

## IBN TAYMIYYA'S CONCEPTION OF JIHAD: CORPUS, GENERAL ASPECTS, AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

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**Abstract:** The question of jihad is fundamental to Ibn Taymiyya since he is one of the theologians of the Mamluk period—and probably of the entire medieval period—who wrote the most on this subject. Jihad was an essential part of the life of the famous theologian of Damascus, who took part in the Mamluk war effort as a volunteer in various expeditions. Over the last decades, scholars have been interested in the issue of jihad in Ibn Taymiyya and have highlighted several elements. These works have helped us learn more about the ideology of jihad in Ibn Taymiyya. However, it should be noted that those works focus on the jihad against a particular enemy (Mongols, heretics of the Kisrawān, Shi'ites) in a particular context and do not deal much with Ibn Taymiyya's general conception of jihad, for which several grey areas remain. This article will discuss Ibn Taymiyya and his general conception of jihad. My method is broken down into two steps to provide new elements and research perspectives. In the first instance, I will identify the maximum of Ibn Taymiyya's writings and passages related to jihad, making the beginning of a type of inventory. Then I will analyze their content and cross-check them to bring to light general aspects of Ibn Taymiyya's conception of jihad.

**Keywords:** Ibn Taymiyya, jihad, conception, Mamluks, Mongols, *fitna*, *shirk*.

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## Introduction

On 6 October 1981, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat died of his wounds following an attack by members of the *al-Jihād al-Islāmī al-Miṣrī* organization. The assassins were certainly influenced by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Salām Faraj (d. 1982) in particular his *al-Fariḍa al-Ghā’iba* (*The Neglected Duty*).<sup>1</sup>

In continuity with the ideology of Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), Faraj calls for jihad to be waged primarily against the rulers of Muslim countries, whom he accuses of not governing according to the principles of Islamic law and who therefore must be considered apostates. To legitimize violent action against these rulers, Faraj relies partly on the anti-Mongol positions of Ibn Taymiyya.<sup>2</sup> He equates Anwar al-Sadat and other Muslim leaders with the Mongol invaders whom Ibn Taymiyya attacked acrimoniously in several of his writings while encouraging his readers to oppose them in combat. Yahya Michot is certainly correct in speaking of ‘Mongolization’ of the enemy.<sup>3</sup>

This phenomenon of ‘Mongolization’ is the result of what can be called an ‘analogical decontextualization’ of Ibn Taymiyya’s fatwas, i.e., consists in making an analogy by identifying points of convergence between the contemporary era and that of the Hanbali theologian, e.g., geographical space, the political system or the identification of enemies (e.g., the Alawites of today are the Nusayrites of Ibn Taymiyya’s time; the Muslim rulers of today are like the falsely/badly converted Mongols). The aim is to legitimize the position of Ibn Taymiyya and its implementation in the contemporary world. In fact, instead of contextualizing Ibn Taymiyya’s fatwas, some ideologies, based on a few contextual elements, decontextualize its content since almost all the real parameters differ from one era to

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat’s Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1986). See also Emmanuel Sivan, *Interpretations of Islam: Past and Present* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1985), 103; Yahya Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslims Rule: Ibn Taymiyya* (Oxford: Interface, 2006), 27-28, 101-107.

<sup>2</sup> Jansen, *The Neglected Duty*, 159-234; Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslims Rule*, 101-107.

<sup>3</sup> Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslims Rule*, 49; Yahya Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya against Extremisms* (Beirut: Albouraq, 2012), XXVI; Jon Hoover, “Ibn Taymiyya between Moderation and Radicalism,” in A. Khan and E. Kendall (eds.), *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 180-190.

another. Ibn Taymiyya became the authority, the reference, the source from which various contemporary Muslim ideologues advocated violent action to lead a Sunni revolution.<sup>4</sup>

*De facto*, one can understand in part why Ibn Taymiyya has been labeled in our time, as a 'fanatic,' 'rigorist,' and 'radical.'<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the stubbornness that emerges from his writings, the aggressive—even contemptuous—tone he sometimes directs at his opponents in the course of polemics that he provoked, as well as his multiple convictions and stays in prison, have contributed to his unsociable and intractable image.<sup>6</sup>

This article will discuss Ibn Taymiyya and his concept of jihad. Researchers have been interested in the issue of jihad in Ibn Taymiyya and have highlighted several elements. In an article published in 1978, Alfred Morabia considered Ibn Taymiyya to have revived the doctrine of jihad, which he placed at the center of his activity, turning jihad into the very essence of religion. In his time, Ibn Taymiyya was undoubtedly the champion of defensive, doctrinal and ethical jihad. According to Alfred Morabia, Ibn Taymiyya's ideology of jihad was "the late fruit of the ideas that Nūr al-Dīn and Saladin germinated in the minds of their times."<sup>7</sup>

The works of Thomas Raff, Denise Aigle, Taymour Morel and, in particular, Yahya Michot has enabled a better understanding of Ibn Taymiyya's jihad against the Mongols;<sup>8</sup> that of Yaron Friedman concerning the jihad against the Kisrawān minorities, particularly the Nusayrites.<sup>9</sup> In a relatively brief manner, Michael Bonner also addresses the question of jihad in Ibn Taymiyya only through the prism of the struggle against the Ilkhanids. For the author, the difficult context of 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century Syria gave rise to a new interpretation of jihad, of which Ibn Taymiyya was the spokes-

<sup>4</sup> Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 94-129.

<sup>5</sup> George Makdisi, *L'Islam Hanbalisant* (Paris: Geuthner, 1983), 57-58, 61, 67.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Little, "Did Ibn Taymiyya Have a Screw Loose," in Donald Little (ed.), *History and Historiography of the Mamluks* (London: Variorum, 1986), part VIII, 93-111.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Morabia, "Ibn Taymiyya, le Dernier Grand Théoricien du Jihad Médiéval," *Bulletin d'études Orientales* 30 (1978), 85-100.

<sup>8</sup> See bibliography.

<sup>9</sup> Yaron Friedman, "Ibn Taymiyya's *Fatāwā* against the Nuṣayrī-'Alawī Sect," *Der Islam* 82, no. 2 (2005): 349-363; Yaron Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-'Alawīs: An Introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 188-199.

person.<sup>10</sup> Without denying Ibn Taymiyya's significant contribution to the intensification of Sunni jihad ideology, Suleiman Mourad and James Lindsay consider that Ibn Taymiyya should not be seen as the initiator of this phenomenon, which was already underway in his time and whose origins are said to date back to Ibn 'Asākir.<sup>11</sup> Contrary to Michael Bonner, for Suleiman Murad and James Lindsay, Ibn Taymiyya's passionate doctrine of jihad is not new and reinforces a long-standing view on fighting both the external enemies of Islam (Crusaders) as well as the internal ones represented by the Shiites, the falsely or badly Islamized Mongols and deviant Muslims.<sup>12</sup> More recently, Jon Hoover devoted a section of his latest book to the doctrine of jihad in Ibn Taymiyya based on an analysis of his *Siyāsa al-Shar'iyya*.<sup>13</sup> Although Ibn Taymiyya's doctrine of jihad may seem intransigent, it is in fact based on pragmatic and utilitarian considerations.<sup>14</sup>

These works have helped us learn more about the ideology of jihad in Ibn Taymiyya. Nevertheless, it should be noted that they do not deal much with the general conception of jihad of the Hanbalite theologian, i.e., apart from that aimed at a particular enemy (Mongols, heretics of the Kisrawān, Shi'ites) in a particular context. In this article, I will attempt to provide some initial answers to simple but fundamental questions: what is jihad for Ibn Taymiyya? How does he

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Bonner, *Le Jihad: Origines, Interprétations, Combats* (Paris: Téraèdre, 2016), 175-176.

<sup>11</sup> Suleiman Mourad and James Lindsay, *The Intensification and Reorientation of Sunni Jihad Ideology in the Crusader Period, Ibn 'Asākir of Damascus (1105-1176) and His Age, with an Edition and Translation of Ibn 'Asākir's the Forty Hadiths for Inciting Jihad* (Leyde/Boston: Brill, 2013), 107-114; Suleiman Mourad and James Lindsay, "Ibn 'Asakir and the Intensification and Reorientation of Sunni Jihad Ideology in Crusader-Era Syria", in Sohail Hashmi (ed.), *Just Wars, Holy Wars & Jibads: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Encounters and Exchanges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 107-112.

<sup>12</sup> Mourad and Lindsay, *The Intensification and Reorientation of Sunni Jihad*, 112.

<sup>13</sup> Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya* (London: Oneworld, 2019), 103-105. Jon Hoover's book is the first synthesis on Ibn Taymiyya.

<sup>14</sup> Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 103-105. See also Jon Hoover, "Foundations of Ibn Taymiyya's Religious Utilitarianism," in *Philosophy and Jurisprudence in the Islamic World*, ed. Peter Adamson (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 145-168. On Ibn Taymiyya's legitimization of violence, see Jon Hoover, "Reconciling Ibn Taymiyya's Legitimation of Violence with His Vision of Universal Salvation," in Robert Gleave and István Kristó-Nagy (eds.), *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Mongols to European Imperialism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 113-116.

conceive it? How and on what substrates did he theorize it? Was his conception of jihad really monolithic, uncompromising and 'radical' as has often been said? This study does not claim exhaustive but rather provides new elements and research perspectives on a sensitive and complex subject with several grey areas. This article builds on the works of the researchers previously cited and aims better to understand Ibn Taymiyya's general conception of jihad. The study of jihad in Ibn Taymiyya is critical for two main reasons: first, jihad is, undoubtedly, one of the most important and sensitive topics in contemporary Islamic debates, especially in the West since the 2001 attacks. Secondly, Ibn Taymiyya's name is often associated with different Islamic violent groups that quote him to legitimate their violent actions and attacks. In other words, it has made Ibn Taymiyya the ideological source of these movements and therefore gave him the picture of a sort of evil genius.<sup>15</sup> Faced with this observation, it is necessary to bring out Ibn Taymiyya's general conception of jihad based on his writings in order to understand it better. In order to be as objective as possible, the analysis must be carried out in the light of the author's writings and context, away from the influence of the laudatory words of his supporters, the subjective criticisms of his detractors, or his instrumentalization by various contemporary jihadist ideologues and groups.

When studying the theme of jihad in Ibn Taymiyya, one comes across two main difficulties: the author has a tendency to make long digressions and sometimes discusses jihad in writings that originally were unrelated to jihad; the second difficulty, a corollary to the first, is how a number of passages that evoke or deal with jihad are simply lost or diluted in the sheer volume of his writings. My method is broken down into two steps: the first is to try to make the beginning of an inventory of the texts related to jihad; the second is to glean his scattered notes on jihad here and there, compare and cross-check them and try to identify as much as possible some general aspects of Ibn Taymiyya's conception in each case.

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<sup>15</sup> Laurent Bonnefoy, "Ibn Taymiyya, mauvais génie des djihadistes?," *Orient XXI* (2015) <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/ibn-taymiyya-mauvais-genie-des-djihadistes>, 0872.

## Ibn Taymiyya's Expertise on Jihad

The main element that can explain why Ibn Taymiyya was one of the scholars who wrote most about jihad in his time is undoubtedly the context of the second part of the 13<sup>th</sup> - early 14<sup>th</sup> century in the Near East, particularly Syria, where he lived.<sup>16</sup> Mongol attacks and attempted invasions, Frankish and Armenian raids were threats and events that Ibn Taymiyya experienced at close quarters from birth. It is likely that his forced exile from Harran due to the Mongol advance at an early age was a real trauma that might have fuelled in part his determination to fight the Mongols. Emmanuel Sivan speaks of a "refugee syndrome."<sup>17</sup> It is certain that these attacks and their ensuing devastation, massacres and kidnappings, which Ibn Taymiyya witnessed or learned from stories that circulated in the region, must have left a deep impression on him.

It should be borne in mind that the period of Ibn Taymiyya's life (661/1263-728/1328) corresponds, give or take a few years, to that of the conflict between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Ilkhanate (658/1260-723/1323), not to mention the war against the Franks and Armenians. The Mamluks' incessant fighting punctuated his life. Ibn Taymiyya was aware that the threats to the Muslim world were considerable and had never been greater, especially the mortal danger

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<sup>16</sup> In addition to his famous anti-Mongol fatwas and his letters sent to Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad urging him to fight the Mongol invaders, Ibn Taymiyya deals with the issue of jihad, with varying degrees of detail, in various writings, among others: *al-Siyāsa al-Shar'iyya fi Iṣlāḥ al-Rā'i wa al-Ra'iyya*; *Iqtida' al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqim li-Mukhālafat Aṣḥab al-Jahim*; *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fi Qitāl al-Kuffār wa Mubādanatibim wa Tahrim Qatlibim li-Mujarrad Kufribim*; *Qā'ida fi al-Maḥabba*; *al-'Ubudīyya*; *al-Ḥisba*; *al-Risala al-Qubrusīyya*; *al-Mas'āl al-Mardīniyya*; *Mas'ala fi al-Murābaṭa bi al-Ṭughūr Afḍal am al-Mujāwara bi-Makkah Sharrafahā Allah Ta'ālā*; *Qā'ida fi al-Inghimās fi al-'Adunn wa hal Yubāḥ?*; *Qā'ida fi al-Maḥabba*; *Kitāb al-Istiḳāma*. In terms of quantity, it seems that Ibn Naḥḥās (d. 814/1411-1412) was probably the one who wrote the most consistent work on jihad in the Mamluk period with his *Mashari' al-Ashwāq ilā Maṣari' al-Ushāq*, which is a sort of small encyclopedia on the subject. Apart from the chapters on jihad found in traditional *fiqh* treatises such as al-Qarāfi's *al-Dhakhira* (d. 684/1285) or al-Nawawī's *Rawḍat al-Ṭalibin wa 'Umdat al-Muṣṭin*, (d. 676/1277), several treatises on jihad were composed in the Mamluk period. Among them is the *Aḥkām al-Jihād wa Faḍā'ilibi* of al-'Izz b. 'Abd al-Salām (d. 660/1262); the *Mukhtaṣar fi faḍl al-Jihād*, *Mustanad al-Ajnād fi Alāt al-Jihād*, *Tahrir al-Aḥkām fi Tadbir Ahl al-Islām* of Badr al-Dīn b. Jamā'a (d. 733/1333) or *al-Ijtihād fi Ṭalab al-Jihād* of Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373).

<sup>17</sup> Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 96.

represented by the Mongols. According to Ibn Taymiyya, due to the weakness of the Muslim powers in Yemen and the Maghreb, and the political instability characterizing parts of the Muslim world such as the Hijaz and Ifrīqiyya, the Muslims in these lands did not have sufficient capacity to defend Islam. According to Ibn Taymiyya, only the Mamluks were powerful enough to defend the religion and the Muslims against the various threats, especially the Ilkhanid Mongols.<sup>18</sup> If the Mongols succeeded in taking over the Mamluk Sultanate, the Muslim world in its entirety is condemned and “there would remain no glory in Islam.”<sup>19</sup>

It is the feeling of living under constant and unprecedented infidel threat to Islam and the fear of the ‘end,’ as he wrote in one of his fatwas<sup>20</sup>, which provoked in Ibn Taymiyya what we would call today the emergence of a pro-jihad militancy to defend Islam and Muslims against the Mongol danger. The context in which Ibn Taymiyya lived and acted is both the key and the framework that unlocks and shapes any interpretation of his conception of jihad.<sup>21</sup>

Jihad was an essential part of the life of Ibn Taymiyya participated in several military expeditions with the Mamluk army, as his biography attests.<sup>22</sup> Ibn Taymiyya was strongly involved in the

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<sup>18</sup> Mehdi Berriah, “The Mamluk Sultanate and the Mamluks Seen by Ibn Taymiyya: between Praise and Criticism,” *Arabian Humanities* 14 (2020). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.6491>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, ed. ‘Āmir al-Jazār and Anwār al-Bāz (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2011), Vol. 14, t. 28: 289. For more information see Berriah, “The Mamluk Sultanate and the Mamluks seen by Ibn Taymiyya” online.

<sup>20</sup> “*Kāda al-Islām an yanthalimā*”. See, Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, Vol. 14, t. 28: 256.

<sup>21</sup> Morabia, “Ibn Taymiyya”, 85-100.

<sup>22</sup> Henri Laoust, “La Biographie d’Ibn Taymiyya d’après Ibn Kathīr,” *Bulletin d’études orientale* 10 (1943), 115-162; Henri Laoust, *Le Hanbalisme sous les Mamelouks Babrides (658-784/1260-1382)* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1960), 6-3; Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les Doctrines Sociales et Politiques d’Ibn Taimīya (661/1262-728/1328)* (Cairo: Ifao, 1939); Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya: Ḥayātuh wa ‘Aṣrūh wa Fiqḥuh* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1952); Caterina Bori, *Ibn Taymiyya: una vita esemplare. Analisi delle fonti classiche della sua biografia*, Supplemento monografico alla Rivista degli Studi Orientali 1/76 (Roma-Pisa: Istituti Poligra ci Internazionali, 2003); Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 5-20. The most significant work on Ibn Taymiyya’s biography remains the compilation of Muḥammad ‘Azīz Shams and ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-‘Imrān, *al-Jāmi‘ li-Ṣirat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya khalīl Sab‘at Qurūn* (Jeddah: Dār ‘Ālam al-Fawā'id, 1422/2001-2002). See also Mehdi Berriah, “Mobility and Versatility of the ‘Ulamā’ in the Mamluk Period: the Case of Ibn Taymiyya,” in Mohamad El-Merheb and

fight against the Mongols, in particular during the years 1300-1303, both in warfare and in advising, supporting, and encouraging the Mamluk authorities to jihad. He also fought them ideologically through a complex and rigorous theological argumentation that was the spearhead of his anti-Ilkhanid propaganda, such as Thomas Raff, Yahya Michot, Denise Aigle, Teymour Morel and Jon Hoover have aptly demonstrated in their respective works.<sup>23</sup>

If Ibn Taymiyya took such an interest in jihad, one might suggest that he must also have shown a keen interest in the art of war. As obvious as this may seem, the subject has hardly been touched upon. Only Yahya Michot and Lina Stas have taken an interest in the subject.<sup>24</sup> The analysis of Ibn Taymiyya's writings and their confrontation with other sources have highlighted the theologian's attraction to the science of war, weapons and *furūsiyya*.<sup>25</sup> It seems that Ibn Taymiyya's first involvement in a Mamluk military campaign was in the siege of Acre in Rabīʿ II-Jumādā 690/April-May 1291.<sup>26</sup> To our knowledge, only al-Bazzār (d. 749/1349) reports this account, which does not necessarily call into question the historical reality of the fact. Indeed, the chroniclers of the Mamluk period report that many volunteers, including 'ulamā', took part in the siege and other campaigns.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, it should be noted that al-Bazzār exaggerates his shaykh's heroic actions and his decisive role in the capture of the

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Mehdi Berriah (eds.), *Professional Mobility in Islamic Societies (700-1750): New Concepts and Approaches* (Leyde: Brill, 2021), 103-107; 113-117.

<sup>23</sup> See bibliography.

<sup>24</sup> Yahya Michot and Lina Stas, "Ibn Taymiyya's Fatwa on Martial Arts Training," *The Muslim World* 108, no. 3 (2018): 1-27.

<sup>25</sup> His student and biographer al-Bazzār reports that his shaykh was skilled in the handling of weapons and *furūsiyya*. Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar b. 'Alī al-Bazzār, *al-A'lām al-'Alīyya fī Manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munjid (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Jadīd, 1976), 75.

<sup>26</sup> al-Bazzār, *al-A'lām*, 63-64.

<sup>27</sup> Berriah, "Mobility and Versatility," 117; Mehdi Berriah, "Combattre par la plume, le prêche et l'épée: les représentations du rôle des ulémas dans l'effort du jihad mamlouk (moitié vii<sup>e</sup>/xiii<sup>e</sup>—début ix<sup>e</sup>/xiv<sup>e</sup> siècles)," in Sylvie Denoix and Salam Diab (eds.), *Représentations et symbolique de la guerre et de la paix dans le monde arabe* (2022), forthcoming.



Crusader fortress.<sup>28</sup> If Ibn Taymiyya had been as decisive as al-Bazzār claims, the chroniclers would have mentioned it. This literary strategy of al-Bazzār should be seen as a way of constructing his master's image as a *mujāhid*.

### Definitions, Representations, and Objectives of Jihad

What is jihad for Ibn Taymiyya? An initial examination of his writings reveals several definitions and meanings. Since the Arabic language was a tool to which Ibn Taymiyya often resorted in his argumentation methodology,<sup>29</sup> it is as a linguist that he offers in his *Qa'ida fi al-Maḥabba* an extensive linguistic analysis of the term jihad. For Ibn Taymiyya, the term *jihād* comes from *jubd*, which means *ṭāqa* (the ability to bear difficult or severe conditions). The word *jubd* has a stronger, more intense meaning than *jabd*, coming from the same trilateral root *j-b-d*, meaning *al-mashaqqa* (difficulty, hardship). The reason being that the vowel of *ḍamma* on the initial consonant *jīm* (*jubd*) is stronger than that of *fatha* (*jabd*) and a fortiori, the stronger, more intense the vowel or letter, the stronger the meaning.<sup>30</sup> He concludes his linguistic analysis by giving the linguistic definition of *jihād*: the paroxysm of *ṭāqa* and *qudra* (capacity), corroborating it with a segment of the verse 79 of sura 9, in which the term *jubd* is mentioned.<sup>31</sup>

In his epistle entitled *al-'Ubūdiyya*, Ibn Taymiyya writes: "Jihad is the acquisition of strength and means and their use for that which is valued by the truth, and to repel that which is contrary to it."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> The same phenomenon occurs in the account of the fight against the Ilkhanids in which al-Bazzār describes Ibn Taymiyya as charging the enemies on horseback and inflicting heavy losses on them. Berriah, "Mobility and Versatility," 115-116.

<sup>29</sup> Ibrāhīm 'Uqaylī, *Takāmul al-Manhaj al-Ma'rifi 'ind Ibn Taymiyya* (Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1994); Hādī Aḥmad Farḥān al-Shajirī, *al-Dirāsāt al-Lughawiyya wa al-Naḥwiyya fi Mu'allafāt Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya wa Atharuhā fi Iṣṭinbāj al-Aḥkām al-Shar'iyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya, 2001); 'Abd al-Allāh b. Nāfi' al-Da'jānī, *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyya al-Ma'rifi: Qir'a Taḥlīliyya li al-Nasq al-Ma'rifi al-Taymi* (London: Takween, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Qa'ida fi al-Maḥabba*, ed. Fawāz Aḥmad Zamralī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2011), 167.

<sup>31</sup> "Wa al-ladhīna lā yajidūna illā jubdabum".

<sup>32</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-'Ubūdiyya*, ed. Fawāz Aḥmad Zamralī and Fārūq Ḥasan al-Turk (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2012), 166.

In his epistle *Mas'ala fi al-Murābata bi al-Tughūr Afḍal am al-Mujāwara bi-Makka Sharrafahā Allah Ta'ālā* (*Question about the most meritorious act: Staying in the border towns or living near Mecca may God the Highest further ennoble it*), Ibn Taymiyya presents jihad as an act that allows “the believer to test himself and make sure that he is a believer.”<sup>33</sup> In support of this, he quotes the prophetic ḥadīth reported by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* according to which the believer who, during his life, did not fight or even formulate his wish to fight, will die with one of the characteristics of a hypocrite.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond these definitions, Ibn Taymiyya in his *Siyāsa al-Shar'iyya* considers jihad as a punishment (*uqūba*) against the neglect of obligations and the practice of prohibitions; this is the objective (*al-maqsūd*) of jihad in the path of God which is obligatory for Muslims according to scholarly consensus. Again, to corroborate his claims, he quotes verses and ḥadīths along these lines.<sup>35</sup>

In many passages related to jihad of his writings such as his epistle *Qā'ida fi al-Maḥabba*, Ibn Taymiyya explains that the final objective of jihad is “that religion is all to God and that the word of God is the Highest.”<sup>36</sup> This expression, which seems to be a leitmotif for Ibn Taymiyya and which he hammers out tirelessly in numerous writings, finds its origins in the combination of a section of verse 39 of sura 8 “...*yakūna al-dīn kulluh lillāh*” (that religion is all to God) and the expression “*takūna kalimat Allah hiya al-'ulyā*” (that the word of God is the Highest) from a well-known ḥadīth related to jihad.<sup>37</sup> Ibn

<sup>33</sup> “*Taḥqīq kawm al-mu'min mu'minan*”. Ibn Taymiyya, *Mas'ala fi al-Murābata bi al-Tughūr Afḍal am al-Mujāwara bi-Makka Sharrafahā Allah Ta'ālā*, ed. Abū Muḥammad Sharaf b. 'Abd al-Maqsūd (Riyadh: Aḍwā' al-Salaf, 2002), 54.

<sup>34</sup> “*Man māta wa lam yaḡhẓu wa lam yuḥaddath nafsahu bi al-ghaẓw māta 'alā shu'bah min nifāq*”. Ibn Taymiyya, *Mas'ala fi al-Murābata bi al-Tughūr*, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Siyāsa al-Shar'iyya fi Iṣlāḥ al-Ra'i wa al-Ra'iyya*, ed. Sa'd b. al-Murshidī al-'Atībī (Riyadh: Madār al-Waṭānī li al-Nashr, 2015), 224-226. For an analysis of jihad in Ibn Taymiyya drawing extensively from his *Siyāsa* see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 103-105. See also at the bottom of <https://sites.google.com/site/jhoover363/taymiyyan-studies/jihad-against-the-mongols>

<sup>36</sup> “...*huma an yakūna al-dīn kulluh lillāh wa an takūna kalimat Allah hiya al-'ulyā*”. Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida fi al-Maḥabba*, 222.

<sup>37</sup> “*Man qātala li-takūna kalimat Allah hiya al-'ulyā, fahuwa fi sabil Allah*”. “The one who fights for Allah’s word to become Superior, is striving in Allah’s Cause.” <https://sunnah.com/bulugh/11/8>.

Taymiyya is not the first to use this expression. We find it in al-'Izz b. 'Abd al-Salām (d. 660/1262) and even earlier.<sup>38</sup>

Interesting is the conception of jihad that Ibn Taymiyya develops in his treatise on the *ḥisba*. More than a concept related to the idea of effort, jihad is for Ibn Taymiyya as an instrument for “commanding right and forbidding wrong.”<sup>39</sup> I agree with Jon Hoover when he says that jihad for Ibn Taymiyya is “the fullest expression of the duty to command the right and prohibit the wrong.”<sup>40</sup>

Jihad is, in fact, a necessary complement to the completion of a system governed by the laws of God. Since jihad is an obligation that binds each individual according to his capacity, each respectful man who neglects it sins only to the extent of his capacity.<sup>41</sup> In the following, I will attempt to shed light on the process of Ibn Taymiyya's theorization of jihad and on which religious substrates it is based to present it as a mandatory act of worship.

### Theorization of Jihad as a Mandatory Act of Worship

For Ibn Taymiyya, jihad against infidels and hypocrites is an act of worship (*ibāda*) on par with prayer, *ṣakāt*, fasting, pilgrimage, and good behavior towards one's parents and others.<sup>42</sup> God has given distinctive signs to those who love Him: the observance of the Sunnah and the performance of jihad in the path of God.<sup>43</sup> When the believer forsakes what he can do in jihad, it is a sign of the weakness

<sup>38</sup> al-'Izz b. 'Abd al-Salām, *Aḥkām al-Jihād wa Faḍā'ilih*, ed. Nazīh Ḥammād (Jeddah: Dār al-Wafā', 1986), 53.

<sup>39</sup> Qur'ān verse 110/sura 3 and verse 71/sura 9.

<sup>40</sup> Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 103.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Taymiyya defends his view by quoting a famous prophetic ḥadīth reported by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* according to the Companion Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī: “Whosoever of you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart; and that is the weakest of faith”. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Ḥisba fī al-Islām aw Waṣā'if al-Ḥukūma al-Islāmiyya*, trans. Henri Laoust (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1984), 71. Michael Cook, *Commanding Right Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-'Ubūdiyya*, 95.

<sup>43</sup> “Fa-ja'ala Allah li abl maḥabbatih 'alamatayn: ittibā' al-Rasūl wa al-jihād fī sabīlīh”. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-'Ubūdiyya*, 164.

of his love for God and His Prophet.<sup>44</sup> For Ibn Taymiyya, God has set the foundation of His love (*asās maḥabbatibi*) and that of His Prophet, jihad. Its fulfillment symbolizes the completeness of both love for what God has commanded and hatred for what He has forbidden.<sup>45</sup> In his *Jawāb al-Bābir*, Ibn Taymiyya confirms that performing jihad is obedience to God and his Prophet. To support his point, he explains that the *bay'ʿa* (*allegiance*) of the Companions to the Prophet consisted of obeying him in battle and not fleeing even if they were to die.<sup>46</sup> As we can see, for Ibn Taymiyya, the duty of jihad is intrinsically linked to the love of God and the Prophet and is totally inseparable from it.<sup>47</sup> It would be a mistake to consider this position as being unique to Ibn Taymiyya. For some authors of the Mamluk period, following the example of Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir and Ibn Shaddād to name but a few, jihad is considered to be a pillar of Islam.<sup>48</sup> To my knowledge, Ibn Taymiyya does not explicitly state that jihad is a pillar of Islam. Nevertheless, given the information presented above about the preponderance of jihad in acts of worship and even in some pillars of Islam, depending on the context and its consideration as one of the distinctive signs of love for God, one is entitled to think that Ibn Taymiyya implicitly considered jihad as a pillar, especially in a context of threats such as the one of 1299-1303.

Interesting is Ibn Taymiyya's exegesis and interpretation of verse 29 of sura 9 (*al-Tawba*)<sup>49</sup> that he gives in his *al-Risāla al-Qubruṣiyya*. For Ibn Taymiyya, this verse indicates that God has

<sup>44</sup> “*Fa-idhā taraka al-ʿabd mā yuqdaru ʿalayh al-jihād; kāna dalīlan ʿalā ḍaʿf maḥabbat Allah wa Rasūlih fi qalbiḥ*”. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-ʿUbūdiyya*, 166.

<sup>45</sup> “*Bal qad jaʿala Allah asās maḥabbatib wa maḥabbat Rasūlih al-jihād fi sabilih, wa al-jihād yataḍammanu kamāl maḥabbat mā amara Allah bih, wa kamāl bugḥd mā nahā ʿanh.*”. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-ʿUbūdiyya*, 192.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-Bābir fi Zuwār al-Maqābir*, ed. Ibrāhīm b. Khālīd b. ʿĪsā al-Mukhlif (Riyadh: Dār al-Minhāj, 2012), 306.

<sup>47</sup> See also Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Istiḳāma*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālīm (Riyadh: Dār al-Faḍīla, 2005), 197-202.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Shaddād, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Zāhir*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥuṭayṭ (Beirut: al-Maʿhad li al-Abʿāth al-Sharqiyya, 1983), 317; Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir, *al-Rawḍ al-Zāhir fi Širat al-Malik al-Zāhir Baybars*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir (Riyadh: n.p., 1976), 89.

<sup>49</sup> “Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth [i.e., Islām] from those who were given the Scripture - [fight] until they give the *ḥijya* willingly while they are humbled.”

ordered to fight all the unbelieving communities and to fight them until they enter the religion or pay capitation (*al-jizya*).<sup>50</sup> Jihad must be waged until associationism (*al-shirk*) is completely eradicated. As a good connoisseur of the Qur'an, Ibn Taymiyya cites verse 36 of sura 8, *al-Anfāl*, to support his point:

“O, believers! What is [the matter] with you that, when you are told to go forth in the cause of Allah, you adhere heavily to the earth? Are you satisfied with the life of this world rather than the Hereafter? But what is the enjoyment of worldly life compared to the Hereafter except a [very] little.”

Immediately afterward, he gives his interpretation of the verse in question:

[...] He (God) has ordained jihad until *fitna* is no more and until the whole religion is God's. He has set as His goal the non-existence of *fitna* and the existence of the exclusiveness of religion for Him. He has established as an objective the non-existence of *fitna* and the existence of the exclusivity of religion for Him. The two are antagonistic: *fitna* is incompatible with the exclusivity of religion for God and vice versa [...].<sup>51</sup>

In his analysis of Ibn Taymiyya's discussion of the word *fitna* in Qur'an 2:217 in his *Siyāsa al-Shar'iyya*, Jon Hoover pointed out that for Ibn Taymiyya, killing is justified to pare down unbelief. However, as with the commandment of good and the prohibition of evil more generally, the overall goal is benefit, and indiscriminate fighting and killing are of no benefit to Ibn Taymiyya's wider vision of a public policy ruled by divine laws.<sup>52</sup>

Here I would like to add some material. The polysemous nature of the word *fitna* has led exegetes to propose different interpretations of the Qur'anic verses in which it is mentioned. For example, for al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), the word *fitna* in verses 191 and 217 of sura 2<sup>53</sup> refers to associationism (*al-shirk*).<sup>54</sup> The *shirk* is, in essence, the antagonistic element to the exclusive worship of the One God advocated by Islam. Therefore, the ultimate goal of jihad would be, according to al-Ṭabarī's definition of the term *fitna*, the total

<sup>50</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Risāla al-Qubruṣiyya*, ed. Qaṣī Muḥibb al-Dīn (Cairo: Dār al-Maṭba'a al-Salafiyya, 1974), 29.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida fi al-Maḥabba*, 158.

<sup>52</sup> Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 105.

<sup>53</sup> “*Al-fitna ashaddu min al-qatl*” and “*Al-fitna akbaru min al-qatl*”.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fi Ta'wīl al-Qur'an* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, 2004), 2:210; 387-396.

disappearance of all forms of associationism so that worship can be totally and exclusively dedicated to God. In his *Qā'ida fī al-Maḥabba*, *Qā'ida fī Qital al-Kuffār*, and one of his anti-Mongol fatwas, Ibn Taymiyya explains that the word *fitna* in verse 36 of sura 8 has the meaning of temptation towards the believers: 'the disbelievers persecute the Muslims because of their faith and thus 'tempt' (*yufṭinūn*) their hearts to turn away from the true religion and to adhere to disbelief.<sup>55</sup> Ibn Taymiyya accuses the Mongols of having caused *fitna* among Muslims during the occupation of Syria in 1300 by persecuting them and inciting them to stop practicing the precepts of Islam, whether by abandoning prayer, drinking wine, insulting the Companions or committing atrocities against Muslims and despoiling their goods.<sup>56</sup> This is an obvious reference to the persecution of Muslims by the pagan Qurayshites during the Meccan period and even after the Hijrah until the conquest of Mecca. For Ibn Taymiyya, *fitna* and *shirk* are intrinsically linked.<sup>57</sup>

### Historicization and Origins of the Jihad

Ibn Taymiyya's explanation of the origins of jihad, which dates back to Moses's time, after he, under God's command, left Egypt with the sons of Israel. Upon arriving in the land promised to them, Moses and his people were ordered to fight the peoples who were enemies of God. As Ibn Taymiyya points out, God relates in verse 43 of sura 28 (*al-Qaṣaṣ*) that after the revelation of the Torah, no divine punishment was sent against an unbelieving people: "And We gave Moses the Scripture, after We had destroyed the former generations, as enlightenment for the people and guidance and mercy that they might be reminded."

The prophecy of Moses and the revelation of the Torah thus mark a significant turning point in the treatment of infidel peoples. Previously, the latter were annihilated by divine punishment as the Qur'ān and ḥadīths echo about the 'Ad, the Tamūd, the peoples of Shu'ayb and Lot. Ibn Taymiyya concludes that, therefore, "jihad is better/fitter (*aṣlah*) for the disbelievers than their destruction by

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida fī al-Maḥabba*, 158-159; Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fī Qital al-Kuffār wa Muḥādānatihim wa Taḥrīm Qatlihim li-Mujarrad Kufrihim*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz 'Abd Allāh al-Zīr Āl Ḥamad (Riyadh: n.p., 2004), 92-95.

<sup>56</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jihād*, ed. A. 'Umayra (Beirut: Dār al-Jayl, 1997), 2:89.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida fī al-Maḥabba*, 158-159.

punishment from heaven.”<sup>58</sup> Ibn Taymiyya thus conceives jihad as the means to improve the situation of the disbelievers, given that before God legislated and ordered Moses to wage jihad, the latter were systematically annihilated by divine punishment when they refused the message of the prophets. With jihad and by submitting to the authority of the believers, the unbelievers thus avoid annihilation. At the same time, jihad offers the possibility for believers to receive a great reward by fighting for the religion that advocates the exclusive worship of one God.<sup>59</sup>

Origins of Jihad according to Ibn Taymiyya  
[Q.S. al-Qaṣaṣ [43]: 28]



Why does Ibn Taymiyya go back to Moses? According to Islamic tradition, Moses is the first prophet who was ordered by God to fight a people in the region of Palestine in the name of religion. This account is found in verses 21-24/5.<sup>60</sup> In addition to being a war leader, several ḥadīths attributed to the Prophet present Moses as a man of great, even superhuman, physical strength.<sup>61</sup> He is the first of a series of prophet-warriors who will come after him and who will also wage war in the name of God, as Islamic tradition records in detail for Joshua,<sup>62</sup> David,<sup>63</sup> and Solomon.<sup>64</sup> Moses can be seen as the

<sup>58</sup> “*Fa al-jihād li-l-kuffār aṣlahu min halakīhim bi-‘adhab sama’*”. Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā’ida fī al-Maḥabba*, 221.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā’ida fī al-Maḥabba*, 221-223.

<sup>60</sup> O my people! Enter the Holy Land which Allah has destined for you “to enter”. And do not turn back or else you will become losers.” They replied, “O Moses! There is an enormously powerful people there, so we will never “be able to” enter it until they leave. If they do, then we will enter!” Two God-fearing men—who had been blessed by Allah—said, “Surprise them through the gate. If you do, you will certainly prevail. Put your trust in Allah if you are “truly” believers.” Yet, they said, “O Moses! Still, we will never enter as long as they remain there. So go, both you and your Lord, and fight; we are staying right here!”

<sup>61</sup> Abū ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Ismā’il b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mughīrah b. Bardhūbah al-Ju‘fī al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth 278; 3404; 2372b; <https://sunnah.com/search?q=body+of+Moses>

<sup>62</sup> For the siege of Jericho, saw the ḥadīth: <https://sunnah.com/search?q=Joshua>

<sup>63</sup> Qur’ān 250-251/2 and 80/21; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth 1979; <https://sunnah.com/search?q=David+battles>

paragon of the prophet-warrior or prophet-*mujāhid* in Taymiyan terms.

By tracing the origin of jihad back to Moses, Ibn Taymiyya wants to demonstrate that war is a divine legislation well before Islam in the name of religion. War is an instrument, a tool in the service of religion, and one that several prophets have used. By historicizing jihad and making it a divine legislation since the time of Moses, Ibn Taymiyya standardizes and normalizes war on the one hand by highlighting that it is part of the tools that God put at the disposal of his prophets and servants to confront unbelief; on the other hand, by showing that other communities before the Muslims were granted this instrument of armed combat and that it is, therefore, an integral part of their religious duties and the means by which religion triumphs over unbelief.

### Qualities and Pre-Eminence of Jihad

The performance of jihad is an expression of several qualities and virtues of the believer. Through the interpretation of a series of verses and ḥadīths, Ibn Taymiyya sees jihad as the paroxysm of patience (*al-sabr*), certainty (*al-yaqīn*), asceticism (*al-zuhd*) and sincerity (*al-ikhblās*).<sup>65</sup>

Jihad for Ibn Taymiyya is worship but not just any worship. When asked which act deserves more merit, retreating to one of the three holy mosques to worship God or stationing oneself in a *thaghr* (border town) such as Damietta, Tripoli, or Alexandria, Ibn Taymiyya replies: “[...]praise be to God. On the contrary, staying in Muslim border cities such as those in Syria and Egypt is better than staying near the three mosques (Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem). In this regard, I do not know of any disagreement among the people of science. More than one scholar has said that *ribāṭ* is a kind of jihad.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Qur’ān 15-18/27.

<sup>65</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jihād*, 2:80-81.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jihād*, 1:47. In his *al-Jawāb al-Bābir* Ibn Taymiyya writes: *Al-maqām bi al-thaghr li-l-jihād afdalu min suknā al-Haramayn bi-itijāq al-‘ulamā’*. “Staying in a border town for jihad is more meritorious than staying in Mecca or Medina, according to the consensus of scholars.” See, Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-Bābir*, 323. See also Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, 28:10-11.



As a good traditionalist, Ibn Taymiyya always supports his answer by quoting several ḥadīths.<sup>67</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya provides further clarification in his epistle *Mas'ala fi al-Murābata bi al-Tughūr Afḍal am al-Mujāwara bi Makka Sharrafahā Allah Ta'alā* in which he confirms the consensus (*ijmā'*) that exists between the four madhhabs (legal schools) that stationing in the *tughūr* (border towns) with the intention of doing jihad is more meritorious with God than living near Mecca or Medina to worship Him.<sup>68</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, the answer to this question is crystal clear to anyone who knows his religion. He deplores the confusion surrounding the subject among most people due to the appearance of innovations (*bida'*) in the belief and religious practices of the Muslims of his time: "And this issue does not pose any problem for one who knows the religion of Islam well. Nevertheless, because of the appearance of many innovations in worship and the corruption of intentions in acts relating to the divine law, the answer to this question has become confusing for many people [...]"<sup>69</sup>

Through a syllogism, Ibn Taymiyya attempts to demonstrate the superiority of the merit of *ribāṭ*, given that *ribāṭ* is a kind of jihad (*min jins al-jihād*) and that it constitutes a more meritorious act than living near the holy mosques for worship (*al-mujāwara bi al-ḥaramayn*), an act which is a kind of *ḥajj* (*min jins al-ḥajj*).<sup>70</sup> Regarding the question of the value of learning archery and any kind of valuable and helpful knowledge for jihad, Ibn Taymiyya answers that it is the best supererogatory act that the believer can perform; more meritorious than any other worship of the supererogatory type.<sup>71</sup>

Throughout his *Mas'ala fi al-Murābata bi al-Tughūr*, Ibn Taymiyya shows the prominent place that jihad occupies in the list of worships, always relying on the sacrosanct corpus (Qur'ān, Sunnah, and sayings of the Companions): acts of jihad have more merit than those of pilgrimage, such as staying near the holy places;<sup>72</sup> performing jihad is more meritorious than remaining in a perpetual state of prayer and

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jihād*, 1:48.

<sup>68</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Mas'ala fi al-Murābata*, 17.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 31. He reports various ḥadīths on the merits of the *ribat* pages 57-59.

<sup>71</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jihād*, 1:52.

<sup>72</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Mas'ala fi al-Murābata*, 31-33.

fasting;<sup>73</sup> and depending on the context, jihad becomes more important than the *hajj* (pilgrimage), the fifth pillar of Islam.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to worship, jihad is the best way for the believer to repent and obtain absolution for his sins: “And for anyone who commits many sins, the greatest remedy is jihad; certainly God Almighty forgives all sins as He says in His Book with His Word Most High and Glorified be He: ‘And He forgives you your sins’ [...]. So let him do jihad who wants God to forgive these evil deeds in the propaganda of ignorance and its defense [...]”<sup>75</sup> The *ribāṭ*-s, lands of jihad, are by definition the best places:

The border towns were filled with the best Muslims, whether in knowledge or acts of worship. They were the places where the laws of Islam and the rule of commanding right and forbidding wrong were best applied, where the fullness of faith could be achieved. To the one who wanted to detach himself from this world to devote himself to worship, to God, to achieve completeness in asceticism, worship and knowledge, the border cities were indicated.<sup>76</sup>

He relates the well-known strong saying of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and other scholars that: “If people differ on anything, let them look to the people of the border towns for the truth is with them for God the Highest says: ‘And as for those who strive in Our cause, surely We will guide them to Our ways.’”<sup>77</sup>

Especially since *ribāṭ* and jihad were easily accessible at the time, simply by traveling to Syria, a region under multiple attacks, mainly from the Mongols. As Ibn Taymiyya reminds us, Syria was a *thaghr* since the early days of Islam against the Byzantines and was still a *thaghr* in his time against the Armenians, Franks, and Mongols. This is why the Prophet attributed more merit to the people of Syria than to those of Yemen and Iraq.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, for Ibn Taymiyya, the Muslims fighting in Syria are the ones most likely to be concerned with the Prophetic ḥadīth about the saved group (*al-ṭā’ifa al-manṣūra*) whom God will support and whom the enemies of the religion can never

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jihād*, 2:66-67.

<sup>76</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Mas’ala fi al-Murābaṭa*, 50.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jihād*, 2:81.

<sup>78</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Mas’ala fi al-Murābaṭa*, 51.

defeat.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, at the end of his *'Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya* and in his *Iqtīdā' fī Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaḳīm*, Ibn Taymiyya invokes God to allow him to be part of the *ṭā'ifa al-manṣūra* (the Victorious group)<sup>80</sup>

While jihad may be more meritorious than pilgrimage and Ramaḍān fasting in some cases, what about prayer, the second most important pillar and one for which some 'ulamā' consider those who do not perform it as non-Muslims?<sup>81</sup> Several elements from the Qur'ān and the Prophetic tradition clearly indicate that in times of war, the prayer can be performed in a different way: walking, on a mount, shortening it, or even grouping several prayers together. There are also specific facilities and permissions in the context of travel that differ between *madhāhib*.<sup>82</sup> This modification of the prayer, in the context of war, shows the importance of jihad. There is no text that stipulates interrupting the jihad to pray. On the contrary, the prayer should be performed in such a way that the conduct of jihad is not hindered.<sup>83</sup> All this leads Ibn Taymiyya to say: "If the completion of the prayer took precedence over the jihad, then He would have agreed to stop doing the jihad in order to perform it."<sup>84</sup> Ibn Taymiyya wants to draw attention here because the texts clearly show that the war effort in the context of jihad takes precedence over any religious obligation, including prayer.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jihād*, 2:63, 143.

<sup>80</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-'Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya*, ed. Ṣāliḥ b. Fawzān (Damascus/Riyadh: Dār al-Fayḥā'/Dār al-Salām, 1997), 168; Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtīdā' al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaḳīm li-Mukhālafat Aṣḥāb al-Jahīm*, ed. Nāṣir b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-'Aql (Riyadh: Dār al-Faḍīla, 2003), 109.

<sup>81</sup> al-Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna* (Cairo: Dār al-Fatḥ li 'Ilām al-'Arabī, 2009), 1:64-67.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:202-210.

<sup>83</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Mas'ala fī al-Murābaṭa*, 41-47.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>85</sup> Ibn Taymiyya reports that during the Prophetic period and up to the reign of several Abbasid caliphs, it was the amir commanding the army who performed the function of imam for the prayers during the expedition. Ibn Taymiyya, *Mas'ala fī al-Murābaṭa*, 47. This shows that for Ibn Taymiyya, the two most important things in religion are prayer and jihad. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Siyāsa al-Shar'iyya*, 66.

## Two Epistles As New Perspectives of Research: *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fī Qitāl al-Kuffār* and *Qā'ida fī al-Inghimās fī al-'Aduww*

In this article, I have tried to bring new elements from a corpus of Ibn Taymiyya's writings other than his anti-Mongol fatwas. Other writings were not included in my analysis to avoid lengthening the article. Among them, two epistles deserve special attention: the *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fī Qitāl al-Kuffār wa Mubādanatibim wa Tahrim Qatlibim li-Mujarrad Kufribim* (Summarized rule concerning the fighting of the disbelievers, contracting truces with them and the unlawfulness of killing them on account of their disbelief) and *Qā'ida fī al-Inghimās fī al-'Aduww wa hal Yubāh?* (Rule about rushing at the enemy (to die), is this allowed?).

In the Muslim world, this epistle has attracted the interest of many scholars such as Muḥammad Abū Zahra and others who have discussed it in their works on jihad.<sup>86</sup> In his great work on jihad, Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī devotes a section to this epistle.<sup>87</sup> Surprisingly, these two epistles have not attracted the attention of scholars in the West, either of Ibn Taymiyya or of jihad.

Furthermore, they contain unique and valuable information that could shed new light on Ibn Taymiyya's conception of jihad. In his *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fī Qitāl al-Kuffār*, Ibn Taymiyya, based on an analysis and interpretation of verses from the Qur'ān (especially of the sura 2) and ḥadīths, demonstrates that jihad is waged against enemies not because they are disbelievers but because they attack Muslims. In other words, disbelief in itself cannot be a justification for jihad according to the Qur'ān and the Sunna.<sup>88</sup> This position is that of *al-jumbūr* which is in opposition to that of al-Shāfi'ī.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> See Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī, *Fiqh al-Jihad: Dirāsa Muqārana li-Aḥkāmih wa Falsafatih fī Daw' al-Qur'an wa al-Sunna* (Cairo: Maktaba Wahba: 2010), Vol. 1: 396. More recently, see Jabir Sani Mihula, "Analysis of *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fī Qitāl al-Kuffār wa Mudābanatibim wa Tahrim Qatlibim bi-Mujarrad Kufribim*," *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, No. 9 (2018), 1103-1109; Yaser Ellethy, "A Medieval Derelict Jihad Canon: Ibn Taymiyya's *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fī Qitāl al-Kuffār* and the Ethics of Combating Non-Believers," paper in the one-day international workshop, *Jihad in Medieval Islam: Texts, Theories, and Practices (7<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>)*, Ifao, Cairo, 11 October 2021.

<sup>87</sup> al-Qarḍāwī, *Fiqh al-Jihād*, 396-403.

<sup>88</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara*, 123-124.

<sup>89</sup> See al-Qarḍāwī, *Fiqh al-Jihād*, 393-397.

Certainly, this statement of Ibn Taymiyya's and the positions he defends in his epistle differ in many ways from the image of the belligerent and aggressive character suggested by the analysis of his other writings, such as his anti-Mongol or anti-Nusayrite fatwas. Moreover, this position of Ibn Taymiyya partly dilutes the image of a rigorous scholar that some have tried to give him, especially among some contemporary scholars claiming to be *salafī*.

Let us note that this epistle was not edited in his *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* but was published much later. One reason is that Taymiyyah thought would not be faithful and/or consistent with that found in his *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*.<sup>90</sup> However, Ashraf b. 'Abd al-Maqṣūd, the editor of the fatwa, demonstrates quite convincingly in his introduction that there is no doubt that this fatwa is the work of Ibn Taymiyya. This observation leads to further research into the authorship of this fatwa supposedly by Ibn Taymiyya and to a fundamental question: assuming that this fatwa was written by Ibn Taymiyya, what could be the reasons that could explain why it was not included in the two editions of his *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*? Answering this question would significantly lengthen the length of the article. I will answer it in detail in a future study.

In all logic, there is no doubt that Ibn Taymiyya is indeed the author of this epistle. Ashraf b. 'Abd al-Maqṣūd, the editor of the text, has demonstrated in his introduction that the position Ibn Taymiyya defends in his *Qā'ida* on the prohibition of fighting the infidels simply because of their disbelief overlaps with other passages in other of his writings.<sup>91</sup>

The tone is more martial and offensive in the second entitled *Qā'ida fī al-Inghimās fī al-'Adūww wa hal Yubāḥ?* As his title indicates, Ibn Taymiyya addresses the issue (*mas'ala*) of the fighter or group of fighters who decide to fight an infidel enemy who far outnumbers them (more than twice the number of Muslims) in the interests of religion while being confident that they will be killed.<sup>92</sup> This position illustrates Ibn Taymiyya's utilitarian conception of jihad in his *Siyāsa*

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 396.

<sup>91</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara*, 67-69. See also Mihula, "Analysis of *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fī Qitāl al-Kuffār*," 1103-1104.

<sup>92</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida fī al-Inghimās fī al-'Adūww wa hal Yubāḥ?*, ed. Abū Muḥammad Ashraf b. 'Abd al-Maqṣūd (Riyadh: Adwā' al-Salaf, 2002), 23.

pointed out by Jon Hoover.<sup>93</sup> Regarding the issue of *al-inghimās fī al-'adunn*, Ibn Taymiyya mentions three cases: 1) the fighter who charges the enemy ranks alone;<sup>94</sup> 2) the fighter who assassinates infidel leaders or commanders among the guards; 3) a fighter or group of fighters who fight the enemy in order to allow the defeated Muslim army to withdraw.<sup>95</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, for the majority of the *'ulamā'* of the four *madhāb*, this act is permissible (*jā'iz*), and the differences on the issue are an exception. The evidence for the lawfulness of this act is found both in the Qur'ān, the Sunnah and the consensus of the first three generations of Muslims (*al-salaf*).<sup>96</sup> As usual, Ibn Taymiyya reports and discusses the evidence from the texts that support his opinion and that he considers the majority opinion among the scholars.<sup>97</sup>

A first reading of these two epistles confirms Ibn Taymiyya's complex thinking and his conception of jihad. Ibn Taymiyya is consistent in these and other writings in that he considers jihad to be a duty and that it must be waged. However, the confrontation of the two epistles brings out a dual image of the Hanbali theologian that may seem contradictory in some aspects: that of a pro-jihad activist, on the one hand, promoting a kind of jihad that remains a war against infidels but respecting a certain code of ethics towards civilian populations and religious 'tolerance/freedom' (*Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fī Qitāl al-Kuffār*); and on the other hand the ideologue behind suicide bombings perpetrated in our time (*al-inghimās fī al-'adunn*). This observation leads us, firstly, to question the reasons for those different tones and this evolution of Ibn Taymiyya's conception of jihad; secondly, and as Mihula J. had already pointed out about *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fī Qitāl al-Kuffār*, to make "a holistic approach to all the works of Ibn Taymiyyah on jihad before branding or sidelining him

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<sup>93</sup> Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 105.

<sup>94</sup> This action is commonly referred to among the *'ulamā'* as that of *al-inghimās fī al-'adunn*, which could be translated as 'sacrificing oneself for the cause of Islam by throwing oneself at the enemy'. This issue was discussed by several *'ulamā'* before Ibn Taymiyya, such as al-Ghazālī, al-Qurṭubī and al-Nawawī to name a few. Ibn Naḥḥās, *Mashārī' al-Asbāq ilā Mashārī' al-'Uṣbāq*, ed. Idrīs Muḥammad 'Alī and Muḥammad Khālīd Iṣṭanbūlī (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya, 1984), 522-560.

<sup>95</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Qā'ida fī al-Ingimās fī al-'Adunn*, 23-24.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-27.

<sup>97</sup> Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 105.

with particular doctrine on jihad.”<sup>98</sup> A more in-depth study of the Taymiyya corpus of jihad is underway, including these two epistles, and other writings will attempt to shed more light on this topic.

### Concluding Remarks

Pending a full examination of Ibn Taymiyya's writings, some initial conclusions are in order. For Ibn Taymiyya, jihad is one of the most important forms of worship for Muslims and one of the necessary means for completing a system governed by the laws of God. Legislated at the time of Moses, warlike jihad is seen by Ibn Taymiyya as a tool to improve the situation of the infidels. Before the legislation of jihad, infidel peoples were annihilated by inescapable divine punishment. Thus, jihad allows the infidels to avoid divine annihilation on the one hand and enjoy a certain 'religious freedom' on the other.

Ibn Taymiyya's interest in and commitment to jihad and a warlike attitude seem to have been the result, in part, of the trauma of the Mongol danger he experienced as a child and to which he was exposed throughout most of his life. Ibn Taymiyya's conception of jihad can therefore only be studied and understood by considering the context of his time.

Ibn Taymiyya was a pro-jihad activist like other of his contemporaries, such as Badr al-Dīn b. Jamā'a (who wrote three treatises on the subject and also participated in expeditions), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and Ibn Kathīr, to name a few. More than a 'radical' or 'fanatic' as often described, Ibn Taymiyya must be seen and considered a man of his time. A time when the Muslim world was more than ever in danger of disappearing, as Ibn Taymiyya himself wrote explicitly. Therefore, it was natural and essential for him and the other '*ulamā*' to rekindle the flame of jihad to lead the struggle for the survival of the territories of Islam. This study has sought to lay the groundwork for Ibn Taymiyya's conception of jihad, a scholar who is intrinsically linked to the issues surrounding the ideology of contemporary jihadism as one of the most important authorities. Nevertheless, it is by placing Ibn Taymiyya's writings in this context that their content can be understood, contrary to contemporary readings of certain jihadi ideologues that decontextualize Ibn Taymiyya's positions and truncate specific passages of his writings in

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<sup>98</sup> Mihula, "Analysis of *Qā'ida Mukhtaṣara fī Qitāl al-Kuffār*," 1103-1108.

order to make them immutable prescriptions that must be applied in today's world.

In order to understand more and better the conception of jihad of a scholar as complex as Ibn Taymiyya, one cannot do without a complete study of his work by analyzing each passage dealing with jihad and cross-referencing it with the others. In this article, I have relied on a significant number of Taymiyya's writings, from which I have tried to highlight some general aspects of the Hanbali theologian's conception of jihad and to indicate some research perspectives. Like his thought, Ibn Taymiyya's conception of jihad is as rich as it is complex and, obviously, anything but monolithic. Like any man, his thought was strongly influenced by the context in which he lived and evolved according to the circumstances. In sum, a man of his time.

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