

The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam

*Volume 1. The Prophet Between Doctrine, Literature
and Arts: Historical Legacies and Their Unfolding*

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Ḥadīth Culture and Ibn Taymiyya's Controversial Legacy in Early Fifteenth Century Damascus

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī and His al-Radd Al-Wāfir (d. 842/1438)

Caterina Bori

1 *Ḥadīth* and Devotion towards the Prophet in Post-canonical Times

In post-canonical times, *ḥadīth* transmission became a pervasive social and cultural phenomenon, the mechanics of which have recently started to attract the attention of scholars. Despite the fact that, from the eleventh century onwards, the growing authority of the written canon challenged the function of the *isnād* and the indispensability of the oral transmission, such transmission did not die, rather it deeply changed opening the way to new modes and literary genres that expressed the concerns and aims of post-canonical transmission. Supported by a powerful ideology that justified transmission as a unique mark bestowed by God upon the Muslim community, transmitting the Prophet's words transformed into a pervasive expression of piety and devotion; an effective way of bringing oneself close to Muḥammad and through him to God; as such "the Prophet's words" became a most precious social and cultural capital worth of special investment and accumulation.¹ From this perspective, *ʿulūw* (elevation in the *isnād*), that is proximity to Muḥammad in the chain of transmission, became the quality most eagerly sought after by scholars and transmitters. *ʿUlūw* allowed not only transmitters but also their auditors to move spiritually near to the Prophet. Such proximity was a source of spiritual benefit as well as social prestige.²

This process was already well on its way in Ayyubid times and was to blossom in the so called "middle period". Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, Damascus and Cairo hosted some of the most outstanding *ḥadīth* experts of all times. Ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 1245/643) and al-Nawāwī (d. 676/1277), al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) and al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341), Ibn Ḥajar

1 See Dickinson, "Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād", and now also Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*. The expression "post-canonical Ḥadīth culture" is from Davidson's work.

2 On "elevation", Dickinson, "Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād"; Witkam, "High and Low"; Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 1–77.

al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), these scholars defined the boundaries of the field and the protocols of transmission, produced commentaries, dictionaries and works of *ḥadīth* criticism, some of which were destined to remain standard reference for the times to come.³

The high regard in which scholars as al-Nawawī and Ibn Ṣalāḥ were held, and the foundation in Damascus in 1233 of the Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya – the school where both al-Nawawī and Ibn Ṣalāḥ taught – also point to this state of affairs. The Ayyubid ruler al-Ashraf Mūsā (d. 635/1237) erected this prestigious madrasa dedicated to the study of *ḥadīth* within the city walls, near to his own residence. By his decision, the madrasa housed a sandal (*naʿl*) of the Prophet which al-Ashraf had been bequeathed a few years before. The relic became an object of veneration, which attracted visits and devotional display; at least one case of *ḥadīth* -reading by the sandal itself is recorded by the sources.⁴ Clearly, *ḥadīth* and the charismatic relic provided believers a special connection to the Prophet. The idea that the prophet's agency could be activated at the advantage of his community by means of *ḥadīth* recitation is also witnessed by the chronicles of the period which attest to an increasing ritual use of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* in particular. Readings of Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* are recorded in collective prayers for rain (*istiṣqāʿ*), in times of danger or even to celebrate a happy event, like the birth of a boy to the Sultan.⁵ Other than this, recent literature has shown that communal *ḥadīth* readings and the transmission in public or private spaces was a massive phenomenon of the period. Invested by the tremendous religious authority and charisma of the Prophet, practices of *ḥadīth* transmission itself became increasingly ritualised.⁶ In sum, *ḥadīth* boosted, *ḥadīth* was everywhere. Symptomatic of this situation was the steady growth in construction of schools dedicated to the study of *ḥadīth* (*dār al-ḥadīth*) in Damascus between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.⁷

3 Beyond the already mentioned works of Dickinson and Davidson, see Brown in *The Canonization of al-Buḥārī and Muslim*; Lucas, *Constructive Critics*.

4 Dickinson, "Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād", 481–84; Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria*; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufasssīrīn*, ii: 276; mentioned by Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands*, 53, 78 fn. 39.

5 For instance, al-Birzālī (d. 738/1339), *al-Muqtafī ʿalā kitāb al-rawḍatayn, al-maʿrūf bi-taʾrīkh al-Birzālī*, ii: 424 and 4: 354. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, xiii: 32; al-Jazārī (d. 738/1337–1338), *Taʾrīkh ḥawādith al-zamān*, i: 44.

6 On the ritual use of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, Brown, *Canonization*, 338–49 and Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 117–23. On the phenomenon of *ḥadīth* reading in public spaces, see especially the corpus assembled by Leder, Sawwās, and al-Ṣāgarjī, *Muʿjam al-samāʿāt al-dimashqiyya*; Leder, "Spoken Word and Written Text".

7 See al-Nuʿaymī (d. 927/1521), *al-Dāris fī taʾrīkh al-madāris*, i: 15–90.

2 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī (d. 842/1438)

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī (d. 842/1438) was a prominent Shāfiʿī *ḥadīth* specialist who, towards the end of his life, was appointed *shaykh* at the prestigious Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya, the same school just mentioned above. The longest biography we have of him is that of al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) who describes him as a learned gentleman, a polite and friendly person, of strong forbearance, certainly the most authoritative transmitter and expert in the field of Prophetic traditions of the time in Damascus. He was in fact known as *ḥāfiẓ al-shām*.⁸

“He undertook the task of spreading *ḥadīth* – writes Sakhāwī – so that people benefitted from him; he transmitted a lot in his town, in Aleppo and other places. He even transmitted with our shaykh (i.e. Ibn Ḥajar) in Damascus ...”.⁹ al-Sakhāwī is especially keen to stress the bond of reciprocal esteem between him and his own mentor, the towering Shāfiʿī Chief Judge, historian and *ḥadīth* specialist Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 8452/1449).¹⁰ This gives us a measure of the respect that Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn enjoyed among the leading *ḥadīth* scholars of the day. Next to this, the image of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn that his biographies deliver is also that of a scholar who cultivated a genuine interest in people’s religious needs. Two aspects that well converge in his writings.

The name of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn passed to posterity because of a bitter confrontation he had with a Ḥanafī-Matūrīdī colleague, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī (d. 842/1438), in the year 835/1432.¹¹ The latter had arrived in Damascus in 832/1429–30 and written a stern pamphlet titled *Muljimat al-mujassima* (*The Bridle for the Corporealists*), where he exposed the opinions that according to him had led Ibn Taymiyya to unbelief.¹² We do not possess details on the actual contents of the quarrel between Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī, but we are told that ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī’s not only declared Ibn Taymiyya to be an unbeliever, but also uttered that whoever acknowledged to Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) the title of *shaykh al-islām* was an unbeliever as well. Following this, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn responded with a broad collection of evidence, gathering instances of 85 scholars from all schools of law having actually applied to Ibn Taymiyya this honorific (i.e. *shaykh al-islām*). The point being that such a great number of people certainly could not all be considered unbelievers.

8 Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, viii: 103–106.

9 Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, viii: 103.

10 Sakhāwī, *ibid.* and *al-Jawāhir wa-l-durar*, i: 181 and ii: 595.

11 Cf. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr*, viii: 258–59. Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, viii: 104 and ix: 292–293.

12 Bukhārī, *Muljimat al-mujassima*.

This writing is titled: *al-Radd al-wāfir 'alā man za'ama anna man sammā Ibn Taymiyya shaykh al-islām kāfir* ("The Ample Refutation of the person who claims that whoever calls Ibn Taymiyya *shaykh al-islām* is an Unbeliever").¹³ Judging from its certificates of auditions and transmission, its *taqārīz* (statements of endorsements) and other materials appended to its various manuscripts, *al-Radd al-wāfir* enjoyed considerable success, especially among Ḥanbalīs and Shāfi'īs. It was read in Damascus, Aleppo, Ḥomṣ and Cairo, and it circulated at least up to the nineteenth century. We possess a license of transmission (*ijāza*) by the well-known Ḥanbalī Syrian jurist al-Ḥijjāwī (d. 968/1560), whereas the Egyptian Ḥanbalī Mar'ī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī (d. 1033/1624) put together an abridged calque of *al-Radd* entitled *al-Shahāda al-zakiyya fī l-ṭhanā' 'alā Ibn Taymiyya*. The book was also copied in Mecca as late as 1285/1869 at the request of Siddīq Ḥasan Khān (d. 1307/1899) from a copy written by the Ḥanbalī muftī Ibn Ḥumayd al-Āmirī (d. 1295/1878).¹⁴ Throughout the centuries and up to modern times, *al-Radd al-wāfir* has been commonly understood as a defence of Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn viewed as one of Ibn Taymiyya's followers.¹⁵ And yet between these two scholars there's a whole untold story of divergences revolving around issues of prophetic devotion. In what follows, I shall try and recount this story which cannot be properly understood if we do not take seriously into account the intense *ḥadīth* culture of the period of which Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was part.

3 Divergences

A somewhat prolific *mawlid* author, in his massive *sīra*-oriented work titled *Jāmi' al-āthār fī mawlid wa-sīyar al-mukhtār*, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn shows highly sympathetic attitudes towards *mawlid* celebrations as well as a firm belief in the benefits deriving from visiting the Prophet's grave.¹⁶ Celebrating the Prophet's birth – he writes at the beginning of *Jāmi' al-āthār* – is "a good innovation" (*bid'a ḥasana*), for *mawlid* festivals are commendable and joyful manifestations of love for Muḥammad as much as a way of showing thankfulness to God for having bestowed upon humanity the grace of His Messenger. *Jāmi'*

13 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Radd al-wāfir*.

14 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Radd al-wāfir*, 139–195. Mar'ī b. Yūsuf, *al-Shahāda al-zakiyya*.

15 Mar'ī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī's *al-Shahāda al-zakiyya* is itself an early testimony of such an understanding. Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1317/1899), *Jalā' al-ʿaynayn*, 68, lists Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn among Ibn Taymiyya's followers. Among modern scholars, e.g. Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie*; Gril, "De la *ḥirqa* à la *ṭarīqa*", 67; El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 354.

16 For Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn on *mawlid*, see Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, 96–97.

al-āthār itself was inspired by *mawlid*. It is a huge *sīra*-like work which was meant to foster feelings of salvific love towards the Prophet.¹⁷

As for the Prophet's grave, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn makes it clear that copious *ḥadīth* converge on pointing to the Prophet's burial place as a charismatic space of conjunction between his person and believers, a place where believers are summoned with the promise of intercession and eternal salvation. Accordingly, in a great number of traditions the Prophet voices requests to believers to visit his grave and promises intercession for those who will visit him.¹⁸ Despite the defective nature of many of these *ḥadīth*, according to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, such traditions can nonetheless be abided by because of their exhortative character towards acquiring merit (*thawāb*). In this regard, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn writes:

In what we have presented, there is awakening of one's desire (*targhīb*) for the excellence of *ziyāra* which the community performs for religion as its distinctive sign. In fact, visiting the grave of the Prophet – the best of prayers and peace be upon Him – is one the *sunna* of the people of Islam, it is an agreed upon deed which draws close to God (*qurba mujma' alayhā*), a desirable and recommendable meritorious action (*faḍila muraġġab fihā mandūb ilayhā*). Its *ḥadīth* are met with approval and consensus even if in some of their chains there is contention (*maqāl*). Nobody discusses them by what rejects them, but the forsaken [*makhdhūl*]. And nobody discredits them with the charge of fabrication, but the doubtful ignorant [*murtāb jahūl*]. We seek refuge in God from abandonment, misery and deprivation (*ḥirmān*).¹⁹

The point made here by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn deserves some attention. In a short work in defence of a special prayer supposedly prescribed by the Prophet (*al-Tarjih li-ṣalāt al-taṣbiḥ*) Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn more thoroughly illustrates the principle he mentions above. Weak *ḥadīth* in matters of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* (exhorting people to the pleasures of Paradise and frightening them with the prospect of Hell punishment), *ḥadīth* reporting edifying stories and parables (*al-qīṣaṣ wa-l-amthāl*) and those conveying admonishments (*mawā'iz*) or relating the meritorious values of certain actions (*faḍā'il al-a'māl*) can be transmitted, and if they can be transmitted they can also be acted upon; many scholars have done it before and this is the opinion of the majority; it is in fact the

17 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-āthār*, i: 63–68.

18 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-āthār*, viii: 101–144, especially 129–141.

19 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Jāmi'*, viii, 141.

rule he applies here.²⁰ In fact, Ibn Nāṣir did embrace a majoritarian position according to which devotional practices generating merit were given priority to issues of weaknesses in transmission.²¹ And yet, at least the polemical voice of one notorious Ḥanbalī of the previous century disagreed on this point. The forsaken and doubtful ignorant who rejects the *ziyāra* traditions and charges them with fabrication Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn alludes to is certainly Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya, although his name is not explicitly mentioned in this passage. The allusion to his unpopular yet well-known position against travelling with the purpose of visiting the graves of pious men, the Prophet *in primis*, is unmistakably there.

Ibn Taymiyya's elaborations on *ziyāra* have been described and discussed in detail by Niels Henrik Olesen and more recently Christopher Taylor, but there is at least one point which deserves further attention because it lays at the foundation of Ibn Taymiyya's refusal to acknowledge the implications of those very same 'prophetic' traditions to which Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was deeply attached.²² As seen, for Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn the traditions recommending *ziyāra* belonged to the realm of exhortation and dissuasion (*targhib/tarhib*) which did not require soundness to produce effective meaning. On this point, Ibn Taymiyya articulated his own peculiar view:

The words of Aḥmad – *Whenever a tradition deals with the licit and prohibited, we are strict with its chains, and whenever it deals with exhortation and dissuasion, we are lax with them* – also apply to what the scholars think about acting upon a weak *ḥadīth* regarding the virtues of action. The intended meaning of these words is not the establishment of legal recommendation (*istiḥbāb*) by means of a *ḥadīth* that cannot be used as authoritative evidence (*lā yuḥtajjū bihi*). In fact, legal recommendation is an institution based on the revealed normativity (*ḥukm sharʿī*) that is established exclusively by a proof which originates from it (*dalīl sharʿī*). Whoever relates about God that He loves an action on the basis of a proof which does not conform to such normativity has legislated regarding religion what God did not give permission for.²³

20 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Tarjīḥ li-ḥadīth ṣalāt al-tasbīḥ*, 36. The work is discussed by Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, 96–100.

21 See Brown, "Even If It's Not True It's True", 12f. on Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn.

22 Olesen, *Culte des saints et pèlerinages chez Ibn Taymiyya* (661/1263–728/1328) and Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 169–218.

23 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xviii: 65.

In sum, for Ibn Taymiyya *istiḥbāb* and *targhib/tarhib* are not to be conflated. *Targhib* encourages towards actions that generate reward and *tarhib* dissuades from deeds that generate punishment; but the legal status of actions is otherwise established by a text (*naṣṣ*) or consensus (*ijmāʿ*), he writes a few lines below the passage just quoted above. Ibn Taymiyya exemplifies his position with a metaphor:

The person wishes *that* reward or is afraid of *that* punishment, and its various types, like the man who knows that trading will bring [him] profit, but is then told that it will bring [him] *great* profit. If he believes in this, it will be beneficial to him, if not, it will bring him no harm.²⁴

Thus, *targhib* and *tarhib* are about actions that are beneficial if performed, and yet unharmed if left unperformed, but their legal qualification (*istiḥbāb*, *karāha*, *ijāb* or *taḥrīm*) is established by other means. Accordingly, in the realm of persuasion and dissuasion, weak *ḥadīth* – as long as they are not fabricated – can be transmitted and acted upon, but cannot be used to establish whether an action is legally recommendable or not.²⁵

Now, contrary to what is usually ascribed to him, Ibn Taymiyya qualified *ziyāra*, or better a certain type of *ziyāra*, precisely as a legally recommended action (*mustaḥabba*).²⁶ But, in view of what we have just seen, some of the beliefs and practices more commonly associated with *ziyāra* in his time, like the request for intercession, had for him no foundation because they were based on *ḥadīth* that Ibn Taymiyya deemed weak, or fabricated.²⁷ To put it otherwise, those very *ḥadīth* that were so meaningful to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn had no import in defining the legal qualification of the action for Ibn Taymiyya. And yet, according to Ibn Taymiyya, *ziyāra* is a legally recommended action (*mustaḥabba*) providing that it is carried out in compliance with his idea of the religious normativity (*ziyāra sharʿiyya*). That is, a visit in which the visitor salutes the dead and performs a supplicatory prayer (*duʿāʾ*) for him/her – as the Prophet used to do for the martyrs of Uḥud – or a visit in which the visitor is reminded of the Hereafter and contemplates the imminence of death, but *not* a visit which has at its centre the fulfilment of one's needs or requests, lest graves and cemeteries be transformed into places of worship (*ziyāra bidʿiyya*).²⁸

24 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xviii: 66.

25 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xviii, 65–68. Brown, “Even If It's Not True It's True”, 25–27.

26 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xxvii, 242, 330–331, 376, 377–381, 415–416 et passim. Taylor, *Vicinity*, 191–192.

27 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xxvii, 29–34, 35–36, 119.

28 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xxvii, 30–32, 70–71, 72; 322, 376–77.

The importance of this point cannot be underestimated for it carries with it a dramatic difference of visions between somebody like Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn and so many of his peers, and the fourteenth century Ḥanbalī scholar.

In drawing a distinct boundary between the dead and the living, in relocating the purpose of *ziyāra* from invocations for one's own benefit to invocations for the dead only, in re-orienting man's requests and needs to God's mercy rather than to those who, because they had left this life, were already close to God, Ibn Taymiyya was perceived and accused of robbing the Prophet of his auspicious power of mediation. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, who showed a marked concern for the religiosity of ordinary people, must have felt that if the Prophet was somehow divested of his unique capacity of mediator, then believers too were deprived of the many possibilities engendered by such mediation: the possibility of accessing God's blessings, of being agents of their own salvation, cultivating feelings of love and closeness to Muḥammad, the possibilities – finally – of hope and relief.

In short, on the desirability, usefulness and legitimacy of *mawlid* celebration as well as the meaningfulness of visiting the Prophets' grave, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was clearly and deeply at odds with Ibn Taymiyya, and yet this did not hamper him from composing a text like *al-Radd al-wāfir* in which he supported the idea that Ibn Taymiyya deserved the honorary title of *shaykh al-islām* and branded as a foolish and extravagant absurdity the proclamation of unbelief for all those who did so.

How could this be? It was again the legacy of the Prophet that allowed Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn to rescue Ibn Taymiyya despite his disagreement on the points illustrated above. In order to see how this happened we need to move back to *al-Radd al-wāfir*.

4 The Transmission of the Prophet's Legacy as a way of Rehabilitating Ibn Taymiyya

Al-Radd al-wāfir can be thematically divided in three sections: an introduction, the body of the evidence and a final corpus of endorsements (*taqārīḥ*) that in time were annexed to the text, and thus became part and parcel of it.

A point of the introduction which is useful to recall here is Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's definition of the expression *shaykh al-islām*. After illustrating a range of possible meanings, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn declares that a *shaykh al-islām* is a scholar of outstanding knowledge of Qur'ān, *sunna* and related branches and, at the same time, a strikingly humble and modest individual. It is not only a scholarly pedigree that is required to be entitled to this honorific, but also a rigorously

upright way of being. The individual who fulfils these requisites is a *shaykh al-islām*, and every generation had its own share of them. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn does provide a brief list of names arranged by periods and places and when he gets to the generation of his teachers' teachers, he praises a small group of Shāfi'īs and Ḥanbalis for whom the appellation is well-known and verified (*mashhūra wa-muḥaqqāqa*). Ibn Taymiyya's name is among them.²⁹ On the whole, the definition, of the term offered by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn is quite generic and it serves the purpose of demonstrating that the title was applicable to Ibn Taymiyya.

In fact, the evidence Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn provides in order to uphold his standpoint consists in listing 85 personalities from the fourteenth century or the beginning of the fifteenth century (mostly scholars) presented in alphabetical order, who applied the honorific to Ibn Taymiyya.³⁰ He does that by presenting excerpts from biographical notices (*tarājim*) of Ibn Taymiyya written by these people and in which the Ḥanbalī theologian and jurisprudent is always presented as *shaykh al-islām*,³¹ by quoting lines of poetry in which Ibn Taymiyya is praised or addressed with that title,³² and by reporting pieces of *ijāzāt* or records of auditions (*ṭabaqāt al-samā'*) in which Ibn Taymiyya's name, with his honorifics, appears in different roles: as the certifying teacher (*musmi'*) who granted the hearing certificate, among the listeners present at an audition (*al-sāmi'ūn*), or as one of the readers (*bi-qirā'at ... qāri'*).³³

Sometimes Ibn Taymiyya's comment on the transmission of a specific *ḥadīth* is quoted.³⁴ In other examples it is his own transmissions which are recalled,³⁵ sometimes together with their *takhrīj*.³⁶ In all instances, Ibn Taymiyya's name always appears as accompanied by the title of *shaykh al-islām*. Clearly, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, who was committed to the transmission of *ḥadīth*, had access to this documentary material which he reproduces in excerpts. Thanks to a recent corpus of growing research, we know that by the time Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was writing, audition records (*samā'āt*) and licenses of transmission (*ijāzāt*)

29 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 22–24.

30 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 26–136.

31 Some instances Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, ... 53, 54, 68, 70, 73, 78, 82, 84–85, 89, 91, 96, 97, 99, 100, 104, 110, 115, 127.

32 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, ... 90, 91, 126 ...

33 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 28, 28–29, 32, 38–39, 40–41, 42, 46, 48, 62, 81, 98, 101, 102, 113, 116, 118, 120, 129–30.

34 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 108.

35 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 111, 112.

36 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 38, 44, 105.

had become the most widespread way for validating *ḥadīth* transmission.³⁷ *Al-Radd al-wāfir* is yet another piece of evidence confirming this picture.

Here is one example of a typical audition record quoted by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn and bearing Ibn Taymiyya as one of its actors:

I [i.e. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn] also found an audition certificate of the *Juz'* of Ḥasan ibn 'Arafa written by the previously mentioned Amīn [al-Dīn] al-Wānī. It read as follows (*ṣūratu-hā*): 'The whole of this *Juz'*, that is the *ḥadīth* of Ḥasan ibn 'Arafa al-'Abdī was heard under the direction of twenty-two teachers [among these] the Imam ... *shaykh al-islām* ... Taqī al-Dīn ... Ibn Taymiyya al-Ḥarrānī'. Then he mentioned the rest of the auditing session (*ṭabaqat al-samā'*) and the auditors (*al-sāmi'īn*), and said: this session (*ṭabaqa*) was written by Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Wānī and his brother Aḥmad in the fourth year.³⁸

There is a great deal of information we learn from this short passage. First, the *Juz'* of Ḥasan ibn 'Arafa (d. 257/870–71) is the collection of *ḥadīth* where Ibn Taymiyya's name appears most frequently as a transmitter in *al-Radd al-wāfir*.³⁹ As a matter of fact, other sources confirm that Ibn Taymiyya was among the local transmitters of this collection, and also that he transmitted its *ḥadīth* samples with elevated chains (*'awālī*), which in turn were selected and transmitted by al-Dhahabī. The manuscript of this *'awālī* selection from Ibn 'Arafa, today edited, preserves its audition register bearing the names of two hundred people.⁴⁰ It was – it seems – a selection whose transmission sessions were rather well attended.

Furthermore, the name of Amīn al-Dīn al-Wānī (d. 735/1334) appears as that of the *kātib* of the audition record translated above. He was a Ḥanafī prominent *mu'adhdhin* and a *ḥadīth* transmitter who was in some way associated with Ibn Taymiyya. In fact, he was the person who put together the chains

37 See Davidson, *Carrying on the tradition*, 79–191; Görke-Hirschler, *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*; Leder's many articles on the subject as well as his *Mu'jam al-samā'āt al-dimashqiyya*; Gardiner, *Esotericism in a manuscript culture*, 124–135; Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, "Ijāzāt al-samā' fi l-makhtūṭāt al-qadima". More bibliography in Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition*, 216–19.

38 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 38–39.

39 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 28, 38–39, 40–41, 62, 98, 113, 116, 120.

40 *al-Aḥādith al-'awālī min Juz' Ḥasan ibn 'Arafa al-'Abdī riwāyat shaykh al-islām al-ḥāfiẓ Ibn Taymiyya intiqā' al-imām al-ḥāfiẓ Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī*, 31–49. For al-Dhahabī's statement: "I have studied with him the section of Ibn 'Arafa more than once", see Bori, "A new source for the biography of Ibn Taymiyya", 347.

of transmission of his forty *ḥadīths*, which amounted to a *mashyakha* for Ibn Taymiyya. Specifically, this *mashyakha* presented forty of Ibn Taymiyya's most distinguished chains together with the text of the *ḥadīth*. *Mashyakhas* in this format were quite widespread. They conveniently allowed for the composition and transmission of somebody's best chains in a quick and handy way, and similarly allowed a swift transmission and reception of such materials.⁴¹

Ibn Taymiyya's forty *ḥadīth* appear more than once in *al-Radd al-wāfir*. We learn when and where they were read, and by whom, and the collection thus acquires a life previously unknown. Moreover, being the object of a *mashyakha* also meant for a transmitter – Ibn Taymiyya in this case – to be at the centre of considerable respect. Apart from al-Wānī, also a certain Ibn al-Fakhr al-Dimashqī (d. 732/1332) was said to have collected “for the shaykh Taqī al-Dīn a selection of his elevated transmissions”.⁴² All this conveys a profile of Ibn Taymiyya as an appreciated *ḥadīth* transmitter.

The auditing records and licenses transcribed by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn are many and detailed.⁴³ They tell us where, when, what, to whom and from whom Ibn Taymiyya audited or transmitted a certain work. The transmissions of Ibn Taymiyya which appear most frequently in *al-Radd al-wāfir* are the following: The *Juzʾ* of Ibn ʿArafa and the *mashyakha* just mentioned above, Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*,⁴⁴ the *Six Books* and Aḥmad's *Musnad*,⁴⁵ a selection (*muntaqā*) of one hundred traditions from al-Buḥārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* including the latter's *thulāthiyyāt* (chains of three transmitters). Apart from a variety of elevated *isnāds*,⁴⁶ some lesser-known collections are also mentioned.⁴⁷ On the whole, these *samāʿāt* attest to Ibn Taymiyya's participation in the local culture of *ḥadīth* transmission, especially with respect to the transmission of elevated *isnāds* such as the *thulāthiyyāt* of Bukhārī just mentioned above, the so called *Ghaylāniyyāt* and the elevated chains of the *Musnad* of al-Ḥārith b. Abī Usāma (d. 282/895–96).⁴⁸ The *Ghaylāniyyāt* being a popular collection of traditions with chains of four

41 For a definition of *mashyakha*, see a al-Kattānī (d. 1962), *Fihris al-fahāris*, i, 67–68, ii, 624. Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 192–208 discusses the proliferation and functions of this specifically *ḥadīth*-related literary genre.

42 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 105.

43 See note 32.

44 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 29, 101 where Ibn Taymiyya is one of the seven *shaykhs* who conducted the final reading (*khatam*) of Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*.

45 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 101.

46 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 111, 112.

47 For instance, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 42, 46, 81, 102, 130.

48 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 48, 130.

links, of which Ibn Taymiyya produced his own selection. The Sessions where he transmitted them were very well attended.⁴⁹

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn thus discloses a hidden world of auditing meetings that depict Ibn Taymiyya as involved in the local transmission of *ḥadīth*. In so doing, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn shows that Ibn Taymiyya was a committed transmitter. It is worth noting that his many biographical accounts, while emphasising his outstanding knowledge of *ḥadīth*, do not usually mention such ordinary transmissions, preferring the more sensational aspects of his life. In *al-Radd al-wāfir*, on the other hand, Ibn Taymiyya steps out of the extra-ordinary aura that is typical for his biographies and becomes part of an urban texture of *ḥadīth* transmission, together with the devotional, moral and social import that derive from it.

Put otherwise, *The Ample Refutation* promotes a normalisation of Ibn Taymiyya; on one hand by passing over the contentious legal and theological issues that distinguished his thought and life, on the other hand by bringing in his participation in the culture of *ḥadīth* transmission that was so intense at his time. By elaborating the specific contents attached to the honorific title of a *shaykh al-islām*, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn demonstrates that Ibn Taymiyya, among others in his time, morally and intellectually met the standards for such an award, and thus indicated that it was nonsense to charge him with *kufṛ*.

5 Conclusion

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was a voice of that grand and invaluable enterprise which was the transmission of the Prophet's legacy in the later middle period. He contributed to the rich set of ideas that scholars had been building since the fifth/eleventh century with the aim of reconceptualising the need for transmission in a time in which *ḥadīth* had been collected, written down, and sifted; a time in which some collections had reached the status of authoritative references and had become unsurpassable models of authenticity.

In the opening pages of *Iftitāḥ al-qārī li-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, a short apology of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, perhaps meant as the introduction to a commentary on al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* which is no longer extant, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn emphatically describes *ḥadīth* transmitters as "The lovers of the Messenger of God, the

49 Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 268–269. Al-Dhahabī also relates that Ibn Taymiyya transmitted the *Ghaylāniyyāt*; see Bori, "A new source for the biography of Ibn Taymiyya", 337f. (Arabic text).

chevaliers of religion, protectors of Islām, custodians of the Law”,⁵⁰ a conclusion he reaches after unfolding a cascade of traditions where the mission of “the people of *ḥadīth*” is invested with a variety of highly symbolic meanings.⁵¹ He qualifies *ḥadīth* scholars as the “Successors of the Prophet” (*khulafā’ rasūl allāh*), God’s “Substitutes” (*abdāl*) on earth, and His “friends” (*awliyā’ li-llāh*); and as those who will divert affliction (*al-balā’*) from the community with their search for *ḥadīth* (*bi-riḥlat aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*). They are the group (*firqā nājiyya*) that will be saved on the Last Day among the 73 (doctrinal) groups, and the guardians (*ḥurrās*) of the earth.⁵² In short, the transmission of the Prophet’s legacy is invested with a dense set of symbolic promises – guidance, protection and salvation – that make it an indispensable task.

Despite his divergence with Ibn Taymiyya on some of the latter’s most typical battlefields, *mawlid* and *ziyāra* in particular, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn somehow rehabilitated the controversial Ḥanbalī scholar. Most importantly, he rescued all those who acknowledged that Ibn Taymiyya deserved the honorific of *shaykh al-islām*. He did this both by avoiding delving into any controversial Taymiyyan issues and by reporting materials that shed light on Ibn Taymiyya’s commitment and participation in the local culture of *ḥadīth* transmission. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was a respected and rather mainstream voice of the post-canonical *ḥadīth* culture of the time, and yet his ability to eschew polarities and embrace a strategy of accommodation is an interesting episode in the history of Ibn Taymiyya’s legacy. His standing by his vociferous Ḥanbalī colleague, as well as the texture of his work as a whole, cannot be understood without taking his scholarly and devotional commitment to the Prophets’ legacy into account.

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50 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Iftitāḥ al qārī*, 329.

51 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Iftitāḥ al qārī*, 323–328.

52 *Ibid.*

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