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Early Mamlūk Ashʿarism against Ibn Taymiyya
on the Nonliteral Reinterpretation (*taʾwīl*) of God's attributes

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Introduction

Modern research on theological production in the early Mamlūk sultanate of Egypt and Syria has focused primarily on the prolific Ḥanbalī theologians Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350).[2] This does not mean, however, that they were generally representative of early Mamlūk theological discourse. On the contrary, they expressed highly controversial views that others sought to marginalize and quell, even by state sanction. In 698/1298 religious scholars in Damascus charged Ibn Taymiyya with ascribing bodily characteristics to God in his *al-Ḥamawiyya al-kubrā*,[3] a fatwa that he had written for the people of Ḥamāh.[4] Ibn Taymiyya emerged victorious over his detractors, but the charge of corporealism (*tajsīm*) in God's attributes emerged again in 705/1306 when the Mamlūk viceroy in Damascus subjected him to three hearings before the leading religious scholars of the day. These hearings were inconclusive, and Ibn Taymiyya was thus summoned to the Mamlūk capital Cairo soon thereafter for a hearing that convicted him of corporealism and other doctrines deemed reprehensible. He was imprisoned and subjected to further hearings in Egypt before returning to Damascus in 712/1313.[5] More than three decades later, in the late 740s/1340s, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya also came under attack for Taymiyyan views on God's attributes and other theological matters from the Shāfiʿī Chief Judge of Damascus Taqī l-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355).[6]

[2] Recent monographs and edited volumes discussing the theologies of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya include Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya und die Attribute Gottes*; Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*; Krawietz and Tamer, *Islamic Theology*; Anjum, *Politics*; Bori and Holtzman, *A Scholar in the Shadow*; Rapoport and Ahmed, *Ibn Taymiyya*; and Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*. Also noteworthy are the many studies by Yahya Michot, among them, *Ibn Taymiyya*, and "A Mamlūk Theologian's Commentary". Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, provides a survey of Ibn Taymiyya's theology in chapters 3, 7, and 8.
[3] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, in *Majmūʿ fatāwā* (hereafter abbreviated MF), 5:5-120.
[4] Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, 15:613 (year 698).
[5] For accounts of these trials, see Murad, "Ibn Taymiya on Trial", 3, 6-21, and Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 24-29. For Ibn Taymiyya's own account of the Damascus trials, see Jackson, "Ibn Taymiyyah on Trial".
[6] Bori and Holtzman, *A Scholar in the Shadow*, 22-26; Holtzman, "Accused".

It is apparent from the writings of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and accounts of their trials that their primary opponents were generally Ashʿarī in theology. However, the thought of these opponents has not been examined from their own writings, and, apart from Louis Pouzet's brief survey of intellectual currents in his study of thirteenth century Damascene religious institutions,[7] very little is known about Ashʿarism under the early Mamlūks.[8] It goes beyond the scope of this study to attempt a comprehensive survey of Ashʿarism in the early Mamlūk sultanate. Instead, it will examine how four contemporary opponents of Ibn Taymiyya responded to the issue at the core of his *Ḥamawiyya*: the interpretation of texts such as "The All-Merciful sat on the Throne" (Q. 20:5) that suggest corporeal and spatial attributes for God.

The four Mamlūk scholars to be examined are Ibn Jahbal al-Kilābī (d. 733/1333), Ṣafī l-Dīn al-Hindī (d. 715/1315-6), Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamāʿa (d. 733/1333), and Shams al-Dīn al-Sarūjī (d. 710/1310).[9] The study will first outline the argument of Ibn Taymiyya's *Ḥamawiyya* and then analyze each of the four figures in turn. This will show that even though only al-Hindī was known primarily as an Ashʿarī theologian, all four scholars worked within the sphere of what may be called the Ashʿarī *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic. This hermeneutic is based on the fundamental conviction that reason requires freeing God of any meaning (*maʿnā*) in revealed texts connoting corporeal or spatial qualities. Once this is established, the hermeneutic posits two options. The first, often called the way of the early Muslims, the *salaf*, is to refrain from further interpretation and delegate the meaning to God (*tafwīḍ*). The second option, sometimes called the way of the later scholars, the *khalaf*, is to reinterpret the text nonliterally (*taʾwīl*) to mean something other than its plain sense (*ẓāhir*) or literal sense (*ḥaqīqa*). Common examples of *taʾwīl* include rendering God's sitting (*istiwāʾ*) on the Throne as God's possessing (*istilāʾ*) and God's hand as His power (*qudra*). Elements of this *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic are found in the works of eleventh century Ashʿarīs such as Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015-1016)[10] and al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072),[11] but it received clear and influential, if somewhat different, expressions in al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.

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[7] Pouzet, *Damas*, 199-205.

[8] Important exceptions are Makdisi, "Ashʿarī and the Ashʿarites", 57-78 (in Part I, 1962), which discusses Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) as an apologist for Ashʿarism in his *Ṭabaqāt*, and Holtzman, "Dhimmi's Question", which provides insight on theological discourse in early 8th/14th century Cairo. See also Bori, "Theology", 62-65, for a useful review of research on theology in the early Mamlūk sultanate.

[9] Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī is not considered here because he launched his attack against Ibn Taymiyya's views on God's attributes after the latter had died; al-Subkī's immediate opponent on these matters was Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.

[10] Ibn Fūrak, *Kitāb mushkil*.

[11] Nguyen, *Sufi Master*, 220-36.

606/1210) and then enjoyed wide currency among late medieval and early-modern Ashʿarīs.[12] As will become apparent, each of the four Mamlūk scholars studied here takes a slightly different approach to taʾwīl, and this shows that early Mamlūk Ashʿarism was by no means uniform. It will also become clear in the course of this study that Ibn Taymiyya and his opponents adopt fundamentally different hermeneutical strategies for reading the texts of revelation as they attempt to safeguard God's distinction from the created world.

Ibn Taymiyya's Ḥamawiyya

The target of Ibn Taymiyya's polemic in Ḥamawiyya is most evidently the version of the tafwīḍ-taʾwīl hermeneutic found in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. After furnishing rational proofs against divine corporeality and location (jiha), al-Rāzī states in his kalām manual al-Muḥaṣṣal: "Either knowledge of [the plain senses of the texts] is delegated to God (tafwīḍ), according to the doctrine of the salaf… or [the plain senses] are reinterpreted (taʾwīl) perspicuously, according to the doctrine of most of the kalām theologians".[13] Similarly, in his extensive refutation of corporealism Taʾsīs al-taqdīs, al-Rāzī calls revealed texts suggesting corporeal or spatial attributes in God indeterminate (mutashābih) and outlines the two options of tafwīḍ and taʾwīl to deal with them, his own practice being that of taʾwīl. In Taʾsīs al-taqdīs, he also expresses considerable scepticism toward the epistemological value of transmitted texts, and he effectively demotes the Qurʾān from the level of knowledge (ʿilm) to probability (ẓann). Only rational proofs can provide definitive knowledge.[14]

Ibn Taymiyya dedicates the first part of his Ḥamawiyya to overturning this Rāzian hierarchy of knowledge: the salaf certainly do know the meanings of the divine attributes, and they do not merely delegate them to God. Ibn Taymiyya lambasts advocates of the

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[12] The formulations of al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī will be elaborated below. For a number of prominent examples of the tafwīḍ-taʾwīl hermeneutic in the generations following Ibn Taymiyya, see El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Ḥajar Al-Haytamī (d. 1566) to Khayr Al-Dīn Al-Ālūsī (d. 1899)", 275-78; and Heer, "The Priority of Reason," 181-83. Makdisi, "Ashʿarī and the Ashʿarites", is incorrect to suggest that Ashʿarism failed to infiltrate the traditionalist-dominated law schools—the Shāfiʿī law school in particular—because it did not exclude taʾwīl from its methodology. The recent study of Spevack, The Archetypal Sunnī Scholar, 53-57, sets Makdisi's proposal firmly aside by showing the dominance of Ashʿarī and Māturīdī kalām in the educational institutions of late medieval and early modern Sunnī Islam. However, Makdisi's work does provide the raw material to suggest that the two-pronged Ashʿarī hermeneutic of ascribing tafwīḍ to the salaf and taʾwīl to the khalaf was formulated to accommodate both traditionalist and Ashʿarī kalām voices within the Shāfiʿī law school.
[13] al-Rāzī, Muḥaṣṣal, 158.
[14] al-Rāzī, Taʾsīs al-taqdīs, 219-34. For further discussion of al-Rāzī's taʾwīl, see Heer, "The Priority of Reason", 183-85; and Jaffer, Razi, 54-83, who, while acknowledging earlier Ashʿarī deployment of taʾwīl in al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī, overemphasizes the originality of al-Rāzī's approach within Ashʿarism. Al-Rāzī's demotion of revelation to probability is not absolute as he elsewhere allows that transmitted texts may yield knowledge if conjoined with contextual factors established by recurrent (mutawātir) reports; see al-Rāzī, Arbaʿīn, 2:251-54, which is translated in Hoover, "Reason and the Proof Value of Revelation", 385-87.

tafwīḍ-taʾwīl hermeneutic for following the ways of unbelief, propounding specious arguments against the divine attributes indicated by the texts, and falling into confusion over what the attributes mean. Faced with this confusion, they either call for belief in the verbal form (*lafẓ*) while delegating the meaning to God—what they call the way of the *salaf*—or they divert the meaning from its plain and literal sense to a variety of nonliteral senses (*majāz*)—the way of the *khalaf*. For Ibn Taymiyya, the result is nothing but a mix of corrupt reasoning and unbelief in the revelation, which makes the *salaf* out to be ignorant of the divine attributes and the *khalaf* more knowledgeable. The *salaf* are rendered ignorant because they believe only in the verbal forms but know nothing of their meanings, while the *khalaf* are thought to be more knowledgeable because they allegedly know both the meanings and the reinterpretations toward which they must be diverted.[15] Ibn Taymiyya considers it absurd that the *kalām* theologians of later Muslim generations should know more than the *salaf*. It is not possible that the Qurʾān provide no guidance about God's attributes, that the Prophet fail to teach the truth about them, and that the early generations of Muslims not know what they mean, especially as humans are naturally disposed to seek out knowledge of their object of worship.[16]

In *Ḥamawiyya* Ibn Taymiyya not only criticizes the epistemology of the Rāzian version of the *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic. He also impugns the genealogy of its *taʾwīl* as pagan. He traces the reinterpretations (*taʾwīlāt*) prominent in his day back to the Murjiʾī and Ḥanafī scholar Bishr al-Marīsī (218/833), and he observes that these reinterpretations are found in al-Rāzī's *Taʾsīs al-taqdīs* and the *Kitāb al-taʾwīlāt*[17] of the Ashʿarī theologian Ibn Fūrak, as well as in the works of al-Ghazālī, the Ḥanbalī Ibn ʿAqīl (513/1119), and the Muʿtazilīs Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (303/915-6), ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024), and Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044). Ibn Taymiyya further roots *taʾwīl* in Jaʿd b. Dirham (d. 124/742 or 125/743) and Jahm b. Ṣafwān's (d. 128/746) stripping God of His attributes, and he says that Jaʿd was the first to deny that God was on the Throne and to affirm that God's sitting meant possessing. Ibn Taymiyya then locates the sources of Jaʿd's views in the Jews, the polytheists, and philosophers among the Ṣābiʾa of Ḥarrān and he traces the source of Jahm's doctrine to "the Sumaniyya, some of the philosophers of India", whom the Islamic tradition sometimes identifies with Buddhists.[18]

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[15] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:9-10, 32-34.
[16] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:7-8, 11-12, 17-19.
[17] Ibn Fūrak, *Kitāb mushkil*.
[18] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:20-22 (quote 22).

To counter this genealogy of error, Ibn Taymiyya in *Ḥamawiyya* seeks to establish a broad foundation of traditional authority for his own position by providing a long list of sources reporting authentic views of the *salaf*. Among these are, to name but a few, the *Ibāna* of Ibn Baṭṭa (d. 387/997),[19] the *Sunna* of Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 311/923),[20] the *Sunna* of ʿAbdallāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 290/903),[21] and *al-Radd ʿalā l-Jahmiyya* by ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-Dārimī (d. 280-2/893–5).[22] Ibn Taymiyya also devotes much of the middle part of *Ḥamawiyya* to quotations from some of these sources, as well as from classical Ashʿarī texts that he takes to come close to his own view. This is to claim the school eponym al-Ashʿarī for the *salaf* and undermine the Ashʿarī authenticity of the *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic, a strategy that Ibn Taymiyya also employs elsewhere in his writings.[23] To achieve his purpose Ibn Taymiyya quotes sections from al-Ashʿarī's creed found in his heresiography *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn* and portions of his *kalām* manual *al-Ibāna* affirming that God indeed sits on His Throne and has hands and eyes, without how (*bi-lā kayf*).[24] (I will examine Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of *bi-lā kayf* below.) He also cites al-Ashʿarī in the *Ibāna* polemicizing against the Muʿtazilīs for reinterpreting God's sitting and for stating that God is in every place. If God were in every place, al-Ashʿarī contends, then He would be sitting even on filth.[25] Ibn Taymiyya quotes similar arguments from al-Bāqillānī's (d. 403/1013) *Kitāb al-Ibāna*, which is not known to be extant. He mentions that al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* contains even more arguments, but he says that he did not have the book immediately at hand.[26] To top off his appropriation of classical Ashʿarī authorities, Ibn Taymiyya quotes a passage on God's attributes from the *Niẓāmiyya* creed of Abū l-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085). In contrast to al-Juwaynī's extensive reinterpretation of divine attributes in his *Irshād*,[27] he in the *Niẓāmiyya* strongly discourages *taʾwīl* and favours the way of the *salaf*, which he defines as "referring the plain senses back to their sources and delegating their meanings to the Lord" (*ijrāʾ al-ẓawāhir ʿalā mawāridihā wa-tafwīḍ maʿānīhā ilā l-Rabb*).[28] Ibn Taymiyya provides little comment on these sundry texts, and he apparently quotes al-Juwaynī merely to add

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[19] Laoust, *La profession de foi d'Ibn Baṭṭa*, which includes a study, edition and translation of Ibn Baṭṭa's *Al-Ibāna al-ṣaghīra*.
[20] al-Khallāl, *al-Sunna*.
[21] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-sunna*.
[22] al-Dārimī, *Kitāb al-radd ʿalā l-Jahmiyya*; Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:24-25.
[23] el Omari, "Ibn Taymiyya's 'Theology of the Sunna'"; Jackson, "Ibn Taymiyyah on Trial", 52-53, 81-82.
[24] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:90-92, quotes selections from al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 211 and 290-97. Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:93-95, quotes selections from al-Ashʿarī, *al-Ibāna*, 7-8, and elsewhere.
[25] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:95-97, quotes selections from al-Ashʿarī, *Ibāna*, 42-44.
[26] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:98-99.
[27] al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 22, 67-70; trans., al-Juwaynī, *Guide to Conclusive Proofs*, 25, 86-91.
[28] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:101; al-Juwaynī, *al-ʿAqīda al-niẓāmiyya*, 32.

another Ashʿarī theologian to his list of Ashʿarī *taʾwīl* critics. Otherwise, al-Juwaynī's view of the *salaf* in the *Niẓāmiyya* seems to be that of the *tafwīḍ* found in the *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic.[29] Probably with this in mind, Ibn Taymiyya comments dryly that those whom he is quoting do not necessarily conform to his own views, whether on this subject or otherwise, but that one should accept truth wherever it is found, even from an unbeliever.[30]

The doctrine of the *salaf* that Ibn Taymiyya derives from his traditionalist sources consists in describing God as He describes Himself and as His Messenger describes Him, neither stripping the attributes away (*taʿṭīl*) in the fashion of the *kalām* theologians, nor likening (*tamthīl*) them to the attributes of creatures because there is nothing like God (Q. 42:11).[31] For Ibn Taymiyya, this means that the *salaf* knew the meanings of God's attributes reported in revelation. However, certain formulaic statements attributed to them do not appear to support his position unequivocally. Ibn Taymiyya notes that al-Awzāʿī (d. 157/774), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), and others said concerning the attributes, "Let them pass by as they came", and "Let them pass by as they came, without how". He explains that letting the attributes pass by (*imrār*) means leaving them intact and not stripping away their meanings, while affirming the attributes "without how" or "without modality" (*bi-lā kayf*) means not assimilating them to the attributes of creatures. With this, Ibn Taymiyya holds affirmation of the meanings of God's attributes together with denial of their likeness to creatures in a double perspective by drawing a distinction between the known meanings of the attributes and their inscrutable modalities.

One might think that the statements of al-Awzāʿī and al-Thawrī instead support total abstention from thinking about the meanings of God's attributes or perhaps the *tafwīḍ* of the Ashʿarī *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic. In the latter case, "Let them pass by as they came", would mean delegating the attributes' meanings to God after freeing Him of corporeal and spatial characteristics. Ibn Taymiyya gives no attention to these possibilities in *Ḥamawiyya* but counters with a statement attributed to Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796) about God's sitting: "The sitting is not a matter of ignorance (*ghayr majhūl*); the modality is not accessible to reason (*ghayr maʿqūl*); and belief in it is obligatory".[32] From this, Ibn Taymiyya concludes that knowledge of only the modality of the sitting is denied, not knowledge of the sitting itself.

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[29] For analysis of the view of al-Ashʿarī, see Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 323-28. Allard, *Le problème*, 407, summarizes the views of al-Ashʿarī, al-Bāqillānī, and al-Juwaynī on anthropomorphic language about God after examining their respective texts individually earlier in the monograph.
[30] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:101-102.
[31] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:26-28.
[32] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:41.

For if knowledge of the meaning of the attributes were denied entirely, Mālik would not have needed to specify that it was only the modality that was not accessible to reason. By the same token, if the statement, "Let them pass by as they came", were intended to deny the meanings of the verbal forms of the attributes, then it would have to read, "Let its verbal form pass by, firmly believing that what is understood from it is not meant".[33] For Ibn Taymiyya, then, the admonition of the *salaf* to let the attributes pass by in no way precludes human knowledge of the meanings of God's attributes. Only the modality of the attributes cannot be known.

Ibn Taymiyya does not clarify how modality (*kayfiyya*) and meaning (*maʿnā*) relate to each other semantically. Rather, he deploys the two terms in tandem to maintain the seemingly paradoxical conviction that God is completely different and beyond human experience on the one hand while God's attributes do signify something real and meaningful in human language on the other. In denying knowledge of the *kayfiyya* and affirming knowledge of the *maʿnā*, Ibn Taymiyya does not resolve the paradox, nor even acknowledge it, but simply holds its two sides together in the conviction that this is the most faithful and rational set of beliefs. This double perspective parallels his denial of assimilation (*tashbīh*) of God's attributes to those of creatures on the one hand and his rejection of stripping away (*taʿṭīl*) God's attributes on the other.

Beyond defending the *salaf*'s knowledge of the meanings of God's attributes, Ibn Taymiyya's core claim in *Ḥamawiyya* is that God is above (*fawq*) and over (*ʿalā*) all things. He asserts that the revelation is very clear and the position of the *salaf* consistent. The Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* are full of unambiguous (*naṣṣ*) and plain (*ẓāhir*) texts indicating that "[God] is above everything and over everything, that He is above the Throne, and that He is above the sky".[34] Among the proof-texts that Ibn Taymiyya quotes are, "To Him ascend fair words, and righteous deeds lift them up" (Q. 35:10), "The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him" (Q. 70:4), "They fear their Lord above them" (Q. 16:50), "The All-Merciful sat on the Throne" (Q. 20:5), "Then, He sat on the Throne", which Ibn Taymiyya says occurs six times in the Qurʾān (Q. 7:54, 10:3, 13:3, 25:59, 32:4, 57:4), and the so-called *ḥadīth* of the mountain goats (*awʿāl*), "The Throne is above that. God is above His Throne, and He knows what you are doing".[35] Such texts are so numerous, Ibn Taymiyya explains, that they yield certain

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[33] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:39-42 (quotation on 42).
[34] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:12.
[35] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:12-14. One version of the *ḥadīth* of the mountain goats is found in al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, 5:348-49 (Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, Wa-min sūrat al-Ḥāqqa, 3320).

knowledge (*ʿilm yaqīn*), and, moreover, no one among the early generations of Muslims opposes them.[36]

Ibn Taymiyya's assertion of certain knowledge that God is above the Throne and the sky flies squarely in the face of the Ashʿarī claim that reason precludes this. In *Ḥamawiyya*, Ibn Taymiyya says only that the rational foundations of the *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic are specious and corrupt,[37] but he does not confront the Ashʿarī arguments. He takes up that task several years later in *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, a refutation of al-Rāzī's *Taʾsīs al-taqdīs* compiled in Egypt in the year leading up to Ramaḍān 706/March-April 1307 when he mentions his book in a letter written from prison.[38] What Ibn Taymiyya does do in *Ḥamawiyya*, however, is further clarify his understanding of God's attributes from the double perspective of denying knowledge of the *kayfiyya* and affirming knowledge of the *maʿnā*.

From the perspective of denying knowledge of the *kayfiyya*, Ibn Taymiyya aims to understand all of God's attributes only in ways that befit God's majesty, whether they be attributes like God's face and hand, which imply corporeality, or attributes like God's power and knowledge, which do not. For Ibn Taymiyya it does not matter whether the sundry attributes suggest corporeality or not. Just as the modality of God's essence is not known, so also the modalities of all of God's attributes are not known. None of God's attributes belongs to the genus (*jins*) of creaturely attributes, which are either accidents subsisting in substances such as knowledge, power, mercy and anger, or bodies such as the face and hands. Instead, all of God's attributes are *sui generis*, and it is wrong to understand God's attributes in ways common to creatures.[39] The same applies to God being above His Throne: "God sits on His Throne with a sitting that befits His majesty".[40] Ibn Taymiyya here indirectly denies

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[36] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:15-16.

[37] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:9-10, 18. Ibn Taymiyya also writes, "We have tradition-based and reason-based proofs, which space does not allow mentioning. I know that the *kalām* theologians who negate [God's attributes] have specious arguments that exist, but it is not possible to mention them in a fatwa. Whoever examines them and wants to elucidate the specious arguments that they mention will find it an easy matter" (*Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:25).

[38] Al-Hunaydī, the editor of Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, narrows the date of writing to between 26 Ramaḍān 705 and 23 Rabīʿ al-awwal 707, that is, between April 1306 and September 1307 (9:22-25). The *terminus ad quem* can in fact be pushed back several months earlier since Ibn Taymiyya refers to *Bayān talbīs* in his letter responding to a message that he received in prison in Ramaḍān 706/March-April 1307: "I wrote about [issues relating to God's sitting on the Throne] in what comes to several volumes, and in them I mentioned the views of all the sects and their revelation-based and reason-based arguments. I dealt exhaustively with what al-Rāzī mentioned in the book *Taʾsīs al-taqdīs*, the *Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl*, and other than those, to the point that I mentioned the doctrines of the peripatetic philosophers, the followers of Aristotle…" (*Jawāb waraqa…Ramaḍān 706*, MF 3:226-27). Yahya Michot dates Ibn Taymiyya's letter to the period Shawwāl—early Dhū al-Ḥijja 706/April—early June 1307 in "Textes spirituels d'Ibn Taymiyya. IX", 10-11 n. 7. For a description of Ibn Taymiyya's letter, see Laoust, *La profession de foi d'Ibn Taymiyya*, 26-29.

[39] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:113-16.

[40] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:28, see also 5:117.

substance, accident, and body of God. In later works, however, he is more nuanced and notes that the *salaf* neither affirm nor deny such terms of God because they were innovated and not found in revelation.[41]

Ibn Taymiyya's interpretive approach from the perspective of denying knowledge of the *kayfiyya* looks much like the *tafwīḍ* that the Ashʿarī *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic ascribes to the *salaf*. God's attributes do not involve creaturely and bodily characteristics in any fashion, and human understanding of these attributes is consigned to God's majesty. However, to compare this to Ashʿarī *tafwīḍ* is to see only one side of Ibn Taymiyya's hermeneutical double perspective. The other side seeks to establish knowledge of the *maʿnā* of the attributes through linguistic analysis and a pragmatic, contextual approach to meaning.[42]

From the perspective of affirming knowledge of the *maʿnā*, Ibn Taymiyya addresses the question of how to interpret God's withness (*maʿiyya*) in the Qurʾānic verse, "[God] is with you wherever you are" (Q. 57:4), while affirming also that God is above the Throne. Ibn Taymiyya asserts that both are to be taken in their real senses, that is, literally—"God is with us literally (*ḥaqīqatan*), and He is above the Throne literally"—and he supports this by quoting again the *ḥadīth* of the mountain goats, "God is above the Throne, and He knows what you are doing".[43] To *kalām* theologians, God cannot be with us at the same time that He is above the Throne, and this obviously illustrates the need for *taʾwīl*. Ibn Taymiyya sees no contradiction. Rather, he explains, "with" (*maʿ*) simply means conjunction (*muqārana*) in general. It need not imply contiguity (*mumāssa*) or spatial proximity (*muḥādhāh*). He notes, moreover, that the *salaf* said that God was with us in His knowledge, which, given the Qurʾānic context is clearly what is meant by "with" in the verse, "God is with you wherever you are". God's being with or conjoined to us is simply a matter of God knowing our affairs. It is not His spatial proximity. This then for Ibn Taymiyya is the plain and literal sense of the text. It is thus inappropriate to follow *kalām* theologians in first thinking about God in a creaturely fashion and then diverting "with" from an allegedly plain and literal sense of spatial proximity to some other nonliteral sense.[44]

Elaborating further in *Ḥamawiyya*, Ibn Taymiyya clarifies that this kind of linguistic analysis is a matter of explicating what is permissible and possible to say about God. It is not a matter of assimilating God to creatures. Moreover, he invokes the Qurʾānic verse, "To God

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[41] See for example Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb al-Iʿtirāḍāt*, 152; Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, 8:540-1.
[42] For explanation of this, see Ali, *Medieval Islamic Pragmatics*, 87-140.
[43] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:103.
[44] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:102-104.

is the highest similitude" (Q. 16:60), which he takes as inspiration in later works for a theological method of freeing God of all imperfections and ascribing all perfections to Him, where the fullest perfection is to be unlike creatures.[45] This returns Ibn Taymiyya's discourse from the perspective of affirming knowledge of the *maʿnā* back to the perspective of denying knowledge of the *kayfiyya*. Denying assimilationism and knowledge of the *kayfiyya* serves as a check to remind readers that the God who is affirmed in the linguistic world of *maʿnā* is totally unique and other.

Ibn Jahbal al-Kilābī (d. 733/1333)

The Damascene Shāfiʿī scholar Ibn Jahbal al-Kilābī penned a direct refutation of Ibn Taymiyya's *Ḥamawiyya*, which is copied into Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-kubrā*.[46] Al-Subkī does not identify Ibn Jahbal as an Ashʿarī explicitly, nor do other biographical sources. However, as will become clear, Ibn Jahbal's treatise takes inspiration from al-Ghazālī and lies firmly within the Ashʿarī *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic that divests God of corporeal and spatial attributes. The treatise does not bear a title, but I will call it *Jiha* after the Arabic word for "location" appearing in al-Subkī's introductory sentence: "I happened upon a composition of his that he composed denying location (*jiha*) in refutation of Ibn Taymiyya".[47] It seems likely that Ibn Jahbal wrote *Jiha* soon after controversy over Ibn Taymiyya's *Ḥamawiyya* erupted in 698/1298. He explains his occasion for writing as follows:

> What called for writing down this tract is what occurred recently (*fī hādhihi al-mudda*). Someone jotted down something affirming location [for God], and whoever does not have a firm foothold in learning is deceived by it… So, I thought it best to mention the creed of the People of the Sunna and the Community and then elucidate

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[45] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:107. See also Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 55-56 (a fuller description of the arguments in *Ḥamawiyya* MF 5:102-107) and 56-67 (exposition of Ibn Taymiyya's theological method based on ascribing the highest similitude to God).

[46] al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:34-91 (biography of Ibn Jahbal), 9:35-91 (refutation of Ibn Taymiyya hereafter referred to as Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*). *Jiha* is printed separately as Ibn Jahbal al-Ḥalabī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*. The English translation Ibn Jahbal al-Kilābī, *Refutation*, is keyed to the pagination in al-Subkī. Ibn Jahbal's full name is Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Ismāʿīl Ibn Jahbal al-Kilābī, and other biographies of him include al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān*, 1:530-31; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī*, 8:252; al-Dhahabī, *ʿIbar*, 4:96; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Durar*, 1:329; Ibn ʿImād, *Shadharāt*, 8:182-183; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, 16:253. Ibn Kathīr, gives Ibn Jahbal's birth year as 670 AH (1270-1), and his death date as Thursday, 9 Jumāda al-ākhira 733 AH, which falls in February 1333.

[47] al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:35.

the corruption of what he mentioned… Then, I provided proofs for the creed of the People of the Sunna and what is linked to that.[48]

Ibn Jahbal's treatise is full of contempt for Ibn Taymiyya, and he never deigns to address the Ḥanbalī theologian directly by name. Instead, Ibn Jahbal calls Ibn Taymiyya "he" or addresses him directly as "you". He also labels him a turncoat (*māriq*),[49] someone deluded (*maghrūr*),[50] and an imposter (*muddaʿin*).[51] Moreover, he counts him among the Ḥashwiyya,[52] and he is particularly disturbed that some Ḥashwiyya—like Ibn Taymiyya—should identify their views with the doctrine of the *salaf* and teach them to the masses.[53] Ibn Jahbal's anxiety over the well-being of the masses shows that the theological disagreement between Ibn Taymiyya and his opponents was not merely an academic affair. This corroborates Caterina Bori's recent contention that theological doctrines were a matter of capital importance to ordinary people within the Mamlūk sultanate and that scholars took great interest in what the ordinary people believed.[54] Ibn Jamāʿa's treatise examined below will illustrate further that the theological issues here in play were of broad public import.

In surveying Ibn Jahbal's refutation, we begin at the end of the treatise where he most fully and systematically outlines his own theological position.[55] This will bring out the distinctively Ghazālian character of his thinking. Ibn Jahbal takes al-Ghazālī's last work *Iljām al-ʿawāmm*[56] as his starting point and abridges the long first chapter of *Iljām* into a few pages. For both al-Ghazālī and Ibn Jahbal, the line dividing those who abstain from *taʾwīl* of God's attributes and those who engage in it falls not between the *salaf* and the later theologians as in Rāzī's rationalist *kalām*, but between the common people and the enlightened elite. Even though Ibn Jahbal takes offence at Ibn Taymiyya's charge that the *kalām* theologians render the *salaf* ignorant,[57] he evades that accusation himself. Ibn Jahbal maintains that the Prophet and some of the *salaf* did know the true meanings of God's attributes but did not share them with commoners.

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[48] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 35.
[49] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 40.
[50] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 90.
[51] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 41, 45, 48, and elsewhere.
[52] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 48.
[53] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 36-39.
[54] Bori, "Politics".
[55] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 80-91.
[56] al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*; English translation: al-Ghazzālī, *Return to Purity*.
[57] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 69-71.

Following al-Ghazālī, Ibn Jahbal outlines seven points that the common people (ʿawāmm) must observe. They must 1) free God of all corporeal and spatial conceptions, 2) believe and affirm that what the Prophet said about God is true even if it cannot be understood, 3) admit one's inability to comprehend, 4) keep silent, 5) refrain from interpreting (tafsīr), reinterpreting (taʾwīl), or in any way restating the texts, 6) stop thinking about them, and 7) believe firmly that the Prophet knew the meanings of the texts.[58] Al-Ghazālī adds the senior Companions of the Prophet, the saints (awliyāʾ), and firmly rooted scholars (ʿulamāʾ) to his list of those who know the meanings.[59] However, the "scholars" here constitute a very limited class because al-Ghazālī relegates jurists and kalām theologians to the level of the commoners. He confines taʾwīl to the gnostic (ʿārif) who may in turn share his gnosis only with those of like spirit and those who would benefit from it. According to al-Ghazālī, the salaf as a whole restrained themselves from taʾwīl so as not to disturb the tranquility of the people.[60] Ibn Jahbal does not elaborate to the extent that al-Ghazālī does. He says only that the common people should not compare themselves to the Prophet, his Companions, and the senior scholars, and he specifies that only a qualified scholar may practice taʾwīl.[61]

Ibn Jahbal goes on in the final section of Jiha to outline proofs for God's freedom from location. He follows Ashʿarī kalām in asserting the priority of reason over revelation, but yet couches this in the authority of the Qurʾān and Sufi shaykhs to preserve its elitist tenor. Noting the Qurʾān's emphasis on reason, Ibn Jahbal explains that only reason and not revelation can effectively establish the existence of God and the reliability of the prophets. Reason furthermore demonstrates the error in affirming location of God, and Ibn Jahbal sketches four rational proofs for this that elite scholars derived from the Qurʾān "in a manner that the elite understood and that did not alienate the commoners".[62] These proofs assert that ascribing location to God subjects God to the absurdities of finitude, temporal origination, and measure, as well as the eternal existence of something else—an independently existing location—apart from God and God's attributes.[63] Ibn Jahbal then quotes a number of Qurʾānic verses, such as "There is nothing like Him" (Q 42:11), which, to his mind, preclude ascribing location to God and "which the elite know and that the commoners do not shrink

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[58] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 80-83, abridging and summarizing al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*, 53-86; trans. al-Ghazzālī, *Return to Purity*, 23-70.
[59] al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*, 84; trans. al-Ghazzālī, *Return to Purity*, 68.
[60] al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*, 67-74; trans. al-Ghazzālī, *Return to Purity*, 42-53.
[61] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 83.
[62] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 85.
[63] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 83-89.

back from", and he underlines that the Qurʾān only negates corporeality of God indirectly.[64] The implication is that openly denying corporeality of God would alienate the masses. It is better that they simply not think about such matters. Ibn Jahbal ends *Jiha* by explaining why God included indeterminate (*mutashābih*) verses in the Qurʾān. He maintains that most of the Qurʾān is in fact determinate (*muḥkam*), and this suffices for the commoners. Among the purposes of the indeterminate verses is distinguishing the ranks of the scholars and providing them opportunity to strive to understand these verses and thereby earn reward.[65]

The Ghazālian tenor of Ibn Jahbal's theology found in the latter part of *Jiha* permeates his refutation of Ibn Taymiyya's *Ḥamawiyya* in the earlier part. Ibn Jahbal rejects Ibn Taymiyya's claim that numerous unambiguous and plain texts prove that God is above the Throne and the sky literally or in reality (*ḥaqīqatan*) because this ascribes location to God. According to Ibn Jahbal, the Prophet did not teach that, and certainly not to the common people. Nor did the Companions and the Successors ever teach it to the masses out of concern to preserve their welfare. The *salaf* were silent on the matter, and, echoing the elitism of al-Ghazālī, Ibn Jahbal adds that no one will ever find him commanding the common people to delve into such matters either.[66]

Ibn Jahbal then reviews Ibn Taymiyya's proof-texts one by one to undermine his allegedly corporealist readings and provide alternative interpretations.[67] Two examples will illustrate his procedure. Ibn Jahbal rejects Ibn Taymiyya's use of the Qurʾānic verse, "To Him ascend (*yaṣʿadu*) fair words" (Q.35:10), to prove that God is above because the verse in fact makes no explicit reference to God being in the sky or over the Throne. More substantively, he argues that ascent (*ṣuʿūd*) can only imply "overness" (*ʿulūw*) when it is taken literally as an attribute of bodies. Corporeality is obviously not relevant when speaking of God. Therefore, ascent must instead mean "acceptance" (*qubūl*).[68] The second example is the verse, "The All-Merciful sat on the Throne" (Q. 20:5). While Ibn Jahbal acknowledges this verse as his opponents' strongest proof text, he disallows rendering "sitting" (*istiwāʾ*) in the sense of "sitting down" (*julūs*) or "settling" (*istiqrār*) because the Arabs understand these terms only in relation to bodies. Since God is not a body, Ibn Jahbal reasons, God's sitting points instead to His greatness, power, authority, and sovereignty.[69]

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[64] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 89-90 (quote on 89).
[65] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 90-91.
[66] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 37-38, 40-41, 43.
[67] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 45-65.
[68] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 45-46.
[69] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 47-49.

This interpretation of God's sitting on the Throne raises the question of how to interpret the verse, "God is with you wherever you are" (Q. 57:4). Ibn Jahbal quotes most of Ibn Taymiyya's discussion of this.[70] He deems Ibn Taymiyya's view that God is literally above the Throne and simultaneously literally with us preposterous, and he rejects the Ḥanbalī theologian's appeal to the *ḥadīth* of the mountain goats, "God is above the Throne, and He knows what you are doing", because it does not actually contain the word "with".[71] Ibn Jahbal furthermore undermines Ibn Taymiyya's interpretation of "with" (*maʿ*) as conjunction (*muqārana*). Ibn Taymiyya's argument that conjunction does not imply contiguity and spatial proximity does not persuade Ibn Jahbal, nor does Ibn Taymiyya's interpretation of God's withness as God's knowledge. Ibn Jahbal counters that if Ibn Taymiyya can interpret "with" as knowledge, then he has no reason not to interpret "above" (*fawq*) as rank, dominion, and sovereignty instead of as location. Ibn Jahbal also asks how Ibn Taymiyya knows that the literal meaning of "withness" is knowledge and that God's "sitting" and the *ḥadīth* of the mountain goats prove that God is "above" literally. He answers sarcastically that it must have been mystical unveiling (*kashf*).[72] In short, Ibn Jahbal dismisses Ibn Taymiyya's interpretations as irrational and censures him for inconsistency. If God's being with us is interpreted nonliterally as God's knowledge, then God's sitting must be interpreted nonliterally as well. Ibn Taymiyya cannot interpret one nonliterally but not the other.[73]

Ibn Jahbal also has no sympathy for the double perspective of Ibn Taymiyya's hermeneutic of denying knowledge of *kayfiyya* and affirming knowledge of the *maʿna*, and he flattens it to polemical advantage. He observes appreciatively that Ibn Taymiyya says in *Ḥamawiyya* that God "sits on the Throne with a sitting that befits His majesty",[74] and he notes that this is in fact his own position and the position of the *kalām* theologians on God's sitting. This is to say, as noted above, that Ibn Taymiyya's perspective of denying knowledge of the *kayfiyya* bears a certain resemblance to the *tafwīḍ* of the Ashʿarī *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic. However, Ibn Jahbal regards affirming location of God as unbefitting of God's majesty, and he again charges Ibn Taymiyya with inconsistency.[75] He does not allow that Ibn

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[70] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 54-58 (includes quotation of much of Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, 102-106).
[71] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 55.
[72] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 58-59.
[73] See also Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 48.
[74] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 49 (quoting Ibn Taymiyya, *Ḥamawiyya*, MF 5:28, with minor differences).
[75] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 48-49.

Taymiyya's discussion of God's aboveness works at the linguistic level of affirming knowledge of the *maʿnā*, the other side of his hermeneutical coin.

Ibn Taymiyya's theological genealogies also come in for Ibn Jahbal's critique. Ibn Jahbal does not broach Ibn Taymiyya's charge in *Ḥamawiyya* that the error of Jahm b. Ṣafwān derived from the Sumaniyya. However, he denies that *taʾwīl* came into Islam by way of the Jews and the polytheists. To Ibn Jahbal's mind, Jews and polytheists are in fact guilty of something far different: assimilationism (*tashbīh*). Moreover, contrary to Ibn Taymiyya, the matter also has nothing to do with the Ṣābiʾa, although he allows that Jaʿd b. Dirham came from their centre of Ḥarrān. Ibn Jahbal then turns the tables and counters that Ibn Taymiyya's own doctrinal lineage goes back to Pharaoh who believed the laughable notion that the God of Moses was in the sky. Additionally, Ibn Jahbal explains that Ibn Taymiyya got it wrong on Bishr al-Marīsī: nothing objectionable in the doctrine of al-Marīsī found its way to later Ashʿarīs such as Ibn Fūrak and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.[76]

In similar fashion, Ibn Jahbal picks apart Ibn Taymiyya's genealogy of allegedly correct doctrine.[77] By and large, he disputes how Ibn Taymiyya reads his authorities. For example, he accuses Ibn Taymiyya of failing to heed the saying of al-Thawrī, al-Awzāʿī and others, "Let [the attributes] pass by as they came", instead of attributing location to God.[78] Ibn Taymiyya of course does not acknowledge this saying as an exhortation to silence about the meanings of the attributes but as a command to respect and communicate their plain senses without *taʾwīl*. In another example, Ibn Jahbal insists that Ibn Taymiyya is incorrect to say that al-Ashʿarī affirmed that God existed in a location. He acknowledges that al-Ashʿarī affirmed that God sat on the Throne. However, he denies that this implies location because al-Ashʿarī also affirmed that God has no need of place.[79]

To sum up Ibn Jahbal's criticism, Ibn Taymiyya disturbs the masses with his attribution of location to God. He is inconsistent to interpret God's being with us nonliterally but not God's sitting on the Throne, which he interprets instead to mean above and over. Moreover, he misreads theological history against the respectable tradition of Ashʿarī *kalām* theology. Ibn Jahbal counters by reinterpreting Ibn Taymiyya's proof texts, and turning his theological genealogies against him.

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[76] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 71-72.
[77] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 73-80.
[78] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 73.
[79] Ibn Jahbal, *Jiha*, 79.

Beyond the polemics, two fundamentally different hermeneutics separate Ibn Jahbal and Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn Jahbal interprets God's attributes from within a single frame of reference that divides the attributes into those like God's knowledge and power that may be affirmed in their plain and literal senses and those like God's sitting that require *taʾwīl* because they imply corporeality, temporality, and location. In this unitary perspective, God's distinction from the world consists most fundamentally in His incorporeality and atemporality. By way of contrast, Ibn Taymiyya claims to affirm all of God's attributes in their plain senses while also denying knowledge of the modality for all of them. God's distinction from the world then consists, firstly, in existing above the world at the level of *maʿnā* and, secondly, at the level of *kayfiyya*, in being utterly unlike creatures in all of their attributes, not just those involving spatial extension, corporeality, and temporality. This crucial difference in hermeneutical frameworks is what divides Ibn Taymiyya not only from Ibn Jahbal but also from his other three early Mamlūk opponents examined in what follows.

Ṣafī l-Dīn al-Hindī (d. 715/1315-6)

Our second Mamlūk Ashʿarī voice is the *kalām* theologian Ṣafī l-Dīn al-Hindī.[80] Al-Hindī was brought in to debate Ibn Taymiyya during the second hearing in Damascus in 705/1306, but he performed poorly and was eventually replaced.[81] Ibn Taymiyya obviously got the better of al-Hindī, and al-Subkī reports him to have said, "Oh Ibn Taymiyya, I see that you are only like a sparrow. Whenever I want to grab it, it escapes from one place to another".[82] Despite this, al-Subkī in his *Tabaqāt* regards al-Hindī as the second leading Ashʿarī theologian of his day, with ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Bājī (d. 714/1315) of Cairo at the fore: "Al-Bājī was the most knowledgeable person on earth of the school of al-Ashʿarī in *kalām* theology. He in Cairo and al-Hindī in Syria were the two who stood in support of the school of al-Ashʿarī, and al-Bājī was the most naturally talented and the best at debating".[83] Unfortunately, no works by al-Bājī relevant to the present enquiry appear to have survived.[84]

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[80] His full name is Ṣafī l-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. Muḥammad al-Hindī al-Urmawī; biographies include al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:162-64; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, 16:113; al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān*, 4:501-505, al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī* 3:239; al-Dhahabī, *ʿIbar*, 4:41-42; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Durar*, 4:14-15; Ibn ʿImād, *Shadharāt*, 8:68-69.
[81] For Ibn Taymiyya's own account of his debate with al-Hindī, see MF 3:181-89; trans. in Sherman Jackson, "Ibn Taymiyyah on Trial", 74-80.
[82] al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:164.
[83] al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:339-66 (al-Bājī's biography, quotation on 10:340); al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:342, reports that Ibn Taymiyya met al-Bājī in Egypt and showed great deference toward his religious knowledge.
[84] See Monferrer Sala, "Al-Bājī", for a brief discussion of al-Bājī's works. Ibn Taymiyya, al-Bājī, and several other scholars together wrote poems against an unbeliever appealing to predestination to justify his unbelief, on which see Holtzman, "Dhimmi's Question", especially the biography of al-Bājī on pp. 33-34.

Al-Hindī's work germane to this study is his *al-Risāla al-tisʿīniyya fī l-uṣūl al-dīniyya* (hereafter *Tisʿīniyya*), which dates to sometime before 713/1313, the copy date of an early manuscript.[85] This is not a direct refutation of Ibn Taymiyya, but it was most likely written in response to the challenge that he posed. At the beginning of the book, al-Hindī explains that the occasion for writing was a disturbance provoked by Ḥanbalīs:

> This treatise comprises ninety issues pertaining to the foundations of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*). I wrote it when I saw students from Syria devoting themselves to learning this discipline after the famous disturbance (*fitna*) that took place between the orthodox (*ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamāʿa*) and some Ḥanbalīs.[86]

Al-Hindī's *Tisʿīniyya* is a straightforward manual of Ashʿarī *kalām* treating the traditional theological topics of God, prophecy, eschatology, and related matters. Unlike the *Ṭawāliʿ al-anwār* of the contemporary Ashʿarī theologian al-Bayḍāwī (d. 716/1316 or earlier) who lived under the Īlkhānids in Persia,[87] al-Hindī's book spends very little time on philosophical preliminaries. However, he still works within the philosophized world of post-classical Ashʿarism, deploying Ibn Sīnā's division of existence into the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*), which is God, and contingent existence (*mumkin al-wujūd*), which is everything else,[88] and expounding not only traditional *kalām* proofs for God's existence from temporal origination (*ḥudūth*) but also philosophical proofs from contingency (*imkān*).[89] After establishing basic epistemological principles and proving the existence of God, al-Hindī argues that God is a thing (*shayʾ*) not like other things,[90] that God is not a substance (*jawhar*), a body (*jism*), or an accident (*ʿaraḍ*),[91] and that God is not in a location (*jiha*) or a space (*ḥayyiz*).[92] Having established and explained all of this, al-Hindī writes, "We have gone on at length about [this topic] on account of people's difficulty in it because of the disturbance mentioned at the beginning of the book".[93] With this, al-Hindī signals his primary reason for

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[85] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*; see the editor's introduction for a full account of what is known of al-Hindi's life and works (pp. 28-59, with discussion of *Tisʿīniyya* itself on pp. 50-52).

[86] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 62-63.

[87] al-Bayḍāwī, *Ṭawāliʿ al-anwār*. For a discussion of the philosophical preliminaries in al-Bayḍāwī's text see Eichner, "Handbooks", 504-507.

[88] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 69.

[89] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 80-81.

[90] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 90.

[91] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 91-95.

[92] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 96-104.

[93] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 104.

writing *Tisʿīniyya*: to clarify against Ḥanbalīs, and probably Ibn Taymiyya specifically, that God does not exist in a location or a space.

To make the point, al-Hindī outlines ten rational proofs for his own view and then refutes his opponents and explains how to interpret their textual proofs. The order of presentation illustrates the priority that al-Hindī's Ashʿarī *kalām* gives to reason over revelation. He first establishes what is rational and then interprets revelation in that light. Al-Hindī's method throughout his ten rational proofs is the *kalām* disjunction. He proves that God is free of location and space by reducing the opposite hypothesis to absurdity. Some of al-Hindī's proofs refer the reader back to his earlier arguments in *Tisʿīniyya* against God being a substance or a body, which would entail, among other things, divisibility, composition, temporal origination, spatial extension, contingency, and finitude in God.[94] Three examples from among his ten proofs will illustrate his specific argumentation against God being in a space and a location.

Al-Hindī's first argument asserts that if God were in a space and a location, this would be the case either necessarily or contingently. If necessarily, then the location, the space, and God all together would have to be either eternal or originated, both of which are impossible. Location and space, for al-Hindī, cannot be eternal, and God cannot be originated. And if God were in a location and a space contingently, then, among other things, He would have no need of them, and it would be of His perfection to do without them.[95]

Another argument presupposes that a God who exists in a space is spatially extended (*mutaḥayyiz*). Now, a space does not need a spatially extended object to fill it because a void space is possible (contrary to the Aristotelian tradition). Conversely, the spatially extended object (e.g. God) does need a space in which to exist. So, the existence of the space is prior to the existence of the spatially extended object in rank. To al-Hindī, it is so patently absurd that a space should be prior to God that he does not bother to say so.[96]

Our third and final example from among al-Hindī's arguments assumes that God is above the Throne by a certain distance. If that distance were infinite, that would yield the oddity of an infinite distance being confined between two limits, God and the Throne. If the distance were finite, then something else apart from God would have had to have assigned or preponderated that particular distance. Otherwise, the distance would have been assigned

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[94] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 91-94.
[95] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 96-97 (first argument of al-Hindī's ten).
[96] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 98 (sixth argument).

without a preponderator (*murajjiḥ*). Al-Hindī takes all of these possibilities to be absurd, which proves that God is not subject to location and space.[97]

Having proved rationally that God is not in a space or a location, al-Hindī in *Tisʿīniyya* attends to the arguments of his opponents. Three of these arguments are rational. These are not found in Ibn Taymiyya's *Ḥamawiyya*, and, as noted above, he does not appear to have mounted rational proofs for his position until writing *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*. It seems unlikely that al-Hindī is responding to this later work, as he makes no mention of it. He may have found these arguments refuted in the works of al-Rāzī.

Al-Hindī's opponents' first rational proof is that it is intuitive knowledge that every existent is either in something else—as in the case of an accident in a substance—or distinct from it—as in two distinct substances. Some argue as well that it is irrational to posit an existent (i.e. God) that is neither inside the world nor outside it. Thus, all existents are subject to space and location, God included. Al-Hindī responds that this is not intuitive because rational people differ over the matter and most take the opposite view. Moreover, his opponents' arguments apply only to the realm of the senses, not the realm of pure reason, and rational proofs have already shown that God cannot exist in a location.[98]

The second rational proof of al-Hindī's opponents argues that a God who is an existent subsisting in Himself (*qāʾim bi-nafsihi*) is spatially extended since that is what it means to be self-subsisting. Al-Hindī counters that self-subsistence carries a more general meaning than mere spatial extension.[99]

The opponents' third rational argument is that people raise their hands to the sky when supplicating God, which proves that God is located in the sky. Al-Hindī disagrees. Raising the hands to the sky is simply what is appointed for supplication just as one prays toward the Kaʿba in the ritual prayer. Moreover, placing the forehead on the ground as part of the ritual prayer does not mean that God is located in the earth.[100]

Al-Hindī then moves on in *Tisʿīniyya* to his opponents' textual proofs, which include the Qurʾānic verses, "The All-Merciful sat on the Throne" (Q. 20:5), and, "They fear their Lord above them" (Q. 16:50), as well as a *ḥadīth* report about the Prophet and a slave girl in which the Prophet asked the girl, "Where is God? She pointed to the sky. Then, he—God bless him and give him peace—said, 'Free her! She is a believer'".[101] Al-Hindī responds with

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[97] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 99 (ninth argument).
[98] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 100-101.
[99] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 101.
[100] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 102.
[101] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1:318-19 (Kitāb al-masājid wa-mawāḍiʿ al-ṣalāh, Bāb taḥrīm al-kalām fī l-ṣalāh, 537).

the rule of interpretation that is familiar from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, but with a more conservative outcome. The passage is here quoted in full:

> If reason-based and tradition-based proofs oppose one another, it is not possible to affirm both or deny both because it is impossible to affirm two opposites or deny both of them. Nor [is it possible] to affirm revealed tradition because reason is the foundation of revealed tradition (*al-ʿaql aṣl al-naql*).[102] The probative value of revealed tradition is not established until the existence of the Maker and His attributes—knowledge, power, and His acting by free choice—and miraculous proof for the truthfulness of the messengers have been established. It is not possible to establish these matters by revealed tradition, on account of the impossibility of circular reasoning. If we denied reason-based proofs in order to authenticate tradition-based proofs, we would deny the root to authenticate the branch, but denying the branch necessitates denying the root. Authenticating revealed tradition by denying reason necessitates denying both of them, which is impossible. So, nothing remains but to affirm reason and divert what the tradition-based plain senses (*ẓawāhir*) indicate from their plain senses and delegate (*tafwīḍ*) knowledge of them to God— Exalted is He—and work to clarify their reinterpretations (*taʾwīlāt*). The first is better, and it is the doctrine of most (*akthar*) of the *salaf*. The second is the doctrine of most of the theologians (*uṣūliyyūn*). We do not believe that they did not permit the first. On the contrary, according to most of them, both [*tafwīḍ* and *taʾwīl*] are permitted. As for the ancients, perhaps they did not permit the second on account of the danger in it.[103]

In this text, al-Hindī first establishes that reason is the basis for accepting revealed tradition and that reason must be given precedence in case of conflict. When reason conflicts with the plain sense of revelation, the plain sense must be denied, and its meaning must be delegated to God (*tafwīḍ*) or reinterpreted (*taʾwīl*). The first is the way of "most" of the *salaf* and the second the way of many later theologians.

Al-Hindī's ascription of *tafwīḍ* to only "most" of the *salaf* substantially qualifies Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's typically universal ascription, as it indirectly envisages some scholars among the *salaf* practicing *taʾwīl*. This subtly undermines Ibn Taymiyya's polemic against

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[102] For analysis of the expression *al-ʿaql aṣl al-naql* in al-Rāzī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Taymiyya, see Griffel, "Ibn Taymiyya and His Ashʿarite Opponents".

[103] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 103; cf. al-Rāzī, *Taʾsīs*, 217.

the *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic for rendering the *salaf* entirely ignorant of the meaning of God's attributes. Al-Hindī does not tell us why he limits *tafwīḍ* to only "most" of the *salaf*—whether to oppose Ibn Taymiyya or otherwise—but in making this qualification al-Hindī joins Ibn Jahbal and, as we will see below, Ibn Jamāʿa and al-Sarūjī, in affirming that some among the *salaf* practiced *taʾwīl*. None of our four early Mamlūk scholars presents the *salaf* as unanimous in their adherence to *tafwīḍ*.

Despite this, and unlike Ibn Jamāʿa, who will be examined next, al-Hindī states his preference for *tafwīḍ* over *taʾwīl*, and he explains that most theologians permit this. Consistent with his preference, al-Hindī does not go on in *Tisʿīniyya* to venture reinterpretations of the textual proofs of his opponents. However, he does come back to clarify what he thinks the *ḥadīth* of the slave girl might mean. He says that it occurred to him that the Prophet only asked the slave girl where God was in order to determine whether she was still an idol worshipper. As idols are gods located on earth, the slave girl proved that she was no longer an idolater by pointing to the sky. Her action proved nothing more than that she had converted to Islam.[104] While al-Hindī's interpretation of this *ḥadīth* might be considered a form of *taʾwīl*, he does not identify it as such, and he does not appear to think that it undermines his stated preference for *tafwīḍ*.

With his preference for *tafwīḍ*, even for himself as a *kalām* theologian, there is no hint of Ibn Jahbal's elitism in al-Hindī's rationalist discourse. What he and Ibn Jahbal do share is a unitary hermeneutical perspective that divides God's attributes into two kinds: those that may be affirmed in their plain senses and those whose plain senses must be negated because they imply corporeality, location, and temporality. This contrasts with Ibn Taymiyya's double perspective, which affirms the plain senses of all of God's attributes in the texts of revelation and simultaneously denies that God's revealed attributes resemble those of creatures in any fashion.

Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamāʿa (d. 733/1333)

Our third expression of early Mamlūk Ashʿarism is the Shāfiʿī chief *qāḍī* of Egypt Badr al-Dīn ibn Jamāʿa and his book *Īḍāḥ al-dalīl*.[105] None of Ibn Jamāʿa's contemporary biographers calls him an Ashʿarī except the historian al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), and his *Īḍāḥ*

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[104] al-Hindī, *Tisʿīniyya*, 104.
[105] Biographical sources for Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Saʿd Allāh b. Jamāʿa include al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:139-46; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Durar*, 3:280-83; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, 16:252-53; al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān*, 4:208-13; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī* 2:18-20; al-Dhahabī, *ʿIbar*, 4:96; al-Dhahabī, *Muʿjam shuyūkh*, 448-49; Ibn ʿImād, *Shadharāt*, 8:184-86.

is not written in the dialectical style of *kalām* works. Yet, Ibn Jamāʿa is a vigorous advocate and practitioner of *taʾwīl*, in marked contrast to Ṣafī l-Dīn al-Hindī, and his interpretative framework in *Īḍāḥ* falls firmly within the Ashʿarī *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic. Ibn Jamāʿa's stated purpose in *Īḍāḥ* is to combat those who assimilate God to creatures (*tashbīh*) and ascribe bodily attributes to God (*tajsīm*), and he complains of "some later Ḥanbalīs" (*baʿḍ al-Ḥanābila al-mutaʾakhkhirīn*) who claim that God's sitting means that God touches the Throne and fills it up.[106] The exact date and circumstances of *Īḍāḥ* are not known, but it is possible that Ibn Jamāʿa wrote it to counter Ibn Taymiyya. He interacted with Ibn Taymiyya through his trials over doctrine in Egypt, including visiting him in prison in 707/1307 to try to convince him to compromise his beliefs.[107] Ibn Jamāʿa does not mention Ibn Taymiyya in *Īḍāḥ* explicitly, but the following reference to the harmful influence of some scholars known for *tashbīh* may allude to him: "As for the doctrine of *tashbīh*, groups of commoners close to the eminent scholars think well of some [scholars] to whom that is ascribed (*baʿḍ man yunsab dhālika ilayhim*), and they depend on them in following their religion since that doctrine is closer to the minds of commoners and their understanding".[108] Even if Ibn Taymiyya was not the direct target of *Īḍāḥ*, Ibn Jamāʿa was clearly concerned about scholars in his own day influencing the commoners toward *tashbīh* and *tajsīm*.

Ibn Jamāʿa's *Īḍāḥ* is a large compilation of interpretations of texts from the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* preceded by an introduction justifying *taʾwīl*. At the beginning of the introduction, Ibn Jamāʿa outlines what he sees to be two opposing errors. One error, more commonly found among the elite, is the doctrine of the Muʿtazilīs who strip God of His attributes (*taʿṭīl*). Ibn Jamāʿa observes that Muʿtazilism has disappeared from the region where he lives and only its memory remains. The opposite error is assimilationism, which leads to corporealism and is more common among the masses.[109]

In *Īḍāḥ* Ibn Jamāʿa builds his case first from the perspicuous character of the Arabic language. He alleges that those falling into corporealism and assimilationism misinterpret the Qurʾān and the Sunna in ways that do not befit God's majesty (*mā lā yalīq bi-jalāl Allāh*) because they fail to respect the way the language works. They do not take into consideration Arabic's use of metaphor, metonymy, ellipsis, and other linguistic features that the original Arab audience of revelation understood and did not have to investigate. Just as the original

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[106] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 107-108.
[107] Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, 16:56.
[108] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 89-90.
[109] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 89-90.

hearers of the Qurʾān knew without question that the verse, "Do not bind your hand to your neck, nor extend it fully" (Q. 17:29), referred to miserliness and generosity, respectively, so also they knew without having to ask that the verse, "He sat on the Throne… and He is with you wherever you are" (Q. 57:4), was to be understood nonliterally (*majāz*) and with *taʾwīl*, and not in ways unbefitting of God. It was only when non-Arabic speakers entered Islam that misunderstandings arose, with some erring into corporealism and others stripping God of his attributes.[110] In his introduction, Ibn Jamāʿa simply takes for granted that it befits God's majesty to be incorporeal and exist outside space and time. He does not provide proofs for this in the fashion of *kalām* manuals. However, he does supply some rational considerations to support his linguistic analysis in the body of *Īḍāḥ*. These will be noted below.

While Ibn Jamāʿa's preference for *taʾwīl* is already apparent in the early pages of *Īḍāḥ*, he allows that there are in fact two correct positions on God's attributes. Both positions are certain that the texts of the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* intend nothing unbefitting of God. Anyone who adheres to the plain sense (*ẓāhir*) of a text that does not befit God is an innovator (*mubtadiʿ*).[111] Beyond this, the two positions diverge. The first engages in *taʾwīl* to fight innovators directly by reinterpreting the texts in ways that befit God's majesty. The second position, which is identified with that of the *salaf*, is to be "definitive that what does not befit the majesty of God—Exalted is He—is not intended, and silent as to which of the meanings befitting the majesty of God—Exalted is He—is intended, if the verbal form (*lafẓ*) could carry several possible meanings (*maʿānī*) befitting the majesty of God".[112] Ibn Jamāʿa explains that this is because these meanings may not be understood, may be supra-rational, or may not have words indicating them in the language.[113] Although Ibn Jamāʿa does not speak of the *salaf* delegating meanings to God (*tafwīḍ*) as do al-Rāzī and al-Hindī, his view appears to be close to theirs. However, he indirectly leaves open the possibility of *taʾwīl* among the *salaf* when the verbal form admits of a single meaning befitting God's majesty. More importantly, as we will see below, he does in fact appeal to the *taʾwīl* of the *salaf* in a particular case.

Ibn Jamāʿa explains that some great scholars preferred the way of the *salaf* as the safer path while others resorted to *taʾwīl* in time of need.[114] He supports his own strong preference for *taʾwīl* over the silence of the *salaf* with five arguments. First, leaving the

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[110] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 90-91.
[111] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 92, 96.
[112] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 92.
[113] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 96.
[114] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 92-93.

meaning unclarified leaves room for doubt and idle speculation that would not befit God. Second, it is better to fill people's hearts with some kind of meaning rather than none; otherwise, they are left open to doubt. Third, inquiring after the truth when one is able to do so is better than remaining in ignorance. Fourth, silence may suffice for the believer, but it will not suffice to correct the unbeliever, the assimilationist, and the corporealist. Fifth, silence contradicts numerous statements in the Qurʾān that claim that it is itself clear, as in "A light has come to you from God and a clear Book" (Q. 4:15). Moreover, Ibn Jamāʿa explains, if God had spoken about His attributes in ways that could not be understood, it would contradict the Qurʾān, as when it says, "This is a clarification for the people and a guidance" (Q. 3:138). To Ibn Jamāʿa it would be of no use for God to address people in terms that they do not understand. He clarifies further that his view rules out saying that it is not known what God meant by attributes such as face (*wajh*) or saying that God's attributes are simply different from ours, as when one says that for God there is "a face not like our faces, a hand not like our hand, and a descent not like our descent".[115] Unlike Ibn Jahbal who reserves *taʾwīl* for the elite and Ṣafī l-Dīn al-Hindī who prefers the *tafwīḍ* of the *salaf*, Ibn Jamāʿa seeks to spread *taʾwīl* to everyone in order to combat Ḥanbalī errors, and most likely the opposing interpretations of Ibn Taymiyya.

The body of *Īḍāḥ* confirms Ibn Jamāʿa as the most fervent advocate of *taʾwīl* examined in this study as he goes on at length providing reinterpretations of Qurʾānic verses and *ḥadīth* reports. To illustrate Ibn Jamāʿa's *taʾwīl*, we examine his reinterpretations of God's sitting (*istiwāʾ*), aboveness (*fawqiyya*), and withness (*maʿiyya*). After his introduction, Ibn Jamāʿa takes up verses affirming God's sitting on the Throne (Q. 20:5, etc.), and he devotes more space to these than any other texts.[116] He explains that God's sitting cannot mean sitting down (*quʿūd*), settling (*istiqrār*), or erectness (*iʿtidāl*) because such meanings do not befit God's majesty. Both the *salaf* and the practitioners of *taʾwīl* agree on that. However, the *salaf* then fall silent while the practitioners of *taʾwīl* go on to interpret sitting as possessing (*istilāʾ*) and vanquishing (*qahr*) in order to rule out any thought of body, space, place, movement, temporal origination, and such like. Here Ibn Jamāʿa invokes rational considerations explicitly for the first time. He argues that, if God's existence were tied to place and time, that would entail the eternity of place and time with God or even their existence prior to God. It would also mean that God needs a place and that God is limited and

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[115] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 94-96 (quote 95), see also 152.
[116] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 101-108.

exists as a body. For Ibn Jamāʿa all of this is impossible. God is prior to all else and independent of everything else. If He were a body, He would be composed and in need of His parts.[117]

Ibn Jamāʿa then fields an objection: since existent things exist only in space and in a location (*jiha*), denying location of an existent is tantamount to denying the existence of the existent itself. Ibn Jamāʿa counters that existence is of two kinds. One kind is accessible to the outer senses (*ḥiss*) and the two inner senses of the imagery (*khayāl*) and the estimation (*wahm*). The background here is Ibn Sīnā's psychology in which the imagery and the estimation process images and information from the world of space and time; a similar analysis is found in fuller form in al-Rāzī's *Taʾsīs al-taqdīs*.[118] The other kind of existent is not accessible to these senses but to reason. God is of this kind "since He is not a body, accident or substance, and so His existence apart from location and space is authenticated rationally (*ʿaqlan*)".[119] God's existence and God's freedom from corporeality, location, and space are all proven rationally, and the senses cannot access these truths. Moreover, Ibn Jamāʿa argues, most rational people agree that there are things that do not exist in space and that cannot be imagined by the mind, things such as intellects, souls, and matter. In this light, according to Ibn Jamāʿa, texts such as, "To Him ascend fair words" (Q. 35:10), and "The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him" (Q. 70:4), do not indicate location in space. Instead, they point to God as the one in whom all matters find their end, as in the Qurʾānic verses, "Truly, matters return to God" (Q. 42:53), and, "To Him returns the entire matter" (Q. 11:123).[120]

Ibn Jamāʿa extends his denial of location for God to the negation of space or place in the meaning of God's aboveness. Thus, "above" in the verse, "He is the Vanquisher above His servants" (Q. 6:61), must be reinterpreted to mean rank (*rutba*), and in "They fear their Lord above them" (Q. 16:50), "above" refers to God's power and His servants' fear of chastisement.[121] In similar fashion, God's withness (*maʿiyya*) in verses like, "God is with you wherever you are" (Q. 57:4), cannot mean nearness in distance. Rather, it means God's knowledge, power, or authority: "It is necessary to reinterpret it with what has been transmitted by the *imām*s from the *salaf*, from Ibn ʿAbbās and others, which is that what is intended is the withness of knowledge and power, not of place. Sufyān al-Thawrī said: His

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[117] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 102-104.
[118] See for example al-Rāzī, *Taʾsīs al-taqdīs*, 46-48, 52.
[119] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 105.
[120] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 104-106.
[121] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 108-109.

knowledge. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said: His power and His authority".[122] Ibn Jamāʿa here invokes reinterpretations of God's withness from the *salaf*, not later theologians. Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 69/688) was a Companion of the Prophet, al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim (d. 105/723) a Successor, and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) an early exegete and jurist. It is thus apparent that from Ibn Jamāʿa's perspective, the *salaf* were not uniformly silent on interpretative difficulties posed by God's attributes. This appeal to the *taʾwīl* of the *salaf* brings us to our last early Mamlūk scholar Shams al-Dīn al-Sarūjī.

Shams al-Dīn al-Sarūjī (d. 710/1310)

Al-Sarūjī was a prominent Ḥanafī jurist and *qāḍī* in Egypt whose precise theological affiliation is not known.[123] As a Ḥanafī, al-Sarūjī may have been influenced by the Māturīdī *kalām* tradition common among Persian and central Asian Ḥanafīs. Yet, it is not evident that Māturīdism had reached Egypt in the late 1200s and early 1300s when al-Sarūjī was active.[124] We include al-Sarūjī within this study because he played a direct role in combating Ibn Taymiyya and his views fall within the scope of the Ashʿarī position.

Biographical notices of al-Sarūjī report that he wrote a refutation of Ibn Taymiyya, to which Ibn Taymiyya then responded. In the words of Ibn Kathīr, al-Sarūjī wrote "*Iʿtirāḍāt* (Objections) against Shaykh Taqī l-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya in *kalām* theology. Shaykh Taqī l-Dīn refuted it in several volumes (*mujalladāt*), and invalidated its argument".[125] Ibn Taymiyya himself mentions both al-Sarūjī's work and his response in his *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*: "One of the people delivered a work to me by the best of the opposing *qāḍī*s, and it contained different kinds of questions and objections. Then, I wrote a response to that and elaborated it in several volumes".[126] He furthermore refers to al-Sarūjī's work when explaining that he

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[122] Ibn Jamāʿa, *Īḍāḥ*, 147; see also 110 and 136.

[123] Biographical sources for Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Sarūjī al-Miṣrī al-Ḥanafī include Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Durar*, 1:91-92; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī. *Rafʿ al-iṣr*, 41-42; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, 16:84; al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān*, 1:159-61; and al-Tamīmī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:261-62. Al-Sarūjī was originally a Ḥanbalī from Sarūj near Ḥarrān in northern Mesopotamia who switched to the Ḥanafī law school; see Bori, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 148, for further biographical information and references.

[124] Madelung, "The Spread of Māturīdism", 148-49, notes that Burhān al-Dīn ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Balkhī (d. 548/1153) was the first major Ḥanafī jurist in Damascus and had studied under the Māturīdī theologian Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114) in Bukhārā. While the extent to which Māturīdī theology permeated Damascene Ḥanafī circles is not clear, it was certainly known 200 years later since Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), who lived the latter part of his life in Damascus, wrote his *Nūniyya* poem to conciliate between the Ashʿarī and Māturīdī theologies; on this see Madelung, "The Spread of Māturīdism", 166-67; Berger, "Interpretations of Ashʿarism and Māturīdism", 697-99; and Badeen, *Sunnitische Theologie*, 10-19 (German), 1-18 (Arabic text including the *Nūniyya*). However, Bruckmayr, "The Spread and Persistence of Maturidi Kalam", suggests that the more traditionalist theology of the Ḥanafī al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933) prevailed in Syria as in Egypt.

[125] Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, 16:84. Also mentioning al-Sarūjī's refutation are Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Durar*, 1:92; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī. *Rafʿ al-iṣr*, 42; and al-Tamīmī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:262.

[126] Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, 1:6-7.

wrote *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya* to oppose the erroneous thinking of al-Rāzī: "That required rounding out the response to *al-Iʿtirāḍāt al-miṣriyya al-wārida ʿalā al-futyā al-ḥamawiyya* (The Egyptian Objections against the *Ḥamawiyya* fatwa) with discussion of what Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Rāzī mentioned in his book called *Taʾsīs al-taqdīs*".[127] Ibn Taymiyya also alludes to al-Sarūjī's treatise in a letter that he wrote in prison responding to a message that he received in Ramaḍān 706/March-April 1307: "When I was in the tower [of the Cairene citadel], it was mentioned to me that someone had written a commentary censuring the *Ḥamawiyya* fatwa. It was sent to me, and I wrote what came to several volumes".[128] Based on this evidence, Ibn Taymiyya wrote his refutation of al-Sarūjī's *Iʿtirāḍāt* while in prison during his first year in Egypt, that is, between Ramaḍān 705/March-April 1306 and Ramaḍān 706/March-April 1307. Presumably, al-Sarūjī had written his *Iʿtirāḍāt* not long before Ibn Taymiyya learned about it.

Unfortunately, al-Sarūjī's *Iʿtirāḍāt* is not known to be extant. However, a small portion of Ibn Taymiyya's response has been found and published, and it contains as well a few paragraphs from somewhere in the middle of al-Sarūjī's text dealing with the interpretation of authentic *ḥadīth* reports implying corporeality of God.[129] Al-Sarūjī makes two key points in this short span of text that are relevant to our inquiry. First, he explains that rational proofs oppose the plain senses of these *ḥadīth* reports, and so they must be reinterpreted because God does not resemble His creatures and He is not subject to limitations, temporal origination, and spatial extension.[130] This locates al-Sarūjī squarely within the framework of at least the *taʾwīl* aspect of the Ashʿarī *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic, which requires freeing God's attributes of corporeal and spatial connotations.

The second key point is that al-Sarūjī attributes *taʾwīl* to the *salaf* themselves, not just to later *kalām* theologians, and he roots this in the authority of the Prophet's Companion Ibn ʿAbbās:

> The *salaf* have reinterpreted many [authentic *ḥadīth* reports] and [Qurʾānic] verses, and Ibn ʿAbbās permitted *taʾwīl* for us in many verses. He is the scribe (*ḥabr*) of this nation and the interpreter (*turjumān*) of the Qurʾān. He said, "When something of the Qurʾān is hidden from you, seek it out in poetry, for it is the linguistic treasury

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[127] Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, 1:8.

[128] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb waraqa…Ramaḍān 706*, MF 3:227. See footnote 38 above for further discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's letter.

[129] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb al-Iʿtirāḍāt*, 3-4, 157.

[130] al-Sarūjī, *Iʿtirāḍāt*, in Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb al-Iʿtirāḍāt*, 4.

(*dīwān*) of the Arabs". He said, "Concerning His statement, 'The day the shin is laid bare' (Q. 68:42), have you not heard the saying of the Arabs, 'The war broke out upon us upon a shin [i.e. violently]'?"[131]

Since al-Sarūjī's full work is not available, we lack the wider context of this strong affirmation of the *salaf* engaging in *taʾwīl*. It could derive from a Ghazālian elitism like that of Ibn Jahbal in which some scholars among the *salaf* know the meanings of God's attributes but refrain from sharing them with the masses. Or it could fall within a more general affirmation that most of the *salaf* practiced *tafwīḍ* while a few among the *salaf* and many among the later theologians engaged in *taʾwīl*. This would resemble the views of al-Hindī and Ibn Jamāʿa. Or, while seemingly unlikely, it could be that al-Sarūjī takes the unique view that the *salaf* as a whole practiced *taʾwīl* and that *tafwīḍ* is not permissible. Whatever be the case, al-Sarūjī's claim that the *salaf* interpreted or reinterpreted verses pertaining to God's attributes effectively counters Ibn Taymiyya's argument in *Ḥamawiyya* that attributing *tafwīḍ* to the *salaf* renders them ignorant of the meanings of God's attributes. Ibn Taymiyya's accusation had no doubt stung.

Conclusion

To sum up, fundamentally different hermeneutical strategies divide Ibn Taymiyya and his early Mamlūk opponents and render their discourses practically incommensurable. In his *Ḥamawiyya* Ibn Taymiyya approaches all of God's attributes in the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* literature from two perspectives. From the perspective of linguistic meaning (*maʿnā*), Ibn Taymiyya claims to uphold the plain (*ẓāhir*) senses of the revealed texts for all attributes, and he understands these plain senses to secure God's distinction from the world by locating God above the sky and the Throne. From the perspective of modality (*kayfiyya*), Ibn Taymiyya insists that all of God's attributes are unique and bear no resemblance to the corresponding attributes of creatures whatsoever. There is no distinction in this regard between attributes such as God's sitting on the Throne and attributes such as power and knowledge. The modalities of all attributes are equally unknown. Ibn Taymiyya does not acknowledge the paradoxical character of his double perspective, speaking both of the plain senses of God's attributes within the human world of meaning and the complete unlikeness of the attributes

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[131] al-Sarūjī, *Iʿtirāḍāt*, in Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb al-Iʿtirāḍāt*, 3. Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb al-Iʿtirāḍāt*, 107-13, responds that he could not find any *taʾwīl* among the interpretations of the Companions of the Prophet, and that "shin" in the verse, "The day the shin is laid bare" (Q. 68:42), does not refer to God having a shin.

from created reality. He simply practices affirming knowledge of the *maʿnā* and denying knowledge of the *kayfiyya* across the full range of God's attributes.

The other four early Mamlūk scholars examined in this study write within the compass of the Ashʿarī *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic that regards God's attributes from a single perspective, across only one plane of existence. This plane of existence divides between the corporeal and spatial on the one hand and the incorporeal and nonspatial on the other, with God falling on the latter side of the divide. Thus, all connotations of corporeality and spatial extension must be denied of God's attributes reported in revelation. Beyond this, the meanings of attributes subject to such connotations may be delegated to God (*tafwīḍ*), or the meanings may be reinterpreted (*taʾwīl*) to indicate something understood to lie outside space and time such as God's knowledge or power.

To Ibn Taymiyya, the Ashʿarī denial of corporeality and location strip God of His rightful attributes such as sitting on the Throne and being above the sky. To Ashʿarīs, Ibn Taymiyya's affirmation of God's sitting and aboveness from the perspective of knowledge of the *maʿnā* falls into corporealism. Ibn Taymiyya's denial of knowledge of the *kayfiyya* from his other perspective is insufficient to redeem his discourse in their eyes. For Ashʿarīs to appreciate Ibn Taymiyya's hermeneutic, they would have to acknowledge his double perspective, and for Ibn Taymiyya to sympathize with the Ashʿarī hermeneutic, he would have to adopt their single perspective and affirm explicitly that God is incorporeal and nonspatial.

Despite the incommensurability of their hermeneutical frameworks, Ibn Taymiyya appears to have influenced the development of early Mamlūk Ashʿarism, even apart from the obvious fact that his theological activism provoked the emergence of an Ashʿarī opposition literature. While Ibn Jahbal, al-Hindī, Ibn Jamāʿa and al-Sarūjī share the core incorporealist presupposition of the Ashʿarī *tafwīḍ-taʾwīl* hermeneutic, they all depart from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's unqualified ascription of *tafwīḍ* to the *salaf*. Ibn Taymiyya attacks al-Rāzī and his ilk in *Ḥamawiyya* for making the *salaf* out to be ignorant of the meanings of God's attributes by adhering to *tafwīḍ*. Ibn Jahbal and al-Sarūjī respond directly to Ibn Taymiyya's criticism by highlighting the practice of *taʾwīl* among the *salaf*. Additionally, Ibn Jamāʿa appeals to the practice of *taʾwīl* among the *salaf* during his interpretive work, and al-Hindī acknowledges it indirectly. None of our four early Mamlūk theologians ascribes *tafwīḍ* to the *salaf* without qualification, and the pressure of Ibn Taymiyya's polemic probably deserves the credit for this.

Beyond this, these four early Mamlūk scholars adopt different stances toward *taʾwīl*. Ṣafī l-Dīn al-Hindī prefers *tafwīḍ* over *taʾwīl*, although he does not prohibit the latter. Al-Sarūjī affirms *taʾwīl* among the *salaf*, but no more is known of its implications. Ibn Jahbal adopts a Ghazālian approach that distinguishes the enlightened elite from the common people. The elite from the Prophet down to Ibn Jahbal himself could engage in *taʾwīl*, but the commoners had to be prevented from doing so. Ibn Jamāʿa provides the most vigorous programme of *taʾwīl* as he aims to counter the influence of Ḥanbalī corporealism among the masses. With Ibn Jamāʿa there is no reserve about sharing *taʾwīl* with ordinary people; it is indeed best to fill the minds of everyone with correct notions of God to ward off doubt, ignorance, and idle speculation. It is certainly plausible that Ibn Jamāʿa had concluded that this was the only effective recourse against the influence of Ibn Taymiyya.

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