Historiography in the Service of the *Muftī*: Ibn Taymiyya on the Origins and Fallacies of *Ziyārāt*

Daniella Talmon-Heller
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Beer Sheva, Israel
talmond@bgu.ac.il

Abstract

This essay demonstrates Ibn Taymiyya's engagement of historiography in *iftā'*. It draws upon *fatwā*s on pilgrimage to Ascalon, travel to shrines of al-Ḥusayn in Ascalon and Cairo, and visits to Jerusalem and Hebron. Ibn Taymiyya weaves sophisticated historical narratives into his legal reasoning against visiting tombs of prophets and Ahl al-Bayt. He exposes lacunas, contradictions and unreasonable assertions in truisms about bodies of prophets and saints and their cults. He argues against *ziyāra* to such sites, blaming Shīʿīs for spreading the innovation at a particularly vulnerable time for Islam. His attack on notions of the religious merits of Jerusalem and of *murābaṭa* hinges upon his reconstruction of the history the Dome of the Rock and of the Islamic frontier. History leads him to stress the temporality of territorial definitions and their dependence on context. His argumentation resonates in works of later writers, demonstrating the continuing relevance of his *fatwā*s.

Keywords

Resolved to explain the full implications of the well-known prophetic *ḥadīth*, "*lā tashuddū' al-riḥāl illā ilā thalātha masājid* (you shall only set out for three mosques),"[1] Ibn Taymiyya (661-728/1263-1328) argues that the prohibition

---

1   On this oft-quoted *ḥadīth*, see Meir J. Kister, "'You Shall Only Set Out for Three Mosques,'

applies not only to mosques, but also to other places to which Muslims may want to travel for the purpose of pious visitation. He lists sites associated with the revelation of the word of God (such as Mt. Sinai and the cave of Hira), caves and mountains connected to the lives of prophets, the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad and tombs of other prophets, and erstwhile garrison towns (*thughūr*).[2] He bases this inclusive interpretation on multiple grounds: additional prophetic *ḥadīth*s, Qurʾānic verses, the principle of distinguishing oneself from Jews, Christians and heretics (*mukhālafat ahl-al-kitāb wa-l-mushrikīn*),[3] the consensus of most legal authorities, the lack of sound *ḥadīth* claiming otherwise, and the syntax of "*lā tashuddū…*" (i.e. *al-ithtithnāʾ al-mufragh*; exclusion based on omission).[4] In his polemics against setting out for the *thughūr*, he takes up the glasses of the historian, offering succinct presentations of the development of the Islamic empire.

Ibn Taymiyya's strong opposition to *ziyāra*s was far from accepted at the time, and encountered reservations not only from rank-and-file Muslims, but also from religious scholars. Many *ʿulamāʾ* of the Ayyubid and early Mamluk period criticized their contemporaries for improper behavior in cemeteries and mausolea, but they did not express similar objections to the visitation of graves. Some of them engaged in *ziyāra*s, and regarded certain aspects of the practice as meritorious.[5] Ibn Taymiyya, therefore, wrote more than 100 *fatwā*s and treatises dedicated to polemics against the veneration of tombs and visits to shrines for an audience of learned colleagues,[6] as much as for common practitioners.[7] His work on those issues has drawn the attention of modern

---

A Study of an Early Tradition," *Le Muséon* 82 (1969), 173-96. The three mosques are, of course, al-Masjid al-Ḥarām (Mecca), Masjid al-Nabī (Medina) and al-Masjid al-Aqṣā (Jerusalem). Ibn Taymiyya acknowledges the special recompense for prayer in those places, using an unusual argument, i.e. that they were built by the prophets Abraham, Solomon and Muḥammad, who explicitly called for travel to their mosques for the sake of prayer. See Niels H. Olesen, *Culte des saints et pèlerinages chez Ibn Taymiyya* (Paris: Libr. orientaliste P. Geuthner, 1991), 201; Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, ed. ʿĀmir al-Jazzār and Anwar al-Bāz, 37 vols. (Riyad: Dār al-Wafāʾ, 1418/1997), 27:140-41.

2   Ibid., 65, 69, 80.

3   E.g. Ibid., 233, 244, 257; see Ibn Taymiyya's *Iqtidāʾ al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm li-Mukhālafat Aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm*, trans. in Muhammad U. Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion* (The Hague: De Gruyter Mouton, 1976).

4   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:121-56.

5   See Daniella Talmon-Heller, "Graves, Relics and Sanctuaries: The Evolution of Syrian Sacred Topography," *ARAM* 19 (2007), 601-20, esp. 611.

6   See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:109-18.

7   On Ibn Taymiyya's accessibility to laymen and his enthusiasm for educating the public, see Livnat Holtzman, "The Bedouin Who Asked Questions: The Later Ḥanbalites and the Revival of the Myth of Abū Razīn," in *Islamic Philosophy from the 12th to the 14th Century*, ed. Stephan Conermann & Abdelkader Al Ghouz (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2018), 439, 449-51.

scholars as well. Muhammad Memon, Christopher Taylor and Niels Olesen have studied the corpus I am addressing, focusing on Ibn Taymiyya's attack on faulty practices, and on his theological arguments: namely, that the cult of saints, and especially the visitation of graves, negates the fundamental Islamic principle of *tawḥīd* and contradicts the *sharīʿa*.[8] I will concentrate on Ibn Taymiyya's historical reasoning, and compare some of his arguments to those of other Mamluk scholars, better known as historians, and to those raised by present-day historians of the Middle East. Highlighting the ways in which this original thinker drew upon historical precedents and narratives in his legal reasoning in matters of religious piety, I shall argue that Ibn Taymiyya reached some bold conclusions.

"Ibn Taymiyya was little interested in history and wrote none," writes Robert Irwin in an essay on Mamluk historiography.[9] Indeed, in modern scholarship, Ibn Taymiyya is hardly ever regarded as an historian,[10] even though some of his early biographers recognized his learning in this field. Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), for example, says that Ibn Taymiyya's knowledge of history and biographies was truly amazing ("*wa-maʿrifatuhu bi-l-taʾrīkh wa-l-siyar fa-ʿajab ʿajīb*").[11] To the best of my knowledge, only one modern essay is fully dedicated to Ibn Taymiyya's concern with history: *Min maʿālim minhaj Ibn Taymiyya fī muʿālajat qaḍāyā al-taʾrīkh min khilāl kitābihi al-fatāwā* (Ibn Taymiyya's method of dealing with historical issues in his *fatwā*s). The author, Saʿd Mūsā al-

---

8   Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*; Olesen, *Culte*; Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra & the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). See also Caterina Bori, "Theology, Politics, Society: The Missing Link," in *Ubi sumus? Quo Vademus? Mamlūk Studies – State of the Art*, ed. Stephan Connerman (Bonn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 69-70.

9   Irwin does acknowledge that "during his lifetime and for some time afterwards, his [Ibn Taymiyya's] students dominated history writing in Syria." See Robert Irwin, "Mamluk History and Historians," in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, ed. Allen Roger and D.S. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 161.

10   On Ibn Taymiyya's image in western scholarship, see Ovamir Anjum, *Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Moment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9-13; Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed, *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3; Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer, eds. *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 13; and Elliott A. Bazzano, "Ibn Taymiyya, Radical Polymath, Part 1: Scholarly Perceptions," *Religion Compass* 9:4 (2015), 100-01.

11   Saʿd Ibn al-Mūsā al-Mūsā, *Min Maʿālim Minhaj Ibn Taymiyya fī Muʿālajat Qaḍāyā al-Taʾrīkh min khilāl Kitābihi al-Fatāwā* (Riyad: Dār al-Qāsim, 1428/2010), 8. This phrase was used, verbatim, by several later authors. Maqrīzī uses the phrase "*tabaḥḥur fī ʿulūm al-taʾrīkh*," to refer to Ibn Taymiyya's profound knowledge of history, and al-ʿUmarī claims that he was most learned in this field (*min aʿraf al-nās bi-l-taʾrīkh*). See Muḥammad ʿA. Shams and ʿAlī b. M. al-ʿImrān, *Al-Jāmiʿ li-Sīrat Shaykh al-Islām* (Mecca: Dār ʿIlm al-Fawāʾid 1422/2001-2), 318, 398.

Mūsā, lists Ibn Taymiyya's references to historical evidence and explains his use of earlier sources[12] and his methodology of historical investigation.[13] Al-Mūsā also highlights Ibn Taymiyya's interest in comparisons. He contrasts Umayyad caliphs and ʿAbbasid caliphs, the Umayyads in al-Andalus and the Fatimids, the era of the Prophet and his own times, Hulagu's attitude towards the Muslims and Nebuchadnezzar's attitude towards the Israelites, the quality of the works of Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī versus that of other Sufi authorities of his time.[14]

Livnat Holtzman and Yahya Michot have noted Ibn Taymiyya's interest in the history of religion. In his *fatwā* on *taʿṭīl al-ṣifāt* (divesting God of his attributes), for example, Ibn Taymiyya explains that this misguided idea comes from sources foreign to Islam that became available in translation to Arabic in the lifetime of Jaʿd b. Dirham and his student al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān (executed in 128/746).[15] A short reference to Ibn Taymiyya's use of historical argumentation in legal reasoning is found in Qamaruddin Khan's book on Ibn Taymiyya's political thought. Khan points out that Ibn Taymiyya's objection to rebellion (*baghī*) is based on his reading of narratives about rebellions against rulers of the early Islamic state. Those include al-Ḥusayn's insurrection against Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya, the rebellion against ʿAbd al-Malik in Iraq, Ibn al-Muhallab's rebellion against his father in Khurasan, Abū Muslim's rebellion against the Umayyads in Khurasan and the rebellions against al-Manṣūr in Medina and in Basra. Based on his investigation of those cases, Ibn Taymiyya concludes that none ended well, "either for religion, or for the world," and for this reason taking up arms against a Muslim ruler, so long as the ruler is a Muslim who prays, is not allowed.[16] According to Khan, "by using true historical facts," Ibn Taymiyya also

---

12 According to al-Mūsā, Ibn Taymiyya deals with the soundness of historical sources by investigating the reliability of their authors, their time and proximity to the events they describe, and – at least in one case – the possibility of fraudulent documentation (al-Mūsā, *Minhaj*, 56). Some of the authors he trusts are Ibn Saʿd, al-Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, al-Qushayrī, Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn al-Mubārak and Ibn Ḥanbal.

13 Al-Mūsā, *Minhaj*, 12-17, 24-25.

14 Ibid., 49-50, 59.

15 Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Fatāwā al-Ḥamāwiyya al-Kubrā*, ed. Ḥamid b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Tawījrī (Riyad: Dār al-Ṣamīʿī, 1998/1419), 211, 243-60. See also his attempts to date *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* by referring to the construction of Cairo, Byzantine military successes and other historical milestones, noted in Yahya Michot, "Misled and Misleading…Yet Central to their Influence: Ibn Taymiyya's Views on the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ," in *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: An Introduction*, ed. Nader al-Bizri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 140-44. I owe these references to Livnat Holtzman and Rodrigo Adem.

16 Qamaruddin Khan, *The Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyya* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1992), 167-68. In a different discussion of *baghī* Ibn Taymiyya accuses the alleged founder of the Sabāʾiyya, ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Sabāʾ (rather than Ṭalḥa and Muʿāwiya), for the rebellion that

proves that the Rāshidūn regime was the ideal Islamic polity, and that it is impossible for any ruler to surpass them.[17]

Zayde Antrim, who has studied another neglected aspect of Ibn Taymiyya's work – geography – focuses on the historical circumstances under which he issued his legal opinions. Antrim argues that Ibn Taymiyya deviates from his usual position against the attribution of sanctity to places (save those explicitly mentioned in the Qurʾān) and ascribed special virtues to Syria. Acutely aware of contemporary historical circumstances, especially the threat of a Mongol assault, Ibn Taymiyya had to enlist the Mamluks to defend Syria, and this need dictated, as it were, a "wartime statement of patriotism."[18]

In a short essay entitled "Law and Historiography," Nimrod Hurvitz notes that the inclusion of historical data in legal discussions is especially common in the domains of administrative and public law. He shows that jurists had agreed that the classification of land for the purpose of taxation was dependent on its mode of conquest by the Muslims (ʿunwat[an] – by force, or ṣulḥ[an] – by agreement), and therefore jurists had to depend on the narratives of historians of the early Islamic empire.[19] The fact that those narratives often disagree with each other and lack the sanctity and authority attributed to Qurʾān and ḥadīth, Hurvitz argues, gave jurists much-desired flexibility in the formation of their legal doctrines.

Overall, the employment of historical narratives in Islamic legal reasoning has received very little attention in modern scholarship. Its 'reverse' – the employment of fatwās as repositories of facts and narratives about the past – is much more current among present-day historians of Muslim societies. Despite

---

led to the assassination of ʿUthmān in Medina in 35/655. Sharif explains that Ibn Taymiyya absolves the above-mentioned Companions from the sin of baghī in order to preserve their superior reputation and position as mujtahids (Mohd F. Bin Mohd Sharif, "The Concept of Jihad and Baghiy with Special Reference to Ibn Taymiyya," PhD diss., Edinburgh University, 2007, 187-90).

17   Khan, Political Thought, 92.

18   Zayde Antrim, "The Politics of Place in the Works of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī," Mamlūk Studies Review 18 (2014-15), 97-111. Ibn Taymiyya recognizes the merit of Syria (bilād al-Shām) based on God's blessings (baraka) alluded to in several Qurʾānic verses (Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā, 21:70-71, 81, 7:130-33, 34:17, 27:1), but also mentions traditions regarding Syria as the abode of the prophets, a land protected by the angels and the scene of future eschatological events (Olesen, Culte, 204-05).

19   Nimrod Hurvitz, "Law and Historiography: Legal Typology of Lands and the Arab Conquests," in The Law Applied: Contextualizing the Islamic Sharīʿa, ed. Peri Bearman, W. Heinrichs, and B.G. Weiss (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 360-73; Shihāb al-Dīn Al-Qarāfī, The Criterion for Distinguishing Legal Opinions from Judicial Rulings and the Administrative Acts of Judges and Rulers, trans. Mohamed H. Fadel (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2017), 206-12.

well-known methodological problems,[20] modern historians use *fatwā*s when searching for information on topics such as economic arrangements,[21] gender relations,[22] familial structures,[23] religious life,[24] social institutions[25] and the status of non-Muslims,[26] as well as on worldviews, common anxieties and shared mentalities.[27]

Returning to Ibn Taymiyya, I will begin with a short exposition of his theological arguments against aspects of saint and tomb veneration. First, he warns, such worship "is an imitation of the ways of the polytheists (*mushrikūn*)... and constitutes the veneration of the created (*al-makhlūq*) [rather than the creator]." Lingering by graves, touching and kissing tombstones and praying in cemeteries resemble polytheistic practices (*al-shirk wa-ʿibādat al-awthān*), and encroach upon *tawḥīd* (the unity of God).[28] He also argues at length against the popular notion that supplication (*duʿāʾ*) is more effective if performed by tombs. He asserts that even if this appears to be the case, the fact that a Muslim's request was granted after he had prayed by a tomb provides no

---

20   Legal responsa may be purely didactic, or 'academic' (that is, designed to impress the reader with the rhetorical and legal acumen of the *muftī*), based on partial and biased information, or too general to give an idea of specific historical circumstances. On these issues see, for example, Muhammad K. Masud, Brinkley Messick, and David S. Powers, "Muftis, Fatwas and Islamic Legal Interpretation," in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and their Fatwas*, ed. M.K. Masud, B. Messick, and D.S. Powers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 22-23; Amalia Zomeno, "The Stories in the *Fatwā*s and the *Fatwā*s in History," in *Narratives of Truth in Islamic Law*, ed. B. Dupret, B. Drieskens, and A. Moors (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 25-49.

21   David S. Powers, "*Fatwā*s as Sources for Legal and Social History: A Dispute over Endowment Revenues from Fourteenth-Century Fez," *Al-Qantara* 11 (1990), 295-342.

22   S.E. Tucker, "And God Knows Best: The *Fatwā* as a Source for the History of Gender in the Arab world," in *Beyond the Exotic: Women's Histories in Islamic Societies*, ed. Amira El-Azhary Sonbol (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 165-79; Maya Shatzmiller, "Aspects of Women's Participation in the Economic Life of Medieval Islam: Occupations and Mentalities," *Arabica* 35 (1988), 36-58.

23   Herald Motzki, "Child Marriage in Seventeenth-Century Palestine," in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftīs and Their Fatwās*, ed. M.K. Masud, D.S. Powers and B. Messick (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 129-40.

24   See, for example Daniella Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 47, 50, 59-60.

25   See Manuela Marin, "Learning in Mosques in al-Andalus," in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftīs and Their Fatwās*, ed. M.K. Masud, D.S. Powers and B. Messick (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 47-54.

26   Seth Ward, "Sabbath Observance and Conversion to Islam in the 14th Century – a *Fatwā* by Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 2 (1985), 47-54.

27   See, for example, Megan H. Reid, *Law and Piety in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 117 n60, 141.

28   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:48.

evidence of an inherent connection between the two, nor to the permissibility of the practice. Using logical reasoning, he exposes the absurdity of seeking intermediaries while appealing to God: if a plea is proper and justified, intercession is unnecessary. If one pursues something improper, why expect righteous Muslims to advance the case?[29]

Ibn Taymiyya insists that, according to the *sharīʿa*, the only places that Muslims ought to seek out with the intention of prayer are mosques and sites along the pilgrimage route to Mecca (*mashāʿir al-ḥajj*). Deliberate travel to tombs for the purpose of visitation (*ziyārat al-qubūr*), prayer or invocation is reprehensible, and merits no reward. He argues against the religious merit or even permissibility of deliberate travel (*safar*) for the purpose of worship at other places considered holy.[30] Addressing the Muslim who feels that his need has been satisfied after having uttered invocations by a hallowed tomb, Ibn Taymiyya explains that God rewards the effort involved in supplication, rather than the location in which the supplication is performed. Praying next to a cross would have had exactly the same outcome![31] Nonetheless, in some places (or at some stage of his life; unfortunately the corpus is not dated) he demonstrates an understanding of human psychology, acknowledging what Memon has called "popular belief in the spirituality of location and its efficacy,"[32] and the human need of intercession by intermediaries considered close to God.[33] Likewise, he is fully aware of the misguided reasoning that leads people to suppose that what seems to be effective must be licit (including the obviously forbidden sorcery, astral worship and soothsaying).[34] Finally, he acknowledges that inasmuch as the sight of graves makes men mindful of death and fearful of the hereafter, grave visitation is permissible and may constitute a "*ziyāra sharʿiyya*."[35]

Turning to historical precedents, Ibn Taymiyya examines the conduct of the rightly-guided caliphs and other Companions of the Prophet. He claims that they did not travel to the tombs of great prophets such as Abraham, to the tombs of other righteous men, or to Mt. Sinai (al-Ṭūr), "the blessed place and

---

29   Taylor, *Vicinity,* 175.
30   Ibid., 169-73. Ibn Taymiyya deals at length with the legal definition of travel (*safar*) for the sake of visiting the tombs of prophets and righteous men, and whether one may shorten obligatory prayers during such travel (his answer is negative), vow to perform such visits, or vow to visit Jerusalem (Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:7, 8, 14, 22, 184, 188, 204).
31   Ibid., 100.
32   Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, 14. See also Talmon-Heller, "Graves," 602.
33   Taylor, *Vicinity*, 174-75; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:44-47.
34   Ibid., 97, 99-101; Taylor, *Vicinity*, 179.
35   Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, 15; Taylor, *Vicinity*, 188-91.

the holy valley where God spoke to Moses, as mentioned in the Qur'ān [79:15]."[36] He argues that even under stressful circumstances, as during a severe drought in the time of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (12-23/634-644), they did not go to visit the tomb of the Prophet to seek his intervention. Under ʿUmar's leadership, the community turned in supplication directly and solely to God. The lesson Ibn Taymiyya draws from this historical example is supported, typically, by ḥadīths, e.g., the Prophet's plea, "do not make my tomb an idol that is worshipped" (quoted from al-Muwaṭṭa' of Mālik b. Anas), or "do not turn my tomb into a mosque" (quoted from the Ṣaḥīḥs of al-Bukhārī and Muslim).[37]

ʿUmar's wariness of tomb worship was demonstrated again, according to Ibn Taymiyya, immediately after the conquest of Tustar, where the perfectly preserved body of the Prophet Daniel was discovered. ʿUmar ordered that the prophet be reburied by night, in one of thirteen identical graves he had instructed to dig by day. In order to eliminate the development of a cult at the site, ʿUmar commanded that all thirteen mounds should be leveled to the ground.[38] Ibn Taymiyya concludes with a logical deduction: "If travel to al-Ṭūr Mountain... is not advised, how much the more so travel to other locations [i.e., less important locations, such as the tomb of Daniel in Tustar]."[39]

In order to assess the permissibility and religious merit of travel to frontier towns (thughūr), Ibn Taymiyya investigates the history of the Islamic frontier. His survey begins with the establishment of the first Muslim stronghold in Medina in 1/622 and ends in the second half of the fourth/tenth century, when the Muslims ruled the Hijaz, Syria and Iraq, but still struggled with the Byzantines on the sea and on the borders of Anatolia. He writes:

> A place might be a frontier zone (thaghr) at one time but not another. It might be an abode of Islam and righteousness at one time, and an abode of apostasy and infidelity at another, just as Mecca was an abode of war and apostasy when Medina became an abode of belief, a destination for migration (hijra), and a place for those who guard Islamic territory (ribāṭ). After its conquest, Mecca became an abode of Islam, and Medina was no longer an abode of hijra and ribāṭ, as it had been before the conquest... while the far ends of the Hijaz, bordering the territories of war, Syria and Iraq, became frontier zones. Once the Muslims had conquered Syria and Iraq, however, the frontier moved to the Syrian coastal plain (sawāḥil

---

36   Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā, 27:65, 81.
37   Taylor, Vicinity, 180.
38   Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā, 27:97; Taylor, Vicinity, 183.
39   Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā, 27:136.

al-Shām). Ascalon and Acre and their surroundings became the *thughūr* of Syria, and Abadan became the *thaghr* of Iraq. This is why early Muslim authorities mention Abadan and Ascalon so often: they were frontier towns, as was Tartus, when Muslims ruled it. Once seized by the infidels, however, the towns adjacent to the territory of the enemy around Aleppo became frontier zones instead.[40]

All in all, Ibn Taymiyya lists thirteen localities along the Syrian coast and inland (from north to south) – Amad, Malatya, Jabal Lukkam, Adhana, Tarsus, Sis, Masisa, Tripoli, Mt. Lebanon, Beirut, Acre, Ascalon and Gaza. On other frontiers, he mentions Qazwin, Abadan and Alexandria.[41] He claims that as long as these towns played a role in the defense of Muslim lands travel to them and sojourn in them was even more meritorious than the *ḥajj*, and better than sojourn in Mecca and Medina.[42]

> Ascalon was a frontier town of the Muslims, and righteous Muslims would reside there for the sake of *ribāṭ* [defending Muslim territory] in the way of God. This is true also of similar places, such as Mt. Lebanon, Alexandria and Abadan, and their like in Iraq and Qazwin and other frontier zones. The righteous would go out to such places for the sake of *ribāṭ* in the way of God,[43] according to a verified saying of the Prophet in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of *Muslim*, as transmitted by Salmān al-Fārisī. "One day and one

---

40   Ibid., 136-37. The Muslims lost Tarsus, al-Massisa and Adana to the Byzantines in 354/965. See *EI²*, s.v. Ṭarsūs (Clifford E. Bosworth). See also the annotated English translation, in Yahya Michot, *Muslims under non-Muslim Rule. Ibn Taymiyya* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2006), 76-84.

41   Olesen, *Culte*, 85, 250; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā* 27:32-35, 81-82.

42   On the history of the coastal frontier of Palestine and its glorification in Islamic traditions, see Shelomo D. Goitein, "The Sanctity of Jerusalem and Palestine in Early Islam," in *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, ed. S.D. Goitein (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 135-48; Amikam Elad, "The Coastal Cities of Palestine during the Early Middle Ages," *The Jerusalem Cathedra* 2 (1982), 146-67 (with a map listing more than twenty posts along the Syrian coast). See also Yumna Masarwa, "Transforming the Mediterranean from a Highway to a Frontier: The Coastal Cities of Palestine during the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods," in *Le Proche-Orient de Justinien aux Abbassides. Peuplement et dynamiques spatiales*, ed. Antoine Borrut *et al.* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 158-67; and Hassan S. Khalilieh, "The Ribâṭ System and its Role in Coastal Navigation," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42 (1999), 212-25. Khalilieh lists twenty posts along the Palestinian coast alone, based on textual evidence and archaeological findings.

43   Text: "*wa-dhālika li-anna al-ribāṭ huwa min jins al-jihād... wa-faḍāʾil al-jihād wa-l-ribāṭ kathīra*" (Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:33). The term *ribāṭ* occurs in Q. 8:6 and 3:200, and in many *ḥadīth*s.

night spent in *ribāṭ* in the way of God are better [viz., more meritorious] than an entire month of fasting and keeping vigil by night; whoever dies as a defender of the Muslim frontier, dies the death of the warrior of *jihād*...[44]

The continued sanctification of such places, and religiously motivated travel to them after they have ceased functioning as [Sunni] outposts, however, should be avoided altogether, according to Ibn Taymiyya.[45] To clarify his point, he narrates the political history of Syria, as follows:

> The Syrian coast was the frontier zone of Islam [only] until the early fourth [tenth] century... at the beginning of the fourth century the caliphate was in turmoil, the treacherous Shi'is and hypocrites (*al-rāfiḍa wa-l-munāfiqūn*)[46] gained power and rule in Egypt, in the Maghrib, in the eastern countries and in Syria...

Hence, according to Ibn Taymiyya, some 300 years prior to his lifetime and that of his petitioners, the Syrian *thughūr* had lost their elevated religious status. Formerly, this status had been based on the strategic value of those sites under specific historical circumstances – the threat of enemy raids from the sea, and the settlement of pious Muslim *murābiṭūn* (defenders)[47] – rather than on any inherent characteristic of the place (*lā li-ajl khāṣṣiyyat dhālika al-makān*). Ibn Taymiyya completes his survey of the vicissitudes of the Levant with the Crusader period, adding that "afterwards the Christians conquered most of the Syrian lands... until God rejoiced in the rule of the kings of the Sunna, Nūr al-Dīn and Saladin and their like, who redeemed Syria from the Christians."[48]

---

44   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:81-82.

45   Olesen, *Culte*, 111.

46   On the term *rāfiḍa* (allegedly coined by the Prophet to warn against future partisans of ʿAlī who are polytheists, and used by Sunni authors to designate Shi'is, Fatimids and/or Nizaris), see Etan Kohlberg, "The Term '*Rāfiḍa*' in Imāmī Shi'i Usage," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99 (1977), 677-79; Suleiman A. Mourad, and James E. Lindsay. *The Intensification and Reorientation of Sunni Jihad Ideology in the Crusader Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 29.

47   The early caliphs encouraged the settlement of the coastal towns and forts by granting land, houses and increased payment for soldiers. The religious merit attributed to *ribāṭ* drew pious visitors and settlers. See Elad, "Coastal cities," 150-52; Hassan S. Khalilieh, "Arsuf and the Defense Pattern of Jund Filasṭīn during the Years 640-1099: *Ribāṭ*s and *Miḥras*es," in *The Encounter between Crusaders and Muslims in Palestine*, ed. Israel Roll, O. Tal, and M. Vinter (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meʾuhad, 2007) [in Hebrew], 125-42.

48   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27: 34. Ibn Taymiyya praises Saladin for defeating the Fatimids in Egypt, and he praises Niẓām al-Mulk and scholars who surrounded him for

Ibn Taymiyya insists that two parameters determine the status of territory, both of them temporal: (1) its role in the protection of *Dār al-Islām* and the spread of proper (i.e. Sunni) Islamic sovereignty, and (2) the status of its inhabitants (*aḥwāl ahlihā*) based on their religious practices (*aʿmāl*). Sanctity – he uses the roots *f.ḍ.l, sh.r.f, q.d.s* and *ʿa.ẓ.m* – is neither inherent to a place nor permanent.[49] He reiterates this theme with regards to Mecca (see above) and the Holy Land (*al-arḍ al-muqaddasa*), which – he reminds us – was referred to as "the abode of the evil-doers (*dār al-fāsiqīn*)" when it was settled by the "giant people" (*al-Jabbārīn*, Q 5: 20-22).[50] He repeats the idea that status of territory is determined by the religious practices of its inhabitants in his famous Mardin *fatwa*.[51] "A land may be praised (*yuḥmadu*) or disparaged (*yudhammu*) at different times, depending on the status (*ḥāl*) of its inhabitants," explains Ibn Taymiyya. He ends this *fatwā* with another aphorism attributed to Salmān al-Fārisī: "Land does not sanctify anybody, but a man is sanctified by his own deeds." To edify his readers, he adds some historical information about his source. He claims that this aphorism is taken from Salmān's correspondence with Abū al-Dardāʾ, who had become Salmān's 'brother' in Medina according to the *muʾākhāt* ('brotherhood') arrangement between pairs of *muhājir*s and *anṣār*. He dates the specific letter to Salmān's service as governor in Iraq under the caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and to Abū al-Dardāʾ's sojourn in Syria.[52]

Ibn Taymiyya continues by refuting the authenticity of shrines erected in honor of the severed head of the Prophet's grandson al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī in Ascalon, and later, almost 500 years after his killing, in Cairo. He asserts that it is well-known that the shrine in Ascalon was established under the rule of the fanatic and deceitful Fatimids, more than 430 (*hijrī*) years after the killing of al-Ḥusayn on 10 Muḥarram (al-ʿĀshūrāʾ) 61/680 in Karbala. No scholar with integrity – neither an expert on *ḥadīth*, on Cairo, on history, or on genealogy (of Quraysh or of the Hāshimīs) – can claim otherwise. Here, Ibn Taymiyya

---

refuting Shiʿi heresies and re-establishing the Sunna (Anjum, *Politics*, 189-90). On Ibn Taymiyya's disparaging attitude towards the Fatimids, see Mourad and Lindsay, *Intensification*, 108-11.

49   Olesen, *Culte*, 210; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:82-83.

50   Q. 7:145. The giants who intimidated the Children of Israel and caused them to sin by refusing to enter the Holy Land correspond to the giants of Canaan (*nefilim* or *bnei ʿanaq* in Hebrew) mentioned by the spies in the biblical narrative. See Numbers, 13:28, 33.

51   Michot, *Muslims*, 65.

52   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:82-83. Giorgio Levi Della Vida dismisses as unsubstantiated all information on Salmān, whom he calls a "semi-legendary figure of early Islam." See *EI²*, s.v. Salmān al-Fārisī (Giorgio Levi Della Vida).

expresses his poor opinion of transmitters of historical anecdotes (*akhbāriyyūn*) who cite any liar or ignoramus, and his preference for transmitters of *ḥadīth* who choose their informants more carefully.[53] He casts doubt on the oft-repeated narrative about the triumphal procession from Karbala to Damascus, said to have been initiated by the governor of Kufa and commander of the Umayyad forces, ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād, after the tragic killing of al-Ḥusayn. Allegedly, the procession exhibited the hapless captives (mainly women) of Karbala, and brought the head of al-Ḥusayn, impaled on the edge of a spear, to the palace of the Umayyad caliph Yazīd.[54] Even though Ibn Taymiyya refers to Karbala as a "calamity" (*muṣība*) and declares al-Ḥusayn a "victim of injustice and martyr,"[55] he objects to the demonization of Yazīd:

> Clearly, the story told about the transfer of al-Ḥusayn's head to Yazīd and what was told about him, namely that he poked it with a stick, is a lie... There is no sound chain of transmission to support it, only a fragmented chain. According to more trustworthy reports, Yazīd expressed sorrow when he heard the news about the killing of al-Ḥusayn, and he cursed the people of Iraq... there is no basis to the claim that the head was transferred to Syria in the time of Yazīd, let alone afterwards.[56]

Relying on early sources that he does consider sound, however,[57] Ibn Taymiyya suggests that the head of the martyr was sent from Karbala to Medina, where it was buried in the cemetery of al-Baqīʿ.[58] He thereby dismisses, or ignores,

---

53   Al-Qarāfī refers to historical reports as *riwāyāt* (al-Qarāfī, *The Criterion*, 205-06). Al-Subkī expresses doubt regarding the reliability of historical sources, even of eyewitnesses, by pointing to disagreements between early reports on the conquest of Damascus, but refrains from accusing anyone of intentional lying. See Hurvitz, "Law and historiography," 368-69. Hurvitz argues that jurists were well-served by the "innate flexibility" and "softness" of historical narratives, in contrast to Prophetic traditions, which had acquired a much more authoritative status.

54   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:212.

55   Yahya Michot, "Ibn Taymiyya's Critique of Shīʿī Imāmology: Translation of Three Sections of his *Minhaj al-Sunna*," *The Muslim World* 114 (2014), 109-49, at 111.

56   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:253. See also al-Mūsā, *Minhaj*, 34-35.

57   Al-Mūsā, *Minhaj*, 24-25.

58   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:79, 207-08. Ibn Saʿd and al-Bukhārī make the same claim. See Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957), 5:238. Ibn Taymiyya identifies the cemetery of al-Baqīʿ and al-Qubba Mosque on the outskirts of Medina as places to which pilgrimage (*safar*) is prohibited, but a visit (*ziyāra*) is allowed, if one happens to be in Medina (Olesen, *Culte*, 43).

variant reports: that the head was buried in Damascus after Yazīd's death;[59] returned from Damascus to Karbala and buried there with the rest of Ḥusayn's body;[60] or taken to Najaf, Raqqa, Aleppo, or Merv.[61]

A rival claim was inscribed on a wooden *minbar* (pulpit) commissioned by the powerful Fatimid Armenian general and vizier Badr al-Dīn al-Jamālī in 484/1091 for a newly built shrine in Ascalon. The *minbar*, a masterpiece of Fatimid woodwork, is extant. Its inscription – eighteen lines in Kufic script – was published and translated into French and English by several specialists, most recently by Moshe Sharon.[62] It accuses "the evildoers" (*al-ẓālimūn*) of "hiding the head of our master (*mawlānā*), the *imām*, the martyr Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib" in a remote place, "in order to obliterate its divine light." Its [re]discovery "in the frontier town (*thaghr*) of Ascalon," (Badr al-Dīn obviously did not hold Ibn Taymiyya's view that Ascalon ceased to be a *thaghr* after it was lost to Sunni Islam and came under Shiʿi rule; nor did other Fatimid authors)[63] is attributed to a wonder (*muʿjiz*).[64] It is also described as a sign (*āya*) of heavenly grace for the Fatimid dynasty and a special favor for the vizier. As we have seen, Ibn Taymiyya sneers at Badr al-Jamālī's alleged discovery of the head, insisting that the relic could not have been buried there in total anonymity for 400 years and later surfaced in Shiʿi-ruled Ascalon. His dating of the Fatimid shrine, however, is strikingly close to that of Badr al-Jamālī's inscription.

---

59   See Stephennie Mulder, *The Shrines of the ʿAlids in Medieval Syria: Sunnis, Shiʿis, and the Architecture of Coexistence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 196-220; Daniella Talmon-Heller, B.Z. Kedar and Yitzhak Reiter, "Vicissitudes of a Sacred Relic: Construction, Destruction and Commemoration of Mashhad al-Ḥusayn in Ascalon," *Der Islam* 93 (2016), 182-215, at 185.

60   Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)*,* 192; *EI²*, s.v. Salmān al-Fārisī (Giorgio Levi Della Vida).

61   *EI²*, s.v. (al-)Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (Laura Veccia Vaglieri).

62   Moshe Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae*, 6 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997-2017), 1:154-59, 167-77; 5:28-38 (with some minor additions).

63   See, for example, the text of a Fatimid *khuṭba* of 969 CE (the year of the conquest of Egypt in Jiwa, Shainhool, trans., *Towards a Shiʿi Mediterranean Empire: Fatimid Egypt and the Founding of Cairo. The Reign of the Imam-caliph al-Muʿizz, from al-Maqrīzī's Itiʿazz al-Ḥunafāʾ* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 82. The phrase "*thaghr* Ascalon" appears also in an account about the embellishment of the shrine of Raʾs al-Ḥusayn three decades after its construction. See Fuʾād A. Sayyid, ed. *Nuṣūṣ min Akhbār Miṣr li-Ibn al-Maʾmūn al-Batāʾiḥī*, Cairo: Al-Maʿhad al-ʿIlmī al-Faransī li-l-Āthār al-Sharqiyya, 1983, 40. In the early twelfth century CE, the town was undeniably a frontier zone, bordering the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and constantly targeted by it.

64   On the 'rediscovery' of forgotten holy sites and relics, see Meri, *Cult*, 43-47. For other examples, see Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety*, 190-98.

In the summer of 548/1153, Fatimid Ascalon surrendered to the Franks after a seven-month siege. Retreating Muslims took the head of al-Ḥusayn from its mausoleum to a safe haven in Cairo, where a new *mashhad* was constructed in its honor.[65] Al-Maqrīzī (766-845/1365-1442) preserves descriptions of the rituals that were performed at that shrine until the fall of the Fatimid dynasty some twenty years later. He mentions lamentations, ritual slaughter and banquets on the day of al-ʿAshūrāʾ; sermons, the reading of the text of ʿAlī's designation as the Prophet's successor, prayer, and a caliphal procession on the day of Ghadīr Khumm (the anniversary of this alleged designation).[66]

The veneration of the head of al-Ḥusayn did not end with the return of Sunni hegemony to Egypt in the 1170s. To the contrary, the *mashhad* became an extremely popular shrine, as depicted enthusiastically in the memoirs of the Sunni Maghribī traveler Ibn Jubayr, who spent some time in Cairo in 1183,[67] and in multiple later accounts (culminating, in my view, with a moving description of a visit to the shrine of Amina, the protagonist of Naguib Mahfouz's 1956 trilogy, *Palace Walk*).[68]

Curiously, the empty *mashhad* in Ascalon continued to attract visitors, despite the transfer of the relic that had sanctified it, and – four decades later – the transfer of its beautiful *minbar* to the sanctuary of the Patriarchs in Hebron (al-Ḥaram al-Ibrāhīmī). This is why Ibn Taymiyya attacks this cult so vehemently, using his knowledge of the past. He points to the improbability of |the superior knowledge of later informants over the wisdom, or admitted uncertainty, of early informants[69] (such as Abū Bakr b. Abī al-Dunyā, Abū al-

65   Daniel De Smet, "La Translation du Raʾs al-Ḥusayn au Caire Fatimide," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras II*, ed. Urban Vermuelen and D. De Smet (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 29-44, at 35-36.

66   Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawāʿiz wa-l-Iʿtibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-l-Āthār*, ed. Ayman F. al-Sayyid, 4 vols. (London: Muʾassasat al-Furqān li-l-Turāth al-Islāmī, 2002), 2: 408; Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 131-34, 202 n.49. On Shiʿi pilgrimage, see also Khalid Sindawi, "Visit to the Tomb of al-Husyan b. ʿAlī in Shiite Poetry: First to Fifth Centuries AH (8th-11th Centuries CE)," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37 (2006), 230-58.

67   Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, ed. W. Wright (Leiden: Brill, 1907), 45; idem, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, ed. and trans. R. J.C. Broadhurst (London: Cape, 1952), 36-37. Ibn Jubayr, who lists nineteen mausolea of the Prophet's family in Cairo, shows no awareness of the history of the shrine in honor of al-Ḥusayn. He is struck by its beauty and by the atmosphere of piety surrounding it.

68   Naguib Mahfouz, *Palace Walk*, trans. W.M. Hutchins (Cairo: Anchor, 1989 [1956]) 168-69.

69   This perplexing phenomenon is addressed with a touch of sarcasm by Michael Cook, who shows how historical data about the Prophet grow with the passage of time (Michael

Qāsim al-Baghawī) and of the later Abū al-Khaṭṭāb b. Diḥya, who "collected all the reports on al-Ḥusayn and his killing." Only late historians maintain the antiquity and authenticity of the tomb in Ascalon, stresses Ibn Taymiyya, while early and reliable authorities claim otherwise.[70] To support this point, he likens those later informants to an impostor who pretends to be an 'Alid *sharīf* (a descendant of the privileged 'nobility' of Islam), although it is well-known that the man's ancestors never made such a claim, or to someone who declares that any random tomb in some Muslim town is that of al-Ḥusayn or that of a prophet.[71]

Similarly, Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī (700-749/1301-1349), another Mamluk period scholar, articulates his skepticism with regards to the Fatimid identification of the site in Ascalon, as follows:

> It is most likely that the head never left Damascus after having been sent to Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya, to the seat of his government and that of the Umayyads. It is inconceivable (*min al-muḥāl*) that the head, which was intentionally brought to the ruler, would have been sent away... [in addition], a long time passed between the killing of al-Ḥusayn and the construction of the shrine in Ascalon.[72]

Al-'Umarī's preferred solution to the riddle of the whereabouts of the relic is the shrine at Bāb al-Farādīs in Damascus. Still, he also quotes the ninth-century *Akhbār al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, where it is suggested that the head was sent to Medina and buried there next to al-Ḥusayn's brother al-Ḥasan.[73] Ibn Taymiyya's student and admirer Ibn Kathīr is even more blunt: "They [the Fatimids] brought a head and placed it at the site of the above-mentioned mosque [Tāj al-Ḥusayn in Cairo] and said: this is the head of al-Ḥusayn. And the rumor got around and people came to believe it."[74]

Cook, *Muhammad*, Oxford (Oxford University Press, 1983), 63-67), and by Nimrod Hurvitz, regarding information about the early conquests (Hurvitz, "Law and historiography," 366-67).

70   Al-Mūsā, *Minhaj*, 35, 55-56.

71   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā*, 27:241, 245.

72   Text: *wa-l-mudda ba'īd bayna maqtal al-Ḥusayn wa-mabnā mashhad 'Asqalān*.

73   Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, ed. 'Abd Allāh b. Yaḥya al-Sarīḥī, 27 vols. (Abu Dabi: al-Majma' al-Thaqāfī, 2003), 1:281.

74   Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-Nihāya* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1993), 8:222.

Ibn Taymiyya argues (correctly, it seems)[75] that there are no reliable early sources that claim that al-Ḥusayn's head was ever buried in Ascalon. There is no earlier evidence whatsoever – no inscription, stone or cult – to indicate that al-Ḥusayn's remains were, indeed, interred there.[76] He further undermines the hypothesis of burial in Ascalon by considering the probability of this narrative within the historical context of the early Umayyad era. He makes two carefully constructed arguments: the first, against burial in Ascalon; the second, in support of burial in Medina. The transmission of al-Ḥusayn's remains to Ascalon, argues Ibn Taymiyya, could not have served any political purpose of the Umayyads:

> Even if we determine that it was indeed sent to Yazīd, what benefit would he have had from sending the head to Ascalon, at that time a garrison frontier town settled by pious Muslim defenders (*murābiṭūn*)? Had they [i.e., the Umayyads] wished to hide the head, Ascalon was well-known to many [hence a bad choice] ... If [one claims that] their purpose was to confer blessing upon the place, that is unreasonable, as al-Ḥusayn was his declared enemy, whose blood he had spilled! It is evident that arranging for al-Ḥusayn to be buried next to his mother and brother in the cemetery of Medina was best for him [i.e., Yazīd].[77]

As further evidence in favor of the claim that the head was buried in Medina, Ibn Taymiyya recalls a similar case: that of the burial of the brutalized body of ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, whom the Umayyads killed a decade or so after the killing of al-Ḥusayn. In that case, with the termination of the great civil war (*fitna*) in 73/692, the Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj sent the body of his nemesis to his mother for burial.[78]

In another discussion of the whereabouts of the head of al-Ḥusayn, the historian al-Nuwayrī (677-733/1279-1333) also reaches the conclusion that its interment in Ascalon is improbable. According to his understanding, in 61/680 Yazīd would have chosen to send the severed head of his defeated enemy to

---

75   The earliest narrative source known to me that claims that the head of al-Ḥusayn was buried in Ascalon *postdates* its 'discovery' by Badr al-Jamālī by several decades. See Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Ibn al-ʿImrānī (d. ca. 580/1184-85), *Al-Inbāʾ fī Taʾrīkh al-Khulafāʾ*, ed. Qāsim Al-Samarrai (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 54. Ibn al-ʿImrānī claims that Yazīd allowed men from Ascalon to take the head with them and that they built a *mashhad* in its honor. On the history of the shrine from the eleventh to the twenty-first century, see Talmon-Heller, Kedar and Reiter, "Vicissitudes," 182-215.

76   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:240-41.

77   Ibid., 253.

78   Olesen, *Culte*, 229; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:253.

Shiʿi communities, in order to induce depression and despair amongst them, rather than to Syria or Egypt, where there were no Shiʿis.[79] Al-Nuwayrī's contemporary, al-Dhahabī, was prepared to acknowledge his ignorance of the final resting place of al-Ḥusayn's head. He quotes earlier sources that relate that when the ʿAbbasids came to Damascus after the successful overthrow of the Umayyads, they inquired about the burial place of al-Ḥusayn's head, took it out and desecrated it. "God alone knows what happened to it afterwards," says al-Dhahabī.[80]

Ibn Taymiyya was certain that the head was *not* buried in Ascalon. At some point in his *fatwā* against the authenticity of the relic of Ascalon, he digresses to discuss the history of the veneration of shrines (*mashāhid*). He dates the spread of this unwarranted innovation (*bidʿa*) to the era of the weakening of the ʿAbbasid caliphate. His *terminus a quo* for its emergence postdates the third generation of Muslims (*tābiʿ al-tābiʿūn*), as he finds it unthinkable that Muslims would engage in saint veneration when Islam was at the height of its power and vigor. At that time, nobody erected shrines in honor of prophets, Companions, or members of the Ahl al-Bayt. Nor did they build mausolea to commemorate any righteous Muslim in any of the provinces of the empire. This claim, of course, is consistent with Ibn Taymiyya's oft-repeated appraisal of the first three generations, the *salaf*, as superior in their understanding of the true message of the Prophet, and therefore as authoritative for generations to come.[81] Under the ʿAbbasids, however, shrines such as the shrine in Karbala appeared in Iraq, despite juristic condemnation. The construction of shrines became normative to the degree that people thought that the attack initiated by the caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 247/861) on Mashhad al-Ḥusayn in Karbala was wrong.[82] Shortly afterwards, during the reign of al-Muqtadir (295-320/908-932), Ibn Taymiyya tells us, the *umma* became divided,[83] and heretics and 'innovators' multiplied. The Shiʿi dynasties of the Qarmatis, Fatimids and Buyids appeared, and seeking to change the religion of Islam (*tabdīl dīn al-Islām*) they

79   Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, ed. Muḥammad R. Fatḥ Allāh and Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafa, 33 vols. (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya liʾl-Kitāb, 1975), 20:478-81.

80   Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ et als., 25 vols. (Beirut: Muʾasasat al-Risāla, 1981), 3:319.

81   *Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:10-13; Rapoport and Shahab, *Ibn Taymiyya*, introduction.

82   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:245.

83   The authors of a volume on the caliphate of al-Muqtadir seem to agree, acknowledging that al-Muqtadir's reign is held "with some justice" to have been disastrous for theʿAbbasid caliphate. See Maaike N.Van Berkel, N. El Chaikh, H. Kennedy, and L. Osti, *Crisis and Continuity at the Abbasid Court* (Leiden: Brill, 2013)*,* 215-19.

established a number of deplorable rites, veneration of tombs being a case in point. This process, according to Ibn Taymiyya's analysis, was accompanied by the fabrication of *ḥadīth*s in favor of the visitation of shrines and tombs.[84] Hence, he warns, every *ḥadīth* in favor of tomb visitation should be regarded as forged.[85] He also points to a book entitled *Manāsik Ḥajj al-Mashāhid*, allegedly written by the Fatimid Qāḍī Ibn al-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974), as proof of the scandalous Fatimid preference for tomb visitation over pilgrimage to Mecca.[86] Ibn Taymiyya's chronology is not unreasonable: according to the assessment of modern historians of the Shiʿa, Shiʿi scholars began to extol the merits of pilgrimage and to explicitly privilege the visit to al-Ḥusayn's grave (at Karbala) in the tenth century CE. They base this periodization on the appearance of compilations such as *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt* by Ibn Qūlawayh (d. 367/978-9), *Kitāb al-Mazār* by Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) and *Kitāb al-Kāfī* by al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941).[87]

From the Shiʿi perspective, tomb visitation, especially the visitation of the tombs of *imām*s and other members of the ʿAlid family, is indeed an accepted and even encouraged practice.[88] Consequently, the majority of Shiʿi legal scholars have voiced no objection to the construction of mausolea and tomb-mosques. A favorable opinion on this issue was attributed to the Prophet in various statements, such as that comparing the erection of mausolea to participation in the construction of Jerusalem by Solomon.[89]

Several modern historians have addressed the historicity of the claim that the Shiʿis, in general, and the Fatimids, in particular, played a pivotal role in the genesis and elaboration of monumental commemorative architecture in the Islamic world – in other words, in the erection of mausolea for saint worship. These include Oleg Grabar, Thomas Leisten, Jonathan Bloom, Caroline Williams and Christopher Taylor. Contemporary Egyptian intellectuals attribute the *mawālid* (*mūlid*s, in colloquial Arabic) to the Fatimids, or to ʿPharaonic

---

84   Text: "*wa-ṣannafa ahl al-firya al-aḥādīth fī ziyārat al-mashāhid wa-l-ṣalāt ʿindahā.*" See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:95.

85   Ibid., 69.

86   Taylor, *Vicinity*, 184.

87   See Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shīʿa: Identity, Ritual and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)*, 243-47; Andrew Newman, *Twelver Shiism: Unity and Diversity in the Life of Islam, 632 to 1722* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 61.

88   Marco Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 2:29-33.

89   Ibid., 248-49.

times.'[90] While the question of whether Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of the history of tomb veneration in Islam is correct is beside the point, it is interesting to note that almost 700 years after his death the debate is still alive.[91]

Ibn Taymiyya, as we have seen, blames the Fatimids – whom he calls Qarmatis, heretics, hypocrites, people of ignorance and innovators (*Qarāmiṭa*, *zanādiqa*, *munāfiqūn*, *ahl al-jahl*, *al-mubtadiʿūn*) – for introducing the innovation (*bidʿa*) of tomb veneration to Islam. He also discredits the Fatimids for having falsified their genealogy: although they claim descent from Fāṭima, they are, in fact, the progeny of Zoroastrians (*al-Majūs*) or Jews.[92] Elsewhere, Ibn Taymiyya blames a Jewish heretic (*zindīq*) for instigating the Shiʿi schism (comparing his role to that of Paul in Christianity!).[93] In a *fatwā* on the confiscation of churches, Ibn Taymiyya insists that the Fatimids falsified their ancestry, exposes their cooperation with the Franks during the Crusades, and blames them for the employment of treacherous Jewish and Christian viziers. He also brings up, unavoidably, the story of Ibn al-ʿAlqamī, the Shiʿi vizier who allegedly betrayed the ʿAbbasid caliph and the Sunni Muslims of Baghdad during the Mongol assault of 1258, thereby contributing to the downfall of the ʿAbbasid dynasty. At the end of that digression, Ibn Taymiyya lists the Shiʿi errors in theology and religious practice, concluding that they "are the worst people among those who follow the [correct] direction of prayer."[94]

Regarding the Cairene *mashhad*, Ibn Taymiyya quotes known scholars such as Ibn Diḥya, Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd, Ibn Khalaf al-Dumyāṭī, Ibn al-Qasṭalānī, al-

---

90   Samuli Schielke, *The Perils of Joy: Contesting Mulid Festival in Contemporary Egypt* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 141.

91   See Caroline Williams, "The Cult of ʿAlid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo Part I: The Mosque of al-Aqmar," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983), 37-52; idem, "The Cult of ʿAlid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo Part II: The mausolea," *Muqarnas* 3 (1985), 38-60; Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mosque of the Qarāfa in Cairo," *Muqarnas* 4 (1987), 9-18. Taylor, who assigns an important place to Oleg Grabar in the '*isnād*' of this theory, attempts to refute it, following Raghib, who dates Islamic commemorative architecture to the very beginning of Islam and finds no solid evidence of specifically Shiʿi 'responsibility' for the rise of the Muslim cult of saints. See Christopher S. Taylor, "Reevaluating the Shiʿi Role in the Development of Monumental Funerary Architecture: The Case of Egypt," *Muqarnas* 9 (1992), 1-10.

92   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:81. See also Michot, "Critique," 114-15, 122-25 (on the genealogy and history of the Fatimids and Sunni religious scholarship, respectively).

93   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:75.

94   Mourad and Lindsay, *Intensification*, 107-09. On Ibn Taymiyya's fierce polemic against the Shiʿa, see Tariq al-Jamil, "Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī: Shiʿi Polemics and the Struggle for Religious Authority in Medieval Islam," in *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 229-46, esp. 232-35. Al-Jamil notes that Ibn Taymiyya waged a multi-faceted campaign: He attacked both Shiʿi practice and scholarship and participated in military operations against Shiʿis.

Qurṭubī (the Qurʾān commentator) and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dīrīnī, saying that it was built by the Fatimids to house the relic taken from Ascalon, when its defenders surrendered to the Crusaders in 1153. Ibn Taymiyya explains that the lie about the so-called head of al-Ḥusayn became deeply entrenched under the Fatimids, as it was not advisable to speak up and state the truth.[95] Moreover, he suspects that even his contemporaries, who know the truth regarding the shrines of the head of al-Ḥusayn, hardly dare voice it, fearing the reaction of commoners.

Here Ibn Taymiyya inadvertently raises another issue that intrigues modern historians: What was the impact of Fatimid Ismaʿili rule on non-Ismaʿili Egyptian society at the time, and for generations to come? Ibn Taymiyya claims that 200 years of Fatimid rule had a deep and continuous influence on the beliefs and practices of the inhabitants of Egypt. Fatimid subjects had absorbed the false propaganda of the 'Qarmati Bāṭiniyya' (i.e. the Ismaʿilis) to such an extent that it could not be uprooted by the return of Sunni hegemony with the establishment of Zangid and Ayyubid rule and the settlement of Sunnis in those lands.[96] Due to the swift disintegration of Fatimid rule after Saladin assumed power in Egypt in 1172, present-day scholars and textbooks usually claim otherwise. However, Yaacov Lev and Devin Stewart argue, very much like Ibn Taymiyya, that Shiʿi customs and Fatimid traditions have been preserved on a popular level, and left their mark on Egyptian popular culture.[97]

To further ridicule the veneration at the shrine of Raʾs al-Ḥusayn in Cairo, Ibn Taymiyya quotes "some Christians," who, rejoicing at the foolishness of ignorant Muslims, compare the Christian pair "*al-Sayyid al-Masīḥ wa-l-Sayyida Maryam*" and the Muslim pair "*al-Sayyid al-Ḥusayn wa-l-Sayyida Nafīsa*."[98] Nafīsa bint Ḥasan b. Zayd (d. 208/824-5) was ʿAlī's great-granddaughter and the daughter-in-law of the sixth Shiʿi *imām* Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq; she was probably the

---

95   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:240, 246.

96   Text: "*fa-zaraʿū fīhim min akhlāq al-zanādiqa … mā lam yumkin an yanqaliʿa illā baʿd ḥīn… kāna al-nifāq wa-l-bidʿa fīhā kathīr mastūr*" (Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27: 256).

97   See Yaacov Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 152; idem, *Saladin in Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 124-50; Devin Stewart, "Popular Shiʿism in Medieval Egypt, Vestiges of Islamic Sectarian Polemics in Egyptian Arabic," *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996), 35-36, 66. On the possibility that the Fatimids inspired the Sunni *mawlid* of the Prophet, see Marion H. Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 1-8.

98   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:243-44. Here Ibn Taymiyya engages in sophisticated polemics against Christians and against misinformed converts from Christianity to Islam, whom he calls '*munāfiqūn*,' because they regard the two religions as equally true: "*fa-inna ʿuqalāʾahum lā yunkirūna ṣiḥḥat dīn al-Islām, bal yaqulūna: hādhā ṭarīq ilā Allāh wa-hādhā ṭarīq ilā Allāh.*"

first ʿAlid to be buried in Egypt. Her mausoleum in Cairo was established short-ly after her death and it was restored by Badr al-Jamālī in the summer of 482/1089 (two years after the establishment of the Ḥusaynī mausoleum in As-calon). It became a popular pilgrimage site, as suggested by the following ques-tion, forwarded to Ibn Taymiyya: "May one recite by her tombstone, ʿSayyida Nafīsa redeems the prisoner and protects the fearful, and [she is] the gate of needs to God?'"[99]

When Ibn Taymiyya raises the provocative possibility that the hallowed head was actually that of a Christian,[100] his conjecture resonates with a remote chapter in the history of saint veneration in Ascalon, though it is unlikely that he was aware of it. In the Byzantine period, the hill upon which the Fatimid mausoleum would later be established was known as the burial place of three Egyptian Christian martyrs who, according to Eusebius of Caesarea, were be-headed before the gates of Ascalon during the persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor Diocletian in 308 CE.[101] The site is mentioned in the itinerary of a sixth-century Christian pilgrim, and depicted in the famous late sixth-early seventh-century mosaic map of Madaba in Transjordan.[102]

According to Ibn Taymiyya's conjecture, there were Christian antecedents to the cult of Abraham (Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl) in Hebron too. He refers specifically to Sufi rituals (known as al-nawba al-Khalīliyya) accompanied by a reed flute (shabāba) that were held next to the mosque there. He writes: "[It] was either an innovation of the Christians, who also penetrated the sealed chamber of Abraham, to which nobody could enter, or an innovation of ignorant Muslims."[103] At this point (as in many other places in this text), he cites the prophetic ḥadīth invoking the wrath of God on the Jews and Christians, based on the ahistoric

---

99   Text: "inna al-Sayyida Nafīsa tukhalliṣu al-maḥbūs wa-tujīru al-khāʾif wa-bāb al-ḥawāʾij ilā Allāh" (Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā, 27: 257); Memon, Ibn Taimīya's Struggle, 295; Olesen, Culte, 235-36. On the mashhad, see Muwaffaq al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad Ibn ʿUthmān, Murshid al-Zuwwār ilā Qubūr al-Abrār, ed. Muḥammad F. Abū Bakr (Cairo: Al-Dār al-Miṣriyya al-Lubnāniyya, 1415/1995), 159-92; Williams, "The cult, part II," 40, 57, 67-68; Jonathan M. Bloom, Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt (Cairo: Yale University Press, 2007), 136.

100   Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā, 242.

101   Eusebius, History of the Martyrs in Palestine by Eusebius Bishop of Caesarea, trans. W. Cu-reton (Paris: Gorgias Place LLC, 1961), 34; Louis-Hugues Vincent, Ernest J.H. Mackay and Félix-Marie Abel, Hébron. Le Haram el-Khalil. Sépulture des patriarches (Paris: Ernest Ler-oux, 1923), 237-40.

102   Michael Avi-Yonah, The Madaba Mosaic Map (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1954), 70; Eugenio Alliata, "The Legends of the Madaba Map," in The Madaba Map Cente-nary, 1897-1997, ed. Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Fransiscum, 1999), 86.

103   Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā, 27:63-65.

generic accusation that they "had turned the graves of their prophets into plac-es of prayer."[104]

Ironically, the only prophet whose site of burial is known with certainty, according to Ibn Taymiyya, is "our Prophet" (*nabiyyinā*) Muḥammad.[105] The identification of other tombs – he lists those of a number of prophets and Companions, including Muḥammad's wives and daughters – is based on unre-liable sources: stories (*ḥikāyāt*) about dreams, wonders, the smell of perfume, or some other sign.[106] He not only acknowledges that the Prophet's place of burial is known beyond doubt, but also recognizes that travel to his tomb is commendable according to the consensus of the scholars.[107] He even concedes that celebrants of his birthday (*mawlid*), and people who offer supplications at his grave out of sincere conviction, are performing a pious act and deserve a reward.[108] By contrast, he ridicules people who, like the Scripturaries, turn sites into shrines because they dreamed that the Prophet prayed there, or heard such a dream from someone else; worse yet – they made up stories about foot-prints of prophets and the like.[109]

But does Ibn Taymiyya ascribe importance to the correct identification of tombs? Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) obviously did, thereby justifying the composition of his renowned geographical lexicon. Citing Q. 6: 11 ("Journey through the land and behold") and a saying attributed to ʿĪsā ("the world is a place of visitation and an abode of transition. Be you then travelers in it, and take warning from what remains of the traces of the early ones"), Yāqūt asserts that all men should know the "times and stations (*mawāqīt*) of pilgrims and visitors, the domiciles of the Companions and Followers, the tomb-shrines of

---

104   Ibid., 69. On Ibn Taymiyya's anti-Christian polemics, see David Thomas, "Apologetic and Polemic in the Letter from Cyprus and Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ*," in *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 255-59. Thomas notes that exposing Christian er-rors and showing that some Muslims make the same errors is a recurrent pattern in Ibn Taymiyya's discussion.

105   Olesen, *Culte*, 213; Taylor, *Vicinity*, 177.

106   See, for example, Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:38, 96-97, 235, 241.

107   Ibid., 114.

108   As pointed out by Raquel Ukeles in her "The Sensitive Puritan? Revisiting Ibn Taymiyya's Approach to Law and Spirituality in Light of 20th–Century Debates on the Prophet's Birthday (*Mawlid al-Nabī*)," in *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Sha-hab Ahmed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 319-37, esp. 321-33. Nonetheless, Ibn Taymiyya scorns the touching and kissing of tombs, including the tomb of the Prophet (Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:40, 44), asserting that only the black stone may be kissed (Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, 316-317).

109   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:78.

the saints and the pious."[110] Although Ibn Taymiyya had devoted considerable effort to disproving the authenticity of various sites, prominent among them the *mashhad*s in honor of the head of al-Ḥusayn, he writes:

> Knowing the exact location of prophets' tombs has no religious benefit (*fāʾida sharʿiyya*), and guarding [viz., remembering] them is not a religious commandment... If one desires to pray for the prophets, salute them, believe in them and preserve their memory, that is possible even if one does not know where their tombs are, peace be upon them.[111]

Finally, at the end of Ibn Taymiyya's long inquiry into the history of the relic known as the head of al-Ḥusayn, he returns to the field of religious law and concludes: "Whether it [i.e. the attribution of the tomb] is true or false, the establishment of mosques [and prayer] over tombs is non-Islamic and prohibited by the words of the Prophet and the consensus of the scholars ...."[112]

Another example of the importance Ibn Taymiyya attributes to historical circumstances – his argumentation against the excessive glorification and adoration (*taʿẓīm*) of the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat al-Ṣakhra*) – also foreshadows a modern historiographical and political debate. In this case Ibn Taymiyya formulated a position that is rejected by most Muslims who participate in the current controversy over worship on the Ḥaram.[113] He stresses that the Rock became a Muslim place of prayer only after the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān assumed power in Syria [in 685 CE]. During his struggle against Ibn al-Zubayr, ʿAbd al-Malik built the dome over the Rock in order to encourage people to travel to Jerusalem rather than to Mecca, then held by his adversary. Ibn Taymiyya does not disclose his sources here. In modern historiography, this explanation for the construction of the Dome of the Rock is most often quoted from the pro-Shiʿi anti-Umayyad geographer and historian al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/897), but Ibn Taymiyya may have read it in other early sources, or perhaps, in works by his contemporaries.[114] Insisting that the Companions and Followers did not glorify the Rock and abstained from prayer there, Ibn Taymi-

---

110   Wadie Jwaideh, *The Introductory Chapters of Yāqūt's Muʿjām al-Buldān* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 2, 4.

111   Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:235.

112   Ibid., 256-57.

113   Ibn Taymiyya reserved the term *ḥaram* for Mecca and Medina, which are 'better' – *afḍal* (Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:16; Memon, *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle*, 316).

114   Olesen, *Culte*, 202; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:8. On the modern scholarly debate over the circumstances of the construction of the Dome of the Rock and its medieval sources, see Anikam Elad, "ʿAbd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock: Further Examination of the Muslim Sources," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 35 (2009), 167-226; idem,

yya constructs a legal argument, in addition to argumentation based on his-
torical reasoning. He explains that, for Muslims, the Rock is the abrogated
direction of prayer (*qibla mansūkha*),[115] "just as Saturday, which is a holiday in
the *Sharīʿa* of Moses, was abrogated by the *Sharīʿa* of Muḥammad and replaced
with Friday." Muslims should not engage in the cult of the Rock, just as they
should not perform special worship on Saturday and Sunday, as Jews and
Christians do.[116] Here, as in many other cases, Ibn Taymiyya uses the principle
of *mukhālafa* – differentiating oneself from non-Muslims and heretics, articu-
lated also as *lā tashabbahū* (do not resemble). Although he certainly accepts
the Prophetic *ḥadīth* that privileges Jerusalem as the third most holy place in
Islam (i.e. "*lā tashuddū al-riḥāl…*"), as we have seen above, he struggles against
contemporaneous veneration of the city in a manner that threatened, in his
view, the unique status of Mecca and the *ḥajj*.[117]

　　Ibn Taymiyya was put on trial for his controversial interdiction of the popu-
lar practice of visitation (*ziyāra*) and imprisoned in Damascus in 726/1326.[118]
He died two years later. His multi-disciplinary attack on the veneration of
tombs and sacred places was a total failure. Yet, his argumentation seems to
have resonated in later works, Mamluk and modern, including, for example,
Itḥāf al-Akhiṣṣa bi-Faḍāʾil al-Masjid al-Aqṣā by Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn al-

---

　　　Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage (Leiden:
　　　Brill, 1995), 158-59; Chase Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik* (Oxford: One World, 2005), 66-80.

115　On traditions about the changing of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca, see Uri Rubin,
　　　"The Direction of Prayer in Islam – on the History of a Conflict between Rituals," *History*
　　　6 (2000), 5-29 [in Hebrew].

116　Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā*, 27:64. *Ibn Taimīyaʾs Iqtiḍāʾ al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm li-
　　　Mukhālafat Asḥāb al-Jaḥīm*, trans. in Memon, *Ibn Taimīyaʾs Struggle*, 78, 125, 317. On the
　　　principle of avoiding any resemblance with non-Muslims in Islamic sources, see Kister,
　　　"La Tashabbahū"; Memon, *Ibn Taimīyaʾs Struggle*, 78, 121-39; Youshaa Patel, "'Whoever
　　　Imitates a People Becomes One of Them': A Hadith and its Interpreters," *ILS* 25 (2018),
　　　1-68.

117　For a review of Ibn Taymiyyaʾs position on the sanctity of Jerusalem, see Memon, *Ibn
　　　Taimīyaʾs Struggle*, 21, 72-77, and in the earlier annotated translation of *al-Qāʿida fī Ziyārat
　　　Bayt al-Maqdis*, in Charles D. Matthews, "A Muslim Iconoclast (Ibn Taymīyyeh) on the
　　　'Merits' of Jerusalem and Palestine," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56 (1936),
　　　1-21; Taylor, *Vicinity*, 174.

118　For details, see Memon, *Ibn Taimīyaʾs Struggle*, 82-85; Olesen, *Culte*, 15-16. This was Ibn
　　　Taymiyyaʾs third trial; earlier he was taken to court for supporting a literal interpretation
　　　of the attributes of God, and for undermining the power of legal oaths. See Johansen,
　　　"Perfect law," 263-64. On the claim that Ibn Taymiyyaʾs position on *ziyāra* was misunder-
　　　stood, to his detriment, or used as a pretext for his arrest, see Yahya Michot, "For a Grave
　　　in Damascus… Reflections on the funeral, and the present state of the tomb, of Ibn Taymi-
　　　yya in Damascus," 7. http://www.interfacepublications.com/~interfa3/images/pdf/Ibn-
　　　Taymiyya_Tomb.pdf

Asyūṭī (d. 880/1475), which is devoted to the sanctity of Syria and its shrines
and revered sites. The author dismisses traditions in which Ascalon is referred
to by beautiful titles such as 'the bride of Syria' and 'the bride of Paradise', and
those that accord it a role in eschatology. Without hesitation, he brushes aside
traditions that depict the Prophet as praying in the cemetery of Ascalon, or
promise rewards for settlement in that town. He cites "one of the scholars, who
explained that the reason [for the spread of such traditions] is that Ascalon
used to be a frightening frontier town and *ribāṭ* that was attacked repeatedly by
the enemy, causing many Muslims to sacrifice their lives and achieve martyr-
dom there. But now," he concludes, "when an attack [on Ascalon] by the ene-
my is unlikely to occur, settlement in other garrison towns is much more
meritorious."[119] Although al-Asyūṭī does not identify the scholars to whom he
refers, he certainly reiterates Ibn Taymiyya's arguments, his critical approach
to sources, and his awareness and thorough knowledge of historical context.
Echoing Ibn Taymiyya's argument against the continuous and uncritical defi-
nition of residence in Ascalon as *murābaṭa*, al-Asyūṭī argues against consider-
ing residence in Homs as a similarly pious deed. Citing the Mamluk historian
al-Dhahabī, who reminded his readers that Homs was a dangerous place in the
first century AH, when the plague struck Syria, he adds the following surprising
comment: "But in our times [i.e. the eighth/fourteenth century] … more wom-
en die there of childbirth [than of causes related to *jihād* or *murābaṭa*]."[120]

In his *fatwā*s on travel to memoria and mausolea in honor of saintly men
and to Jerusalem and erstwhile garrison towns, Ibn Taymiyya draws upon se-
lected Qur'ānic verses, *ḥadīth*s, the (alleged) consensus of early authorities, the
opinions of great legal scholars, theological *dicta*, linguistics and rational de-
duction. I have argued here that, less conventionally, his argumentation also
draws upon his understanding of historical processes that shaped the Islamic
state from its inception and until his own times. Ibn Taymiyya's sensitivity to
historical context led him to the striking assertion that heightened religious
merit (or: sanctity) of space may be temporary and relative, rather than di-
vinely ordained for eternity. Arguably, he may be implying that religious devo-
tions should change in response to changing circumstances.

---

119   Text: "*li-istibʿād nuzūl al-ʿaduww bihā hādhihi al-ayyām.*" Shams al-Dīn al-Asyūṭī, *Faḍāʾil
      al-Shām,* ed. Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿĀdil b. Saʿd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001), 169-
      72. The editor of al-Asyūṭī's *Faḍāʾil al-Shām*, Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿĀdil b. Saʿd, lists addi-
      tional explanations for the high number of fabricated *ḥadīth*s about the merits of Syria:
      political competition, pre-Islamic tribal *ʿaṣabiyya*, patrons willing to pay storytellers and
      liars (*al-qaṣṣāṣīn wa-l-kadhdhābīn*) for fabricating *ḥadīth* praising this or that, and the
      infiltration of Jewish and Christian lore through converts to Islam. See al-Asyūṭī, *Faḍāʾil
      al-Shām*, 8.
120   Ibid., 35.