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Emrah Kaya

Sakarya University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8889-5587>

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**Süleyman Uludağ, *İbn Taymiye: Ezber
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Harf Yayınları, 2019, 199 pp.**

Emrah Kaya

The ideas of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), one of the most prominent and contested thinkers of medieval Islamic thought, need to be examined and re-discussed over time due to their complexity and originality. In our time especially, many researchers from various countries undertook the study of his life and works and it is a very valuable and precious effort, indeed.

Among the results of the growing contemporary scholarly interests in Ibn Taymiyya are the two books, one written in Turkish and authored by Süleyman Uludağ, while the other one -written in English- is authored by Jon Hoover¹. Notwithstanding the different intellectual and scholarly background of the two writers, both of them focus on the most remarkable and, at the same time, high disputed ideas and conceptions of Ibn Taymiyya. In order to remain within the scope of this review, one of them, the book authored by the Turkish scholar Süleyman Uludağ, in Turkish, will be examined here. In spite of the different scholarly and cultural backgrounds, it is noteworthy that both writers have made significant scholarly efforts to understand and interpret the diverse and contested thoughts and teachings of Ibn Taymiyya.

¹Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya* (London: Oneworld Academic, 2019).

Süleyman Uludağ is a well-known professor in Turkish academia through his books, articles, and translations. Among his prominent translation works are *Risāla* of ‘Abd al-Karīm Qushayrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb* of Hucwīrī, *Muqaddima* of Ibn Khaldūn and *Faṣl al-Maqāl* of Ibn Rushd. In addition to these translations, he also authored many works on Islamic thought and Muslim thinkers, as well.

*İbn Taymiyye: Ezber Bozan Bir İlim ve Fikir Adamı*² is a well-researched biographical and a well-focused analysis of his ideas and thoughts. The book consists of three main sections entitled “İbn Taymiyya”; “Anti-Taşawwuf Trends and the Philosophy of Taşawwuf of Ibn Taymiyya” and “The Problem of Logic in Ibn Taymiyya”.

The book starts with a discussion on Ibn Taymiyya as a significant critic and thinker due to the remarkable features of his thought such as the centrality given to original sources of Islam, the defense of *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning) rather than *Taqlid* (imitation), and the attempt to revive the religious sciences, preferring them over the rational and natural sources of knowledge in religious matters.

Uludağ highlights both the effort and the commitment of Ibn Taymiyya to dispel the damaging effects of political chaos that Muslim societies were experiencing after the tragic Mongol invasion and the end of the Abbasid Caliphate (1258).

In the first section, Uludağ mentions the conditions of the religious, scientific, political, and social atmosphere in which Ibn Taymiyya lived. Ibn Taymiyya, throughout his life, was committed to the Islamic community trying to solve the issues and challenges Muslims had to face in the aftermath of the Mongol invasion. At the same time, he was also waging the war on innovations and superstitions that contaminated religious thoughts. However, this atti-

²Ibn Taymiyya: An Extraordinary Scholar and Thinker.

tude angered both Sufis and traditionally educated scholars, and this is the reason why Ibn Taymiyya's influence remained limited among the scholars of his time and many scholars of the following centuries (p.12).

He was actively involved in the resistance against the Mongols, while remaining within the sphere of Muslim scholarship, jurisprudence and theology, he wrote critiques against some Muslim scholars, philosophers, and non-Islamic faiths and ideas. Since the critical attitude expressed in his writings was directed towards several representative figures both at the juridical and political levels, he was put on trial and had to suffer throughout his life. For example, some Sufis, like 'Atā'Allāh al-Iskandarī and Naṣr al-dīn al-Manbijī, censured Ibn Taymiyya, and they were also actively involved in several attempts to get him imprisoned (p. 26-30).

As far as Sufism is concerned, according to Ibn Taymiyya, many of the schools of thought and Sufi orders degenerated due to the influence of philosophy, the Bāṭinī ideas, and social and political factors. On the theological side, he argued against both the Ash'arīs', challenging their approach to the divine attributes, and Sufis', by disputing their speculations about the oneness of God.

According to Uludağ, who dedicates a section of his book to the different aspects of Ibn Taymiyya's harsh criticism (p. 40-64) of both Ash'arite philosophy and Bāṭiniyya, Ibn Taymiyya's perspective could be approached as attachment to the ways of the *Salaf*. In fact, he, as one of the most faithful and devoted followers of the *Salaf*, considers the way of predecessors to be the only remedy for the corruption of the faith and, therefore, whatever he considers being incompatible with this way, he labels it as innovation.

Ibn Taymiyya is usually portrayed as an uncompromising enemy of *Taşawwuf*. The underlying reason for this

kind of perception is mainly due to his critical approach to Muḥyī al-dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī and other similar Sufi masters and thinkers. Even though Ibn Taymiyya regards Ibn ‘Arabī as a thinker not completely unrelated to Islam and its principles; he views him as a *Zindiq*, a term which could be loosely translated into English as "heretic". On the contrary, as far as Şadr al-dīn Qunawī, a famous follower of Ibn al-‘Arabī, is concerned, Ibn Taymiyya considers him, unlike Ibn al-‘Arabī, far away from Islam and its way. The author considers the attitude of Ibn Taymiyya both extreme and unnecessary and, consequently, criticizes him. Those, who are familiar with the works of Uludağ know that even though he criticizes *Taşawwuf* occasionally, he never fails to emphasize importance of "good and true *Taşawwuf*." Therefore, we can say that the author is consistent in his interpretation.

In relation to the sphere of jurisprudence, Ibn Taymiyya built his approach and issued *fatwas* based on the premise that there is harmony between human reason and the plain text of the sources pertaining to legal matters, as exemplified clearly in the case of the many juridical issues he discussed. Actually, Ibn Taymiyya, at one level applied rational methods in jurisprudence; and at the other level, he separated reason from the belief systems, following the way of the *Salaf*.

Though in *Fiqh*, Ibn Taimiyya followed the principles of the Hanbali school of law and issued *fatwas* accordingly,³ he didn't shy away from issuing *fatwas* independently, showing his insights as an independent scholar, as in the case of the invalidity of triple divorce in a single pronouncement, thus courting both controversy and persecution by the authorities of the time.

Ibn Taymiyya is a *sui generis* scholar. Even though his

³As an example, it can be quoted the Imam Ahmad' *Fatwa* that whoever eats camel meats needs to take ablution.

effect remained limited in the scholarly environment, some people and groups followed him with great respect. In Ibn Taymiyya's understanding a believer keeping away from sinful and immoral acts is not enough; he should actually also prevent others from doing things that are forbidden, as per Islamic law. And this proactive approach of Ibn Taymiyya, seen in some of his *fatwas*, along with following the ways of the *Salaf*, without taking into consideration of the circumstances, according to the author, have resulted in *fatwas* that are misused by fundamentalist elements.

In the second section of the book, which was previously published as a journal article in 1999,⁴ the author offers some reflections on the *Taşawwuf* in the light of the works of Muḥāsibī, Ghazzālī, and Ibn Khaldun. For the author, *Taşawwuf* is a lifestyle based on asceticism and piety. The human soul, if it follows the real teaching of *Taşawwuf*, can attain peace and perfection through the remembrance of God, away from the worldly pleasures.

At the end of the section dedicated to Sufism, Uludağ briefly examines the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya about *Taşawwuf*. The author attempts to explain Sufi terminologies and concepts like sainthood, religious law (*Sharī'a*), prophecy (*Nubuwwa*), miracles of the saints (*Karāmāt*), unveiling (*Kashf*), gnosis (*Ma'rifa*), extinction in God (*Fa-nā'*), love (*Muḥabba*), existence (*Wujūd*), unity (*Ittiḥād*), and incarnation (*Hulūl*). The author underlines that, while Ibn Taymiyya affirms the spiritual methods based on the religious law and the practices of the *Salaf*, he objects to innovated beliefs and practices integrated later into *Taşawwuf*.

The third section of the book entitled "The Problem of Logic in Ibn Taymiyya" begins with historical information concerning the role of logic in the early Islamic thought

⁴Süleyman Uludağ, "Tasavvuf Karşısı Akımlar ve İbn Taymiye'nin Tasavvuf Felsefesi" *İslamiyat* 3 (1999), 39-66.

and its impact on the Muslim scholars, who did not welcome the discipline. Until the time of Ghazzālī, Muslim scholars did not accept the Aristotelian logic in a significant way, as they were concerned about the intervention of philosophy in the *Ilāhiyāt* (theology). However, Ghazzālī lent support to the Aristotelian logic and integrated it into the Islamic sciences. In this manner, logic becomes a cornerstone in the Islamic sciences. Ibn Taymiyya, after realizing certain harmful and mistaken aspects of logic, wrote some tracts rejecting logic and its place in the Islamic sciences. Then, he emphasized that the correct path was to follow the way of *Salaf*.

Ibn Taymiyya has been one of the most influential, productive, and famous scholars in Islamic thought and history. Even though he did not establish a school of thought by his own, effect of his thought could be actually seen on many scholars. Therefore, works written about Ibn Taymiyya are crucial in understanding his ideas. In this context, it would be useful to read Jon Hoover's book too, in a comparative way, along with Uludağ's, thus helping us to understand the thoughts of Ibn Taymiyya from two different perspectives.

Uludağ's works offers us some good insights into Ibn Taymiyya's life and thoughts, and looking from this angle, it definitely contributes to our understanding of one of the most discussed and contested medieval Muslim thinkers whose life and messages have got a very deep contemporary presence. However, many subjective interpretations that we encounter in the book appear to challenge the objectivity of its assessments; nevertheless, as observed before, the book will definitely enhance the readers' understanding of Ibn Taymiyya's thoughts and works.

Emrah Kaya

Sakarya University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8889-5587>

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emrahkaya@sakarya.edu.tr