IN MEMORIAM

THE THIRTEENTH ANNUAL VICTOR DANNER MEMORIAL LECTURE

MAMLŪKS, QALANDARS, RĀFIDĪS, AND THE “OTHER” IBN TAYMIYYA

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April 15, 2015 at 7:15pm
University Club, President’s Room
In Honor of a Dedicated and Beloved Scholar and Mentor, Professor Victor Danner

It has now become a cherished custom to publish the Victor Danner Memorial lecture delivered each year. This year we are publishing the lecture “Mamlûks, Qalandars, Râfidîs, and the ‘Other’ Ibn Taymiyya” given by the thirteenth Danner lecturer Prof. Yahya Michot of the Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. The thoughtful and stimulating lecture generated quite a bit of discussion among the audience members and encouraged all to reflect on the importance of Ibn Taymiyya’s work and its enduring legacy, not only in the field of Islamic Studies but also in the larger fields of world philosophy and literature. Many lingered after the talk to enjoy the refreshments and continue their conversation with Prof. Michot.

If you were able to physically attend the lecture, you will welcome this published version as a memento of the event and the opportunity to continue to reflect on some of the issues that were raised during the question-and-answer session. If you were not able to attend yourself, I hope you will appreciate the publication of the revised content of that lecture and get a sense of the intellectual richness that many of us were privileged to enjoy that evening.

As you well know, academically important events of this sort that are such a beneficial and significant component of our students’ overall education and of the life of the department and the university are in need of continuous replenishment of the resources that sustain them. The Danner Lecture fund is greatly in need of your financial support to be able to continue into the future. As a well-wisher and friend of NELC who wishes to guarantee its prosperity and well-being in the coming years, please do consider donating generously specifically to the Danner fund and/or to the NELC IU foundation account.

On behalf of the NELC faculty and students, I thank you in advance for your help during this critical period.

Warm regards,

Asma Afsaruddin
Former Chair (2011 - 2015) and Professor
NELC
Abstract

The Syrian theologian and mufti Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) is often accused of opposition to reason and mysticism as well as of fundamentalism and radicalism. He even gets a mention in The 9/11 Commission Report as the source of “a long tradition of extreme intolerance.” His own writings however confirm that the Damascene scholar never ceased to be a great spiritual master of the middle way of traditional Islam. Concerning the Mamlûk rulers of his time and their innovations – e.g. martial music –, he is not just a loyal subject but promotes an open-minded, merciful, Salafism. Rather than condemning the Qalandars and their anti-religious excesses, he invites to understand their circumstances and blames the ulemas for not doing their job properly. As for the Râfidîs, he clearly makes a difference between theoretical, general, pronouncements and adopting effective, unconsidered, practical measures against individuals. This “other” Ibn Taymiyya fully deserves to be reexplored.
Mamlūks, Qalandars, Rāfidīs, and the “Other” Ibn Taymiyya

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The Thirteenth Annual
Victor Danner Memorial Lecture
Indiana University
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INTRODUCTION

I am very honoured and grateful to have been invited to deliver the thirteenth annual Victor Danner memorial lecture. My gratitude goes especially to Professor Asma Afsaruddin and Mrs Rachael Daum for arranging the practicalities of this invitation.

The Syrian theologian and mufti Ibn Taymiyya died in prison in Damascus in 728/1328 and was buried in what was then called the “cemetery of the Sufis.” His grave can still be visited today but is partly destroyed. ¹ Similarly to the headstone of his tomb Ibn Taymiyya’s reputation is also in pieces. Some might call him “Shaykh al-Islam” and see him as one of the most influential scholars of the Mamlûk period. He is however far from being loved by everybody, to say the least. As a matter of fact, the regretted Professor Victor Danner obviously preferred Ibn ‘Atâ‘ Allâh al-Iskanderâni to him. In his book The Islamic Tradition. An Introduction, he referred to Ibn Taymiyya as an example of “belligerent religious authorities.”² In the introduction to his Ibn ‘Ata’ Illah, The Book of Wisdom, he presented him, more explicitly, as “the Hanbalite theologian, representing an extreme version of fundamentalist exoterism […] this stern and hidebound exponent of Hanbalism […] cultivated an air of reforming the Islamic tradition by harking back to the early days of the religion and eradicating everything that blocked the reaffirmation of primitive Islam.”³

Ibn Taymiyya is of particular ill-fame in political matters. In the early years of Imam Khomeini’s Islamic Republic of Iran, he

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was called “Father of the Islamic Revolution” by Emmanuel Sivan.² Twenty years later, he became the spiritual ancestor of Usama bin Laden. In The Age of Sacred Terror, Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon notably wrote that, “to grasp the worldview of al-Qaeda and its leader, Usama bin Laden, it is essential to start with Ibn Taymiyya.”³ The Syrian theologian is even mentioned by name in the official 9/11 Commission Report, which states: “Usama Bin Ladin and other Islamist terrorist leaders draw on a long tradition of extreme intolerance within one stream of Islam (a minority tradition), from at least Ibn Taymiyyah, through the founders of Wahhabism, through the Muslim Brotherhood, to Sayyid Qutb.”⁴

According to Natana Delong-Bas in her book Wahhabi Islam. From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad, at least three serious accusations can be directed at Ibn Taymiyya, in relation to what she calls his “hallmark themes:” (i) “the permissibility of overthrowing a ruler who is classified as an unbeliever due to a failure to adhere to Islamic law,” i.e. promoting tyrannicide; (ii) “the absolute division of the world into dar al-kufr and dar al-Islam;” (iii) “the labeling of anyone not adhering to one’s particular interpretation of Islam as an unbeliever.”⁵ Before dealing with this third accusation in relation to Mamlûks, Qalandars, and Râfidîs, a quick word must be said about the two first grievances.

Accusing Ibn Taymiyya of having encouraged the killing of despots and dictators is quite common in the literature. In his book Osama Bin Laden, Michael Scheuer thus writes that, “the duty to attack rulers who refuse to govern according to Islamic law

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was set down in the early fourteenth century by the Syrian Islamic jurist Ibn Taymiyyah.\(^8\) This accusation is usually illustrated by the quotes from Ibn Taymiyya’s writings found in Islamist pamphlets such as *al-Farīdat al-ghā’iba - The Neglected Duty* of the Egyptian electrician ‘Abd al-Salām Faraj (d. 1982)\(^9\), who was calling for the assassination of President Anwar Sadat (d. 1981), or *Fasl al-kalām fī muwājahah al-hukkām - The Decisive Treatise on how to confront the Injustice of Rulers* of the Algerian activist and number two of the *Front Islamique du Salut*, ‘Alī Belhadj,\(^10\) whose role was pivotal in the civil war against Algiers generals in the 1990s. In these two cases as in others the Taymiyyan quotes were drawn from particularly famous writings of the Syrian theologian: three “anti-Mongol” fetwas he composed against the Tatar Īlkhāns of Iran who, after converting to Islam in 695/1295, once again threatened to attack Syria in the first years of the 8th/14th century.\(^11\) To stir up resistance against these invaders known for their cruelties during former invasions, Ibn Taymiyya put in doubt the sincerity of their conversion and argued that someone not complying with all the rules of the *Sharī’a* was not a real believer and, hence, had to be

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fought.

Vis-à-vis his own Mamlûk rulers, Ibn Taymiyya’s views nevertheless always remained in line with those of traditional Sunni scholars and he never ceased to be a loyal subject of the Sultan Muhammad b. Qalâwûn. In his Kitâb al-Istiqâma - Book of Rectitude, he writes: “Among the fundamentals of the truth, for which the texts [to which one refers to know the religion] provide proofs, there is that people with a tyrannical (jâ‘ir) and unjust (zâlim) leader are commanded to show patience (sabr) in the face of his tyranny, his injustice, his oppression (baghî), and not to fight him. The Prophet likewise commanded that in more than one hadîth. He did absolutely not authorize the pushing back of oppression by fighting (qitâl) [it]. Quite the contrary: as fighting is the source of dissension (fitna), he prohibited the pushing back of oppression by this means and commanded patience.”

For sure, Ibn Taymiyya did not intend to substitute unconditional submission to armed revolt but went for a middle way between these two extremes, the same via media of critical obedience faithful to the three fundamental commitments implied in the Companions’ pledge of allegiance to the Prophet, as reported by al-Bukhârî, Muslim, and others: “to obey within obedience to God, even if the one giving the order is unjust; to abstain from disputing the authority of those who dispose it; to take up the cause of the truth without fear of any creature.” Though ready to stand up – peacefully, not with the sword – and to speak the truth in front of authorities, the Syrian theologian wrote more than once that, “sixty years with a tyrannical (jâ‘ir) imâm are better than one night

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without an imām.”

In a clearly autobiographical text, probably written during his last detention, Ibn Taymiyya even explains that, “when a scholar forsakes what he knows of the Book of God and of the Sunna of His Messenger, and follows the ruling of a ruler which contravenes a ruling of God and His Messenger, he is a renegade, an unbeliever who deserves to be punished in this world and in the hereafter [...] If he is beaten, detained, and submitted to various forms of harm in order to abandon what he knows of the Law (shar’) of God and His Messenger, which he is obliged to follow, and follows someone else’s ruling, he deserves to be punished by God. On the contrary, it is incumbent upon him to be patient. And, if he is harmed for [the sake of] God, then this is the way (sunna) followed by God with the Prophets and their followers.”

As for Muslims’ relations with non-Muslim rulers, the Syrian theologian finds in Joseph’s service of Pharaoh a perfect paradygm to emulate: for the believers, according to circumstances, there are indeed many other ways to position themselves vis-à-vis the non-Muslims than jihād; notably, like Joseph, volunteering to assume high political responsibilities in non-Muslim states, “willing the best” for their people, and contributing as much as possible to the rule of justice among them.

All this obviously displays a Taymiyyan political theology which is far more complex than Faraj’s or Belhadj’s assimilation of modern rulers to the īlkhānid invaders of Syria against whom Ibn Taymiyya wrote his anti-Mongol fetwas. In their “Mongolization” of Sadat and of the Algerian junta, these modern Islamist activists misused and abused Ibn Taymiyya’s fetwas by transforming a

14 See the Taymiyyan texts translated by Y. MICHOT, IBN TAYMIYYA. Against Extremisms, p. 230, 258-259.
16 See the Taymiyyan texts translated by Y. MICHOT, IBN TAYMIYYA. Against Extremisms, p. 255, 262-263.
“theology of war”, developed *ad hoc* against potential invaders in a particular, specific, historical context, into a general, absolute, rule on how believers should relate to their own Muslim rulers, in all time and everywhere. The ignorance of such “Mongolizing” Islamists might be forgiven. When it is mediocre orientalist academics who hold similarly distorted views, it becomes more difficult to show them any indulgence.

The second accusation of N. Delong-Bas against Ibn Taymiyya has to do with a supposedly absolute division of the world into two abodes, one of Islam, the other of war. The invalidation of this charge is even easier than with the first one. It indeed suffices to refer to another Taymiyyan fetwa to learn that the Syrian theologian did not recognize any normative authoritativeness to such a division. Today, Mardin is a little city in the South-East of Turkey. Around 700/1300, it was a satellite principality of the Mongol empire of Iran, ruled by a Muslim emir under the protection of Tatar troops, with a mixed Muslim and Christian population, and disputed by the Syro-Egyptian Mamlûk sultanate. Asked whether Mardin was a land of war (*balad harb*) or a land of peace (*balad silm*), Ibn Taymiyya gave what we call in French “a Normand’s answer”, “but-yes, but-no”: “Is [Mardin] a domain of war or of peace? It is a [city of a status] composite (*murakkab*), in which both the things signified [by those terms are to be found]. It is not in the situation of a domain of peace in which the institutions (*akkâm*) of Islam are implemented because its army (*jund*) is [composed of] Muslims. Nor is it in the situation of a domain of war, whose inhabitants are unbelievers. Rather, it constitutes a third type [of domain].”¹⁷ For Ibn Taymiyya, there are thus more than two abodes in the world. He could not have been

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clearer...

At the end of this introduction, Ibn Taymiyya’s ideas already appear quite different from what we are told by N. Delong-Bas and her like. But what about the third accusation, which leads to consider the Syrian mufti as some kind of professional anathematizer (*mukaffir*)? The soundness of this accusation will now be weighted in relation to the three groups already mentioned: the Mamlûks, the Qalandars, and the Râfidîs.

**THE MAMLÛKS**

The slave dynasty of the Mamlûks ruled Egypt, Syria, and the Hedjaz from 648/1250 to 922/1517. As they defeated the Mongols in 658/1260 and put an end to the Crusades in 690/1291, Ibn Taymiyya sees in them the champions of Islam. They are however far from being impeccable rulers, he perfectly knows it. They are even innovators in many fields, for example military music. In the same *Kitâb al-Istiqâma - Book of Rectitude* already mentioned, he unexpectedly addresses the question of the origins of this military music of the Egypto-Syrian sultanate – the Mamlûk equivalent of the Ottoman *mehter:*19 “These beatings (*daqdaqa*) and these trumpets (*būq*) that resemble the shofars of the Jews and the bells of the Nazarenes were not known in the time of the well-guided caliphs, nor of the emirs of the Muslims who [ruled] after them. It is only, I think, a novelty introduced by one of the kings of the East (*mashriq*), from amongst the people of Persia. They have indeed introduced (*ahdatha*) many novelties in the matter of the

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emirate and fighting, and these have spread through the earth as their kingdom expanded; so far so that the young is educated in the idea that things have always been that way and that the old man falling into decrepitude thinks likewise. They know nothing else but that. Moreover, they object to the opposite being said by anyone. Some people are even of the opinion that it is a novelty introduced (ihdāth) by ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān. The matter is nevertheless not so. On the contrary, this was not practiced commonly by the caliphs and the emirs posterior to ‘Uthmān.’

For Ibn Taymiyya, the influence exerted by non-Arabs on Muslims was so great that it caused among their military the apparition of a number of other novelties than martial music: “The emblematic practices (sha’īra) of the non-Arabs – the Persians and others – appeared among the emblematic practices of the military (jund) and the fighters of this country; and this, even in the clothing, the fighting operations, and the names given to the emiral offices. This is for instance the case with the terms constructed with the suffix -dār, just as our military say rikāb-dār, tisht-dār, and jān-dār. This -dār, in the language of the Persians, has the meaning of ‘master’ (sāhib) and ‘guardian’ (hāfiz).” After listing and explaining the Persianate titles of more than a dozen of Mamlūk dignitaries, from the “guardian of the mounts” (rikābdār) to the “master of hospitality” (mihmāndār), the Syrian theologian concludes that “the novelties introduced (muhdath) in the fields of the emirate, kingship, and fighting are very numerous but this is not the place to speak about them.”

According to Ibn Taymiyya, novelties are not innovations (bid’a) as he reserves this latter term for changes in the creed and the canonic practices of Islam. He nevertheless considers that “the

20 IBN TAYMIYYA, Istiqāma, vol. i, p. 325.
21 jāndār : khāndār I
Sunna, when fighting, was to lower the voice,”\textsuperscript{24} i.e. not to shout and, a fortiori, not to accompany jihād with music. This being so, what kind of religious position should one adopt with regard to martial music and other such novelties? Can they be condoned or should they be condemned?

The Syrian mufti answers such questions in three steps, the first of which is a realistic assessment of the diversity of human circumstances and a pragmatic reminder concerning the finality of the prophetic call: “Most human affairs include these three types of things: commanded things, prohibited things, and permitted things. That which is obligatory is commanding what God commands, prohibiting what God prohibits, and allowing what God permits. However, when an individual or a group do not perform something commanded except by also committing something forbidden and more important than that, or\textsuperscript{25} do not abandon something forbidden except by also abandoning something commanded\textsuperscript{26} and more important than that, the truth is that nothing was commanded by God in a manner necessarily entailing that something preponderantly forbidden also occur; just as nothing was forbidden by God in a manner necessarily entailing to abandon\textsuperscript{27} something preponderantly commanded.\textsuperscript{28}

Commanding the proper and forbidding the reprehensible, this is what the Messengers have been sent out for, the purpose being the pursuit of beneficial things and bringing them to their perfection (tahsil al-masālih wa takmīlu-hā), as well as the neutralization of factors of corruption and their diminution (taʿīl al-mafāsid wa

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\textsuperscript{24} IBN TAYMIYYA, \textit{Istiqāma}, vol. i, p. 325.
\textsuperscript{25} lā tatruku mahzūran + : aw I
\textsuperscript{26} illā bi-tark maʾmūran : lā tatruku maʾmūran illā [li-mahzūr] I
\textsuperscript{27} tark : [wuqūʾ] I
\textsuperscript{28} The text of the three first lines of p. 330 is manifestly corrupt and the emendations between square brackets made by the editor do not improve the situation. Those suggested here are inspired by the Taymiyyan text concerning the same topic translated in Y. MICHOT, \textit{IBN TAYMIYYA. Against Extremisms}, p. 264-266.
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This world’s reality is never black and white but \textit{alwān}, multicoloured, multifaceted like a stormy sea and, for Ibn Taymiyya, navigating between its sharp reefs is always a dangerous, uneasy exercise requiring continuous attention, weighing the pros and cons, pondering of aims and effects relatively to each other, in order to make the right choices: lesser evils and greater goods. Moreover, humans are weak, inconstant, and mostly ignorant. The Prophets themselves had to take this situation into account and did not expect from the believers anything that was impossible to achieve. They were of course sent out to pursue beneficial things and to bring them to their perfection as well as to neutralize factors of corruption and to make them diminish, but, and this is essential to remember, only “as far as possible.”

In a second moment of his reasoning, pragmatism leads Ibn Taymiyya to remind those wanting to guide the Muslims on the prophetic path that they should be extremely cautious not to take any unconsidered, irresponsible, absolute, measures. He could not come with a stronger, more explicit, statement: even commanding the proper and forbidding the reprehensible may sometimes be inappropriate: “When commanding the proper and forbidding the reprehensible necessarily entails more corruption (\textit{fasād}) than what it encompasses of goodness (\textit{salāh}), it is not Lawful (\textit{lam yakun mashrū’}). The imāms of the \textit{Sunna} have detested one to take part in the fighting during the dissensions that many of the adepts of caprices caused\textsuperscript{30} by commanding\textsuperscript{31} the proper and forbidding the reprehensible; this, when commanding the proper and forbidding the reprehensible necessarily entails dissensions producing a more serious corruption than there would come from abstaining from doing so. The lesser of two corruptions shall indeed not be repelled

\textsuperscript{29} IBN TAYMIYYA, \textit{Istiqāma}, vol. i, p. 329-330.
\textsuperscript{30} yusabbibu-hā : yusammī-hā
\textsuperscript{31} bi-l-amr : al-amr
by means of the highest one. One shall rather repel the highest of
the two by bearing the lesser one, as the Prophet said, God bless
him and grant him peace: ‘Shall I not inform you of something
more eminent than the degree of fasting, praying, giving alms,
commanding the proper and forbidding the reprehensible?’ – ‘Oh
yes, O Messenger of God,’ the Companions said. – ‘To re-establish
good relations (islāh dhāt al-bayn),’ he said. ‘Have corrupted
relations and there comes the woman who shaves! I do not say that
she shaves the hair but, rather, that she shaves the religion.’”

Ibn Taymiyya is totally aware of the risks inherent to
the issuing of religious opinions. In a third and final part of his
reasoning, he comes back to the question of Mamlûk military
music, firmly disagrees with those who see some preponderant
benefit therein and reaffirms his indefectible attachment to the
“way of the Ancients (salaf)” on this, and other, points. The manner
he then speaks of this “way of the Ancients (salaf)” is of the greatest
interest: “Some might be of the opinion that there is a preponderant
benefit (maslaha râjiha) in these sonorities newly introduced in
the matter of jihâd. It is nevertheless in holding to what is proper
that the preponderant interest resides, just as is the case with the
sonorities of the remembrance (dhikr) of God. The early vanguard
of Islam and those who followed them in beneficence were indeed
more eminent than the later Muslims, in everything: the prayer and
what is of its genus – the remembrance and the invocation of God,
reciting the Qur’ân and listening to it, etc. –, the jihâd, the emirate
and what is attached thereto – the various types of policies (siyâsât),
the chastisements and the procedures concerning the payment of
sums of money and their spending. The way of the Ancients is
indeed more perfect in everything (fa-inna tarīq al-salaf akmal fi

32 IBN TAYMIYYA, Istiqāma, vol. i, p. 330. The meaning of this shaving of the
religion is that nothing remains of it. On this hadîth, see ABÛ DĀ’ÛD, Sunan,
Adab (ed. M. M. D. ‘ABD AL-HAMĪD, vol. iv, p. 280, no 4919); AL-TIRMĪDĪ,
Sunan, Qiyâma (ed. ‘A. R. M. ‘UTHMÂN, vol. iv, p. 73, no 2627); IBN HANBAL,
kull shay’). The Muslim shall nevertheless implement thereof what he is capable of (wa lākin yafʿal al-muslim min dhālika mā yaqdiru ʿalay-hi).”

The short sentence ending this last passage is as important as the profession of Salafism preceding it and should in fact never be separated from it since it qualifies what actually constitutes true Salafism for Ibn Taymiyya: a faithfulness to the way of the Ancients both absolute (fī kull shay’) and mercifully conscious of man’s incapacity; in other words, an idealism both unconditional and tempered by reality. Rather than saying that every novelty is an innovation and that every innovation leads to the Fire, i.e. rather than excommunicating the Mamlūks for their martial music and condemning them to the Gehenna, Ibn Taymiyya is able to accommodate their lack of compliance with the Sharīʿa. And, of course, in no way is he calling to overthrow them as we were led to believe by N. Delong-Bas and M. Scheuer!

In another text on the purpose of the religious Law, the Syrian mufti reaffirms this kind of merciful Salafism and goes even farther in his open-minded understanding of the “way of the Ancients.” What he then recommends is not simply ponderation, weighing the pros and cons, but readiness to show leniency, or even to keep silent in some circumstances and, always, to learn how to communicate better with people: “It is proper for the scholar (ʿālim) to ponder (tadabbur) these various kinds of questions. In some of them […] what is obligatory is to show leniency (ʿafw) regarding the commanding and prohibiting of certain things, not to declare lawful (tahlīl) what is prohibited, nor to forsake (isqāt) what is obligatory. For example, there may ensue from a scholar’s commanding an act of obedience, the doing of an act of disobedience greater than it: he therefore abandons commanding it in order to repell the occurrence of that act of disobedience […] For example, he abandons bringing a sinner before an unjust holder

33 IBN TAYMIYYA, Istiqāma, vol. i, p. 331.
of power who, in chastising him, would be in enmity to the sinner more gravely harmful than his sin. Another example: by prohibiting some reprehensible thing (munkar), he might leave undone something proper (ma'rūf) of far greater usefulness than the abandonment of this reprehensible things. He keeps quiet therefore rather than prohibiting it, for fear that prohibiting it necessarily entails abandoning something that God and His Messenger have commanded, something that in his eyes is more important than the simple abandonment of that reprehensible thing”\textsuperscript{34} – Mamlûk.

“So the scholar sometimes commands and sometimes prohibits, sometimes he authorizes and sometimes he remains silent rather than commanding, prohibiting or authorizing – authorizing, for example, a sheer or preponderant virtue, or prohibiting a sheer or preponderant corruption. And, in case of incompatibility of two things, he shall […] make the preponderant thing preponderant, according to what is possible. But if the one to whom command and prohibition are addressed does not, whether on account of his ignorance or on account of his injustice, even hold to what the one addressing these things to him judges it possible to say to him, and it is not possible to put an end to his ignorance and injustice, the best (aslah) is perhaps to abandon the attempt and to abstain from addressing commands and prohibitions to him. Thus it has been said that, among the questions that come up, there are some for which the appropriate answer is to remain silent, as the Legislator (shāri‘) was silent at the outset, rather than commanding certain things and prohibiting others, which situation continued until the time when Islam had the upper hand and triumphed. So it goes similarly for what concerns expounding (bayān) and communicating (balāgh): the scholar shall delay the exposition and communication of certain things until the moment when he has the possibility (waqt al-

\textsuperscript{34} IBN TAYMIYYA, \textit{Majmū‘ al-fatāwā}, vol. xx, p. 58.
of doing so, just as God, Glorified is He, delayed the sending down of certain verses and the exposition of certain judgements (hukm) until the Messenger of God, God pray over him and grant him abundant peace, had the possibility of expounding them. What makes the situation really clear on this point is that God said: ‘We do not torment with a chastisement until We have sent a Messenger.’ The divine argument (hujja) against the servants rests on only two things. It has by way of conditions only that they have the possibility to have knowledge of what God has sent down as revelation and that they are able to implement it. Whoever is unable to know – like the madman – or is unable to act, neither command nor prohibition is imposed on him. When there is an interruption in the knowledge of a part of the religion or there is incapacity to implement a part of it, this situation, for the one who is incapable of knowing or implementing this part of what it says, is like the situation of someone who is cut off from the knowledge of the whole religion or incapable of implementing it in its entirety – like the madman, for example. Such are times of religious lukewarmness (awqāt al-fatārāt). When someone then comes along who, among the ulemas, or the emirs, or the whole of their two orders, takes the religion in hand, his exposition of that with which the Messenger came is done little by little (shay'ān fa-shay'ān), on the pattern of the exposition that the Messenger did of that with which he was sent, little by little (shay'ān fa-shay'ān). We know that the Messenger only communicates what it is possible to know and to implement, and the Law did not come all at once (wa lam ta'tī al-sharī'ā jumlatan). Thus it is said: ‘If you want to be obeyed, command what people are capable of.’

Beautiful words! The Messenger sometimes kept silent… God Himself delayed some revelations until the appropriate moment… The religion was not established in one day but “little by little”, shay'ān fa-shay'ān… And those were golden days, not an era

35 Q. al-Isrā’ - xvii, 15.
of religious tepidity like Ibn Taymiyya’s own time, with its Mamlûk sultans and many others innovating in all possible fields! But how could such a society be “re-islamized” in an instant? Rather than dreaming of re-establishing a new golden age of the Medinan type by double doses of commanding good and forbidding evil, what must then be pursued is properly understood and articulated by Ibn Taymiyya: a patient, subtle and very slow societal and religious therapy, gently, little by little…  

THE QALANDARS

What reader of The Arabian Nights does not remember the story of the three Qalandars? Galland, in his famous French translation, introduces them as “dervishes whose religious life is generally not approved by the Muslims.” In Arabic, qalandariyya usually designates a socially deviant form of dervishism, comprising different kinds and degrees of poverty, mendicancy, itinerancy, celibacy, and self-mortification. According to A. Karamustafa, the earliest manifestations of this type of piety “in the form of identifiable social collectivities” date from the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century in Syria and in Egypt. Were N. Delong-Bas to be followed, Ibn Taymiyya would be expected to have condemned as unbelievers (kâfir) such poorly practising Sufi “hippies” whose views and actions he must obviously have

abhorred. Asked about their identity and belonging to Islam, he indeed wrote a fetwa about them,\textsuperscript{40} the content of which deserves to be examined here for its quite surprising progression and conclusion. Six steps can be discerned in the Syrian mufti’s thinking.

Ibn Taymiyya starts with a clear condemnation: “These Qalandars, with the beard entirely shaved off, are among the adherents of misguidance and ignorance. Most of them are people who unbelievel in God and His Messenger. They do not see prayer and fasting as a duty. They do not put a prohibition on that which God and His Messenger have put a prohibition on. They do not have by way of religion, the religion of the Real. Many of them are even more unbelieving than the Jews and the Nazarenes. They are neither from among [our] co-religionists (ahl al-milla), nor from among the people who enjoy [our] protection (ahl al-dhimma). There may be among them some who are Muslims but they are innovators gone astray or depraved perverts (fāsiq fājir).”\textsuperscript{41}

After this strong statement, the Syrian mufti explains that the effort to connect this movement back to someone called “Qalandar” who might have been a contemporary of the Prophet is a lie and fabrication. It is a form of devotion, of Persian origin, for which they must be chastised “just as must every individual who allows himself publicly to go into an innovation or some depravity (fuṣūr).” And God knows, Ibn Taymiyya then remarks as a sociologist would, how many there are of such individuals in the Mamlūk society of his time, “among the votaries (mutanassik), the jurists (mutafaqqih), the worshippers of God (muta’abbid), the impoverished suppliants of God (mutafaqqir), the ascetics (mutazahhid), the theologians (mutakallim), the philosophizers (mutafalsif), and those who correspond to them among the kings, the rich, the secretaries, the accountants, the doctors, the members

\textsuperscript{40} IBN TAYMIYYA, Majmū’ al-fatāwā, vol. xxxv, p. 163-166.

\textsuperscript{41} IBN TAYMIYYA, Majmū’ al-fatāwā, vol. xxxv, p. 163.
of the administration (*ahl al-dīwān*) and the commoners!”

For the Syrian mufti, the Qalandars are thus not the only ones to distinguish themselves by “accursed practices” and he makes it clear that his anathemas and admonitions are not valid exclusively for this movement but are addressed to all those individuals who, in his time, publicly let themselves go into innovation, perversity, deviancy, anomialism and bringing the religion into question – whatever their place in society.

In a third moment of his thinking, Ibn Taymiyya refrains from going any farther on the road to condemnation of the Qalandars and seems, instead, to look for mitigating circumstances or excuses for those whom he has just been taking strictly to task! Suddenly changing the subject, he questions himself on the why of the spreading of the forms of spirituality – associationist, permissive, or anomialist – that he has just denounced. The chief culprit now appears to him to be ignorance, a general lack of religious knowledge: “If these [diverse] sorts [of people] have multiplied in this epoch, it is on account of the small number of persons inviting (*dāʿī*) to knowledge and faith, as of the fact of the cooling down of the effects of the [prophetic] Message in most countries. In respect of the effects of the [prophetic] Message and the legacy of prophethood, most of these [people] dispose of nothing whereby they might know the guidance, such [knowledge] not having reached many among them.”

In short, rather than keeping on censuring the Qalandars, start at the men of religion supposed to guide and enlighten the community but who are not up to their responsibilities! If indeed the ulema fail to answer the call, how can one be surprised that charlatan shaykhs and dervishes multiply?

The observation is of fundamental importance as it implies, Legally speaking, a duty to shift one’s viewpoint, an ignorant person

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being not liable to any accusation of unbelief. In opposition to those who resort unconditionally to takfīr and to other practitioners of automatic condemnations, the Syrian theologian then insists upon the divine mercy, the primacy of faith, circumspection and the Sharī'a rules in the matter of issuing anathemas, the need to take account of circumstances, and the imperative requirement that the one accused have had some Islamic upbringing: “During the times and in the places of the cooling down [of the effects of the prophetic Message], a man is recompensed in virtue of the little of faith that he owns and God then forgives, to someone who has not been notified of the justification (hujja) [of a thing], things that He does not forgive to someone who has been notified of such a justification. Thus [one reads] in the well-known hadīth: ‘A time will come upon men when they will know neither prayer nor fasting, nor pilgrimage nor ‘umra any more, unless it be a very elderly man or a very aged old woman. ‘We would overhear’, they will say, ‘our fathers in the midst of saying ‘No god but God!’” It was said to Hudhayfa, son of al-Yamān: ‘[To say] ‘No god but God’ will not be of any use to them!’ He said: ‘That will save them from the Fire.’”44 Somehow, in this fourth step of his thinking, Ibn Taymiyya looks at his time and society as an Islam closer to the religion of the Last Days depicted in this prophetic tradition than to the golden age of Medina.

Directly after quoting this hadīth, Ibn Taymiyya enunciates the principle determining his whole approach of the Qalandars question and, more generally, the conditions for anathematization: “The fundamental [principle to follow] in this subject is that, about spoken words that are [expressive of] unbelief vis-à-vis the Book, the Tradition (sunna) and the consensus (ijmāʿ), one shall say in an absolute manner (qawlan yutlaqu) that they are [words of] unbelief, as demonstrated by the proofs of Legal nature. Faith is indeed

among the statuses (hukm) fixed by God and His Messenger. It is not something of which people will judge according to their opinions and caprices! For any individual making such statements one must [however] not judge that he is an unbeliever until the conditions for accusing [someone] of unbelief (takfīr) have been established for him, and [until] the reasons forbidding doing so have been reduced to nothing (hattā yuthbata fī haqqi-hi shurūt al-takfīr wa tantafiya mawāni‘u-hu).”

This means that there are simultaneously two levels at which a mufti must operate: (a) the principle (asl), the revealed Norm, the canonic rule, in regard to which things are dealt with in the absolute, as fixed by God and His Messenger, and which no one can change; (b) the individual (shakhs), particular, person or question for which a judgement (hukm) must be rendered. This principle moreover means that when, passing from the absolute Law to the concrete case, someone’s faith is at stake and he might eventually be accused of being an unbeliever, it is not enough that all the conditions for excommunicating him be filled but all the objections against doing so must also be refuted. Now, such objections might be innumerable, hence the impossibility to refute them all and, consequently, to issue any kind of condemnation. As the Syrian theologian explains while, perhaps, thinking of the Tatars – or the Mamlūks –, “someone may say for example that wine or usury are lawful on account of his adherence to Islam being recent, or because he grew up in remote steppes, or because of [his] having heard some sayings that he disputes and of which he has not believed that they come from the Qurʾān, nor that they are hadīths of God’s Messenger.”

In the final part of his Fetwa on the Qalandars, Ibn Taymiyya seems to feel obliged to justify canonically the open-mindedness and leniency, the prudence and moderation of the

ideas he has just expressed. He does so from two points of view: first, revisiting the ways the Ancients (salaf) were actually living Islam; second, quoting another tradition of the Prophet: “So too certain among the Ancients (salaf) disputed [certain] things until it was established to their eyes that the Prophet had said them. Similarly, the Companions had doubts about things like the seeing of God, etc., until the moment when they questioned God’s Messenger about these subjects. There is also the example of the one who said: ‘When I die, reduce me to dust and scatter me in the sea! Perhaps I may thus escape God!’; and similar things…”47 The person alluded to in this tradition was a Jewish shroud-robber who had wanted to be cremated so as to escape being resurrected and punished by God, but whom God eventually forgave because of his fear of Him. The Syrian mufti then concludes by writing “These people will not be accused of unbelief until they have been notified of the justification based on the Message, as God, Exalted is He, said, ‘…in order that people should have no justification against God, after the [coming of the] Messengers.”48 God has absolved the errors and forgetfulness of this community.”

So, concerning the Qalandars as well as the Mamlûks, we find ourselves face to face with a scholar of Islam a good deal more complex than he is made out to be by N. Delong-Bas and her like. The caveats that, in this *Fetwa on the Qalandars*, Ibn Taymiyya places on *takfīr* have nothing to do with some personal reluctance but are grounded in the religion. Indeed, he brings to bear some stories and reports related to certain Companions of the Prophet and to certain Ancients (salaf) of the community. Notable among them is an affirmation by Hudhayfa, the son of al-Yamān, that at a certain epoch, the simple fact of saying “No god but God” will lead

48  Q. *al-Nisā’* - iv, 165.
to being saved from the Fire. Then there is the striking anecdote concerning a dying man asking his near relatives – with the aim of thus escaping God – to reduce him to dust after his death and to scatter his remains in the sea… Once again, it is a Salafism of mercy which Ibn Taymiyya promotes, with the necessity to operate simultaneously at two levels: first, restating the Norm, the rule, as the religion does not belong to us; second, being realistic and merciful toward people when judging them, because of their individual circumstances and because of the advanced decay of religiousness into an Islam of the end of time.

Diverse actions in the field, and practical initiatives in the way of commanding the proper and forbidding the reprehensible, have surely contributed to give Ibn Taymiyya the image of a particularly rigorist ulema. However, to go from there to making of him a vehement excommunicator, or the archetype of extreme intolerance, requires a step that is impossible as soon as one takes a broader spread of his writings into account. Only one of such texts was examined here. There are however a number of other writings than the *Fetwa on the Qalandars* in which he expounds similar ideas, in relation to times and places where and when the prophecy has “cooled down”, and quotes the traditions of Hudhayfa and of the dying Jew who wanted to be cremated.49

**THE RĀFIDĪS**

In a class devoted to Ibn Taymiyya’s *Fetwa on the Qalandars*, I was once told by a student that the Syrian mufti’s tolerance toward them was fine, but “what about the Shīʿīs?” I must acknowledge that I was then unable to answer, as I had not yet studied his *Fetwa on the Rāfīḍīs*, i.e. those extremist Shīʿīs who, among other things, consider as one of their religious duties to curse some of the

49 For a longer analysis of the *Fetwa on the Qalandars* and similar texts, see Y. MICHOT, *IBN TAYMIYYA. Against Extremisms*, p. 19-82.
Companions and the wives of the Prophet.

One of the principal reasons for Ibn Taymiyya’s fame is his magisterial deconstruction of Twelver Shi‘ism in his Minhāj al-sunnat al-nabawiyya - The Way of the Prophetic Sunna, a systematic refutation of the Kitāb Minhāj al-karāma fī ma‘rifat al-imāma - The Book of the Way of Dignity, Concerning the Knowledge of the Imāmate by the Iraqi Imāmī theologian Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hillī (d. 726/1325). The Syrian theologian is also remembered for the part he played in punitive military expeditions against some Nusayris and similar sects in the Lebanese mountains in 399/1300 and 704-705/1305. Political reasons can easily be found to shed light on both his anti-Shī‘ī scholarly activism and his militantism: these sects had collaborated with the Crusaders and the Mongols after the Mamlūk defeat at Wādī l-Khazindār in 699/1299; as for al-Hillī, he had written his Minhāj al-karāma for Ōljāytū, the īlkhānid ruler of Iran who, after becoming a fanatic Twelver Shī‘ī, planned one more Mongol invasion of the Mamlūk sultanate in 712/1313. There are of course several other Taymiyyan writings concerning Shī‘ī topics and they are far from being all determined by politics. It notably seems to be the case of the Syrian theologian’s Fetwa on the Rāfidīs.

“The Shaykh al-Islam Taqī l-Dīn was asked about people who claim to believe in God, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Last Day, and believe that the true imām after

the Messenger of God was ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib, that the Messenger of God textually appointed him as imām, that the Companions were unjust towards him, deprived him of what was his right, and thereby became unbelievers. Is it obligatory to fight these people and shall they be called “unbelievers” for such beliefs, or not?”

The question addressed to Ibn Taymiyya is plain and concise. His answer, on the contrary, is long and poorly structured. It nevertheless seems, initially, to develop in three steps: (i) The canonic sources of Islam and the practice of the early caliphs impose to fight against the Khārijīs and the other groups exempting themselves (khārij ‘an), in any measure, of the obligations of the religion. (ii) In many respects, the Rāfidīs pass through the religion and come out of it in a manner which is much worse than that of the Khārijīs. (iii) It is therefore even more necessary to fight them. The syllogism is clear, but its major premisse remains to be documented and its minor one demonstrated. The Syrian theologian then devotes himself to this double task with the energy and tenacity for which he is renowned. This leads him to write that, “as for killing one of the Khārijīs, the Harūrīs, the Rāfidīs, and their like in someone’s power, there are about this [question] two things that are said by the jurists; both are reported from imām Ahmad [b. Hanbal] and the correct one is that it is permitted to kill any one of them, like for example someone inviting to join his doctrine, etc., from among these people in whom there is corruption. The Prophet indeed said, God bless him and grant him peace: ‘Wherever you encounter them, kill them!’ He also said: ‘If I was going to live until their time, I would surely kill them as the Ād were killed.’ To Sabīgh b. ‘Isl, ‘Umar said: ‘If I had found you with the head shaved, I would have hit you where your two eyes are.’ [This is also the case] because ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib sought to kill ‘Abd Allāh b. Saba’, the first of the Rāfidīs, so that the latter ran away. [It is also] because those people are among the greatest corruptors on earth. Therefore, if

their corruption is not repelled except by killing them, they shall be killed.”

More interesting than all this is however the way how, directly after this passage, Ibn Taymiyya makes a U-turn similar to the one already noticed in his *Fetwa on the Qalandars* and adds: “It is however not obligatory to kill each of them when such sayings have not been held publicly, or when, in killing them, there is something preponderantly corrupting (*mafsada rājiha*). This is why the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, gave up killing this Khārijī at the outset, so that people do not say that Muhammad is killing his companions. Also, there was no general corruption then. ‘Alī therefore gave up killing them the first time they appeared, because they were many and because, outwardly, they had entered into obeying [God] and being part of the communion (*jamā’a*) [of believers]. They had not yet waged war against the members of the communion [of believers] and it had not yet become clear that they were who they were.”

So, there are thus objections against actually implementing the condemnations that have just been doctrinally worked out, in case of an absence of public harm or when there is a risk of consequences more harmful than the evil to be condemned. Once again, pragmatism and ponderation, weighing the pros and cons, should prevail. And if one needs a canonic justification for this approach, let him remember that the Prophet abstained from having some Khārijī executed for a simple reason of public relations – “so that people do not say that Muhammad is killing his companions” –, or that ‘Alī did not fight them from the start.

Ibn Taymiyya then continues: “As for calling these [people] ‘unbelievers’ (*takfīr*) and condemning them eternally (*takhlīd*) [to hell], there are also, on this subject, two well known things that are said by the ulemas and both are reported from Ahmad [b.

Hanbal]. These two sayings concern the Khārijīs and those who go through the religion – the Harūrīs, the Rāfidīs, and their like – and what is correct is that these things which they say, and which are known to be contrary to what the Messenger came with, are unbelief (kufr). Similarly, their actions that are of the kind of the unbelievers’ actions against the Muslims are also unbelief (kufr). I have mentioned the proofs of this elsewhere. Calling ‘unbeliever’ one of them in particular (mu‘ayyan) and judging him eternally condemned to the Fire shall however depend on [two things]: [i] that the conditions for calling someone ‘unbeliever’ be established (thubūt shurūt al-takfīr) and [ii] that the reasons forbidding calling him so be reduced to nothing (wa intifā’ mawāni‘i-hi).”

At this point, it becomes obvious that the long canonic demonstration occupying the major part of the fetwa was led in the absolute, the duty of an ulema being to reaffirm the religious Norm before any other consideration, to call a spade a spade, and to pronounce as unbelief what is unbelief, be it words or deeds. As for applying this Norm to concrete cases, especially to accuse a specific individual of unbelief, doom him to eternal hell, and dash him into it by starting at him physically and killing him, this, for Ibn Taymiyya, is a different task, which imposes to take into account many parameters and which shall eventually appear impossible to achieve. The same two levels at which a mufti must operate distinguished in the Fetwa on the Qalandars thus reappear here and, likewise, the two conditions required to pass from a general judgement to a particular condemnation: before attacking any individual, one must make sure, not only to have every reason to do so but, also, to have reduced to nothing all that there could be as an objection to do so. And of course, in the present case as about the Qalandars, the number of such objections might be infinite...

As if he feared not to have been properly understood, the Syrian mufti then confirms his two levels and two conditions

methodology: “We, we speak in the absolute (nutliqu l-qawl) on the basis of the [scriptural] texts concerning the [divine] promise and threat [relating to the hereafter], the accusation of unbelief (takfīr) and the accusation of perversity (tafsiq). However, we do not judge that a particular individual (mu’ayyan) enters under this general (‘āmm) rule until comes up about him that which would demand it to be the case and against which there would be no objection (al-muqtaḍī alladhī lā mu’ārida la-hu). I have extensively explained this rule in The Rule for Accusing of Unbelief.”57 When a mufti, normally expected to modulate his opinions according to circumstances, explicitly writes that he is issuing a rule (qā’ida), not just a fetwa, the matter is obviously of the highest importance in his eyes and should be understood as such. It is thus not by coincidence that Ibn Taymiyya’s Fetwa on the Qalandars and the one on the Rāfidīs develop in a similar way: both are based on this same Rule for Accusing of Unbelief which is for the Syrian mufti-theologian a core tenet of Islam. Intangible in its possible rigor, the religious Norm goes hand in hand, when it has to be concretely applied, with a pragmatic and merciful consideration of the living conditions of humans, in compliance with the ways of acting (sunna) of God and the Prophet. The consistency of Islam thus derives from the dynamic tension which the divine mercy introduces between the two poles, apparently contradictory but actually complementary, of the sovereignty of the Law and the weakness of man.

This being so, does it really come as a surprise that Ibn Taymiyya concludes his Fetwa on the Rāfidīs by quoting the hadīth of the cremated shroud-robber, by alluding to possible circumstances to be given attention to, and by inviting to communicate the Message of Islam and to educate, rather than to excommunicate? “This is why the Prophet did not call ‘unbeliever’, although he was having doubts about the power of God and His bringing him back to life, the individual who said: ‘When I am

dead, cremate me, then scatter me in the sea. By God! If God were indeed to have power (qadara) over me, He would torment me in a way in which He assuredly has not tormented anyone in the worlds!' This is also why the ulemas do not call ‘unbeliever’ someone who, because of the recent nature of his conversion to Islam, or because he has grown up in a far away steppe, considers lawful something which is forbidden. The judgement of unbelief indeed only occurs after communication of the Message (bulūgh al-risāla). Now, many of those people, the texts going against what they think have perhaps not been communicated to them, and they do not know that the Messenger was sent with that. It shall thus be said, in the absolute, that saying such things is unbelief but one shall only call ‘unbeliever’ someone to whom the [canonic] justification has been notified, which is such that anyone giving it no attention is to be accused of unbelief, not someone else. And God knows better!”

CONCLUSION

We now have two very different Ibn Taymiyyas. One is the simplistic, caricatural, jihādist, fanatical, exclusivist, excommunicator incrusted in the imagination of several Islamist militants and poorly academic orientalists. The other is the complex, intelligent, pragmatist, realist, open-minded, tolerant, moderate, ulema revealed by the texts examined in this talk, about people as diverse as Mamlûk emirs, qalandarî dervishes, and Shi‘ī extremists. Of course, as already noted, a mufti can be expected to issue opinions sometimes determined by circumstances, political or other, and Ibn Taymiyya is no exception, for example when he develops a theology of war against Mongol invaders or their Nusayri collaborators. The tree should however not hide the forest and, in the present case, the “other” Ibn Taymiyya does far more than just issuing fetwas: he explicitly formulates – and applies in

different contexts – one same core religious rule, and this rule goes against the image too often given of him, not only by N. Delong-Bas, M. Scheuer, and their like, but by too many Islamists claiming him as their Patron Saint and inspirer of their most atrocious crimes.

Another aspect of this “other” Ibn Taymiyya deserving to be underlined here is the priority he gives to communication as well as to education. For him, what the religion is firstly about is “expounding and communicating” (al-bayān wa l-bulūgh), “communicating the Message” (bulūgh al-risāla), “notifying of the [divine] justification based on the Message” (qiyyām al-hujja bi-l-risāla). In the *Fetwa on the Qalandars*, he wrote: “These people will not be accused of unbelief until they have been notified of the justification based on the Message, as God, Exalted is He, said, ‘… in order that people should have no justification against God, after the [coming of the] Messengers.’

God has absolved the errors and forgetfulness of this community.”

In the *Fetwa on the Rāfidīs*, we read: “This is also why the ulemas do not call ‘unbeliever’ someone who, because of the recent nature of his conversion to Islam, or because he has grown up in a far away steppe, considers lawful something which is forbidden. The judgement of unbelief indeed only occurs after communication of the message (bulūgh al-risāla). Now, many of those people, the texts going against what they think have perhaps not been communicated (balagha) to them.”

In the text on the finality of the *Sharī'a* that was also quoted, he stated: “So it goes similarly for what concerns expounding (bayān) and communicating (balāgh): the scholar shall delay the exposition and communication of certain things until the moment when he has the possibility (waqt al-tamakkun) of doing so, just as God, Glorified is He, delayed the sending down of certain verses and the exposition (hukm) of certain judgements until the Messenger of God

59 Q. al-Nisā’ - iv, 165.
60 IBN TAYMIYYA, Majmū' al-fatāwā, vol. xxxv, p. 166.
had the possibility of expounding (bayān) them […] Such are times of religious lukewarmness (awqāt al-fatarāt). When someone then comes along who, among the ulemas, or the emirs, or the whole of their two orders, takes the religion in hand, his exposition of that with which the Messenger came is done little by little (shay‘an fa-shay‘an), on the pattern of the exposition (bayān) that the Messenger did of that with which he was sent, little by little (shay‘an fa-shay‘an).”

“Little by little” (shay‘an fa-shay‘an)… This and other lessons of the “other” Ibn Taymiyya completely invalidate the third accusation put forward by N. Delong-Bas against the Syrian mufti-theologian. Also, they are actually more relevant in our fifteenth/ twenty-first century than in his days as we are even farther from the golden age of Medina than he was, and closer to the end of time. Finally, with their faithfulness to the Message of the Qur‘ān and the Prophet, these lessons offer a much better paradigm than extremism and terror to deal with the challenges of History and the traumas of Muslim and other modern societies.

This is the “other” Ibn Taymiyya I wanted to introduce to you: a true Shaykh al-Islam and a reviver (mujaddid) of the kind he himself describes and we are still in dire need of today: “The renewer (mujaddid) of His religion and reviver (muhyī) of his Sunna only communicates (ballagha) what it is possible to know and implement. So also it is not possible that he who enters Islam should see himself inculcated, at the moment that he enters it, with the whole of its prescriptions and commanded [to implement] them all. Similarly again, [for] the one who repents of his sins, the one who instructs himself, the one who seeks to be guided [by others], it is not possible to [communicate] to them at the outset all the commandments of the religion, nor to evoke before them the whole of the knowledge [to be acquired]. Indeed, they would not [be able to] bear it. Now, as they would not bear it, in this situation

it would not be something obligatory for them. And as this would not be something obligatory, it would not be for either the scholar or the emir to make the whole obligatory from the outset. Rather, one shall with leniency abstain (‘afā ‘an) from commanding and prohibiting things that it would not be possible [for them] to know and implement, until the time when that becomes possible, just as the Messenger showed leniency (‘afā) in regard to what he showed leniency in regard to, until the time when he expounded (bayān) it. [To act] in this way shall not signify approving prohibited things, nor abandoning commanding the obligatory things. Obligation and prohibition are indeed conditional on the possibility of knowledge and action. Now, we have hypothesized that this condition was not achieved. Ponder this fundamental principle! It is useful.”63 Fatadabbar hādhā l-asl. Fa-inna-hu nāfi‘!

Indeed. And God knows better.

63 IBN TAYMIYYA, Majmū‘ al-fatāwā, vol. xx, p. 60.
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He is internationally recognized as a specialist of both the Iranian philosopher Avicenna (d. 1037) and the Syrian theologian-mufti Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). He has also explored the influence of Avicenna on later Sunnism and English thought, that of Ibn Taymiyya on pre-Wahhābī Ottoman puritanism and modern Islamism.
Professor Victor Danner was born on October 22, 1926, in Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico to Arthur James and Maria Lopez Danner. As a young man, he served his country during WWII. After the war he attended Georgetown University where he received his B.A. *magna cum laude* in 1957. Later that year he traveled to Morocco to become an instructor and eventually Director of the American Language Center, sponsored by the US Information Service. While there he took advantage of the opportunity not only to get acquainted with the country but also to perfect his knowledge of classical Arabic texts.

In 1964, Professor Danner returned to the US for his doctoral studies and graduated from Harvard in 1970. He came to IU in 1967 and was a professor of Arabic and Religious Studies at Indiana University until his death in 1990. He served as Chairman of the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department for five years, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Middle Eastern Studies Program. He was an internationally renowned scholar in the fields of Islamic mysticism, comparative religion, and classical Arabic literature. In 1976, he was invited to speak at the international World Festival of Islam in London. Professor Danner was also active in a number of professional organizations, including the Washington D.C.-based Foundation for Traditional Studies, for which he served as Secretary-Treasurer. He wrote *Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah’s Sufi Aphorisms* (1973); *Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah: The Book of Wisdom*, (1978); and *The Islamic Tradition: An Introduction* (1988), in addition to over twenty-five articles and reviews. One of his students, Lauri King Irani, captured his essence: “As a teacher, Victor Danner had few equals. He taught Arabic, classical Arabic literature, Islam, Sufism, the Qur’an, comparative religion, comparative mysticism, and Eastern religions. His dignified bearing, elegant gestures, and verbal eloquence transformed his lectures into performances which had the power to captivate and inspire his students, whether he was discussing Arabic grammar or Islamic theology. His concern for and encouragement of his students, coupled with his understated sense of humor, earned him a well-deserved reputation as a caring and committed educator who taught not only when behind the classroom lectern, but also by example.”