Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 108. On the fact that God loves and is loved, see Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 390.

<sup>92</sup> Griffel 2018, 15, 27-30.

<sup>93</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2011a, 172, 176, 218, 222-3, 227, 257, 270, 288, 340, 407-9. E.g. on the *samā'* see Michot 1988. For an example of a point of convergence with al-Ġazālī's views on the power of God, see Anjum 2012, 183.

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

<sup>95</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 68. In his *Raf' al-malām*, Ibn Taymiyya writes:

“فهؤلاء كانوا أعلم الأمة وأفقهها، وأتقنها وأفضلها، فمن بعهم أفتنص” (1992-93, 17-18)

Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Ġuwaynī, 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<sup>96</sup> – for not having succeeded in finding the 'way' despite they made great efforts, implicitly by practising the *kalām*.<sup>97</sup> As usual, Ibn Taymiyya left the best argument for last and quoted a saying he attributed to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī:

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*.<sup>98</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya presented the saying he attributed to al-Ġazālī 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 Aš'arī to corroborate his opinion on the 'uluww (height, altitude) of God who was on his throne, the latter situated above the seven heavens.<sup>99</sup> Ibn Taymiyya quoted the *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn* of Abū al-Ḥassan al-Aš'arī (d. 324/936) and the *Kitāb al-asmā' wa al-ṣifāt* of Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066).<sup>100</sup>

Further on, Ibn Taymiyya defended the idea that the term *al-istiwā'* in verse 5 of Sura 20 could not be interpreted<sup>101</sup> and refuted the interpretation of the term *yad* as *ni'ma* (benefit).<sup>102</sup> To support his position, he quoted once again Abū al-Ḥasan al-Aš'arī 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 Aš'arī *mutakallim* who existed according to Ibn Taymiyya.<sup>103</sup> A little further he used the words of al-Baqillānī to refute the belief that God, by virtue of His Being, was

<sup>96</sup> It is the case for Fahr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

<sup>97</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 68-70.

<sup>98</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 70.

<sup>99</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 127-37. It is on this last point that several Aš'arī 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-'uluw*), 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 Muršīda of Muḥammad b. Tūmart (d. 524/1130), often, and wrongly, attributed to Ibn 'Asākir, one of the reference texts of the Aš'arī 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 الست كسائر المبتدعات".

<sup>100</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 186, 190.

<sup>101</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 200.

<sup>102</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 202.

<sup>103</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 203.

present everywhere (*fī kullī makān bi-dāti-hi*).<sup>104</sup> 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-Ġuwaynī (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*.<sup>105</sup>

These few examples illustrate this ambivalent attitude of Ibn Taymiyya's towards certain Aš'arī-*mutakallimūn* ulemas: 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:

وكلامه وكلام غيره من المتكلمين في هذا الباب مثل هذا كثير لمن يطلبه وإن كنا مستغنين بالكتاب والسنة وآثار السلف عن كل كلام. وملاك الأمر أن يهيب الله للعبد حكمة وإيماناً بحيث يكون له عقل ودين حتى يفهم ويدين، ثم نور الكتاب والسنة يغنيه عن كل شيء، ولكن كثير من الناس قد صار متنسباً إلى بعض طوائف المتكلمين، ومحسناً للظن بهم دون غيرهم، ومتوهماً أنهم حققوا في هذا الباب ما لم يحققه غيرهم، فلو أتى بكل آية ما تبعها حتى يؤتى بشيء من كلامهم...

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 Qur'ān, 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 Qur'ān 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.<sup>106</sup>

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*

<sup>104</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 204.

<sup>105</sup> Ibn Taymiyya criticises this position at the beginning of the book, see fn. 95.

<sup>106</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2015, 205.



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 *ṣuyūḥ mutakallimūn* 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-*mutakallimūn* were innovators.<sup>107</sup> This process was quite similar to that employed in al-Ḥnā'ī's refutation of the visitation of the tombs with the use of Mālikī-Aš'arī sources; or that of al-Quṣayrī, 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 *mutakallimūn* authors in his *Fatwā al-ḥamawiyya 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 *muḥaddiṭ*, Ibn Taymiyya was competent in the science of *hadīṭ* and the so-called science of narrators (*'ilm al-riḡāl*).<sup>108</sup> He emphasised the importance of the *isnād* and lamented that in his time, "many among the servants did not memorise the *hadīṭ* or their *isnād* and consequently, there were many errors made in both the *isnād* and the *matn* [text] of the *hadīṭ*".<sup>109</sup> Ibn Taymiyya sifted through the passages of al-Quṣayrī'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-Quṣayrī reported that Ḍū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī<sup>110</sup> was said to have been asked about verse 5 sura 20<sup>111</sup> and replied that God confirms His Being there and refutes any place for Him. God exists by His Be-

<sup>107</sup> On Ibn Taymiyya's position on the different types of interpretations see Zougar 2010, 198-204.

<sup>108</sup> al-Matroudi 2006, 25-6.

<sup>109</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 159:

لكن كثيراً من العباد لا يحفظ الأحاديث ولا أسانيدها فكثيراً ما يغلطون في إسناد الحديث أو منته.

<sup>110</sup> His full name Abū al-Fayḍ Ṭawbān b. Ibrāhīm, born in Aḥmīm 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.

<sup>111</sup> "The Most Merciful [who is] above the Throne established".

ing and things exist by His command (*ḥukm*) and as He Wills.<sup>112</sup> But for Ibn Taymiyya, the problem of the *isnād* arose already before analysing its content:

هذا الكلام لم يَذكر له إسناداً عن ذي النون، وفي هذه الكتب من الحكايات المسندة شيء كثير لا أصل له، فكيف بهذه المنقطعة المسببة التي تتضمن أن يُنقل عن المشايخ كلام لا يقوله عاقل، فإن هذا الكلام ليس فيه مناسبة للآية، بل هو مناقض لها. فإن هذه الآية لم تتضمن إثبات ذاته ونفي مكانه بوجه من الوجوه، فكيف تُفسر بذلك؟! وأما قوله: "هو موجود بذاته، والأشياء موجودة بحكمه"، فهو حقٌّ، لكن ليس هذا معنى الآية.

I say: he [al-Quṣayrī] does not cite any *isnād* going back to Ḍū 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 *ṣuyūḥ* 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 [*it̤bāt*] of the Being of God [*d̤āti-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.<sup>113</sup>

Further on, we find this same problem of the *isnād* concerning a saying which al-Quṣayrī attributed to Ḍū al-Nūn and according to which he praised the merits of the beautiful voice and the *samā'* which pushes and directs hearts towards the truth (*al-ḥaqq*).<sup>114</sup> For Ibn Taymiyya:

هذا الكلام لم يسنده عن ذي النون، وإنما أرسله إرسالاً، وما يرسله في هذه الرسالة قد وجد كثير منه مكذوب على أصحابه، إما أن يكون أبو القاسم سمعه من بعض الناس فاعتقد صدقه، أو يكون من فوقه كذلك، أو وجده مكتوباً في بعض الكتب فاعتقد صحته.

This saying has no *isnād* going back to Ḍū al-Nūn but he [al-Quṣayrī] reports it without quoting its main narrator [*arsala-hu irsālan*].<sup>115</sup> Many of what he reports in this book are actually false words that are

<sup>112</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 150. This position echoes what is also found in the *Muršida*: (al-Qāḍī) وله الحكم والقضاء وله الأسماء الحسنى، لا دافع لما قضى ولا مانع لما أعطى يفعل في ملكه ما يريد ويحكم في خلقه بما يشاء (1999, 20-7, 46)

<sup>113</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 151.

<sup>114</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 275.

<sup>115</sup> Although it is not a prophetic *ḥadīth*, Ibn Taymiyya treats this *ḥadīth* (narrative) attributed to Ḍū al-Nūn using the nomenclature of *ḥadīth* scholarship. By the expression *arsala-hu irsālan* Ibn Taymiyya refers to the *mursal ḥadīth*, characterised by the lack of the last person to hear the *ḥadīth* directly from the Prophet.

falsely attributed to these people; either Abū al-Qāsim [al-Quṣayrī] heard it from some people and considered it true or he found it written in some books and considered it authentic [...].<sup>116</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya went on to highlight the phenomenon of attributing false and misleading words to the most illustrious *ṣuyūḥ* and *‘ulamā’* for the purpose of legitimising a particular belief or innovative practice:

ومن أكثر الكذب، الكذب على المشايخ المشهورين، فقد رأينا من ذلك وسمعنا ما لا يحصىه إلا الله. وهذا أبو القاسم – مع علمه وروايته بالإسناد – ومع هذا، ففي هذه الرسالة قطعة كبيرة من المكذوبات، التي لا يُنازع فيها من له أدنى معرفة بحقيقة حال المنقول عنهم.

And among the most numerous lies are those about the famous *ṣuyūḥ* 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 *ṣuyūḥ*].<sup>117</sup>

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 *samā’* were found:

أما الذي يستند من الحكايات في باب السماع، فعامته من كتابين: كتاب اللمع لأبي نصر السراج – فإنه يروى عن أبي حاتم السجستاني عن أبي نصر عن عبد الله بن علي الطوسي، ويروى عن محمد بن أحمد بن محمد التميمي عنه – ومن كتاب السماع لأبي عبد الرحمن السلمى، قد سمعه منه.

As for the one who supports, with an *isnād*, narrations related to the *samā’* then most of the time he uses two works: the book *al-Lam’* by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāḡ which reports after Abū Ḥātim al-Siġistānī, after Abū Naṣr, after ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī al-Ṭūsī, and also reports from Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tamīmī; the book *al-Samā’* of Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī that he heard from him directly.<sup>118</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya was ardently opposed to singing, which he considered a perversion and a danger for the heart.<sup>119</sup> Although he was an enthusiast for warrior arts like *furūsiyya*, Ibn Taymiyya had no taste for military music, a military practice for which there is no trace either

<sup>116</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 275-6.

<sup>117</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 276.

<sup>118</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 276.

<sup>119</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2011c, 343-52; 2005, 238; 1991; Michot 1988, 255-61.

in the Prophet or the *salaf*.<sup>120</sup> But it was above all the *samā'* practised by some *mutaṣawwifa* with all the turpitudes and perversions committed therein that he strongly denounced and condemned.<sup>121</sup> However, Ibn Taymiyya's position on the *samā'* 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.<sup>122</sup>

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.<sup>123</sup> 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*.<sup>124</sup> Like a *muḥaddith*, Ibn Taymiyya analysed in depth the *isnāds* quoted by al-Quṣayrī and did not hesitate to point out when one of the narrators was unknown:

قال أبو القاسم: "حدثنا الشيخ أبو عبد الرحمن، سمعت أبا العباس بن الخشاب البغدادي، سمعت أبا القاسم بن موسى، سمعت محمد بن أحمد، سمعت الأنصاري، سمعت الخزاز يقول: حقيقة القرب فقد حُسن الأشياء من القلب، وهذوء الضمير إلى الله."  
قلت: "هذه الحكاية في إسناده من لا يُعرف حاله، وإن صحَّ هذا الكلام عن أبي سعيد الخزاز، فليس مقصوده أنّ القرب من الله ليس إلا مجرد ذلك".

Abū al-Qāsim said: 'the *ṣayḥ* Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān reported to us': 'I heard Abū al-'Abbās b. al-Ḥaššāb al-Baḡdādī who heard Abū al-Qāsim b. Mūsā who heard Muḥammad b. Aḥmad who heard al-Anṣārī who heard al-Ḥarrāz say, 'the real closeness [to being with God] is not losing the attachment for the good things in one's heart and the serenity of mind towards God'.

**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 'ulamā's music could be a psychological weapon in the service of Muslims. For the Ḥanafī Badr al-Dīn 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-aḡrās*) 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 *samā'*. See also Pouzet 1983, 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** "فهذا الكلام كلام حسن، وإن لم يعلم إسناده" (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'.<sup>125</sup>

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-Sulamī, a great Sufi *ṣayḥ* 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-Quṣayrī attributed to al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr, better known as al-Ḥallāḡ, and whose reputation as a misguided person, heretic and even apostate was well known and which Ibn Taymiyya did not forget to mention.<sup>126</sup> Regarding the words of al-Ḥallāḡ, Ibn Taymiyya wrote:

هذا الكلام - والله أعلم - هل هو صحيح عن الحلاج أم لا؟ فإن في الإسناد من لا أعرف حاله، وقد رأيت أشياء كثيرة منسوبة إلى الحلاج من مصنفات وكلمات ورسائل، وهي كذب عليه لا شك في ذلك، وإن كان في كثير من كلامه الثابت عنه فساد واضطراب.

Is this saying - and God is more Knowledgeable - really from al-Ḥallāḡ 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-Ḥallāḡ 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-Ḥallāḡ, there is corruption, disorder and disruption.<sup>127</sup>

We must acknowledge here a certain rigour and objectivity on the part of Ibn Taymiyya, which were not always present,<sup>128</sup> if we take into consideration the criticisms he made of al-Ḥallāḡ in other *fatwās*.<sup>129</sup>

It is clear that no matter which author al-Quṣayrī 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-

<sup>125</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 154. See page 158 for another example of criticism of the absence of an *isnād*.

<sup>126</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 106.

<sup>127</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 107.

<sup>128</sup> See for example the false accusations against Rašid al-Dīn, highlighted by Michot 1995.

<sup>129</sup> Massignon 1975. Nevertheless, he agrees on several points with al-Ḥallāḡ and his perception of al-Ḥallāḡ and his creed seems to have evolved over time. See Michot 2007.

Fuḍayl b. 'Iyād (d. 187/803), a famous Sufi *ṣayḥ* whom he particularly liked.<sup>130</sup> For some sayings reported by al-Quṣayrī 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 Qur'ān:

هذا الكلام ليس له إسناده عن سهل، وكلام سهل بن عبد الله وأصحابه في السنة والصفات والقرآن أشهر من أن يُذكر هنا. وسهل من أعظم الناس قولاً بأن القرآن كله حروف، ومعانيه غير مخلوقة، بل صاحبة أبو الحسن بن سالم – أختير الناس بقوله – قد عُرف قوله وقول أصحابه في ذلك. وقد ذكر أبو بكر بن إسحاق الكلاباذي في "التعريف في مذاهب التصوف" عن الحارث الحاسبي وأبي الحسن بن سالم، أنهما كانا يقولان: إن الله يتكلم بصوت. ومذهب السالمية أصحاب سهل، ظاهر في ذلك، فلا يُترك هذا الأمر المشهور المعروف بالظاهر لحكاية مرسله لا إسناده لها.

This saying has no *isnād* from Sahl. The saying of Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh and his companions about the Sunna, the Attributes and the Qur'ān are so well known that there is no need to recall them here. Sahl is among the most illustrious people who claimed that the Qur'ān in its entirety consists of *hurūf* and that its meanings are not created. Moreover, his companion Abū al-Ḥasan b. Sālim – the most knowledgeable of Sahl sayings – and his companions, are known for his words on this subject. Abū Bakr b. Ishāq al-Kalābāḍī has mentioned in his book *al-Ta'arruf fī maḏhab al-taṣawwuf* according to al-Ḥarīṭ al-Muḥāsibī and Abū al-Ḥasan b. Sālim that both say: 'surely God speaks through a *ṣawṭ*.' The *maḏhab* of the Sālimiyya and the companions of Sahl is clear on this and it is not appropriate to bring a *mursal* narration without an *isnād* for this type of thing that is clear and well-known.<sup>131</sup>

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

<sup>130</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 377.

<sup>131</sup> Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 163.

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 *ḡumhūr 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-Fārisī 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-Iḥnā'iyya*, 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 *maḏhabs* and schools of thought, the sources of his opponents regardless of their *maḏhab* of affiliation. Ibn Taymiyya built his arguments on sources from his opponent's *maḏhab* and used it against him to deconstruct his discourse and discredit him. His expertise in the *maḏhabs* in general, and the Mālikī *maḏhab* in particular, allowed him to discuss and quote the opinions of the '*ulamā*' of the different *maḏhabs* as he wished. Although he was attached to the Ḥanbalī *maḏhab* and admired its founder, it would seem that Ibn Taymiyya was not concerned with necessarily appearing to be a Ḥanbalī scholar and/or ensuring that the opinions of the scholars affiliated with his *maḏhab* prevailed, particularly towards the end of his life. This pluri-*maḏhab* referencing and selection of sources, which he practiced at the end of his life, was the result of both his expertise in the *maḏhabs* and a long intellectual journey. It was a further indicator of his independence from the *maḏhabs*, an independence that was evident in his later writings: Ibn Taymiyya wanted to place himself above the *maḏhabs*, 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 *maḏhabs* 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 Aṣ'arī-*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*.

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