

## **Ranks of the Divine Seekers: A Parallel English-Arabic Text. Volume 1**

*Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*

*Translated, Annotated and Introduced by Ovamir Anjum*

*Leiden: Brill, 2020. 1015 pages.*

The Ḥanbalī jurist and theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) has attained something of a celebrity nimbus in recent years. Since the publication of an edited volume entitled *A Scholar in the Shadow: Essays in the Legal and Theological Thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah*<sup>1</sup> in 2010 several studies of his thought and works have been published in both monograph and article form, and many of his texts have been translated into English and other languages.<sup>2</sup> The shadow to which the aforementioned title refers, that of Ibn al-Qayyim's teacher Ibn Taymiyya, is still present in the reception of Ibn al-Qayyim's thought and work, but he is increasingly being seen as an original and influential figure in his own right. The attention that he now enjoys in English-speaking academic circles echoes his immense popularity in the Islamic world with a wide range of readers.

Ovamir Anjum's annotated translation of *Madārij al-sālikīn bayna manāzil iyyāka na'budu wa-ıyyāka nasta'ın* (subsequently *Madārij*) is a recent addition to the list of English translations of Ibn al-Qayyim's works. *Madārij* is one of Ibn al-Qayyim's latest texts and although presented as a commentary on 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī's (d. 481/1089) Sufi classic *Manāzil al-sā'irīn*, its length and complexity enables it to be read as an independent treatise addressing the stations that mark the believer's path to God. Comprising three volumes in most editions, *Madārij* is far longer than al-Harawī's comparatively succinct text and reflects the author's profound understanding of what are now called Sufi sciences. Ibn al-Qayyim's approach to al-Harawī ranges from reverential to critical, particularly where he sees al-Harawī as neglecting the place of the Scriptures in the practice of devotion. In *Madārij* Ibn al-Qayyim seeks to restore the primacy of the Qur'an and Prophetic example in spiritual practice and to warn the reader against excessive experientialism or antinomianism. As such, the work is essential for understanding Ibn al-Qayyim's relationship to Sufism and his religious thought in a wider sense.

Anjum has translated the entire text of *Madārij*, relying on the edition published by Dār al-Ṣumay'ī in 1432/2011. The translation is due to

appear in four volumes, although only volumes one and two have been published so far, with the next two volumes scheduled to appear in the next years. This review is concerned with volume one, which contains a comprehensive translator's introduction, Ibn al-Qayyim's prologue to *Madārij*, his commentary on the first stations listed by al-Harawī, and a glossary of technical terms used in the volume.

Anjum begins his introduction to the text with a summary of Ibn al-Qayyim's life, thought and relationship to Ibn Taymiyya. In addition to recognizing the limited independence that Ibn al-Qayyim maintained in regard to his teacher Anjum also emphasizes Ibn al-Qayyim's role in "grasping, synthesizing and presenting" (9) Ibn Taymiyya's teaching in what is often a more reader-friendly format. This touches on the important question of how far Ibn al-Qayyim contributed to the enormous influence that Ibn Taymiyya has had on Islamic law, theology and spirituality in the centuries since his death. Anjum also outlines Ibn Taymiyya's and Ibn al-Qayyim's relationship with Sufism. His demonstration of the influence that Sufi thought and teaching exercised over Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim is not new, but his observation that views of them as hostile to Sufism arise from contemporary (mis)representations of Sufism as mysticism is an insightful and important contribution to the debate about how to understand the spiritual thought of the two men.

This biographical introduction precedes a summary of the historical formation of Sufism, which highlights the role of traditionalist ascetic circles, especially those close to the Ḥanbalīs, in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century. Here Anjum engages productively with the recent work of Laury Silvers and contextualizes the devotional tradition represented by Ibn al-Qayyim in *Madārij*. Following a short presentation of *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* and its author, Anjum closes the introduction with a brief study of Ibn al-Qayyim's approach to both al-Anṣārī and *Manāzil al-sā'irīn*, in which he develops some of the points raised in the overview of Sufism and of Ibn al-Qayyim's thought. As Anjum notes in a footnote, much of the introduction to his translation can also be found in his contribution about *Madārij* to the edited volume *A Scholar in the Shadow*, mentioned previously. However, readers wishing to learn more about *Madārij* are recommended to consult this contribution nonetheless, as it contains additional information about Ibn al-Qayyim's access to the text of *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* that is not included in the translation's introduction.

Following this admirably accessible and comprehensive introduction, the translation of *Madārij* maintains the same high standard. The Arabic

text on the right-hand page has been positioned to correspond almost exactly with the English translation on the left, to the pleasure of readers wishing to use both languages. Anjum's prose is meticulous and thorough, with explanatory additions inserted where necessary. It is also fluent and easy to read; this is no small achievement, given the highly complex language and argumentation in the original text. Explanatory footnotes have been kept to a minimum but a glossary of key terms at the end of the volume is helpful for understanding Ibn al-Qayyim's use of some technical or polemical terms. Here Anjum's expertise in Ibn Taymiyya's thought and works is helpful, as it allows him to elucidate the background to some of Ibn al-Qayyim's phrases. For example, his explanation of the term *jabrites* or *jabriyya* relates Ibn al-Qayyim's and Ibn Taymiyya's use of the term to the way that it was used by the Mu'tazila, the Ash'arites and the Māturīdīs.

It would be churlish to seek out blemishes simply for the sake of balancing this review, and there really was very little that this reviewer could find to detract from the translation and the explanatory introduction. It would have been interesting to learn more about the manuscripts used for the printed versions, or the book's reception before the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Given the arguments of researchers such as Caterina Bori, Christopher Melchert and Khaled El-Rouayheb that Ibn al-Qayyim was not a particularly authoritative figure in the Islamic, or even Ḥanbalī tradition before the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, questions about the earlier history of *Madārij*, which are not discussed by Anjum, are relevant to understanding the role that his spiritual teaching played in the changing perception of his teaching. But this is a suggestion for further research and not a shortcoming of Anjum's edition, which excels in presenting Ibn al-Qayyim's thought and prose in a clear, accessible fashion. His work is a praiseworthy addition to the Brill Islamic Translation Series and will be appreciated by scholars of Ibn al-Qayyim and Sufism alike.

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1. Caterina Bori and Livnat Holtzman (eds.), *A Scholar in the Shadow: Essays in the Legal and Theological Thought of Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah* (Oriente Moderno n.s. 90) (Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino, 2010).
2. Studies include the edited volume of Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer, with Alina Kokoschka (eds.), *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013)

and the monograph of Miriam Ovdia, *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and the "Divine Attributes": Rationalized Traditionalistic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2018). Translated works into English include Abdul-Rahman Mustafa, *On Taqlid: Ibn al-Qayyim's Critique of Authority in Islamic Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *The Invocation of God. Al-Wābil al-ṣayyib min al-kalim al-ṭayyib*, trans. Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald and Moulay Youssef Slitine (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2000).

doi: 10.35632/ajis.v37i3-4.1706