

# **The Emergence of a Scholar from a Garrison Society**

**A contextual analysis of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's  
doctrine in the light of the Qur'ān and Hadīth**

Shahajada Md Musa

Supervised by Prof. Gary Bunt

Submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Masters of Research in

Islamic Studies at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

2022

## Abstract

*Many scholars have contributed to the Islamic theological discourse. Amongst them was Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb (1703-1792), a Sunni scholar, who still influences Muslims today, encouraging them to 'revert' to his view of 'orthodox' Islam and to follow the original practices of the Prophet Muhammad. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), among others, claimed to follow his teachings. The re-establishment of what Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb argued to be 'monotheism' in the worship of God was pivotal to his mission in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, opposing traditions which he considered to be contradictory to the practices of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic tradition. He therefore engaged in eradicating the veneration of saints and what he perceived to be 'idolatrous' ceremonies at their tombs, which in his view attributed divinity to individual humans. He urged all Muslims to adhere to what he proclaimed to be the correct interpretation of the Qur'ān and Hadīth, advocating the return to the early Islamic theological teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions while rejecting, what he believed to be innovation (bid'ah) within the Islamic religion. His doctrine is claimed to be justified by a conception of a 'puritan' traditionalist theology, entirely based on Islamic scriptures and his monolithic and literal understanding of the first three generations of Islam. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's ideas were not met with approval, his own father disagreed with him, while he was challenged and denounced by his older brother, the Islamic theologian and jurist Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb (1699–1793/94) who wrote a deprecating refutation against him and his doctrine. Apart from intra-Muslim theological disputes amongst his contemporaries, his doctrine – and his interpretation of the scriptures – still have repercussions for modern Muslim theological discourses who use traditionalist scholars to engage in critical dialogue with other theologians and philosophers.*

*This research analyses the approach, understanding and reasoning of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine and to critically examine his interpretation of the Qur'ān and Hadīth. In*

*order to discern his methodology and his usage of these primary Islamic texts, this research engages with the Qur'ān, Hadīth, exegetical commentaries, historical and contemporary work as well as epistles from Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's opposing contemporaries. The findings of this research provide a critical re-assessment of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and his theological understanding of Islamic doctrine with the aim to aid dialogue amongst contemporary Muslims in order to prevent the misinterpretation of his theology for advocacy of extreme ideology in Islam.*

## Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date .... 20/04/2022.....

### STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date .... 20/04//2022.....

### STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for deposit in the University's digital repository.

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date ....20/04/2022.....

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Declaration.....	4
Note on Transliteration .....	7
Figures .....	8
Preface .....	9
1. Introduction.....	10
1a. <i>Aqīdah</i> / Doctrine .....	13
1b. Methodology .....	17
1c. The Structure of this Research .....	23
2. Central Arabia at the Eve of the Wahhābi Movement .....	25
2a. Najd and the Geographical Context .....	26
2b. Economy and Society .....	30
2c. Slaves and Slavery in Arabia .....	33
2d. Arabian Politics in the 18 <sup>th</sup> Century .....	35
2e. The Religious Situation in the 18 <sup>th</sup> Century .....	40
2f. Conclusion .....	44
3. The life of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb.....	45
3a. His Genealogy .....	46
3b. His Travel to Seeking Knowledge .....	48
3c. His Travel to Basrah.....	51
3d. His Return to Najd .....	54
3e. From al-Uyaynah to al-Dir'iyyah .....	57
3f. Conclusion .....	62
4. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's Doctrine in Light of the Qur'ān and Hadīth .....	63
4a. Introduction .....	63
4b. The Doctrine of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb .....	71
<i>Shirk</i> .....	71
Tawhīd <i>ar-Rubūbiyya</i> (Oneness of Divine Lordship).....	73
Tawhīd <i>al-Asmā' wā-s-Sifāt</i> (Oneness on Divine Names and Attributes of God).....	74
Tawhīd <i>al-Uluhiyya</i> or Tawhīd <i>al-'Ībāda</i> (Oneness in Worshipping God) .....	76
4c. Visiting Graves.....	80

Muhammad ash-Shawkānī.....	87
Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s Divine Bolts of Lightning.....	91
Ibn Taymiyyah .....	97
4d. <i>Tawassul</i> (Intercession ) .....	99
4e. <i>Takfīr wa Qitāl</i> : Declaring a Muslim as an Apostate and killing.....	107
4f. Summary.....	114
5. Conclusion .....	116
Bibliography .....	124

## Note on Transliteration

### Consonants

ه'	ز z	ق q
ب b	س s	ك k
ت t	ش sh	ل l
ث th	ص s	م m
ج j	ض d	ن n
ح h	ط t	و w
خ kh	ظ z	ه h
د d	ع '	ي y
ذ dh	غ gh	
ر r	ف f	

### Short Vowels

ا a  
و u  
ي i

### Long Vowels

ā  
ū  
ī

## Figures

1 - Manuscript of Ibn Bishr's <i>'Unwān al-Majd fī Tārīkh Najd</i>	20
2 - Map of Arabia	28



## Preface

Having visited Bangladesh several times during my early childhood, I experienced a society in which the worship of saints was common place. My father once showed me the tomb of Jalāl Mujarrad Kunyāi (1271–1346), popularly known as Shah Jalal in Sylhet to make me aware of these practices. In my mid-20s, during my many visits to Mecca, I was immersed in a society of scholars inside the holy mosque teaching Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine, whom I had heard of, but did not yet fully understand the extent of his popularity in Saudi Arabia. This initiated me to engage with his works through his writings, textual books and through scholarly explanations from teachers of the holy mosque. This inspired me to contextualise who he was in his time and how he understood the Qur'ān and Hadīth. The seed of curiosity inspired me to investigate how an individual, who is praised by the scholars of Saudi Arabia and beyond, and who taught a very simple concept of *tawhīd* and *shirk* through his doctrine, could possibly be linked with such extremist groups, like ISIS, especially since Saudi scholars were openly rejecting ISIS's ideology. This motivated me to write this research, trying to contextualise the scholar of a garrison society, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, understanding his character and his motivations, and in particular reviewing how he utilises and interprets the Qur'ān and Hadīth in order to justify his teachings.

My research was aided by many institutions. I am particular indebted to the British Library, where I could access rare Islamic manuscripts that were essential for this study, as well as to the School of Oriental of African Studies, the Al-Azhar University in Cairo. I am very grateful to my MRes supervisor, Prof. Gary Bunt.

## 1. Introduction

In the eighteenth-century, there emerged a man from the ‘garrison society’<sup>1</sup> in Arabia who advocated a radically new vision of Islam which was ‘puritan’ and ‘orthodox’ in nature. His name was Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb who to this day not only remains a controversial figure, but one that divides Muslim communities across the globe.<sup>2</sup> For some, like the distinguished Islamic scholar Hamid Algar, Muhammad Ibn Abd-al-Wahhāb and the ‘Wahhabis’ stand outside Sunni Islam,<sup>3</sup> while others have raised his status to that of a scholar and revivalist of Islam.<sup>4</sup> Members of the Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISIS (‘Islamic State in Iraq and Syria’) have instrumentalised many of his canons,<sup>5</sup> notably citing his most famous work *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* (‘Book of Monotheism’). In his aim to promote his view of ‘puritan’ Islam, he provided his own interpretation of Islamic doctrine which he sought to restore in order to eradicate what he believed to be ‘non-Islamic’ religious beliefs and practices. In his works, he defines fellow Muslims – be it Sufi and Shi’a followers, or the Sunni Muslims whom he considered to be corrupted and deviant – as apostates if they do not accept the belief and practices of his doctrines. From the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, the followers of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb were accused by some to be heretics, infidels and Khārijites;<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I have used the expression ‘garrison society’, to illustrate the controlled anarchy amidst the tribesmen and the absence of a single dominant political figure in Najd, and the change brought by an Islamist ideology and developed by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhāb to that situation.

<sup>2</sup> David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta: Islamic Publication International, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Sālih Ibn Fowzān, *Al-Mulakhas Fi Sharh Kitāb At-Tawīd* (Saudi Arabia: Dārul āsiyah lilnushra wal Tāwzigh, 2001), p. 5 (author’s translation).

<sup>5</sup> The term ‘canon’ refers to a collection of books accepted as genuine. These are principles that ISIS, al-Qaeda, and others have ‘foraged’ from Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrines, notably from his ‘Book of Monotheism’.

<sup>6</sup> The term Khārijites is developed from the story of those who rebelled against the leadership of the Muslim community following the murder of the third caliph, ‘Uthmān, in 656 CE. The community leaders chose Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, Ali Ibn Abi Tālib (600-661 CE), as ‘Uthmān’s successor. Ali had support because of his piety, wisdom, and courage. Some supported him because he was Muhammad’s closest surviving male relative. Mu‘āwiya Ibn Abī Sufyān (597/605-680), the governor of Damascus, revolted against ‘Ali’s leadership. In a battle at Siffin in 657, ‘Ali’s armies were prepared to defeat Mu‘awiyah’s forces when Mu‘awiyah’s forces sought arbitration. Ali agreed, whereupon some of his supporters turned against him.

the latter term still has relevance today since one of their characteristics is that they declare apostasy to the one who commits major sins.<sup>7</sup> The well-known Islamic scholar Ameer Ali (1849–1928) states that ‘the Wahhābis are a direct descendant of the Azārīka, who, after their defeat by Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf (661–714), had taken refuge in the recess’.<sup>8</sup> Within the Khārijite movement the Azārīka branch were most extreme subject, disconnecting themselves from the Muslim community and declaring death to all sinners and their families.

Many of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s works have been translated in countless languages, from Bengali and Hindi to Spanish and English, further spreading his theological understandings across the world. His works are the basis of many totalitarian and fundamentalist interpretations of Islam, notably in Saudi Arabia where Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb entered an alliance with Muhammad Ibn Saud that created the first Saudi state. But his works have also been exerting influence in the political and societal atmosphere far beyond its Arabian origin. In our own lifetime, they have influenced discussions about Islam on online social media, like Twitter,<sup>9</sup> further arousing the course of several Islamic Salafist and Jihadist groups, such as ‘ISIS’ (‘Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’), Taliban, al-Qaeda, who take some snippets of the canons from Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s works out of context to support their ideology.<sup>10</sup>

---

Believing Mu’āwiya and his supporters had apostate through their rebellion, some held that Ali was obliged to fight them. Many then declared Ali and his supporters an apostate, the Khārijites went forth to fight Ali and his supporters, until they killed him in 661 CE. See: Richard C. Martin, ed, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Michigan: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2016), pp. 613-614.

<sup>7</sup> Richard C. Martin, ed, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Michigan: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2016), pp. 613-614.

<sup>8</sup> Ameer, Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (London: Christophers, 1946), p. 357.

<sup>9</sup> Gary Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> Abdoul Aziz Gaye, ‘The violent Wahhabism and the Use of Islamic Texts to Justify Armed Valence Against Muslims and Non-Muslims’ in *The (De)Legitimization of Violence in Sacred and Human Contexts*, ed. by Muhammad Shafiq and Thomas Donlin-Smith (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillam, 2021), pp. 195–218, at p. 212: ‘...Ibn ‘Abd Al-Wahhāb is using Islamic texts and principles to achieve their goal’.

It has been argued that ‘ISIS presents itself as a representative of ‘authentic’ Islam as practised by the Muslim, commonly known as Salafism. The official brand adopted in Saudi Arabia is known as Wahhābism, named after the founder Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’.<sup>11</sup> Although I attempt to avoid using the terms Wahhābism, Wahhābiyya and Salafism as much as possible, it is important to acknowledge that these terms are employed as a negative expression to the movement of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb by his critics. In particular, the term Wahhābiyya seems to be used during his lifetime by his brother Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb in his refutation entitled *Al-Ṣawā‘iq al-ilāhiyyah fī al-radd ‘alā al-Wahhābiyya* (‘Divine Bolts of Lightning in the Refutation of Wahhābism’).<sup>12</sup> Although the terms Wahhābiyya and Salafism go back to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrine, others make a clear distinction between the two terms, whereby Wahhābiyya and Salafism refer to those who claim to follow a monolithic understanding of the first three generations of Islam regardless of them adhering to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, while Wahhābiyya refers to his doctrine and movement. Moreover, we now acknowledge that many who follow a monolithic understanding of the first three generations of Islam, including those who accept Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrine, have embraced the term Salafism as a label of their doctrine and methodological understanding of Islam.<sup>13</sup> Hassan argues that extreme ideologies can be regarded as the development of a ‘slow hybridization between doctrine Salafism and other Islamism

---

<sup>11</sup> Hassan Hassan, *The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Sulaymān Ibn ‘Abdī’l-Wahhāb, *Al-Ṣawā‘iq al-ilāhiyyah fī al-radd ‘alā al-Wahhābiyyah* (Beirut: Dār Dhū’l-Faqār, 1997) (author’s translation).

<sup>13</sup> Namira Nahouza, *Wahhabism and the Rise of the New Salafists, Theology Power and Sunni Islam* (London: I.B Tauris, 2018), pp. 74-76.

currents'.<sup>14</sup> He further explains that groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda are heavily influenced by Salafism,<sup>15</sup> which includes Wahhābism.<sup>16</sup>

This research aims to evaluate and assess the approach, understanding, and reasoning of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's concept of Islamic doctrine. Apart from examining the context of his teachings – and how they relate to social and religious practices in the eighteenth-century Arabian peninsula – it is important for this study to critically examine his interpretation (and his instrumentalization) of the Qur'ān and Hadīth – the two works that are still essential to contemporary Muslims and theological authorities. This study aims to make a contribution to the theological debates and discussions amongst contemporary Muslims and authorities of Islam by revealing some of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's interpretations of the Qur'ān and Hadīth in developing his theology with the aim to aid dialogue amongst contemporary Muslims in order to prevent the misinterpretation of his doctrine to advocate extreme ideologies in Islam.

### 1a. *Aqīdah* / Doctrine

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was motivated to spread his view of the 'right' doctrine or creed across the Islamic world. But apart from the Confession of Faith (*shahāda*), there is no 'universally accepted Islamic creed'.<sup>17</sup> The Arabic term '*aqīdah*' basically just means linguistically 'to bind, to tie', similar to the Latin term religion (*religio*) from *religare*, 'to bind,

---

<sup>14</sup> Hassan Hassan, *The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Sayed Khatab, *Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2011), p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Jon Hoover, 'Creed', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 3, ed. by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Everett Rowson. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_25587](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_25587), first published online 2014 [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022].

to fasten’. *Aqīdah* is used to define cardinal beliefs in the Islamic faith, notably the belief in one God, in the angels, the six pillars of faith, the focus on monotheism, and the Arabic term can therefore be translated into English as theology, dogma, creed or doctrine. The term doctrine – from Latin *doctrina* – is preferred in this research – notably when referring to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s teachings – because it mirrors the fact we are dealing with a set of taught principles aimed to instruct about the theological understanding of Islam, but at the same time, doctrines may vary, as scholars were seeking to find the ‘true authentic’ belief, as we shall see in the case of Muhammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb.

Since the beginning of Islam in the seventh-century, Muslims have shown considerable interest in defining the importance of doctrine as it became the most critical incentive in accepting the Islamic faith. Muslims around the world in the past and present teach and discuss Islamic creed, as the ‘authentic belief’ (*aqīdah sahīha*) is considered the essence of Islamic faith.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, when reading the Qur’ān and the Hadīth, one cannot help but acknowledge the significance of doctrine reiterated throughout the texts. Muslims understand the current life as the beginning of the next life, and that the place of the hereafter is a result of how they live their lives in measurement to the Qur’ān and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that the subject of theology incorporates broad concepts related to Islamic belief.

Since the death of the Prophet Muhammad in the year 632, there have been many polemical debates about Islamic doctrine amongst scholars as many differed in their theological understanding of concepts within Islam.<sup>20</sup> The Egyptian reformer Hassan al-Banna (1906–

---

<sup>18</sup> Richard C. Martin, ed, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Michigan: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2016), p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> Surah al-e-Imrān 3:32; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’ān*, p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Jeffry R Halverson, *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam, The Muslim Brotherhood, Ash’arism and Political Sunnism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 13.

1949) argued that some Islamic theological teachings<sup>21</sup> have conflicted with scriptural texts.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb believed that people in his society were disregarding the Qur'ān and Hadīth that are deemed to be the foundation of Islamic knowledge and from which all religious and substantive laws are extracted to establish Islamic legislation.<sup>23</sup>

It may be argued that the state of affairs of the Islamic 'movement'<sup>24</sup> in Saudi Arabia remains distinct from that of other countries with a Muslim majority because of their more secular political administration that instrumentalises religious authorities to legitimise their actions to the Muslim majority population. For example, modern technological devices like the camera would have to go through the scholarly consensus before the administration endorses the permissibility of the use of photography in the country.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Islam in Arabia is and was a theme of contention, fundamentally between the administration and religious authorities; additionally, the Muslim clergies themselves were divided because of the multiplicity of concepts that motivated them. This would have been the impact of the various School of Jurisprudence and their opinions on personal incentives linked with the political authority of their lands. In the lifetime of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb these discourses were also expressed in theological or juridical idioms that are interconnected to social circumstances.

In Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's time, Islam was the principal religion in Arabia, but theological disputes were omnipresent resulting in polemical debates across the land. Hence, the following research attempts to focus on the approach, understanding, and reasoning of

---

<sup>21</sup> Here I am referring to Islamic belief, including the scholars from the science of Kalām, also known as Islamic doctrine or *aqīdah*.

<sup>22</sup> David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), p. 141.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey T. Kenney and Ebrahim Moosa, *Islam in the Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge 2014), p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> Reference to religious organisations and scholars that propagate and practice Islam.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, 'The Ruling on Photography and Videos', You Tube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WH0wU65zSBU>. [accessed 13/02/2020]

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's theology and it critically examines his interpretation of the Qur'ān and Hadīth, representing the earliest period of Islam. Oliveti<sup>26</sup> and Sardar<sup>27</sup> claim that his doctrine is the reason that triggers acts of extremism in the present time. This contradicts other scholars, like Delong-Bas,<sup>28</sup> who have disputed that his teachings promote violent coercion which the 'radical followers' employ to spread their view of the Islamic faith.

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb challenged the flexibility of religious traditions, ceremonies and customs that were prevalent in his time, claiming they violated what he considered to be orthodox practices of Islam which, in his view, were mandatory for every Muslim to observe. In order to understand his interpretation of Islamic doctrine we need to analyse the political background of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb during his lifetime, his doctrine conveyed in his books, his epistles relating to theology, his studies, teachings and what has been stated about him in his time of revolution. Additionally, I have engaged critically with a wide range of modern scholarship concerning Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and his doctrine, as we shall see in the next section. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, notably since 9/11, many modern writers of various academic and non-academic backgrounds, including journalists, have taken a particular interest in Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and his links with modern extreme ideological groups,<sup>29</sup> such as al-Qaeda.<sup>30</sup> This has prompted Muslim scholars<sup>31</sup> and non-Muslim academics<sup>32</sup> to write clarifications regarding the link between extreme ideology in Islam and Muhammad Ibn Abd

---

<sup>26</sup> Oliveti Vincenzo, *Terror's Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and its Consequences* (Birmingham: Amadeus, 2002), p. 77.

<sup>27</sup> Ziauddin Sardar, *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim* (London: Granta, 2004), p. 149.

<sup>28</sup> Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> John. L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the name of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 6–7.

<sup>30</sup> Sayed Khatab, *Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2011), p. 238.

<sup>31</sup> Jalal Abualrub, *Biography and Mission of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab* (Richmond, Virginia: Madinah Publishers and Distributors, 2013), p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 289.



al-Wahhāb. But what is lacking so far is an academic work that provides a balanced view of his work based on a critical contextual analysis of his writings.

## 1b. Methodology

I have adopted an interdisciplinary and hermeneutical methodological approach for this research based on a close reading of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's epistles, work, doctrine and the Qur'ān and Hadīth. The textual and discourse analysis disposition of my research has involved many challenges, notably physically locating important works and manuscripts by and about Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, some of which could only be accessed in specific collections, for example in Egypt and of course in Saudi Arabia – a country which is very much based on the politico-religious alliance between Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and the al-Saud family; this alliance needs to be taken into account in order to critically interpret his works, his doctrine and his *jihād*.<sup>33</sup> First-hand access to eighteenth-century manuscripts were also important to analyse his writing style.

In order to engage critically with Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb – the person and his doctrine – it was necessary to engage with a large variety of written texts, dating from the eighteenth-century to the twenty-first century, that were either written by him or concerned him, including favourable works, like biographies, as well as dissenting writings that were written against his doctrine. The two most prominent works that relay information about Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-

---

<sup>33</sup> *Jihād* is from the Arabic word 'ja-ha-da' which means to 'struggle' or 'strive'; the Qur'ān mentions, '*jāhādu bi-amwālihim wa-anfusihim*' – '...and struggled for God's cause with their possessions and persons'. See Surah Al-Anfal 8:72; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 187. In the late eighth century, the notion of *jihād* as 'armed struggle' had become well-known in most territories of the world, but the notion was not limited to 'armed struggle'. See Oliver Leaman, ed, *The Qur'ān: an Encyclopedia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 331. We shall see in chapter 4e the different categories of *jihād* understood by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb.

Wahhāb are written by the historians Husayn Ibn Ghannām (n.d–1811) from al-Ahsa,<sup>34</sup> *Tārīkh Najd, al-musammā: Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* ('History of Najd, entitled: The garden of thoughts and perceptions') and subsequently by Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Bishr (n.d–1873), *Unwān al-majd fī tārikh Najd* ('Token of Glory, on the history of Najd'). The former includes a detailed account of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's biography and his epistles in the Arabic language. The book displays the influential ideal and interpretation of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's message; it also provides accounts from 1746 to 1797 that aim to depict the 'dark polytheistic' environment into which Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was born.

In contrast, Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Bishr's book called *Unwān al-majd fī tārikh Najd* (1853) provides a different angle. It includes more detailed information about the events of Arabia which are connected to the al-Saud family; his technique of writing is simpler to read than that of Ibn Ghannām. The book reinforces Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's message while venerating his status as a scholar, referring to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb as *Sheikh*<sup>35</sup> which is a distinguished title in the Arabic language, here referring to an Islamic scholar.

These two chronicles include many of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's epistles, events that took place in his lifetime, which also contain discussions of local accounts, societies, tribes, political influences as well as polemical<sup>36</sup> debates. However, as both authors were instructed by the then rulers<sup>37</sup> of Arabia to recount the history of Arabia, it is clear that both are in support

---

<sup>34</sup> al-Ahsa is a province in Najd.

<sup>35</sup> Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Bishr, *Unwān al-majd fī tārikh Najd*, vol 1 (Riyadh: Dar al-Malik 'Abd al-Aziz, 1982), p. 36 (author's translation).

<sup>36</sup> Their work often reads like a polemical supporter rather than a biography of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb.

<sup>37</sup> Saud Ibn Abdul Aziz (1748–1814) ruled from 1803 to 1814 and invited Husayn Ibn Ghannām to teach Arabic grammar in al-Dir'iyyah, and it was during the time of his stay he wrote the book *Tārīkh Najd*. The chief of al-Dir'iyyah, supported Ibn Bishr's work, *Unwān*, which was written in 1853–1854.

of and serve to promote and glorify the theology of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb as well as the history of Arabia's rulers for their personal agenda.

Having spent an extended period in the British Library, I was able to read, inter alia, Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Bishr's original manuscript – the only copy that is known to exist<sup>38</sup> – (Fig. 1), which enabled me to study his work on the history of Najd as well as Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's letters in great detail, including his original annotations in his book on Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's works. The manuscript helped me in my attempt to identify the thinking and objectives of Ibn Bishr. I have utilised both authors' writings throughout my research as they constitute the primary sources, available only in the Arabic language, representing Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's life, work and the circumstances he had encountered. I have added my own translations of these texts in this research at appropriate places.

---

<sup>38</sup> British Library no.: BL Or. MS 7718.

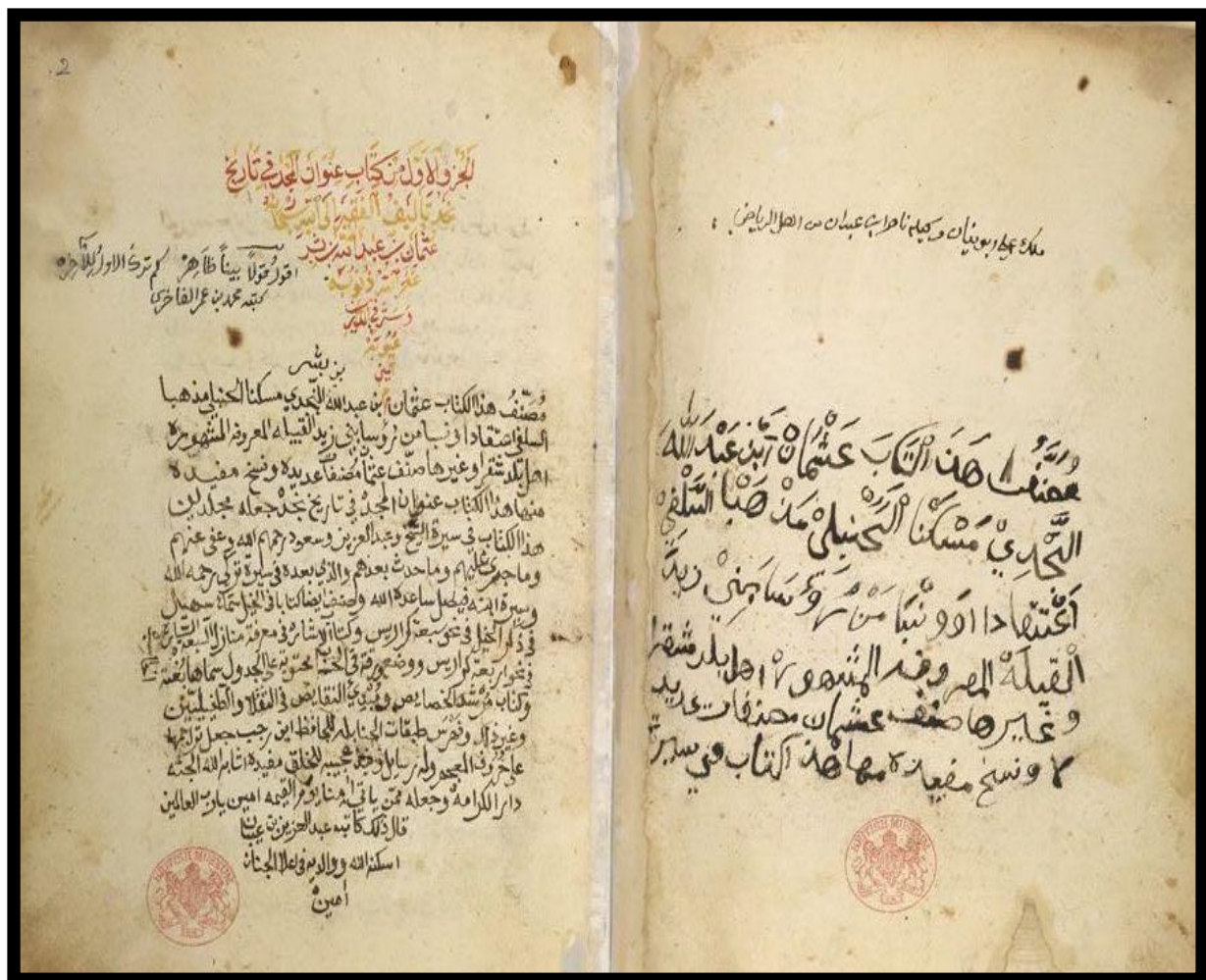


Figure 1: Unwān al-majd fī ta'rīkh Najd By 'Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Bishr al-Ḥanbalī, 1853 (© The British Library Board BL Or 7718, ff. 1-2. Used by permission)

In order to analyse Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's interpretation of the sacred texts, it was essential to engage in modern scholarly exegesis. For example, I have studied the exegete of the Qur'ān by various modern scholars, such as Uthaymin, who refer to traditional scholarly understandings in order to re-assess Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's theological understandings in comparison to traditional Islamic scholars. The critical engagement of a wide variety of academic books, journals and online resources enabled me to explore a diversity of controversial views in respect to his person and his teachings. As we shall see, so many works have been written in support for and against Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb that had to be critically reviewed in this research.

In order to locate many of the necessary sources, I not only had to use multiple library resources, like the British Library and the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London), which hold multiple publications that are not accessible elsewhere in the UK, I also spent a prolonged period of time at Al-Azhar University in Egypt to access essential books concerning numerous epistles, theologies and verdicts of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb. My stay in Egypt also allowed me to engage with Islamic scholars, both from Egypt and other Islamic countries, allowing me to explore their position on Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and his doctrine.

My research focuses on Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's works concerning those controversial matters that he encountered and addressed in his lifetime, notably in his acclaimed book, 'The Book of Monotheism'. As he supports his doctrine by quoting from the Qur'ān and Hadīth, it is therefore essential to engage in the scholarly commentary of the verses of the Qur'ān as well as the *as-sharh*; this is when scholars explain the intent or meaning of the Hadīth texts, to identify any conflict or similarities within Islamic doctrine. It is equally important to discuss the authenticity of the Hadīth, which is subject to scholarly understanding in order to distinguish 'authentic' Hadīth of the Prophet Muhammad from so-called 'weak' narrations concerning theology, based on twenty-first century Hadīth scholars. Although the *isnād* or the chain of transmission aims to achieve authentic Hadīth, its authentication differs amongst Muslim scholars from various places and periods of history. Consequently, Muslim scholars would verify and examine the reporters' reliability in the chain of transmission before using the Hadīth to support their understanding. The criticism of authentication includes the

most authoritative Hadīth books by Muhammad Ibn Ismā'īl (810–870) and Muslim Ibn al-Hajjāj (815–875).<sup>39</sup>

Though I used literature translated into English where required, in many cases I had to translate Arabic sources myself due to the lack of any available translations. Whilst only summarising some of my translations in the text in order to avoid long quotations, I cite my translations in full where I thought it necessary for the discussion, also providing future students with a reliable translation. Many Arabic and Islamic works of literature use dating according to the Islamic *Hijri* (migration) calendar, which was established in the year 622 CE when the Prophet Muhammad migrated from Mecca to Madina. I have transcribed all significant dates to the Common Era to prevent any confusion with the Islamic lunar calendar. Furthermore, all transliterations of the Arabic words are presented in Italic fonts.

A critical reading of all primary sources was essential to understand Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's work in depth. In some instances, it was necessary to utilise different publications for the same work, such as in the case of the refutation written by his brother, Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb against him, entitled, *Al-Ṣawā'iq al-ilāhiyyah fī al-radd 'alā al-Wahhābiyyah*. The reason for this is because the newer publication in 1997 was physically easier to read in the Arabic language, while the older 1975 version had the advantage that it allowed me to concentrate on the epistle without getting side-tracked by any annotation or criticisms that attempt to explain its purpose.

---

<sup>39</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism In India and Pakistan 1857–1964* (London and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 49–50.

## 1c. The Structure of this Research

The research is divided into five chapters, including the Introduction.

In Chapter Two, I endeavour to analyse the historical, political circumstances of Arabia – and notably in Najd – before and during the lifetime of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s theology. The aim is to understand the societal, cultural and religious factors prominent in eighteenth-century Arabia that have shaped Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and may have motivated him to develop and propagate his doctrine, along with an investigation how his circumstances may have impacted his ideological approach to Islamic doctrine.

In Chapter Three, I focus on the life of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, investigating in particular his family background and specific events that may have impacted his approach, understanding and reasoning that led to his theology.

Chapter Four assesses Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrine and critically examines his use and interpretation of the Qur’ān and Hadīth. I have aimed to discuss controversial theological beliefs that he had contested and claimed to have corrected. I have also investigated other theologians’ arguments against him. In particular, this Chapter provides a critical assessment of his approach and reasoning concerning his objections to visiting the graves and tombs (of ‘saints’), intercession (*tawassul*), the declaration of a Muslim an apostate, and finally *jihād* (*Takfīr wa Qitāl*). As we shall see, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb engages with other theologians’ work, such as Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) and Ibn al-Qayyim (1292–1350), adding to their understanding of Islamic theology and employs demonstrative arguments which are potentially original contributions to Islamic doctrine. But Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s approach of critical engagement and development in the discipline of theology also challenged and outraged many of his contemporaries which also led to violent conflicts and theological refutations of his doctrine.

Lastly, in the Conclusion, I aim to summarise my main findings regarding the reasoning and motivation behind Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's theology, trying to understand his driving force as well as his approach. This includes an overview of his fluid interpretations and diverse writing styles that depended on his audience, whether he addressed the 'masses' or aimed to convince other Islamic scholars of his doctrine. After all, the vast majority of contemporary Islamic scholars were highly critical of his views. We also need to engage with his 'monolithic' and literal interpretation of the Qur'ān and Hadīth, as well as his harsh understandings, for example by re-establishing the anachronist forms of capital punishment by stoning which aimed to reinstate the practices of the time of the Prophet Muhammad when Islamic law was fully established. As we shall see, his actions need to be considered in this particular period of the eighteenth-century, notably the socio-religious establishment that would lead to the rise of the al-Saud family in Arabia.



## 2. Central Arabia at the Eve of the Wahhābi Movement

In this Chapter, we need to analyse the background that gave rise to such an eminent scholar from a garrison society. Throughout history, we can see that one's geographical location, as well as political, social and cultural surroundings, plays a fundamental role in forming and shaping one's character and epistemological belief, which – in the case of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb – would have consequences to people's lives to this day. The aim is to identify any potential influences that may have shaped his epistemological approach and the development of his doctrine which has influenced so many people ever since. One objective is to understand the societal structures in his homeland, the Najd, and in Arabia in general, notably the importance of tribal structures, which includes the role of sedentary, nomadic and semi-nomadic populations, and how Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb could manipulate and utilise them, among others, to generate the followers for his movement.

In the eighteenth-century, the Arabian peninsula was rather fragmented and we need to understand the different regional powers, both in Central Arabia, such as the Najd, as well as the domination of the Ottoman empire, notably in Hijaz.<sup>40</sup> Despite the polynucleated socio-political structures, what unites the people on the Arabian peninsula was Islam. Even in the garrison society where Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb grew up in Najd, Islamic scholarship was practised and valued. His grandfather, father and brother were important scholars of Najd, maintaining their own family library, so that he grew up in a scholarly environment. This remind me of a seventeen-year old boy I once met in Mecca who had memorised not only three huge compilations of the Hadīth books, but also the chain of narrators in each different Hadīth, and who was deemed to be a scholar in his community teaching other contemporary scholars

---

<sup>40</sup> The Hijaz, The holy land of Islam, is a geographical region that comprises most of the western part of modern-day Saudi Arabia and is centred on the two holiest Muslim cities of Mecca and Madina.

of his time due to his immense memory. But in Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's time, the scholarship in Najd was limited; this is why he had to travel to other place, like Basrah, to pursue his acquisition of Islamic knowledge.

We also need to discuss other social institutions that may shaped his character. Among them, the importance of slavery in eighteenth-century Arabia. Last but not least, we need to engage with the aspect that would prompt the development of one of the major elements of his doctrine, namely the worship of saints and non-human sites, like trees, which was prevalent in the Najd at that time.

## 2a. Najd and the Geographical Context

This section examines how the geographical location had impacted Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's epistemological approach, his understanding of Islam and the development of his doctrine. The sedentary society from which he emerged was a part of the Arabian Peninsula that was dominated by settlers rather than pastoral nomads in the eighteenth-century. In 1703, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was born in the village of al-Uyaynah (العيينة, meaning 'Little Water Spring') which is located some 30 km north-west of Riyadh in the region of Najd, in the centre of modern-day Saudi Arabia. The region of Najd dwells in a desert and is rather isolated from the outside world, being separated from the eastern region of Arabia and the Persian Gulf by the long sandbanks of ad-Dahna. Najd, which can be translated as 'upland', is divided into many oases, including the land of al-Sudayr, al-Washm, al-Hautah, al-Hareeq, al-Aflaaj and Waadi al-Duwaasir, all of which are located in Central Arabia.

Eighteenth-century Najd was dominated by Arabs who were segregated by tribal structures. It was typical for most of the population, who were nomads or semi-nomads, to become settlers and occupy numerous oases. These oases states were ruled by local leaders who inherited their

status through ancestry lineage.<sup>41</sup> Political differences were the cause of the never-ending disputes amongst oases states. Additionally, external authorities would muscle their power across Najd; this would be either the head of an Islamic state, notably the Ottoman Empire, or other conquerors who intended to occupy the garrison society in Najd, but failed.<sup>42</sup> In other words, the absence of a single dominant political figure made possible the ‘controlled anarchy’ of the various tribal societies that allowed the Islamic ideology developed by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb to prosper. Some have stated that the location of Najd was ideally situated for unifying and controlling what was then known as Arabia,<sup>43</sup> which may explain why the modern-day capital of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, is located near Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s home village of al-Uyaynah.

---

<sup>41</sup> Michael Cook, ‘The Historians of Pre-Wahhābī Najd’, *Studia Islamica*, Vol. 76, 1992, pp. 163–176, at p. 174. Jstor: [www.jstor.org/stable/1595666](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1595666), 174 [accessed 08/09/ 2019].

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>43</sup> George S. Rentz, *The Birth of Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia, Muhmmad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) and the Beginnings of Unitarian Empire in Arabia* (ed. with an introduction by Willian Facey) (London: Arabian Publishing, 2004), pp. 11–13.



Figure 2: Map of Arabia.<sup>44</sup>

Much of the historical developments that took place at the advent of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's movement were initiated from his birth town al-Uyaynah as well as al-Dir'iyyah, which was the seat of the alliance of the House of Saud that was established by Muhammad Ibn Saud Ibn Muhammad Ibn Muqrin al-Maridi (1687–1765) who later conquered the majority of Arabia, including Yemen and Oman. Wadi Hanīfah, a valley with much historical significance, is located in the eastern part of Najd; its name derives from the tribe of Bani Hanīfah from the fifth century CE. It passes through al-Aqaba, al-Dir'iyyah, al-Malqa, al-

<sup>44</sup> Based on: University of Texas Libraries, Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection, Arabian Peninsula and Vicinity (Shaded Relief) 1984, Open Source Map. [http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/arab\\_penninsula.gif](http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/arab_penninsula.gif) [accessed 29/07/ 2020], edited by Shahajda Md Musa.

Shai'ab, al-Bukaythah as well as al-Uyaynah. While surrounded by deserts, making it amongst the driest lands in the world, many settlers and tribes would reside in the area around the valley as it was fertile, thus making agricultural cultivation possible.<sup>45</sup> Although the climate does not by itself regulate the nature of the people, it does present limitations to what can be accomplished in local societies, and Najd is located amidst the harshest conditions on earth, resulting in famines, malnourishment and diseases.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, the anthropologists Crate and Nuttall note that 'Climate change is also about the relocations of human, animal, and plant populations to adjust to change and to cope with its implications'.<sup>47</sup>

From a social science perspective, climatic conditions bring several kinds of dangers and possibilities. It would have influenced the socio-political and economic structures of Arabia's indigenous inhabitants, whether it be the complexity of poverty or limitations in agriculture; this would have meant that the tribal leaders and rulers would have to make adjustments in local policies to improve their livelihood. It would consequently have impacted individual characters in society, as we shall see in the case of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb. His experiences were shaped by settlers and nomads that were faced with scorching heat that prevented essential nourishment from growing in that land, thus forcing tribes to move from place to place continuously, which also led to widespread hostilities over land.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from climate, we need to take into account many other factors, including the lifestyle and tribal structures of nomadic Bedouins as well as sedentary communities. Since Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was nurtured in these authoritarian tribal structures, they seem to have

---

<sup>45</sup> Mohammad al-Asad and Yildirim Yavuz, *Wadi Hanifa Development Plan* (Riyadh: Ar-Riyadh Development Authority, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> William Facey, *Dir'iyyah and the First Saudi State* (Stacey International; Box edition, 8 Feb. 2001), pp. 12-14.

<sup>47</sup> Susan A. Crate and Mark Nuttall, eds, *Anthropology and climate change: from encounters to actions* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2009), p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> George S. Rentz, *The Birth of Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia, Muhmmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) and the Beginnings of Unitarian Empire in Arabia* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2004), p. 13.



shaped his mindset how a community should be led, with an *amīr* ('leader') leading his followers in all aspects of life, from social and judicial to religious facets. As we shall see in the next Chapter, the instability of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's residency had not only permitted him to be familiar with exceptional practices in these societies he visited, which he thought to be in contradiction to the Qur'ān and Hadīth, but it later fuelled him to fight against leading political and religious authorities.

## 2b. Economy and Society

Acquiring an understanding of the economic and societal circumstances in eighteenth-century Arabia is essential to understanding the multifaceted influences society would have on Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's methodology in the portrayal of his doctrine. Merchants and traders were essential for economic sustainability and growth, in particular in Arabia. Al-Ahsa, the eastern province of Arabia, and Hijaz were engaged in business transactions while the province of Mecca was considered to be the central location for commercial trades. These activities supplemented a predominantly subsistence economy based on farming and nomadic and semi-nomadic animal husbandry. Dry dates were the primary agricultural product and the main source of consumption and trade, making it the preferred food in the arid peninsula of Arabia. Other agricultural produces that were traded in Arabia were barley, millet, wheat and oats; the latter was primarily transported from the province of Najd to Hijaz where it was most in demand.<sup>49</sup> These exchange patterns not only demonstrate how the people in Najd were connected to the outside world, they also show how the exposure to long-distance trade, transactions and new ideas would have nurtured Muhammad Ibn Abd Wahhāb from a young age to develop a critical mindset concerning economic development and structure in Arabia,

---

<sup>49</sup> Alexei M. Vasiliev, *The History Of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2000), pp. 51–52.

while providing him with the tools to engage with other tribes and to make allegiances in order to spread his doctrine later in life.

The nomadic animal husbandries would predominantly breed camels,<sup>50</sup> while horses were mainly considered an instrument of conflict in Arabia, used to attack one's enemies and capture goats and sheep; the latter were used to produce milk, cheese and butter.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, the people of Najd would make money by selling clothing to pilgrims who would usually travel with a caravan of people across Arabia, notably from Iraq; they would also barter woven textiles, tanned hides and livestock with other settlers and Bedouins.<sup>52</sup>

The assumption that the Arabian Peninsula was only occupied by hereditary nomadic pastoral Bedouins is misunderstood. Rather, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was not only a member of the sedentary population of Najd, but he also was from a family of scholars, as we shall discuss in the next Chapter, which also shows that scholarly education was taking place amongst the tribes living in Najd, both the sedentary and nomadic ones.

The sedentary and nomadic tribes were essential to the reform movement of Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhāb, as many of them later became supporters of his doctrine. The social practices of the tribesmen in which Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhāb was raised, were traditionally followed and accepted by the people of Najd. The tribes would designate a leader who possessed honourable ancestry, family relations, age, strength, wisdom and knowledge, who would gain the lofty title of *Sheikh* or *amīr*. The *amīr*'s role would be to unify and guide the tribe; they would lead the caravans while travelling, give solutions and act as judges to

---

<sup>50</sup> John Lewis Burckhardt, *Notes of the Bedouins and Wahābys, Vol. II* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1930), p. 70.

<sup>51</sup> Charles M. Doughty, *Travel in Arabia Deserta*, Vol II (London: Cambridge University Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. 1925), p. 209.

<sup>52</sup> William Facey, *Dir'iyyah and the First Saudi State* (Stacey International; Box edition, 8<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2001), p. 27.

resolve internal and external disputes within the tribes.<sup>53</sup> The *amīr* would discuss and receive counselling from other members of his tribe before finalising crucial matters, like declaring war with other tribesmen and parties.

Moreover, the difficulties in finding a peace arrangement amongst the Bedouins and sedentary tribe members would hinder the growth of wealth in the land. The Bedouins, who were often portrayed as poverty-stricken, would have also struggled to wear garments against the cold weather during the winter period, if we believe, for example, the first-hand observations of Harry Philby.<sup>54</sup> Further, if the poor participated in a tribesmen's war and became victorious, they would profit from the booty and thus have the opportunity to raise their status out of poverty. The victory would earn the Bedouins financial rewards as well as an elevated status in their society,<sup>55</sup> which would allow them to support their families.

These traditional and cultural norms in the Najd reflect the harsh tribal societies within which Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhāb was raised. Perhaps, they shaped his harsh epistemological method in spreading his doctrine. Moreover, the reliance on and obedience to tribal leaders reflect their traditional relationships to the *amīr*, which would have been an advantage to Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhāb. For example, his influence resulted from verdicts (*fatāwa*) that resonated with his followers, who were obedient to him, thus consolidating his power and control.

---

<sup>53</sup> See the first-hand account of Charles M. Doughty, who spend a prolonged period of time with the Bedouins during the 1870: *Travel In Arabia Deserta*, vol. I (London: Cambridge University Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1925), p. 480.

<sup>54</sup> For this view, it is useful to consider the first-hand account of Harry Philby, who was T.E. Lawrence's successor as British representative in 'Transjordan' and adviser of Ibn Saud in the 1920: Harry St. J. B. Philby, *The Heart of Arabia* (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1922), p. 40.

<sup>55</sup> See the eye-witness report of Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, the Swiss explorer, who spend many years in the Near East, from 1809 to his death in 1817, just a few years after Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's death: John Lewis Burckhardt, *Notes of the Bedouins and Wahābys*, Vol. II (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), p. 98.



## 2c. Slaves and Slavery in Arabia

Slavery was common place in the society, in which Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb grew up, and may have influenced his aggressive approach in forcing his understanding of Islamic theology upon others. On the other hand, we can see in his works that despite the fact that the Qur'ān permits owners to take slaves as concubines,<sup>56</sup> he explicitly expressed his disapproval, preferring that men should marry them instead.

Slave trade was significantly present in Arabia in the eighteenth-century.<sup>57</sup> For example, it was a common practice for pilgrims to buy a male or female slave to accompany and serve them along their pilgrimage;<sup>58</sup> in some instances, they would sell them on their arrival at Mecca.<sup>59</sup> This was to either pay for the costs of the pilgrimage or to make a profit, as the people of Hijaz acquired slaves more frequently than other cities. This also distinguishes the wealth of the people in the region of Hijaz to those in Najd. The people of Hijaz consumed significantly more wealth than the people of Najd because of its location since Muslims from around the world would come here to perform their pilgrimage which provided an important source of revenue. Palgrave provides a first-hand account of his journey through Central and East Arabia in 1862-1863, recounting his observations how the sub-Saharan African slave trade took place. In Jawf, Shammar, al-Qasīm and Seydeyr, the slaves had no share in the political power or even in the civil scheme<sup>60</sup> of the Arabs society. In the south of Najd, the ex-slaves formed an African and

---

<sup>56</sup> Surah Al-Mu'minun 23:5-6; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 343: 'who guard their chastity. Except their spouses or their slaves – with these they are not to blame'; Surah Al-Ma'arij 70:29-30; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 570. 'who guards their chastity. From all but their spouses or their slave girls – they are not to blame'.

<sup>57</sup> Harry St. J. B. Philby, 'African Contacts with Arabia', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 86, no. 4438, 1937, pp. 90–102. Jstor: [www.jstor.org/stable/41361168](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41361168).<sup>95</sup> [accessed: 22/01/2020].

<sup>58</sup> Charles M. Doughty, *Travel In Arabia Deserta*, Vol I (London: Cambridge University Press, 1925), p. 209.

<sup>59</sup> Murray Gordon, *Slavery in The Arab World* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1998), p. 222.

<sup>60</sup> The term 'civil scheme' refers to an authority or a dominant tribe establishing a policy to support the rights of a slave through financial and political schemes.

multiracial diaspora community.<sup>61</sup> The slaves were considered inferior members of society. Male slaves were usually employed for maintaining domesticated work, while the female slaves would be concubines.<sup>62</sup> Philby (1885–1960), a British ‘Orientalist’, internationally renowned as writer and explorer as well as an advisor to the al-Saud family, argues that – contrary to the slave trade in European empires – after the death of the slave master, the slaves could in some cases even inherit their master’s property, while they and their children would be manumitted.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, the historian Burckhardt notes in his travel to Arabia from 1930:

‘The slaves, though emancipated, still retain the stamp of servile origin, and must not marry a white girl; neither does a free Arab ever marry a white girl. The descendants of slaves intermarry among themselves...’<sup>64</sup>

It was the typical practice among the settlers and nomadic people to free slaves after a period contracted between them. After freeing the slaves, often the Bedouins would get them married to those who shared similar skin colour and were from descendants of slaves.

Recent studies focus on the injustice forced upon the slaves, the enslaved had little control over their lives, and they were beaten and shackled if they refused to be subservient to their masters. Often, female concubines who were found to be pregnant would immediately be made to marry a male slave to hide the child’s biological father’s identity.<sup>65</sup> In a society in which ‘shame’ was an important social criterion, they would hide their children’s identity because having a child

---

<sup>61</sup> William Gifford Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year’s Journey Through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862–1863)* 2 vols (3rd ed.) (London and Cambridge: Macmillan, 1866), vol. 1, pp. 452–453.

<sup>62</sup> H. Philby, *The Heart of Arabia*, Vol I (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1922), p. 88.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>64</sup> John Lewis Burckhardt, *Notes of the Bedouins and Wahābys, Vol. I* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1930), p. 182.

<sup>65</sup> Matthew. S. Hopper, *Slaves Of One Master – Globalization and Slavery In Arabia In The Age Of Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 122–123.

with the female concubines would mean to extend their genealogy through a slave, which would be considered ‘shame’, leading to a lowering of the father’s social standing.

Although Islamic law permits sexual relations with a female slave who was captured in conflict, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb states in the chapter on marriage in his *Kitāb al-Nikāh* that Muslim men should lawfully marry captive women in conflict. He further deterred Muslim men from looking at captive women with sexual desire.<sup>66</sup> He states,

‘The common understanding with regards to marriage is to reap the mutual benefit. Others have said it was a mutual sharing. This is why God has made a distinction between wives and *malakat al-yamīn* (those whom your right hands possess, i.e. concubines of battle)...’<sup>67</sup>

He emphasised what he believed to be pleasing to God by exalting marriages between husbands and wives over sex with captive slave women from wars and concubines. Further, he makes a comparison of equality between wives and *malakat al-yamīn* signifying his dislike for sexual relations with female slaves, which may reflect his ‘puritan’ understanding of Islam, perhaps also reflecting a certain *zeitgeist* since Christian puritans equally opposed all sexual relations outside marriage; we must not forget that eighteenth-century Arabia was part of an entangled world which leads us to Arabian politics and conquerors.

## 2d. Arabian Politics in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

The political struggle of Najd varied throughout time. Najd was invaded by many rulers throughout its history: by the Ottomans, the ruler of al-Hasa, the *Sharif* of Mecca and other local rulers, though it was regarded as an unattractive and difficult place to conquer due to its

---

<sup>66</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, *Mu’llafāt al-shaykh al-imām ‘Abd al-Wahhāb*. (Riyadh: Jāmi‘ah al-imām Muḥammad Ibn Sa‘ūd al-islāmiyyah, 1976), vol. 2, p. 658.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 658.

harsh climate.<sup>68</sup> As we shall see, the political conflicts in Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's time also reflect underlying religious struggles.

Between 1517 and 1916, the Ottoman Empire was the main power in the region being *inter alia* in charge of the holy city of Mecca. Since the sixteenth-century, the Ottoman sultans had taken a particular interest in both holy cities, Mecca and Madina, spending considerable amounts of money on beautifying the holy cities as well as defending them as in the case of the Battle of Jeddah on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1517 when they drove back the Portuguese army that had reached Jeddah with the aim to invade the Arabian peninsula.<sup>69</sup> Although the name sultan was traditionally given to the head of the Ottoman Empire, Abd al-Aziz bin Abd al-Rahman al-Saud also adopted the title of sultan of Najd until he was proclaimed King of Saudi Arabia.<sup>70</sup>

It could be argued that the Ottoman's incentive behind caring for two holy mosques was to maintain their sovereignty by seeking recognition from Muslims across the world. Hourani has highlighted how the Ottoman sultans helped to preserve Islamic religious learning, the Arabic language, Islamic sciences and Arab history.<sup>71</sup> Further, by adorning the two holy cities, the Ottoman Empire conspicuously displayed their religious commitment, which would have helped them to gain support from Muslim communities around the world while aiming to prevent any uprising by those who denounce their rule.

Prior to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, many Ottoman sultans had governed Arabia, mainly the two holy cities. Amongst the rulers were Suleiman I, famously known as Suleiman the Magnificent (1494–1566). He has been called the 'the Lawgiver' as he ordered Ibrahim Ibn

---

<sup>68</sup> William, Facey, *Dir'iyyah and the First Saudi State* (Stacey International; Box edition, 8<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2001), p. 15.

<sup>69</sup> George S. Rentz, *The Birth of Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia, Muhmmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) and the Beginnings of Unitarian Empire in Arabia* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2004), p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> J. E. Peterson, *Historical Dictionary of Saudi Arabia* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 2003), p. 140.

<sup>71</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 33.

Muhammad (1460–1549), who was the leading jurist in Aleppo, to publish a book which was related to the codification of *shariah* in its Hanafite judgment.<sup>72</sup> He was the son of Sultan Selim I (1470–1520), who claimed sovereignty of Arabia in 1517, but had little impact in governing Arabia. The longest reign over the Ottoman empire was by the tenth sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent, which lasted from 1520 to his death in 1566; he governed over many regions including Iraq, Hungary and North Africa.<sup>73</sup> This would empower the Ottoman Empire to take control over the eastern region of the Arabian Peninsula in the year 1592. The Ottomans in the sixteenth-century did not only extravagantly decorate the holy mosques but expanded their Empire while losing other smaller Ottoman states.<sup>74</sup>

An interesting case for our study is Murad IV (1612–1640), the seventeenth sultan, who was only seven when he inherited the position of sultan.<sup>75</sup> Reigning from 1623 to 1640, he not only achieved respect as a conqueror, but he was renowned for his extreme authority over Islamic laws, to the extent that Murad IV would execute those who revolted against what he had prohibited, like smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol. So, too, did Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb gain a reputation for the extreme enforcement of Islamic law in Arabia when he re-established the capital punishment of adultery. The following chapters will address many of his harsh approaches and understanding that were criticised by contemporary Muslim jurists.

During Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's lifetime, numerous sultans succeeded each other; their rather short reigns may mirror a certain power vacuum on the Arabian peninsula. For example, Ahmed III (1673–1736), the twenty-third sultan, reigned from 1703 to 1730 and is

---

<sup>72</sup> Francis. E. Peters, *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and competition, The words of God*, Vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 123.

<sup>73</sup> Abdurrahman Atcil, *Scholars and Sultans In The Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 501.

<sup>74</sup> George S. Rentz, *The Birth of Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia, Muhmmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) and the Beginnings of Unitarian Empire in Arabia* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2004), pp. 16–17.

<sup>75</sup> Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem, Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 234.

remembered for the lengthy time it took to mobilise his troops at Uskudar, Istanbul in order to advance his army to the eastern campaign.<sup>76</sup> He was succeeded by Mahmud I (1696–1754), Osman III (1699–1757), Mustafa III (1717–1774), Abdul Hamid I (1725–1789) and finally by Selim III (1761–1808) who was in power between 1789 and 1807, at the time of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's death.<sup>77</sup>

This leads us to the *Sharifs* who ruled over Mecca before the emergence of Muhammad Ibn Abd-al-Wahhāb's doctrine. They were descended from the dynasty of the Ottoman Empire and were placed in office by the sultan. Although the *Sharifs* of Mecca had much independence in decision-making, they continued to recognise the Ottoman dynasty as the dominant authority and looked to Istanbul for assistance and reassurance in all political, social and religious matters.<sup>78</sup> Muhammad Ibn Awn (1767–1858) was the *Sharif* for Mecca from 1836 to 1840, who later was taken to Egypt by order of Muhammad Ali Pasha (1769–1849).<sup>79</sup> After the death of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb his followers confronted Muhammad Ibn Awn as they wanted to expand their doctrine in Hijaz.<sup>80</sup> Crawford claims that there are no records about Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb in the Ottoman bureaucracy (though there are later records regarding his movement after his death).<sup>81</sup> This demonstrate that the circulation of the Wahhābi doctrine was probably rather limited to Arabia, in particular Najd, during his lifetime, and had not yet reached the sultans of the Ottoman states, or at least it was not deemed to be a concern

---

<sup>76</sup> Robert W. Olson, 'The Esnaf and the Patrona Halil Rebellion of 1730: A Realignment in Ottoman Politics?', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 17, no. 3, 1974, pp. 329–344.

<sup>77</sup> Rhoad Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty, Tradition, Images and Practice in the Ottoman Imperial Household 1400-1800* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. x.

<sup>78</sup> Suraya Faruqi, *Another Mirror for Princes: The Public Image of the Ottoman Sultans and Its Reception*. (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2009), p. 151.

<sup>79</sup> R. Y. Ebied and M. J. L. Young, 'An Unpublished Letter from 'Ali Pasha, Ottoman Governor of Iraq, to the Sharif of Mecca', *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 17, no. 1/4, 1976, pp. 58–71, at p. 59. Jstor: [www.jstor.org/stable/1570339](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1570339) [accessed 06/02/2020].

<sup>80</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 31–32.

<sup>81</sup> Michael Crawford, *Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab* (Series: *Makers of the Muslim world*) (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014), pp. 15–16.

for the Empire. It may have been considered that Najd was theoretically part of the Ottoman Empire, but the socio-political reality was quite different: if it had been under Ottoman control, unquestionably military actions would have taken place against Muhammad Ibn Abd-al-Wahhāb, his doctrine and his followers.

In the mid-eighteenth-century, the *Sharifs* acquired great wealth by trading and taxing the inhabitants of Jeddah. Moreover, the *Sharifs* sold food to the pilgrims, imposed a hefty tax upon them when entering the city of Mecca, while engaging in numerous trade deals to support their opulent lifestyle.<sup>82</sup> These substantial taxes that were imposed on pilgrims would go against Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's principle of pilgrimage being an act of worship, which should not entail any fees other than the cost to journey to the holy cities. This would have encouraged him to further spread his doctrine and to eradicate the taxes that he believed to be a contradiction of Islamic law.

This leads us to the local socio-political structures in Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's times. In Najd, there were continuous territorial wars between the tribes over the various oases. The two most powerful forces in Najd in the eighteenth-century were the al-Saud family from al-Dir'iyyah, established by Muhammad Ibn Saud Ibn Muhammad Ibn Muqrin Al-Maridi (1687–1765), and the al-Rashid family. The latter were the rulers of al-Ha'il, a city in northern Najd that emanated its wealth from being on the route of the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and its role of commercial hub; they were founded by Abdullah bin Ali al-Rashid (1788–1848),<sup>83</sup> whose father Ali al-Rashid (n.d) led the family during Muhammad Ibn Saud's lifetime. In this period,

---

<sup>82</sup> Alexei M. Vasiliev, *The History Of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2000), p. 122.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

the various tribes would fiercely fight their neighbouring lands before robbing, raiding and governing them.<sup>84</sup>

The tribal lifestyle that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb had experienced may have provided important motivational factors to develop his Islamic religious reform and his harsh approach to spreading his doctrine. One may even suggest that his claim to be a scholar, along with his aggressive approach to those who objected to his understanding of Islam, stood in clear opposition to the characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad who was patient in his call to Islam.<sup>85</sup>

## 2e. The Religious Situation in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

‘They took the tomb of their Prophets and Righteous as a place of worship, they placed lamps on the tombs (...), they took these places as locations for celebrations.’<sup>86</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb perceived the early eighteenth-century Arabia as a place where acts of polytheism were pervasive in a land once dominated by the monotheistic faith. Numerous places in Najd witnessed diverse forms of reverence, veneration and worship at tombs that were associated with the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, seeking protection and help while wailing around the tombs.<sup>87</sup> For example, people would visit al-Uyaynah where they venerated the grave of Zaīd Ibn al-Khattāb (n.d–632), offering prayers to him and performing circumambulation around his grave, similar to what pilgrims do around the Kāba. By supplicating to the grave, they hope that Zaīd would intercede for their sins to be forgiven.

---

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>85</sup> Surah al-Qalam 68:4; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’ān*, p. 565.

<sup>86</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-ma‘rūf bi-majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-najdiyyah : majmū‘at kutub wa-rasā’il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-‘āmmah lil-ihtifāl bi-murūr mi‘at ‘ām ‘alā ta’sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 135 (author’s translation).

<sup>87</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), p. 14.



He was the brother of the second Caliphate in Islam, Umar Ibn al-Khattāb (585–644), and, more importantly, one of the Prophet Muhammad’s companions.<sup>88</sup> These forms of worship were widespread and their eradication was the main aim of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s theological teachings.

In his description of Arabia’s religious traditions in the eighteenth-century, the ‘pro-Wahhābi’ historiographer Husayn Ibn Ghannām (see Chapter 1b), paints an image of a country where the majority of Muslims had been returning to the traditions of the pre-Islamic era. In his portrayal, people were deviating from the Qur’ān by associating other deities with God; he vividly describes that the Muslims were worshipping the living and the dead, venerating trees, and that they substituted God for idols.<sup>89</sup> In al-Fida, women would travel to pray to a ‘male date palm tree’ in the hope to obtain a husband before they become barren and unable to have children. New mothers would journey to a tree named ‘*tamarisk*’ after the birth of a new born child and would hang a piece of cloth on the tree in the belief that their child will be protected from the evils of society and death. Others would travel to a cave beneath al-Dir’iyyah which was believed to protect those who offer meat and bread. They would engage in votive offerings, in hope to be protected from evil. This tradition roots in the story of Ghar Bint al-Amīr (n.d), the daughter of Amīr, who, having been attacked, was crying while seeking protection and was miraculously saved from her attackers.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), p. 14 (author’s translation).

<sup>89</sup> Nabil Mouline, translated by Ethan S. Rundell, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 46.

<sup>90</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), p. 15 (author’s translation).

He argues that these acts of idolatry, such as placing lamps on the tombs of prophets and saint,<sup>91</sup> show people's engagement in *shirk* that takes them outside the fold of Islam. The religious practices described by Husayn Ibn Ghannām aim at supporting the motivations behind Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's view that the Muslims had not only gone astray, but returned to a period comparable to the time of the Prophet Muhammad when idolatry practices amidst 'pagans' were common. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's widespread use of quotes from the Prophet Muhammad to support his course of action against 'polytheists' may insinuate that he considered the return of idolatry across Arabia to resemble the era of the Prophet Muhammad. This may be the reason for his desperate attempt to return the Arabs to his understanding of orthodox Islam; clearly, his first-hand experience of these practices impacted his rigorous approach while believing that he was drawing people back to Islam.

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb states that the practices of associating deities varied amongst the people, from slaughtering in the name of others than God in the hope to be successful in this world, to physically worshipping graves: 'And from associating others with God is, slaughtering to other than God, like those who slaughter for jinns<sup>92</sup> and graves.'<sup>93</sup> He bases his interpretations on the Qur'ān, notably on these two statements:

'God does not forgive the worship of others besides Him – though He does forgive whoever He will for lesser sins – for whoever does this, has gone far, far astray'<sup>94</sup>

'If anyone associates others with God, God will forbid him from the Garden and Hell will be his home. No one will help (such) evildoers.'<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū'at al-tawhīd al-ma'rūf bi-majmū'at al-tawhīd al-najdiyyah : majmū'at kutub wa-rasā'il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-'āmmah lil-iḥṭifāl bi-murūr mi'at 'ām 'alā ta'sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 135 (author's translation).

<sup>92</sup> The term *jinn* is applied to all kinds of supernatural entities, in most cases it is associated with the devil.

<sup>93</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū'at al-tawhīd al-ma'rūf bi-majmū'at al-tawhīd al-najdiyyah : majmū'at kutub wa-rasā'il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-'āmmah lil-iḥṭifāl bi-murūr mi'at 'ām 'alā ta'sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 177 (author's translation).

<sup>94</sup> Surah Al-Nisa 4:116; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 98.

<sup>95</sup> Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:72; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 121.

The preceding verses from the Qur'ān distinguish the threat of those who join deities with God, as God may choose to forgive all sins other than *shirk*, which implies Paradise will be denied for the wrong doer. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb quotes similar verses to not only warn against these acts, but also to increase significantly the number of his followers, as he demonstrates his scholarly use of the primary sources that helped him to spread his agenda, be it for political or personal gain.

For Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, worship was not only limited to graves of dead saints, but also included worship of a living person. For instance, the people of al-Kharj in the south of Najd would direct their worship, including sacrificing animals as to a deity, to a living man by the name of Taj Bin Shamsan (n.d) who claimed to possess supernatural powers.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, the people of Mecca would engage in 'idle talk', mixing between men and women, around the graves of the Prophet Muhammad's wives, Khadījah Bint Khuwaylid (556–619) and Maīmūnah Bint Hārith (594–671); they would raise their voices in seeking protection from the dead. Others would exhibit characteristics of reverence around the tombs, they would direct their worship to the Prophet Muhammad's grave rather than the Kāba. They would rub their cheeks to the dust of Madina to seek blessing from it. In the city of Jeddah, countless people would make pilgrimages to the claimed sixty cubits long grave of Eve, despite being charged to enter.<sup>97</sup>

For Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhāb, the society of Arabia was engaged in practices that included religious innovation, which distorted 'puritanical' Islam. He further perceived that these 'extreme' practices of calling to saints were an act of polytheism that promoted disunity amongst Muslims as it played no part in Islam. Undoubtedly, these practices of what he

---

<sup>96</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), p. 15 (author's translation).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17 (author's translation).

perceived to be blasphemous became an important motivational factor to spread his doctrine and later call for *jihād*. In his understanding, the Qur'ān supported his understanding as well as his approach and reasoning, but this will be reviewed in Chapter 4 when we investigate his methodology when utilising the holy scriptures.

## 2f. Conclusion

In this Chapter, we have identified a wide range of aspects that have influenced not only Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's character and understanding, but also his epistemological approach in conveying his doctrine. His dislike for servile concubines emphasises his puritan application to Islam, even though it contradicted the Qur'ān. The Najd's geographical climate would have conditioned his stern character, while the economic and societal structures would have provided the basis for his role as leader. The hierarchal structure of tribal leadership in Najd would have educated him, leading to his authoritarian approach to society and to imposing his religious authority. The de facto absence of the Ottoman Empire in Najd enabled Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb to unite the tribes under his leadership, which, in association with the al-Saud family, would allow him to unify Arabia, as we shall discuss in the next Chapter.

### 3. The life of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb

The aim of this Chapter is to understand Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's life journey. What impacted him mentally, from his childhood to his adolescence? His education, the relationship with his father, his marriage at a young age and him memorising the whole Qur'ān while still being an immature child, all of which shaped his behavioural pattern and his motivations. All this became a driving force for him, from a seeker of knowledge to becoming an 'influencer' not just for his own society, but around the globe still today.

According to Traboulsi,<sup>98</sup> there are not many sources discussing Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's life in chronological order, and our two main sources to obtain historical events of his life are the works of the chronicler Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Bishr *'Unwān al-majd fī Ta'rīkh Najd'* ('Token of glory, on the history of Najd'), published in 1853–54, and of Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *'Tarikh Najd al-Musamma Rawdat al-Afkar wa-l-afham'* ('History of Najd, entitled: The garden of thoughts and perceptions'), both of which were written after his death. According to Cook, the dates stated in these works must be contested, making it difficult to confirm any specific dates for his early life.<sup>99</sup> Traboulsi accused Ibn Bishr and Ibn Ghannām of political and religious propaganda when presenting their biographical information on Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb.<sup>100</sup> Another work that I have used is the book entitled *Kitāb lam' al-shihāb fī sīrat Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb* ('The Shinning of the Flame: A Biography of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb'),<sup>101</sup> whose completion is dated to the year 1817 CE; its author has not been identified and only the editor's name is recorded. The only extant

---

<sup>98</sup> Samer Traboulsi, 'An Early Refutation of Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhāb's Reformist Views', *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 42, no. 3, 2002, pp. 373–415, at p. 375. Jstor: [www.jstor.org/stable/1571420](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1571420) [accessed: 08/09/2019].

<sup>99</sup> Michael Cook. 'The Historians of Pre-Wahhābī Najd', *Studia Islamica*, Vol. 76, 1992, pp. 163–176, at pp. 165–166. Jstor: [www.jstor.org/stable/1595666](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1595666) [accessed 08/09/2019].

<sup>100</sup> Samer Traboulsi, 'An Early Refutation of Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhāb's Reformist Views', *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 42, no. 3, 2002, pp. 375.

<sup>101</sup> Ahmad Mustafa Abu Hākimah, *Kitāb lam' al-shihāb fī sīrat Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb / tahqīq Aḥmad Mustafā Abū Hākimah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1967) (author's translation).

manuscript of this work can be found in the British Library (MS 23,346). During several visits to the British Library, I was able to study this handwritten manuscript, explore the author's writing style and identify where he re-edited the text and added handwritten notes, thus allowing me to critically assess the information stated in his manuscript. The manuscript has received several criticisms as some of the biographical information also contradicts both the works of Ibn Bishr and Ibn Ghannām.<sup>102</sup>

### 3a. His Genealogy

Prominent historians of Arabia provide different dates of birth for Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, but there is a consensus that he must have been born around mid-May 1703. Ibn Ghannām mentions that his full name was Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb Ibn Sulaymān Ibn Ali Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rashid Ibn Buraīd Ibn Muhammad Ibn Buraīd Ibn Musharraf Al-Tamim.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the family of Musharraf, who can be traced back to the ancient noble tribe of Tamim, used to be simple nomads who later settled as farmers in villages. Abu Huraira reports about the Tamim in a Hadīth: 'There are some distinguishing features of Banu Tamim which I heard from God's Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) and my love for them is never on the decline after that, and the words are: They are the bravest amongst people in the battlefield'.<sup>104</sup> This raises the question about Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's true identity concerning the lineage of his ancestry. It is possible that the names stated in his lineage

---

<sup>102</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- 'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. xx.

<sup>103</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), p. 81 (author's translation).

<sup>104</sup> Muslim Ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qushayrī an-Naysābūrī, *Sahīh Muslim* (Cairo: Darul-tāsīl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2014), 6:383 #2605 (author's translation).

were added to enrich his status, as Arabs would traditionally pride themselves from their progenitors.<sup>105</sup>

Ibn Bishr mentions that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb descended from a family of scholars, preachers and religious leaders.<sup>106</sup> His grandfather, Sulaymān Ibn Ali (n.d–1687), was deemed to be amongst the greatest scholars of Najd; he was an Islamic judge from the Hanbalīte School of Jurisprudence in al-Uyaynah where Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was born.<sup>107</sup> His father, Abd al-Wahhāb Ibn Sulaymān Ibn Ali (n.d–1740), also had another son, Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb (1699–1793/94).

As a child, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb had to memorise the entirety of the holy Qur’ān. Having completed this before the age of ten, it allowed him to continue his studies and develop his understanding of Islamic law and sciences.<sup>108</sup> The author of *Kitāb lam‘ al-shihāb fī sīrat Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb* describes Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb as intelligent, keen in learning and with a good understanding of his learning. He obtained much knowledge of Islamic sciences, which included Qur’anic commentary of each verse, Hadīth classification and understanding from a scholar named Abdur-Rahman Ibn Ahmad (n.d), who was from Buraydah,<sup>109</sup> the capital of the al-Qasīm Region. Abdur-Rahman Ibn Ahmad played a significant role in his early phase of understanding the scriptural texts, providing him with the foundations to develop his Islamic theology later in life. Ibn Ghannām refers to a letter written by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s father from which we learn that he decided to marry his

---

<sup>105</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live in*. (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007), p. 107.

<sup>106</sup> Uthmān Ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Bishr, *Unwān al-majd fī tārikh Najd*, vol. 1 (Riyadh: Dar al-Malik ‘Abd al-Aziz, 1982), p. 33 (author’s translation).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33 (author’s translation).

<sup>108</sup> Simon. R. Valentine, *Force and Fanaticism: Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Beyond* (London: Hurst and Company, 2015), p. 31.

<sup>109</sup> Abu Hākimah, Ahmad Mustafa. *Kitāb lam‘ al-shihāb fī sīrat Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb / tahqīq Aḥmad Mustafā Abū Hākimah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1967), p. 15 (author’s translation).

son off at the age of 12, as he had already obtained substantial knowledge of Islam, and later he accompanied him on the pilgrimage on his son Muhammad's request.<sup>110</sup> Not only does this highlight the custom of young aged marriage in Najd, but also indicates the urgency felt in the society to marry as soon as one reaches puberty. Marriage at a young age would have forced Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and other young men and women in Arabia to take on full adult responsibilities, which meant they were compelled to mature emotionally at an early age. These experiences of the socio-cultural norms in his youth may have been important factors in developing Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's charisma and boldness in spreading his doctrine. After the pilgrimage of the young Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, he travelled to Madina to visit the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad and remained there for two months.<sup>111</sup> His stay would have exposed him to numerous forms of worship, which he had previously been unaware of, as well as the diverse interaction and debates between various groups of Muslims, as we shall discuss later.

### 3b. His Travel to Seeking Knowledge

Throughout the Muslim world, scholars would traditionally travel to seek knowledge as it is understood to be a form of worship,<sup>112</sup> as did Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb. Having completed his elementary education with his father and other local scholars, he then followed in the footsteps of classical scholars in seeking Islamic knowledge outside the limited scholarly lessons in Najd in 1715. Mouline argues that when Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was young,

---

<sup>110</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), p. 81 (author's translation).

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82 (author's translation).

<sup>112</sup> Richard C. Martin, ed, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Michigan: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2016), p. 297.



he was compelled to uphold traditional studies, as he was an offspring from a scholarly family. His travels to seek Islamic knowledge are challenging to reconstruct because our sources only provide rare insights; his studies took him, among others, to the scholars of Mecca, Madina, al-Ahsa and Basrah.<sup>113</sup> The tradition to seek Islamic knowledge may have rooted in his family, who was known for nurturing and participating in creating the scholars of their society.

His second visit to Madina may have shaped his spiritual vision of the world and thus created his understanding and epistemological approach in spreading his doctrine. The principal teachers that influenced Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb were Abd Allah Ibn Sayf al-Shammari (n.d.),<sup>114</sup> who had moved from Najd to Madina, Muhammad al-Majmu'i (n.d.) and the renowned Hadīth scholar Muhammad Hayāt as-Sindī (n.d–1750); it is through them that he discovered the writings of the fourteenth-century work of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim.<sup>115</sup>

In 1724 Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was introduced to the renowned Indian scholar named Muhammad Hayāt as-Sindī al-Madani in Madina who would have a significant impact on him.<sup>116</sup> Being recognised for his rigorous teaching in the field of the prophetic tradition, Muhammad Hayāt as-Sindī summoned the people to the prophetic tradition and openly rejected all *madhāhib*, i.e. the Islamic School of Jurisprudence.<sup>117</sup> This shows to what extent Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was inspired by the example of Muhammad Hayāt as-Sindī,

---

<sup>113</sup> Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 52.

<sup>114</sup> Simon R. Valentine, *Force and Fanaticism: Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Beyond* (London: Hurst and Company, 2015), p. 31.

<sup>115</sup> Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 52.

<sup>116</sup> Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Bishr, *Unwān al-majd fī tārikh Najd*, Vol. 1 (Riyadh: Dar al-Malik 'Abd al-Aziz, 1982), p. 35.

<sup>117</sup> Basheer Nafi, 'A Teacher of Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhāb: Muḥammad Ḥayāt Al-Sindī and the Revival of Aṣḥāb Al-Ḥadīth's Methodology', *Islamic Law and Society*, Vol. 13, no. 2, 2006, pp. 215–217, from JSTOR: [www.jstor.org/stable/40377907](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40377907) [accessed 02/03/2020].

as he equally refused all *madhāhib* and would extrapolate rulings directly from the Islamic sources. Another pupil of as-Sindī was the famous Islamic scholar from Delhi, Shāh Walīullāh Dehlawī (1703–1762),<sup>118</sup> who is equally considered to be a reformer. But the fact that both Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and Shāh Walīullāh studied with Muhammad Hayāt as-Sindī does not mean – as some have argued<sup>119</sup> – that they all shared the same ideas and teachings, as demonstrated by Ahmad Dallal, apart from a general focus on the Qur’ān and the Sunnah and the rejection of *taqlid* ‘blind following’.<sup>120</sup> For example, Shāh Walīullāh’s reform work did not aim to remove the ‘metaphysical character’ from Sufism, while Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was an ‘ardent anti-Sufi’ scholar, although both had the same teacher.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, as-Sindī warned his students ‘against the excesses of Ibn ‘Abd al- Wahhāb’.<sup>122</sup>

Critics would argue that having been influenced by his teacher, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb aimed to imitate Muhammad Haya as-Sindī’s approach in rejecting *madhāhib* over the ‘literal’ understanding of the Qur’ān and Hadīth, while condemning any polytheistic acts. The conversations that took place between Muhammad Hayāt as-Sindī and his student are essential to identify what may have influenced Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb in shaping his doctrine in the light of the Qur’ān and Hadīth. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb had asked his teacher about the reasoning and ruling why worshippers were surrounding the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad and supplicating to it? His teacher answered by explaining that these types

---

<sup>118</sup> Also called Shāh Walīullāh Dehlawī or Shāh Walī Allāh Ahmad Ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahīm ad-Dihlawī.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, the works of Wilfred C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), 42, H. A. R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), 27-28 and John Voll, ‘Muḥammad Ḥayyā Al-Sindī and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd Al-Wahhāb: An Analysis of an Intellectual Group in Eighteenth-Century Madīna’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 38, no. 1, 1975, pp. 32–39, who also focus on the spread of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrine across the Muslim world.

<sup>120</sup> Ahmad Dallal, ‘The origins and objective of Islamic Revivalist thought, 1750–1850’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 113 (3), 1993, 341-359, at 342.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* p. 342.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* p. 342.

of worship were futile and are rejected by God as they had no origin in Islam. He further emphasised that all forms of worship should be directed to God alone.<sup>123</sup> It is therefore conceivable that as-Sindī played an essential role in ingraining into Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb the belief that their people had fallen into a state of apostasy similar to the idolaters of pre-Islamic periods.<sup>124</sup>

The question itself suggests the uncertainty of what was considered permissible. Perhaps Muhammad Hayāt as-Sindī makes his statement so clear because he is an ‘outsider’ to the community and therefore surprised about a practise, as well as the lack of Islamic knowledge concerning acts of polytheism that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb possessed. Additionally, the teacher’s unexpected answer would have left a lasting impression on the young Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, profoundly shaping his understanding of Islam, including what invalidates one’s testimony of faith as we note in the latter part of his life.

### 3c. His Travel to Basrah

It was common to travel from Madina to the city of Basrah in Iraq and from there to Damascus in Syria to seek Islamic knowledge from esteemed Islamic scholars. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, too, later travelled to Basrah where he remained the longest, studying with scholars to enhance his knowledge of the Arabic language and grammar and of the Hadīth, as stated by Ibn Ghannām.<sup>125</sup> While living and studying in Basrah, he would have encountered many strands and understandings of Islam. In particular, he had the chance to observe Shi’ite

---

<sup>123</sup> Uthmān Ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Bishr, *Unwān al-majd fī tārikh Najd*, vol 1 (Riyadh: Dar al-Malik ‘Abd al-Aziz, 1982), p. 36 (author’s translation).

<sup>124</sup> Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 55.

<sup>125</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārikh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), p. 82 (author’s translation).

Muslims who revered and sought protection from the shrines of Ali Ibn Abi Tālib (599–661) and Hussain Ibn Ali (626–680) who were both from the Prophet Muhammad’s family.<sup>126</sup> He participated in debates relating to Islamic theological matters, forbidding practices of associating deities with God, religious innovations and insisting on following the path of steadfastness which was the Qur’ān and Hadīth. Furthermore, Ibn Ghannām claims that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb began to preach the obligation of what he believed to be the orthodox theology.<sup>127</sup>

It was in Basrah that he wrote his opus magnum, ‘The Book of Monotheism’.<sup>128</sup> Its aim was to define the nature of monotheism in Islam in order to expose those acts and practices that he considered to contradict Islamic belief. The book is divided into sixty-seven chapters and the title of each chapter is accompanied by verses from the Qur’ān along with statements from the Hadīth. To give more weight to his arguments, he cites testimonies from the Prophet Muhammed’s companions and supports them with scholarly accounts. His summary aims to clarify the alleged ‘misconceptions’ of the Islamic doctrine that were practised in his lifetime.

It could be argued that this book provides the clearest and most complete account and explanation of his doctrine as he wrote it in such a way as to make it more accessible by using a more precise and simple language that is more easily accessible to the lay public. The sentences are frequently short and to the point.<sup>129</sup> His writing style and approach in his books, epistles, lectures and sermons significantly varied enormously depending on whom he was addressing. For example, when he wrote letters to the judges in Mecca, he employed a highly

---

<sup>126</sup> Richard C. Martin, ed, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Michigan: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2016), p. 24.

<sup>127</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), p. 82 (author’s translation).

<sup>128</sup> Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (New Haven. Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 52.

<sup>129</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996).

sophisticated style, mirroring the highest intellectual approach, in order to explain his doctrine using evidence beyond the primary sources, such as scholarly explanations of renowned intellectuals like Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim.<sup>130</sup> In other works, he employed a more polemical style, sometimes answering questions in two styles: he was concise when he believed that the verses from the Qur'ān were sufficient to answer the rebuttal against his doctrine, while he answered in great detail when the verses in the Qur'ān were ambiguous.<sup>131</sup> Although he initiated the writing in Basrah, the 'Book of Monotheism' was circulated from the city al-Huraymila by his students and supporters who made hand copies of the book and then distributed them across the region.<sup>132</sup>

He was later expelled from Basrah.<sup>133</sup> This may not only have been triggered by his teacher Muhammad al-Majmu'I (n.d) being attacked for propagating orthodox theology, but also on the basis of his contentious debates on – and the denunciations of – Sufism and Shi'ism.<sup>134</sup> In the streets of Basrah, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb would preach and debate in public which would leave him with a public recognition outside of Najd. He had prolonged his stay in Basrah where he denounced the worshipping of saints and idols as well as associating deification or worship of anyone or anything besides God. Moreover, he established religious circles where he explained the meaning of 'monotheism' in Islam and how the abolishment of worshipping saints should be enforced upon all as it contradicts the foundation of the Islamic doctrine.<sup>135</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> Mu'īnuddīn Aḥmad Khan and Harford Jones, 'A diplomat's report on Wahhabism of Arabia', *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 1, 1968, pp. 33–46, at p. 35. JSTOR: [www.jstor.org/stable/20832903](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20832903) [accessed 16/12/2020].

<sup>131</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Abdul-Rahman bin Nasir al-Barrak, eds, *Sharh Kasf ash-shubuhāt* (Riyādh: Al-matab al-ilmi bishubkah nur al-Islām, 2015) (author's translation).

<sup>132</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn-'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 77.

<sup>133</sup> Ahmad Dallal, 'The origins and objective of Islamic Revivalist thought, 1750–1850', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 113 (3), 1993, p. 349.

<sup>134</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn-'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 35.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

All in all, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's sojourn in Basrah would have conditioned him to develop the harsh and firm approach that he later employed to propagate his doctrine. More so, the resilience against Sufism and Shiism which he had endured in his time in Basrah, would have prepared him for his future struggles against his adversaries and opponents by engaging in both verbal disputes and aggressive physical methods to propagate his teachings.

### 3d. His Return to Najd

Having been banished from Basrah, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb left for al-Zubair where he remained for some time, intending to continue his journey to Damascus to study with the scholars of the Hanbalīte School of Jurisprudence. Being unable to continue because of a lack of money,<sup>136</sup> he soon made his journey back to Najd. He stopped over at al-Ahsa where, according to Husayn Ibn Ghannām, he studied with Abdullah Ibn Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Latif (n.d.), a teacher of the Shafi'ite School of Jurisprudence.<sup>137</sup> Unfortunately, as Mouline has shown, there are no records of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's activities in al-Ahsa.<sup>138</sup> Subsequently, he settled in al-Huraymila, the land in which his father had been serving as a judge since 1727 after having been banished from al-Uyaynah by the successor of Abd Ibn Mu'ammār (n.d.).

Despite his father's opposition, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb taught public religious classes in mosques and elsewhere in al-Huraymila, preaching his doctrine while denouncing the

---

<sup>136</sup> Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Bishr, *Unwān al-majd fī tārikh Najd*, vol 1 (Riyadh: Dār al-Malik 'Abd al-Aziz, 1982), p. 37 (author's translation).

<sup>137</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārikh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), p. 83 (author's translation).

<sup>138</sup> Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 52.

idolatry taking place in the same locality until his father's death in 1740.<sup>139</sup> Had his teaching been limited to a private domain, there would have been no attempt in assassinating him, but despite the danger to his life, he followed his ambition to teach about monotheism through dialogue and debate in public in order to convey his views to the widest possible audience. The fact that he was able to teach his doctrine in al-Huraymila, while his father was living, identifies the gravity of protection Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was receiving because of his father's scholarly status, and perhaps his father agreed with some theological aspects of his doctrine, permitting him to teach.

In al-Huraymila, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was fortunate to acquire access to his grandfather's library.<sup>140</sup> Not only would the books have influenced his understanding of Islamic theology, but it also would have deepened his knowledge in scholarly discussions and debates concerning Islamic theology, in particular the books of Ibn Taymiyyah<sup>141</sup> whom he quotes extensively in many of his writings. His grandfather's library and his previous experiences in Basrah would have shaped and moulded his mental framework concerning his approach to propagate his doctrine. The nineteenth-century English scholar Gifford Palgrave endorses the common accusation that the Najd was primarily inhabited by nomadic Bedouins and that they have made no impression of 'good or ill...', describing Najd as a stagnant non-functioning society, a civilisation with little access to education and trade.<sup>142</sup> This statement clearly contradicts the evidence that demonstrates – as we discussed in Chapter 2 – that we are dealing

---

<sup>139</sup> Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Bishr, *Unwān al-majd fī tārikh Najd*, vol 1 (Riyadh: Dar al-Malik 'Abd al-Aziz, 1982), p. 37 (author's translation).

<sup>140</sup> Michael Crawford, *Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab* (Series: *Makers of the Muslim world*) (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014), p. 29.

<sup>141</sup> John Voll, 'Muḥammad Ḥayyā Al-Sindī and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab: An Analysis of an Intellectual Group in Eighteenth-Century Madīna', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 38, no. 1, 1975, pp. 39.

<sup>142</sup> Alexei M. Vasiliev, *The History Of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2000), pp. 138-139; William Gifford Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey Through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862–1863)*, 2 vols (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) London and Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1866).

with a predominantly sedentary tribal society. Also, the fact that both Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's father and grandfathers were Hanbalīte judges implies that they must have been Islamic scholars. This explains why already his grandfather maintained a library which reveals the intellectual milieu that was present in Najd in the eighteenth-century.

The claim by Sulaymān Ibn Suhaym (1718–1767), one of the staunchest Nadjdi opponents of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, that the latter had disregarded the *madhhab* of the Hanbalīte School<sup>143</sup> and created a new religion or a fifth *madhab*,<sup>144</sup> thus causing more division amongst the Muslim community, is incorrect. Instead, it can be confirmed that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb tended to follow the opinions of the Hanbalīte School of Jurisprudence regarding subjects concerning Islamic laws, unless its opinions contradicted his interpretation of what he considered to be an authentic Hadīth or source. Though he did not institute a new *madhab*, his intellectual, theological and juridical position differed from other, contemporary Hanbalīte jurists. The emphasis of adhering to the Qur'ān and Hadīth is supported by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal himself who used to say, 'Do not look into what Ishāq, Sufyan, ash-Shafi'i or Malik wrote; you have the source'.<sup>145</sup> This indicates Ahmad Ibn Hanbal's preference to follow a source over the opinions of the *madhāhib*, which Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhāb is believed to have observed.

Moreover, his *ijtihād* – i.e. the independent or original interpretation of problems not precisely covered by the Qur'ān and Hadīth – did not expel him from the Hanbalīte School of Jurisprudence, unlike Ibn Taymiyyah. Rather, the *ijtihād* demonstrates his scholarly merit as a

---

<sup>143</sup> Al-Yassini, Ayman S., 'Middle East and Central Asia', in *Religion and Societies*, ed. by Carlo Caldarola (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1983), pp. 59 – 79, at p. 68. '...rejection of following the interpretation of any specific school of thought (*madhab*), including the Wahhabis' own Hanbali school...'.  
<sup>144</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- 'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 110.

<sup>145</sup> Muhammad Abu Zahra, *The Four Imams: their lives, works and their schools of thought*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (London: Dar Al-Taqla, 2000), p. 409.



*mujtahid*, as someone who is able to reach an independent ruling concerning Islamic law. We must also take into account that the Hanbalīte School was not monolithic and had several opinions: Ibn Taymiyyah demonstrated his use of selected opinions from the Hanbalīte School while rejecting other statements from the same School.<sup>146</sup>

Like his Hanbalīte progenitors, Ibn Taymiyyah's epistemology maintained that the Qur'ān, *Sunnah* and the legal understanding of the first three generations of Muslims consist of the most authoritative sources of Islamic teaching. He defended Ahmad Ibn Hanbal's ontological argument that the sacred texts should be taken literally and that anthropomorphic characterisations and descriptions of God were clearly misunderstood. This meant that by citing the Qur'ān, one was 'describing God only as He has described Himself in His Book and as the Prophet has described Him in the *Sunnah*'.<sup>147</sup>

Overall, we have shown that Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhāb followed the tradition of the Hanbalīte School and that he stressed the significance of following the authentic prophetic tradition, following the practice of Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Qayyim and other scholars from the Hanbalīte School.

### 3e. From al-Uyaynah to al-Dir'iyyah

For Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, to purify Islam meant to return Muslims to what he believed to be Islamic monotheism. He did this by warning people against what he regarded to be polytheism; he emphasised that acts, such as calling upon the dead and seeking their help, was *shirk*. Watt argues that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb depended on attacking saints and

---

<sup>146</sup> Abdul Hakim I. Al-Matroudi, *The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict or Conciliation* (London and Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 26.

<sup>147</sup> Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyyah, *Commentary by Sālih Ibn Fawzān, Sharh Al-Aqeeda Al-Wāsatya* (al-Riyād: Darul al-āsiyah, 2005), p. 19 (author's translation).

their tombs in order to force the people to return to what he understood to be the Prophet Muhammad's teachings.<sup>148</sup> In other words, he took advantage of the fact that the majority of the people of Najd revered graves and saints, by arming himself and his followers against them, which resulted in a de facto physical threat against the people of Najd.

Soon after his father's death in the year 1740, he decided to propagate his dogma by preaching more publicly in al-Huraymila by denouncing any acts of polytheism with the aim to eradicate what he considered to be heretic practices. His influence in al-Huraymila and nearby towns, like al-Arid, seems to have been so significant that he managed to recruit large groups of residents amongst his followers who accepted his doctrine and were subsequently spreading it publicly, which in turn was creating controversies and conflicts in their local communities.<sup>149</sup> Some local leaders would have contested the teachings of Muhammad Ibn al-Wahhāb not only because they posed a threat to their political and personal agenda, but also undermined their authority as they considered themselves to be directly in charge of Muslim scholars.

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's activities in al-Huraymila made him a subject to an assassination attempt in 1740.<sup>150</sup> His enemies had climbed the wall of his residency in an attempt to kill him, but Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb escaped and sought refuge in his birth town, al-Uyaynah. He found shelter in the house of Uthmān Ibn Hamid Mu'ammār (n.d.),<sup>151</sup> the chief (*ra'īs*) of al-Uyaynah, who also married Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb to his paternal aunt, Jawhara (n.d.).<sup>152</sup> Above all, he actively supported Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's dogma by commanding everyone in the city to accept and spread his teaching.<sup>153</sup>

---

<sup>148</sup> William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy And Theology, An Extended Survey, An Extended Survey* (Edinburgh: University Press Edinburgh, 1985), p. 146.

<sup>149</sup> David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>150</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), p. 84.

<sup>151</sup> No date of birth nor death have been recorded.

<sup>152</sup> Our sources do not mention what happened to his first wife.

<sup>153</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), p. 84.

His stay in al-Uyaynah and notably his marriage provided him with the opportunity to build kinship relations with the current leader who actively assisted his movement, enabling him to grow his recruitment efforts and further disseminate his theology by lessons being taught in mosques and Islamic study circles. Uthmān Ibn Mu'ammār supported his programme of destroying the places that received worshipped other than God, like tombs and sacred trees, to prevent 'idol' worship. The great tomb of Zāid Ibn al-Khattāb (?–632), who was a companion of the Prophet Muhammad and a brother of Umar, the second Caliph, in al-Jubailah his tomb was demolished by an army of men supporting the Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's cause. The demolition of the tomb was carried out in the presence of many devotees of Zāid Ibn al-Khattāb, who were not able to prevent the destruction of their holy shrine that had been worshipped for hundreds of years.<sup>154</sup>

This act would have had significant impact in the propagation of his doctrine as many would have been afraid to fight against Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and his followers, allowing his movement to grow in strength. Many who feared him may have had no alternative other than to join him from fear of being killed, thus further supporting and legitimising his movement.

Moreover, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb established obligatory prayer and *zakah* on all Muslims while he enforced *shariah* law with its traditional capital punishment with the support of Uthmān Ibn Mu'ammār. This was a significant development as capital punishments had not been implemented in the region. The news travelled fast all over Arabia and beyond,<sup>155</sup> displaying the gravity of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's mission and highlighting the profound impact he has had on the people across Arabia, signifying the determination of him

---

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 84 (author's translation).

<sup>155</sup> David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), pp. 17–18.

and his followers to impose their view of Islamic law. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's influence across the garrison society had given him widespread recognition, notably at al-Dir'iyyah. Amongst the followers who converted to his course were Mishari (n.d) and Thunayyan (n.d),<sup>156</sup> the brothers of the *amīr* of al-Dir'iyyah, Muhammad Ibn Saud, who would become a major ally in his movement.

Despite his success, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was forced to leave al-Uyaynah as the chief of al-Ahsa, who had a higher status in the hierarchy amongst the chiefs because he occupied a more significant amount of land and wealth than others, gave Uthmān Ibn Mu'ammār an ultimatum: he was demanding the life of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb or the commission Uthmān was receiving from taxing the lands in al-Ahsa would be terminated. So many people at al-Uyaynah had accepted Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine to such an extent that the majority of his supporters from al-Uyaynah decided to migrate with him to al-Dir'iyyah, publicly displaying their allegiance to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb.<sup>157</sup>

Having been forced to leave al-Uyaynah in 1744, Abu Hākima recounts that Muhammad Ibn Saud embraced Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, reassuring him that al-Dir'iyyah is his home and not to fear his enemies. The *amīr* accepted his creed, provided shelter and helped to expand his mission. It was in al-Dir'iyyah where the two created an alliance, agreeing that Muhammad Ibn Saud would lead the military and political campaigns, while the religious affairs were to be in the hands of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, with the aim to spread his doctrine throughout the land of Arabia.<sup>158</sup>

---

<sup>156</sup> Dates of birth and death are not known for both the brothers.

<sup>157</sup> Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 33.

<sup>158</sup> David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), pp. 18–19.

Fundamentally, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb requested that Muhammad Ibn Saud joined him in the *jihād* against those whom he considered to be disbelievers in Islam, and in return he promised to support Muhammad Ibn Saud to attain the leadership of all communities in Arabia while he would direct religious affairs.<sup>159</sup> It may be debated whether Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's assertion to declare one a disbeliever (*takfīr*) was the central reason for the establishment of the Saudi kingdom. His supporters would have attacked the surrounding provinces on the premise that those who claimed to be Muslims were participating in polytheistic acts.

In his 'Beschreibung von Arabien' from 1772, Carsten Niebuhr (1733–1815) was the first to report about the Wahhābi movement to Europeans.<sup>160</sup> Among others, he stated that Sir Hartford identified ten doctrines that explained the beliefs and practices of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb. He mentions that the Wahhābis do not call themselves Wahhābis, but 'true Muslims', while the name Wahhābi was given by those who challenged and contested the doctrine. The explorer and cartographer further describes these *Muwahhidūn*<sup>161</sup> or 'monotheists' as those who claim to follow the first three generations of Muslims and never to have disrespected any Islamic Schools of Jurisprudence. Instead, they would ascribe themselves to the Qur'ān and Hadīth while asserting the teaching of Ibn Taymiyyah.<sup>162</sup>

---

<sup>159</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A history of Saudi Arabia* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 16.

<sup>160</sup> C. Niebuhr, *Beschreibung von Arabien aus eigenen Beobachtungen und im Lande selbst gesammelten Nachrichten* (Copenhagen: Hofbuchdruckerei, 1772) who dedicated an entire chapter on Najd and Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb.

<sup>161</sup> Referring to the followers of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb.

<sup>162</sup> Mu'tnuddīn Aḥmad Khan and Harford Jones, 'A diplomat's report on Wahhabism of Arabia', *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 1, 1968, 33–35.

### 3f. Conclusion

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's experience in various cities whilst seeking Islamic knowledge would have significantly shaped his religious understandings and the reasoning of his doctrine. His father's influence was detrimental to promoting Islamic knowledge and courage, which is displayed throughout his life. As a young child, he would want to make his father proud, which motivated him into completing his memorisation of the Qur'ān and to later be encouraged to pursue further traditional studies in cities outside Najd. By focussing on the theme of monotheism, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb highlighted 'shortcomings' in the Islamic practices of his time which proved successful in his acquiring a large entourage of followers that were inspired by his charismatic personality, thus encouraging the mission to spread his doctrine. His studies of the Qur'ān and Hadīth led him to propagate the re-assertion of a puritanical belief of Islam. He supported this concept by utilising statements of the influential revivalist, Ibn Taymiyyah. This demonstrates the scholastic method Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was following while achieving his goal to convey his doctrine across Arabia.

## 4. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's Doctrine in Light of the Qur'ān and Hadīth

### 4a. Introduction

‘Whosoever believes that a Guidance (Sunnah) other than the Guidance of the Prophet is more complete than his Guidance, or that the ruling of others than the Prophet is better than his ruling, it is as if he has preferred the ruling of *tawāgīt*<sup>163</sup> over his ruling. He is a disbeliever.’<sup>164</sup>

In his works, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb based his arguments on the central primary source of Islam, the Qur'ān, supported by the Hadīth.<sup>165</sup> This is particularly the case for his *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* ('The Book on Monotheism'),<sup>166</sup> in which he cites Qur'ānic verses accompanied by his brief commentary (*as-sharh*), quotations from Hadīth as well as his exegeses (*al-tafsīr*) of the verses of the Qur'ān and Hadīth.<sup>167</sup> He wrote it between 1734 and 1742<sup>168</sup> for a society in which he saw himself being on a mission to spread a doctrine that he believed to convey the creed of the Prophet Muhammad. The use of simple Arabic language and short chapters reinforces that the book was not only aimed at Islamic leaders and scholars, but at a wider audience, seeking to correct the public's understanding of what he considered to be the authentic creed. He also commonly demanded from both his followers and antagonists

---

<sup>163</sup> It is signifying a focus of devotions other than on God; in modern terms, it refers to tyrannical power that transgresses the authority of God.

<sup>164</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū'at al-tawhīd al-ma'rūf bi-majmū'at al-tawhīd al-najdīyah : majmū'at kutub wa-rasā'il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-'āmmah lil-iḥtifāl bi-murūr mi'at 'ām 'alā ta'sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 177 (author's translation). The Hadīth scholar Abd Al-Rahman Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rajab (1335–1393) mentions that '...every action on which the matter of Allah and His Messenger is not (based) is rejected for the one who does it'; see also: Abd Al-Rahman Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rajab, translated by Abdassamad Clarke, *The Compendium of Knowledge and Wisdom* (London: Turath Publication, 2007), p. 87.

<sup>165</sup> As we discussed before, Hadīth means 'speech, news, and story, historical and present narrative': see Edward W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Lebanon: Beirut, 1968), vol. 2, p. 529.

<sup>166</sup> *Kitab at-Tauhid* in the English language is spelt in numerous ways, for example as *Kitāb at-tawhīd*.

<sup>167</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), pp. 23–24.

<sup>168</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- 'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 77.

to quote verses from the Qur'ān.<sup>169</sup> He would have believed that engaging with his rivals and followers with the Qur'ān was the correct approach that the companions of the Prophet Muhammad would have undertaken as Muslim theologians agree that Islamic theological disputes are rendered principally from the Qur'ān. By calling people to the Qur'ān, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb may also have considered that this would purify the practices that contradict Islam by returning Muslims to what he considered were the original teachings of Islam.

In the above quoted passage, it is clear that he also considered *Sunnah*<sup>170</sup> (plural *Sunnan*) – the ‘practices’ or ‘*exempla*’<sup>171</sup> – to be a critical pillar for anyone who accepts Islam, and he disqualified – or indeed, excommunicated – anyone from Islam who misunderstood the *Sunnah* to mean anything other than the practice and teaching of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>172</sup> The Hadīth concerning adhering to the *Sunnah* undoubtedly impacted Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s motivation to convey his doctrine, as he claimed to have followed the *Sunnah* and a monolithic, i.e. literary, understanding of the first three generations of Islam, which included the ‘rightly guided Caliphates’.

---

<sup>169</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-ma‘rūf bi-majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-najdīyah: majmū‘at kutub wa-rasā’il* (al-Riyād : al-Amānah al-‘āmmah lil-ihtifāl bi-murūr mi‘at ‘ām ‘alā ta’sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 152 (author’s translation).

<sup>170</sup> *Sunnah* means ‘a way, course, rule, mode, manner of acting or conduct of life’: see Edward W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Lebanon: Beirut, 1968), vol. 4, p. 1438.

<sup>171</sup> In the pre-Islamic era, *Sunnah* described the exemplary practises of individuals within families and tribes who were acknowledged and distinguished for their lofty stature; the head of families and tribes would provide the *Sunnan* for their people to follow and imitate them: see Wael B. Hallaq, *The origins and evolution of Islamic law* (4<sup>th</sup> edition) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 46.

<sup>172</sup> The term *Sunnah* is mentioned sixteen times in the Qur’ān: see John Penrice *A, dictionary and glossary of the Koran, with copious grammatical references and explanations of the text* (first published 1873) (Delhi: Adam, 1991), p. 73. See for example Surah Al-Ahzab 33:62; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’ān*, p. 427: ‘This has been God’s practice with those who went before. You will find no change in God’s practice (*Sunnah*).’ In this verse, the word *Sunnah* is translated as ‘practice’, which means what God has ordained or His law and establishment will not come to any alteration.



‘You must adhere to my *Sunnah* and the way of the Rightly Guided *Khulafā*.<sup>173</sup> Hold on to it and cling fast to it. And beware of newly-invented matters, for every newly-invented matter is an innovation and every innovation are a deviation.’<sup>174</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb argued that the scholars and followers of the Muslim community, particularly in Arabia, had gone astray from Islamic practices, as they had ‘misinterpreted’ the Qur’ānic texts, thus causing what he claimed to be polytheistic acts across Arabia. This interpretation was triggered by his experiences of the Muslim communities in Basrah and Najd, who were dogmatic in their practices, as we saw in Chapter 3.

While Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb utilises the Hadīth – a complex collection of ‘narrations’ or ‘utterances’ of the Prophet Muhammad with varying authenticity – in order to give weight to the legitimacy of calling people to puritanical Islam, the Hadīth’s understanding is debated amongst exegetists and commentators in various contexts within the Qur’ān and the collection of Hadīth from both Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims. In order to understand Islamic doctrine, and the creation of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrine in particular, it is absolutely critical to engage with the scholarly tradition of Hadīth (pl. *Ahadīth*) in order to understand the purpose or objective of Hadīth, i.e. the reason why the Prophet Muhammad uttered a statement, as well as to verify its authenticity. Hadīth therefore not only include the text (*Matn*) explaining his words or actions, but also the chain of transmission (*isnād*) by stating the reporters of each narration.<sup>175</sup> When studying Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrine,

---

<sup>173</sup> I.e. Caliphates.

<sup>174</sup> Abū Dā’ūd Sulaimān Ibn al-Ash’ath Ibn Ishāq al-Azdī al-Sijistānī. *Sunan Abu Dawud*, edited by Abu Tāhir Zubair ‘Alī Za’ī, translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008), 5:162 #4607.

<sup>175</sup> From 700 CE, *Isnād* lists a chain of ‘authorities’ or ‘sources’ who transmitted a single Hadīth to ensure the authenticity of the Hadīth. See Jonathan Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), p. 6; Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 3. Furthermore, transmitters are examined in order to distinguish the reliability of the *isnād* of a Hadīth to determine the Hadīth’s authenticity. The reason for the study of *isnād* was due to the large scale of fabricated Hadīth that were widespread immediately after the death of the Prophet Muhammad – see G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in chronology, provenance and early authorship of early Hadīth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 74.

it is therefore essential to understand which Hadīth he used and how he interpreted them. In his works we can see that he was always keen in using only authentic narrations from the Hadīth tradition in order to stress the importance of following the Prophet Muhammad and the first three generations of Islam. Hadīth criticisms were imperative in the lifetime of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb who also accused many of his challengers of providing ‘fraudulent’ Hadīth, i.e. materials that were falsely attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. One must bear in mind that the Hadīth were systematically compiled only a century after the death of the Prophet Muhammad which allowed for fake statements being included in the collections, thus necessitating scholarly investigating to prove the authenticity of each Hadīth.<sup>176</sup>

By identifying what constituted authentic Hadīth over weak, fabricated and/or apocryphal Hadīth, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was able to demonstrate to his counterparts and rivals that his knowledge and epistemological approach allowed him to position and support his teachings by ‘correctly’ citing the primary sources of the first three generations of Islam. However, as we will investigate in this Chapter, his interpretations and his judgment of the Hadīth did not remain unchallenged by his contemporaries. The textual understanding and authentication of Hadīth varied significantly from scholar to scholar and from community to

---

<sup>176</sup> Jeffrey T. Kenney and Ebrahim Moosa, *Islam in the Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 49-50. In this respect, it is important to consider Hadīth grading as it has become a criterion during the developments of Hadīth to distinguish false claims to what is authentic. There are two categories in Hadīth status: ‘accepted’ (*Maq’būl*) and ‘rejected’ (*Mar’dūd*), and from the *Maq’būl* Hadīth there are two more divisions ‘authentic’ (*Sahīh*) and ‘agreeable’ (*Hasan*), which themselves are divided into ‘authentic by itself’ (*Sahīh-li-dhatihi*), ‘authentic owing to the presence of others’ (*Sahīh-li-ghairhi*) and ‘agreeable by itself’ (*Hasan-li-thatihi*), ‘agreeable owing to the existence of others’ (*Hasan-li-ghairhi*). The *Mar’dūd* Hadīth is repudiated because of the deficiency in raconteurs, i.e. when the narrators have been abandoned, deemed to have weaknesses or other reasonings that affect the soundness of the Hadīth: see John Burton, *An Introduction to Hadith* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 111. Later Muslims scholars differed in what was an accepted and a dubious Hadīth; the group named Mu’tazila, emerging in the eighth and ninth-century, negated all Hadīth that contradicted the holy Qur’ān. For example, the Hadīth that states the descension of God in the third of the night is rejected by the Mu’tazilites as it Hadīth personifies God, thus constituting an unacceptable anthropomorphism: cf. Jeffrey T. Kenney and Ebrahim Moosa, *Islam in the Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 71-72.

community through time, and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb's approach to his doctrine and reasoning behind it was thus affected by his method and extrapolation of Hadīth understanding.

As we shall see, the collections of the so-called six canonicals are frequently cited by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb to support his evidence and to propagate his doctrine as they represent the most influential books for Sunni Muslims. Among them, the two books of Hadīth, *Sahīh* of al-Bukhārī and *Sahīh* Muslim, have become the synecdoche representation of the Prophet Muhammad; the other books that follow are *Jāmi'at-Tirmidhī*, *Sunan* work of al-Nisā'ī and Abu Dawūd and Ibn Mājah. The latter is considered to be the lowest category of the six canonical books.<sup>177</sup> In this respect, it is interesting that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb quotes from Ibn Mājah's collections of Hadīth to support his agenda: 'I am afraid about my community of those astray leaders who will lead astray [...]'.<sup>178</sup>

He employs this quote to emphasise that the leaders of the tribes in Arabia have gone astray; he possibly includes the Ottoman representatives who were given administration of the two holy mosques because he engaged in scholarly discuss with the reputable scholars in Hijaz, who under the Ottoman authority, aiming to correct their theological understanding of Islamic doctrine. It may be assumed that the supporting narrative aims to encourage his followers to massacre the tribal leaders, including the leading government in Arabia, as the existing authorities, according to him, all have gone astray and are in dire need to return to the original teachings of Islam. But his usage of Ibn Mājah's canonical work may also be considered problematic as there were Islamic scholars, such as Ibn al-Athir (1160–1233) and Ibn Hajar

---

<sup>177</sup> Unlike the other five canonical work, the *Sunan* Ibn Mājah – authored by Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Yazīd ar-Rab'i (824–887) – does not specify its epistemological approach in collecting Hadīth, nor the reason for selecting materials. It contains 4341 Hadīth, 1339 of which are equally mentioned in the other five canonical works; see Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Hadīth Canon* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 55.

<sup>178</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 93.

(1372–1449), who disliked including this book amongst the other canonicals as they believe it contains weak Hadīth.<sup>179</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's interpretations of the Qur'ān equally need to be scrutinised rigorously in this Chapter. First, there is his selective use of Qur'anic verses, for example by quoting the shorter Meccan verses in the first six chapters of his *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, rather than the longer Madinian revealed verses;<sup>180</sup> the latter encourage readers to reflect and take a detailed lesson from the verses,<sup>181</sup> as in the case of the rituals of the five pillars of Islam, like Hajj and other Islamic components.<sup>182</sup> In this respect, the Meccan verses that stress the importance of monotheism and warn humanity against corruption, were more suited for Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's objective to expose alleged misunderstandings and misapplications of the principles of Islam, rather than to write a desirable book on Islamic theology.

He also advocates a 'literal' understanding of the Qur'ān, rejecting any 'metaphorical' interpretation, as we shall see. In his commentaries he likewise limits his references to Sunni scholars whilst engaging in polemic debated with Shi'a Muslims. This leads us to his engagement with Islamic scholarship. While the Qur'ān is the primary source and main foundation for understanding Islamic theology, it has triggered theological disputes, due, *inter alia*, to variations in understanding of verses among Islamic scholars. The Qur'ān addresses subject matters concerning theology, later extended by scholars of exegesis (*tafsīr*) from as

---

<sup>179</sup> Muhammad M. Al-A'zamī, *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature* (Oak Brook, Illinois: American Trust Publication, 2012), 106.

<sup>180</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhāb, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 17.

<sup>181</sup> Francis. E. Peters, *The monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and competition, The words of God*, Vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 28.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

early as the seventh century,<sup>183</sup> who gave a detailed explanation of the verses contained in the Qur'ān; some of these differ significantly from Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's interpretations, which we will need to analyse in more detail in this Chapter. He was considered highly controversial among Islamic scholars, judges and rulers during his lifetime, resulting in his expulsion from Basrah and his home town. His brother, Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, provides a detailed and contemporary refutation of his doctrine, equally based on the Qur'ān and Hadīth, exposing many of the arguments against Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine.

It is important to remember that the interpretation of the Qur'ān has been debated and criticised by many scholars, including philosophers who have contended that the Qur'ān does not have a fixed meaning; instead, it is fluid according to the reader's interpretation since the meaning of the words are subjective.<sup>184</sup> This raises questions to the motive and agenda Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb had in his interpretation of the Qur'ān. Was he the selfless 'reformer' or did he perhaps try to establish himself as a leading authority in his land, increase his social status, or aspire to get a place in the history books?

A direct affront to Muslims in general and more specifically to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's interpretation concerning the understanding of the Qur'ān derive from Islamic

---

<sup>183</sup> Husayn Alawi Mehr, *An introduction to the History of Tafsir and commentators of the Qur'ān*, translated by Hamid Hussein Waqr (Al-Mustafa International Translation and Publication Center, 2012), p. 23. Among the early books of exegesis is one authored by Abū Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī (839-923), who has compiled his books from notes and oral statements from past exegetes (*mufasssirūn*) (see Franz Rosenthal, trans., *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, Vol 1 (State University of New York Press, 1989), 6). Having been inspired by his contemporaries, notably Muhammad Ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (767-820) and Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780-855), Abū Ja'far al-Tabarī interprets that Surah Al-Fatiha (the opening chapter of the Qur'ān) in this way: 'Guide us to the straight path: the path of those You have blessed, those incur no anger and who have not gone astray.' (Surah al-Fatiha 1:7; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 2.). The verse above refers to Jews and Christians who, according to al-Tabarī, have earned God's anger and took to the path of deviation – see Bruce Lawrence, *The Qur'ān; A Biography* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), p. 87.

<sup>184</sup> Jeffrey T. Kenney and Ebrahim Moosa, eds, *Islam in the Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 67.

scholars, like Ibn al-Rawandi (827–911),<sup>185</sup> who accused the Qur’ān concerning the battle of Uhud to be forgery. Although many battles were avoided in the history of Arabs even when two armies confronted each other, the Prophet Muhammad believed that the encounter between Muslims' rivals in Badr<sup>186</sup> and Uhud would be inevitable.<sup>187</sup> Ibn al-Rawandi questions that if Angels were helping the Muslims to be victorious in the battle of Badr, as stated in the Qur’ān, where were those Angels in the battle of Uhud in 625 when the Muslim army was ‘defeated’.<sup>188</sup> He further quotes inconsistencies as evidence that the Qur’ān has not been conveyed from the Divine.<sup>189</sup> Crone and Cook also dispute the Qur’ān’s validity, arguing that the Qur’ānic statements contradict themselves which renders the integrity of the scripture as not divine. In this respect, one needs to remember that the Caliph Uthmān Ibn Affān (576/79–656) had to order that all the copies of the Qur’ān be destroyed apart from those that were confirmed to be the original Qur’ān; this was in response to critics who opposed Islam and were spreading fabricating fraud versions of the Qur’ān, which led to the rejection of its authenticity.<sup>190</sup>

This Chapter will focus on the textual analysis of four major aspects of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrine. First, we will investigate his doctrine and his understanding of *tawhīd ar-rubūbiyya*, i.e. ‘Oneness of Divine Lordship’ (Chapter 4b). His interpretation of *tawhīd* provides the basis for what he defines as ‘polytheism’ and polytheistic acts, notably the veneration of tombs (Chapter 4c) and the question regarding intercession (*tawassul*) (Chapter 4d); these provide the basis for Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s definition of *shirk* which leads us to his

---

<sup>185</sup> Abu al-Hasan Ahmad Ibn Yahya Ibn Ishāq al-Rawandi.

<sup>186</sup> Badr is a town in Al Madina, the second holiest site in Islam), in the Province of Al-Hijaz, Saudi Arabia. It is located about 81 miles from the Islamic holy city of Madina.

<sup>187</sup> Martin Lings, *Muhammad his life based on the earliest sources* (revised edition from 1991) (New York: Inner Traditions Internat. 1991, first edition from 1983), p. 146.

<sup>188</sup> Patricia Crone, edited by Hanna Siurua, *Islam the Ancient Near East and Varieties of Godlessness. Collected Studies in Three Volumes*, Volume 3 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1994), pp. 208–209.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208–209.

<sup>190</sup> Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 17.

most contentious act, *takfīr wa qitāl*, i.e. declaring Muslims apostates and advocating their murder, leading to a textual discussion of the primary sources that he utilises (Chapter 4e).

#### 4b. The Doctrine of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb writings are mainly aimed at theological correction rather than being limited to Islamic jurisprudence. His contemporary antagonists and opponents had challenged many aspects in his doctrine as it was perceived to be controversial amidst the vast majority of scholars in Najd and beyond. In addition, his adversaries included influential scholars of the holy cities as well as the intellectuals who were supporting the rulers under the flag of the Ottoman Empire. His teachings are considered by his supporters to be a movement to purify Islam by returning Muslims to what he considered to be the fundamental concept of Islam. The essence of his preaching was calling people to what he perceived to be unity of God, *tawhīd*, which caused contention amongst his peers and society at large.

#### *Shirk*

In an epistle, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb states:

‘To vow to other than Allah is an act of *shirk*.’<sup>191</sup>

According to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, *shirk* (شرك), which can be translated here as polytheism or idolatry, was a common practice in his lifetime. In his assessment, the non-repenting ‘idol worshippers’ had to be killed.<sup>192</sup> Within the contentious branches of theology which Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb claims to have consisted of acts of *shirk*<sup>193</sup> are:

---

<sup>191</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 57.

<sup>192</sup> David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), p. 24.

<sup>193</sup> The Arabic word *shirk* refers to deification or worship of a deity, god or anything other than Allah.

supplicating to pious people, living or dead, seeking their intercession,<sup>194</sup> making vows,<sup>195</sup> visiting graves and erecting domes.<sup>196</sup> From the study of *shirk* ('polytheism'), *kufr* ('disbelief, infidel')<sup>197</sup> and *takfīr* ('excommunication'), Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb developed his theories in relationship to *tawhīd* ('Oneness'), *bid'ah* ('innovation') and *qitāl* ('killing').

His teachings warn of the practices and traditions which consist of associating deification or worship of anyone or anything besides God as this constitutes *shirk*. According to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, *shirk* and *kufr* are the distinguishing factor of one professing the Islamic faith, he cites the verse from the Qur'ān: 'Verily, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives less than that (anything else) to whom He pleases.' He further adds that the Prophet Ibrahim said: 'And keep me and my sons away from worshipping idols'.<sup>198</sup>

Muslims report that the Prophet Muhammad said: 'Whoever meets Allah (on the Day of Judgement) not having associated anyone with Him (in worship), shall enter Paradise; and whoever meets Him having committed *shirk* in any way will enter the Hell-fire'.<sup>199</sup> But this leads us to the controversies regarding Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's definitions of *shirk*. His teachings and sermons mostly condemn acts of polytheism and 'urge Muslims to adhere to monotheism in worshipping God and obey God's command'.<sup>200</sup> While his opponents largely agree with the scriptural texts he quotes, they disagree with his definition and understanding of the religious texts. He categorises *shirk* into two types, Greater *shirk* and Lesser *shirk*. Greater

---

<sup>194</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 71.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>197</sup> *Kufr* means 'disbelief', 'to be thankless', 'to be faithless', or 'ingratitude' and is used in different ways in the Qur'ān; it is the opposite to *īmān* or faith: see Charles Adams and A. Kevin Reinhart, 'Kufr', *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*. Retrieved 2 March 2021. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0467>.

<sup>198</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 32.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

<sup>200</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Khutab al-imām Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb wa-ba'dih Ahfādihi* (al-Riyādh: al-Amānah al-'āmmah lil-ihfāl bi-murūr mi'at 'ām 'alā ta'sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 17 (author's translation).



*shirk* is those who call onto anything other than God, like, those who invoke holy men, requesting their assistance, whereas the lesser, hidden *shirk* is any action that is purportedly undertaken to please other than God, thus giving the rights to a human being in what is deserved to be with God. For example, the individual who consciously beautifies their physical appearance while praying in the presence of others, while the same individual becomes reckless when praying in seclusion of others.<sup>201</sup>

### Tawhīd *ar-Rubūbīyya* (Oneness of Divine Lordship)

This leads us to *tawhīd ar-rubūbīyya*, ‘Oneness of Divine Lordship’,<sup>202</sup> which Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb considered to be at the core of Islamic doctrine, so much that those who contest the principle of *tawhīd ar-rubūbīyya*, would be classified as polytheist or infidels and would be permitted to be killed under the Islamic law.<sup>203</sup> Along with Ibn Taymiyyah and other Islamic scholars,<sup>204</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb divides *tawhīd* into three categories: *tawhīd ar-rubūbīyya* (oneness of divine lordship), *tawhīd al-asmā’ wā-s-sifāt* (oneness on divine names and attributes of God) and *tawhīd al-ulūhiyya* or *tawhīd al-’ibāda* (oneness in worshipping God).<sup>205</sup>

*Tawhīd ar-rubūbīyya* is defined as the assertion of the unity of God in His actions, such as to believe and confess that He alone is the Creator, the Provider and Disposer of the universe. It

---

<sup>201</sup> Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 63-64.

<sup>202</sup> *Tawhīd* is a testimony that God is the sole Creator, Ruler and Judge of the universe. It is defined as ‘Unity of God’.

<sup>203</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū’at al-tawhīd al-ma’rūf bi-majmū’at al-tawhīd al-najdiyyah: majmū’at kutub wa-rasā’il* (al-Riyād: al-Amānah al-’āmmah lil-iḥṭifāl bi-murūr mi’at ‘ām ‘alā ta’sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 153 (author’s translation).

<sup>204</sup> Yusuf Al-Dajwi and Omar Abdullah Kaamil, *The Bid’ah and Perils of Trinity of Tawheed* (Darul-tahqiq, 2017), p. 4.

<sup>205</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Abdul-Rahman bin Nasir al-Barrak, eds, *Sharh Kasf ash-shubuhāt* (Riyādh: Al-matab al-ilmi bishubkah nur al-Islām, 2015), p. 10 (author’s translation).

also means that one should believe that God created the actions of humanity and that they take place according to His will. However, although the actions are the creation of God, as He is the Creator of humankind, they are also the latter's genuine actions as he or she has his or her own will. Therefore, he or she is accountable for these actions. Dallal argues how *tawhīd ar-rubūbiyya* is agreed amongst all Muslims, and even the Arabs before the advent of Islam as they, too, believed that God is the Creator and Administrator of the universe.<sup>206</sup>

### Tawhīd *al-Asmā' wā-s-Sifāt* (Oneness on Divine Names and Attributes of God)

Concerning *tawhīd al-asmā' wā-s-sifāt*, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb claims that his doctrine is in conformity with the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Algar suggests Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's definition is described as a simple affirmation of the divine names and attribute of God declared in the Qur'ān, unaccompanied by any attempt at interpretation, alongside the impermissibility of implementing the names to any other than God.<sup>207</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb accuses that those who went astray were those who changed what had been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad:

‘They distorted (God’s) word from its original state.’<sup>208</sup>

His response to what he perceived to be distorted belief in the society is said to be his motivation to correct and propagate, in what he considered to be pure Islam. It is traditionally

---

<sup>206</sup> Ahmad Dallal, ‘The origins and objective of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750–1850’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 113, no. 3, 1993, pp. 341-359, at p. 351. JSTOR: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/605385> [accessed 01/11/2019].

<sup>207</sup> Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta: Islamic Publication International, 2002), p. 31.

<sup>208</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-ma‘rūf bi-majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-najdiyyah : majmū‘at kutub wa-rasā’il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-‘āmmah lil-ihṭifāl bi-murūr mi‘at ‘ām ‘alā ta’sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 133 (author’s translation).

accepted amongst the Muslims that the holy books that came before Islam, the Torah and the Bible, were distorted and changed from its original form. Consequently, according to this traditional opinion, the nations before the Prophet Muhammad went into error.<sup>209</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb denounced the likes of Jahmītes, Mu'tāzilītes, as well as the Ash'arītes and the Shi'ites for their 'failure' to properly observe the name and attributes of God; he also rejects the doctrines of anthropomorphisms.<sup>210</sup> And although he rejected the theology of the Ash'arītes, he had accepted a large portion of al-Ghazali's (1058–1111) understanding of Islamic creed who was renowned for his Ash'arīte doctrine.<sup>211</sup> Furthermore, he objected to several popular Sufi practices, notably venerating the saints after their death and then seeking intercession from their tombs, as these practices violated what he preached to be *tawhīd ar-rubūbiyya* and *tawhīd al-uluhiyya*.<sup>212</sup>

Claiming to follow the strict principles from the first three generations of Islam to understand the names and attributes of God, he advised his followers to recognise it as described in the Qur'ān and by Prophet Muhammad, without *tah'rīf* (distorting the wording or the meaning), *ta'tīl* (divesting or denying the attributes), *tak'yīf* (asking how) or *tam'thīl* (resembling God to any of His creation).<sup>213</sup> For example, the Ash'arītes differ from the belief of Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb in their interpretation of the Qur'ān by understanding some of the Qur'anic words metaphorically.<sup>214</sup> For example, the word *istawā* in the Qur'ān means 'to rise', which the Ash'arītes interpret to mean *istawlā*, i.e. 'to conquer'; *yad* literally means 'hand', but the

---

<sup>209</sup> Surah An-Nahl 16:36; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 272.

<sup>210</sup> In Arabic the word *istashbīh* ('assimilating') which refers to embodying God to created things.

<sup>211</sup> Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 65.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>213</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- 'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 116.

<sup>214</sup> Clifford Edmund Bosworth and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs, eds, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. VII, (New York and Leiden: Brill, 1993), p. 783.

Ash'arītes understand it to mean *al-ihsān* 'magnanimousness'.<sup>215</sup> Further, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb rejects the anthropomorphic expression of the Qur'ān relating to the attributes of God interpreted by the Mu'tāzilītes. For example, the Mu'tāzilītes interpret the nature of God's 'hand' to mean 'grace' or 'power', which is the metaphoric meaning of the word translated to the English language 'to lend a hand'.<sup>216</sup> The Mu'tāzilītes believe that the word *istawā* means 'sitting' (*julūs*) and that the word *yad* means 'blessing' (*ni'ma*);<sup>217</sup> thus they consider the term *yad* to mean 'performance of good deeds'. In contrast, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb prefers the literal meaning of *yad* without likening it to any creation of God and without any modification, anthropomorphism or rhetorical assimilation of the attribute *yad*,<sup>218</sup> and he supported his interpretation by quoting the Qur'ān verse 'There is nothing like Him'.<sup>219</sup> In his view, the others were considered guilty of *tam'thīl*, *ta'tīl* and *tah'rīf* from its original meaning,<sup>220</sup> while the vast differences in the theological understanding of the verses originated from the various meanings that can be attributed to the Arabic language employed in the Qur'ān.

### Tawhīd *al-Uluhiyya* or Tawhīd *al-Ībāda* (Oneness in Worshipping God)

The definition of Oneness in Worshipping God is core to what Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was propagating. For example, he extracts from the Qur'ān that jinn and humankind have been

---

<sup>215</sup> *Al-ihsān* is to achieve perfection in devotion in worship, such that Muslims try to worship God as if they see Him, and although they cannot see him, they assuredly believe that He is continually observing over them.

<sup>216</sup> William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey* (Edinburgh: University Press Edinburgh, 1985), p. 66.

<sup>217</sup> Kifayat Ullah, *Al-Kashshaf: Al-Zamakhshari's Mu'tāzilītes Exegesis Of the Qur'ān* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 196–197.

<sup>218</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- 'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), pp. 116–117.

<sup>219</sup> Surah ash-Shu'ara 42:11; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 485.

<sup>220</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- 'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), pp. 116–117.

created to worship God alone.<sup>221</sup> He also cites a famous Hadīth recording a conversation between the Prophet Muhammad and his companion, Mu'adh Ibn Jabal (603–639). The Prophet Muhammad states that the right of God upon His slaves is to worship God alone without associating anything with God; the rights of slaves upon God is not to punish any person who does not associate anything with Him, and that they will be given glad tidings.<sup>222</sup> It is not merely words of an utterance like *tawhīd ar-rubūbiyya* since, as he states, even the ‘polytheists’ in the time before the Prophet Muhammad believed in it. Instead, it marks the difference between Muslims and disbelievers, between monotheism and associating partners with God.<sup>223</sup> In his *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, he states:

‘And verily, We have sent among every Ummah<sup>224</sup> a Messenger<sup>225</sup> (proclaiming):  
 “Worship Allah (Alone), and avoid<sup>226</sup> *taghūt*<sup>227</sup>”’.<sup>228</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb professes that the actions that nullify one’s faith are the association of others while supplicating to God, which is *shirk* in supplication. The Qur’ān states,

‘When you get into distress at sea, those you pray to besides Him desert you, but when He brings you back safe to land, you turn away: man is ever ungrateful.’<sup>229</sup>

The exegetist Ismā’īl Ibn Kathīr (1300–1373) explains this verse as ‘meaning, everything they worship besides Allah disappears from their hearts and minds’.<sup>230</sup> Ibn Kathīr recounts the story of Ikrimah bin Abi Jahl (598–636). When he fled from the Prophet Muhammad after the

---

<sup>221</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 17.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>223</sup> Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta: Islamic Publication International, 2002), pp. 31–32.

<sup>224</sup> I.e. community, nation.

<sup>225</sup> I.e. the Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>226</sup> Or: keep away from.

<sup>227</sup> All false deities, etc. i.e., do not worship *taghūt* besides Allah.

<sup>228</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), pp. 17–18.

<sup>229</sup> Surah al-Isra’ 18:67; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’ān*, p. 290.

<sup>230</sup> Ismā’īl Ibn ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)* (Lebanon: Darusslam Publication, 2003), 6:50.

conquest of Makkah and headed for Ethiopia, his journey across the turbulent sea forced him to vow that if he safely arrived on the land, which he did, he would accept Islam.<sup>231</sup>

In this respect, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb also cites a Hadīth from Sahīh of al-Bukhārī concerning associating partners to God:

‘Whoever dies while ascribing partners to God, enters the Hell-fire.’<sup>232</sup>

Here, he employs a Hadīth to warn the Muslims in Najd against what he considers to be ‘polytheism’, arguing that anyone ascribing divinity to other than God would reside in Hell.<sup>233</sup> This Hadīth comes from Sahīh al-Bukhārī, the most important of all *Musanāf*<sup>234</sup> works, compiled by Muhammad Ibn Ismā’il (810–870), and considered to be the most authoritative book after the holy Qur’ān in Sunni Islam, containing 7,563 *Ahadīth*.<sup>235</sup> It is his teacher named Ishāq Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Hanthalee (777/8–852/3), better known as Ishāq Ibn Rahway, who has been given credit for his suggestion of the compilation of authentic Hadīth tradition to simplify the Hadīth and make it more accessible for studies. The epistemological approach that was taken by Muhammad Ibn Ismā’il is considered to be the most rigorous in the collection of Hadīth, consequently regarded to be the most authentic book in Hadīth literature. Muhammad Ibn Ismā’il’s prerequisites were that the narrators of Hadīth who had forwarded Hadīth from one narrator to another must have lived in the same period and be publicly distinguished to

---

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:50.

<sup>232</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 32.

<sup>233</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-ma‘rūf bi-majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-najdiyyah : majmū‘at kutub wa-rasā’il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-‘āmmah lil-iḥtīfāl bi-murūr mi‘at ‘ām ‘alā ta’sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 125 (author’s translation).

<sup>234</sup> *Musanāf* means a book that is arranged by chapters or sectionally arranged, see John Burton, *An Introduction to Hadith* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p. 119.

<sup>235</sup> Adis Duderija, ed, *The Sunnah and its Status in Islamic law: The Search for Sound Hadith* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 75.

have met each other, which would have to be confirmed by honest, trustworthy and reliable people.<sup>236</sup>

Despite the allegation that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was indifferent to scholars of Islam,<sup>237</sup> his use of the Qur’ān and Hadīth in support of exegetists of the Qur’ān confirms his proficiency to deduce theological understanding from the scriptural texts. But it is important to review his methodology. For example, it is worth mentioning that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb quoted many Hadīth from the canonical work of Muslim Ibn al-Hajjāj,<sup>238</sup> which is considered to be the second most authentic book in the tradition of Hadīth, indicating his belief that the canonical of Sahīh Muslim consists of authentic Hadīth.

‘Whoever goes unto a dwelling and says (while entering), I seek refuge in  
God’s perfect words from the evil (of the creations) while He created, no  
harm shall befall him until he departs from the place.’<sup>239</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb quotes here a Hadīth from Sahīh Muslim to support his doctrine. But it is important to notice that he does it by ‘negative inference’. In other words, he infers that those who seek refuge to other than God’s perfect world will have harm befall them – a meaning that may not have been implied in the original text.

---

<sup>236</sup> Muhammad Z. Siddiqi, *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features* (2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition). (London: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp. 56-57.

<sup>237</sup> Sulaymān Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Al-Sawā‘iq al-ilāhīyah fī al-radd ‘alā al-Wahhābīyah* (Istānbūl: Maktabat Ishīq, 1975), p. 45 (author’s translation).

<sup>238</sup> Muslim Ibn al-Hajjāj composed the Sahīh Muslim in the city of Naysābūr in north-eastern Iran (see Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Hadīth Canon* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 81). Being divided into 43 books, containing a total of 7190 narrations, the book’s aim is to collect Hadīth that all Muslims had agreed on its precision, by registering Hadīth only when two different trustworthy companions of the Prophet Muhammad recounted the same narrative in two separate chains of reports; Muslim Ibn al-Hajjāj states in his book of Hadīth all the versions of the narrations in the same theme to model its various narratives on specific topics. – Wadad Kadi, ed, *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Text*, vol. 38: *The Development Of Early Sunnite Hadīth Criticism, The Taqdima of Ibn Abī Hātim al-Rāzī (240/854-327/938)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 119–120. Critiques have argued that the publication of Sahīh of al-Bukhārī was well into the tenth-century and was mainly transmitted by Abu Ali Sa’id Ibn Uthmān Ibn al-Sakan (d. 932); this suggests the work of Imam Muslim may have been more broadly distributed: Christopher Melchert, “Bukhārī and Early Hadith Criticism.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 121, no. 1, 2001, pp. 7–19, at p. 8.

<sup>239</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 58.

#### 4c. Visiting Graves

This leads us to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's discourses on those practices that constituted *shirk*. His position was that anyone who visits and venerates at the tombs is a disbeliever (*mushrik*), as they seek help, support and protection from someone other than God, therefore rejecting *tawhīd*, and that they either have to repent from their polytheistic acts or be killed,<sup>240</sup> was considered extremely contentious amongst his rivals in Arabia. He supported his reasoning by stating that Ibn Taymiyyah declared disbelief (*takfīr*) on those who supplicated to the companion of the Prophet Muhammad named Ali Ibn Abi Tālib.<sup>241</sup> By contrast, Al-Ghazali, who is considered by many as a *mujaddid* ('the reviver of the faith'), mentions that visiting the tombs and graves of the righteous to receive blessings is desirable.<sup>242</sup> By contrast, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb does support the visiting of graves with certain conditions, as a reminder of the life of the hereafter, as a means of keeping alive the memory and to gain mutual benefit for the visitors and the dead.<sup>243</sup> According to Nāsir ad-Dīn Nuh al-Albānī (1914-1999), 'the act of incorporating graves into worship is *bid'a*',<sup>244</sup> for example visiting graves for the purpose of praying may make them into a mosque and, travelling to any grave including the grave of the Prophet Muhammad, as it may lead to idol worship as graves in the past and present had become shrines or places of pilgrimage.

---

<sup>240</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Mufīd al-mustafīd fī kufri tariki al-tawhīd* (Riyādh: Maktabah al-himmah, 2015), p. 16. (author's translation).

<sup>241</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Mu'llafāt al-shaykh al-imām Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdi'l-Wahhāb*, (Riyadh: Jāmi'ah al-imām Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyyah, 1976), 1:297 (author's translation).

<sup>242</sup> Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife: Book XL of the Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din) with an introduction and note by T.J. Winter*, translated by T.J. Winter (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2015), p. 112.

<sup>243</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- 'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 125.

<sup>244</sup> Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Hadīth Canon* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 322.



Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb advocates may claim that his theological understanding as ‘orthodox’, echoing from the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* without blindly following (*taqlīd*) any teachers or *madhāhib* (Schools of Jurisprudence). Throughout his writings, he would quote verses from the Qur’ān and Hadīth addressing and warning Muslims against grave worshipping. Perhaps, the manner of those prostrating and positioning one’s head near or on the tombs resembled acts of worship in which Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb deemed it to be ‘idol worship.’ He suggested that the nations before Islam who had gone astray were those who were blindly following (*taqlīd*) their religion without any guidance from their messenger.<sup>245</sup>

In the twenty-first century, Ibn al-Qayyim’s name has become controversial amongst Muslims because of his popularity amongst many followers of the Sunni movements of Salafism and Wahhabism.<sup>246</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was clearly influenced by Ibn al-Qayyim’s thirteenth-century conceptualisation of *shirk* in worship. Ibn al-Qayyim emphasised that prostration to anything other than God is *shirk* and that the one prostrating and the prostrated one have indulged in associating partners to God. He states that those who prostrate say, ‘this is not prostration, it is only putting the head before the shaykh.’<sup>247</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim then addresses those who prostrate:

‘You may name it whatever you wish, but the essence of prostration is placing one’s head before the object of prostration, and the prostration of the worshipper of idols, the sun, stars, and rocks all simply place their head before them.’<sup>248</sup>

---

<sup>245</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-ma‘rūf bi-majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-najdīyah : majmū‘at kutub wa-rasā’il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-‘āmmah lil-ihtifāl bi-murūr mi‘at ‘ām ‘alā ta’sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 126 (author’s translation): ‘Their religion was built upon specific principles, the greatest of which was blind following (*taqlīd*). So this was the biggest principle for all of the disbelievers, the first and the last of them. As God states “Whenever We sent a messenger before you [Muhammad] to warn a township, those corrupted by wealth said, in the same way, We saw our fathers following in their footsteps” (Surah Az-Zukhruf 43:23; Abdel Haleem, The *Qur’ān*, p. 492)’.

<sup>246</sup> Namira Nahouza, *Wahhabism and the Rise of the New Salafists, Theology Power and Sunni Islam* (London: I.B Tauris, 2018), pp. 141–142.

<sup>247</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abī Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ranks of the Divine Seekers*, Vol. 1, translated by Ovamir Anjum (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2020), p. 720.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 720.

This illustrates that Ibn al-Qayyim understood that those who were physically prostrating to graves, tombs and saints were considered engaging in the act of *shirk*, as he considered physical prostration is forbidden in Islam law. This interpretation would have certainly influenced Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's conceptualisation of *shirk*.

Not only does he warn his followers as well as his opponents to return to the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, but he also attributes fanaticism to those who strictly follow a school of jurisprudence (*madhhab*) over the Qur'ān and Hadīth. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb states: 'They held fanaticism for a particular school of jurisprudence (*madhhab*), as God mentions 'but do not sincerely believe in anyone unless he follows your religion'.<sup>249</sup> Here he implies that they are those who went astray from Islam as they blindly followed a School of Jurisprudence (*madhab*), even if it contradicted the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. He urged his readers to respond to the Islamic sources. His emphasis on the Qur'ān and the Hadīth causes him to reject scholars – past and present – from the various *madhab* whose had a different interpretation of the primary Islamic sources.

And although the thirteenth/fourteenth-century scholar Ibn Taymiyyah's teachings had a profound influence on Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, as he equally called the Muslims to orthodox belief, Ibn Taymiyyah did not deny the intermediary between the Prophet Muhammad and God which he supports by quoting a Hadīth, 'Ask God to grant me the means (*al-wasīlah*), it is a rank in Paradise that is fitting for one of God's servants. And I hope that I may be that servant. So, one who asks God to grant me the means (*al-wasīlah*) will be granted my intercession on the Day of Resurrection'.<sup>250</sup> The Hadīth concerns the five daily calls to prayer

---

<sup>249</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū'at al-tawhīd al-ma'rūf bi-majmū'at al-tawhīd al-najdīyah : majmū'at kutub wa-rasā'il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-'āmmah lil-ihtifāl bi-murūr mi'at 'ām 'alā ta'sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 133 (author's translation).

<sup>250</sup> Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah, *Ziyārat al-Qubūr wa al-Istinjād bi'l-Maqbūr* (Tantā: Dār al-Sahābah lil-Turāth, 1992), p. 15 (author's translation).

(*athān*) and states that whoever sends their blessing to the Prophet Muhammad would receive ten blessings from God. Ibn Taymiyyah further explains that Muslims should ask God for the highest degree in Paradise (*al-wasīlah*), so the Prophet Muhammad can seek intercession for the Muslims.<sup>251</sup>

Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Hanbal Ash-Shaybānī (780–855) and other Hadīth scholars have recount a story concerning the permissibility of *tawassul*,<sup>252</sup> it is reported in a Hadīth:

‘A blind man came to the Prophet Muhammad and said: “Supplicate to Allah to heal me.” The Prophet Muhammad said: “If you wish I will supplicate for you, and if you wish, you can be patient, for that is better for you.” The blind man said: “Then supplicate to Him (Allah).” So the Prophet Muhammad ordered him to perform ablution and to make his ablution perfect, and to supplicate with this supplication: “O Allah, I ask You and turn towards You by Your Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of Mercy. Indeed, I have turned to my Lord, by means of You (Prophet Muhammad), concerning this need of mine, so that it can be resolved, O Allah accept his (Prophet Muhammad) intercession for me.”’<sup>253</sup>

Arguably, this Hadīth demonstrates the permissibility to do *tawassul*, and that *tawassul* was restricted to when the Prophet Muhammad was alive and not after his death. Moreover, it can be argued that the narrative supports the concept of *tawassul* to be practised through ranks of the status of distinct individuals, alive or dead.

Abu Al-Hasan Taqī al-Dīn Ali Ibn Abd al-Kafī Ibn Ali al-Khazraji al-Ansari as-Subkī (1284–1355) was a famous Egyptian born Shafi'i scholar, Hadīth master, jurist, Qur'anic exegete and Islamic judge, who said:

‘It is reported from Malik al-Dar that he said: “The people suffered a drought during the successorship of Umar Ibn al-Khattāb – God be pleased with him - whereupon

---

<sup>251</sup> Muslim Ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qushayrī an-Naysābūrī. *Sahīh Muslim*. (Cairo: Darul-tāsīl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2014), 2:138 #378 (author’s translation).

<sup>252</sup> Refers to one who is obtaining ‘nearness’ to God.

<sup>253</sup> Muḥammad Ibn ‘Īsā Tirmidhī. *Sunan at-Tirmidhī*. (Cairo: Darul-tāsīl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2016), 4:420 #3914 (author’s translation).

a man came to the grave of the Prophet – May God be Pleased with him – and said: “O Messenger of Allah, ask (Allah) for rain for your community (*Ummah*), for verily they have but perished”, after which the Prophet – May God be Pleased with him – appeared to him in a dream and told him: “Go to Umar and give him my greeting, then tell him that they will be watered. And say to him: You must be clever, you must be clever!”

So the man came to Umar and informed him, after which ‘Umar cried and then said: “O my Lord, I spare no effort except in what escapes my power!”

And the point in mentioning this narration as proof is: His asking for supplication for rain (*Istisqa*) from the Prophet – May God be Pleased with him – after his death in the period of the *Barzakh*.

There is nothing wrong with this, because the supplication of the Prophet to his Lord, may He be Exalted, in this situation is not impossible – and narrations have been reported regarding that which we’ve mentioned and we mention a part of it – and Prophet's knowledge – May God be Pleased with him – regarding the question of the one asking him has also been reported. With these two matters, then there is nothing wrong with asking the Prophet – May God be Pleased with him – to supplicate for rain just as he was asked in this world.<sup>254</sup>

This event took place in the life time of Umar Ibn al-Khattāb, emphasising the acceptance and permissibility of seeking aid from the Prophet Muhammad with the first three generation of the Muslims.

Contrary to this, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb supports his argument by quoting a verse from the Qur’ān; he implies that the acts of *tawassul* lead to other prohibited polytheistic acts, such as extremism (*ghulū*).<sup>255</sup> He believed that this type of reverence led to polytheism which

<sup>254</sup> Taqi al-Din al-Subkī, *Shifā al-Saqam fi Ziyarāt khayr al-Anām*, (Lebanon: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 2008), 381-382. (author’s translation):

يا رسول : عن مالك الدار قال : أصاب الناس قحطٌ في زمان عمر بن الخطاب رضي الله عنه ، فجاء رجل إلى قبر النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال فأتاه رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في المنام فقال : « إئت عمر ، فاقرأه السلام ، وأخبره أنهم مسقون ، وقل . الله ، استسقى لأمتك ، فإنهم قد هلكوا . له : عليك الكئيب الكئيب » . فأتى الرجل عمر فأخبره ، فبكى عمر رضي الله عنه ثم قال : يا رب ، ما ألو إلا ما عجزت عنه ومحل الاستشفاء من هذا الأثر : طلبه الاستسقاء من النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم بعد موته في مدة البرزخ ، ولا مانع من ذلك ، فإن دعاء النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لربه تعالى في هذه الحالة غير مُمتنع ، وقد وردت الأخبار على ما ذكرنا ، وتذكر طرفاً منه ، وعلمه صلى الله عليه وسلم بسؤال من ومع هذين الأمرين ؛ فلا مانع من أن يُسأل النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم الاستسقاء كما كان يسأل في الدنيا . يسأله ؛ ورد أيضاً

<sup>255</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-ma‘rūf bi-majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-najdīyah : majmū‘at kutub wa-rasā’il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-‘āmmah lil-ihṭifāl bi-murūr mi‘at ‘ām ‘alā ta’sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 128, author’s translation: ‘They went to an extreme concerning the scholars and righteous people. As is found

the Prophet Muhammad was sent to warn against. He further argues that Muslims should strive to fight against those who commit these acts of disbelief (*kufr*), and that is legitimised in Islamic law:

‘It is due to this aspect humankind becomes divided into Muslims and disbelievers, and it is due to it that enmity occurs and that fighting (*jihād*) was legislated, as God mentions: “And fight them until there is no more persecution, and all worship is devoted to God alone.”’<sup>256</sup>

This shows his stern approach and how he simply categorises people into two groups, Muslims and disbelievers. However, those he claimed to be disbelievers affirm the Islamic belief by declaring the testimony of faith. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb alleged that an entire community rejected monotheism and can therefore be legally killed under Islamic law, at least in his interpretation. He further supports his claim by addressing how the people in the past left Islam because of their religious acts which set them astray:

‘They took the tombs of their Prophets and the righteous as places of worship, “they placed lamps on the tombs” and “they took these places as locations for celebrations.”’<sup>257</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s language is distinct from Ibn Taymiyyah’s; he mostly identifies the ‘corruption’ of society and laws encompassing capital punishment. He further targeted practices that he considered included veneration and fanaticism towards anything other than God as errant.

It is apparent that his teacher, Muhammad Hayāt al-Sindī (see Chapter 3), had a significant impact on the teaching of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb as Muhammad Hayāt al-Sindī expresses in his writing his aversion against erecting tombs and drawing anthropomorphic

---

in God’s saying ‘People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth’ (Surah An-Nisa 4:171; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’ān*, p. 106)’.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125 (author’s translation); Surah al-Anfaal 8:39; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’ān*, p. 182.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135 (author’s translation).

images of God which would reappear in the teachings of his student.<sup>258</sup> The teachers influence on Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was that those who seeks others as intercession, in attaining closeness to God has come to renounce their Islamic belief.

His exegesis concerning ‘monotheism’ outlines the parameters that define his understanding of Islamic faith and its boundaries. He comments that the non-believers of pre-Islamic Mecca testified that God is the Creator of the universe, ‘despite this, they did not enter the fold of Islam’ and consequently ‘their lives or wealth were not religiously sanctified’. He further comments that ‘they would also give in charity; perform Hajj;<sup>259</sup> perform Umrah and other forms of devotion and worship’; however this was all in vain. In his view, they are excluded from salvation ‘due to the fact that they failed to testify to God’s exclusive right to be worshipped’.<sup>260</sup>

He demonstrates how the Prophet Muhammad was at war with those who invoked other than God; encouraging his followers to join his army against anyone who venerates or makes equal to God as they, according to him, were classified as infidels. He supported this with the claim that the fight against the ‘pagans’ of Mecca in the time of the Prophet Muhammad was as a

---

<sup>258</sup> Basheer Nafi, ‘A Teacher of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: Muḥammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī and the Revival of Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth’s Methodology’, *Islamic Law and Society*, Vol. 13, no. 2, 2006, pp. 215–217, at p. 217.

<sup>259</sup> Major pilgrimage to Mecca.

<sup>260</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-ma‘rūf bi-majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-najdīyah : majmū‘at kutub wa-rasā’il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-‘āmmah lil-iḥfāl bi-murūr mi‘at ‘ām ‘alā ta’sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 149 (author’s translation): ‘This is a great issue and of great importance; it is the fact that the non-believers testify to all of this and acknowledge it (Affirming that God is the Creator, etc.). Despite this, they did not enter the fold of Islam, nor did it cause their lives or wealth to be religiously sanctified even though they would also give in charity; perform Hajj, perform Umrah, and other forms of devotion and worship. They would also abstain from many forbidden acts out of reverence of God. However, it is the second point which caused their excommunication from Islam; their lives and wealth to be no longer sanctified. This is due to the fact that they failed to testify to God’s exclusive right to be worshipped; worship in the form of invocation, hope whilst associating none beside Him in that. So, relief from calamities should not be sought from others besides God; sacrifices should not be offered to others besides Him; oaths should not be taken in the name of others besides Him. None of the above should be directed to anyone but God; not to an Angel nor Prophet. Whosoever seeks relief from a calamity from others besides God has disbelieved (*kufṛ*), whosoever directs their sacrificial offering to other than God has disbelieved (*kufṛ*), whosoever makes an oath to other than God has disbelieved (*kufṛ*) and similar’.

result of their ‘invocation of righteous beings’ despite the fact that ‘they testified that God was the Creator, the Sustainer and the one who disposes all affairs’.

Here, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb likens his society with the situation under the Prophet Muhammad, since there, too, the people of Mecca, despite believing in Monotheism, used other idols as intermediaries to seek closeness to God. For him, the concept of *tawassul* practice, i.e. seeking intervention by saints, was not only similar, but he considered it to be even more depraved since for the eighteenth-century ‘polytheists’, Islam had already been revealed to them. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb employs this comparison to justify that their actions, despite believing in the essence of the testimony of Islamic faith, warrants the waging of war against the wrongdoers.<sup>261</sup>

### Muhammad ash-Shawkānī

In this regard, we should also refer a contemporary of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb: Muhammad ash-Shawkānī (1759–1839) was a Yemeni scholar of Islam who was considered one of the most senior scholars of Hadīth of his time. Shawkānī had achieved such a high level that he was a major *muhaddith* to verify scholarship within the Islamic perimeter, so highly esteemed that everyone would refer to him as a reference in the sciences of *ijtihād*; he is well known as a scholar who would clarify the subtleties of the *shariah*.<sup>262</sup>

---

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149 (author’s translation): ‘This is fully conceptualised by knowing that the pagans whom the Prophet was at war with would invoke righteous beings such as Angels, Jesus, Uzair and others, and they were infidels as a result even though they testified that God was the Creator, the Sustainer and the one who disposes all affairs (...) If you comprehend this, you might understand the meaning of the testimony of faith. You will also understand that whoever venerates a Prophet or Angel, excessively laments over them or seeks divine relief in them, has left the fold of Islam. This is the basis upon which the Prophet went to war against them’.

<sup>262</sup> Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 145.

Shawkānī had written a book called *Al-Badr At-Tāl' bi Muhāsin Min B'da al-Qur'ān As-Sāb'*, which contains over 600 biographies, predominantly of scholars and other personalities from Yemen, the country of his origin, and also of others who he classified as great scholars known amongst the Muslims, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Shams ad-Dīn adh-Dhahabī (1274–1348), Abd Al-Rahman Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rajab (1335–1393), Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (1428–1497), as-Suyuti (1445–1505) and others. In this work, he wrote that he received a volume of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's works in the year 1801:<sup>263</sup>

'And in the year 1215H, I obtained from the aforementioned person from Najd two light volumes (i.e. pamphlets) which were dispatched to our respected leader, the Imam (may Allah preserve him). One of them included the treatises of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, all of them were about directing (the people) to sincerity in *tawhīd* and warning against *Shirk*, which is practised by those believing in the graves, and these are valuable treatises, filled with evidence from the Book and the *Sunnah*. And the other volume incorporated a refutation of a group of negligent ones from the jurists of Sana'a and Sa'dah; they corresponded on some issues with him, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, regarding the foundations of the religion (*aqīdah*) and a group amongst the companions of the Prophet Muhammad; so he responded to them with detailed, corroborating, verified responses, suggesting that the one responding is from the truthful scholars, knowledgeable of the Book and the *Sunnah*, and he destroyed everything they constructed (in argument) and invalidated everything they compiled because they are negligent, prejudiced followers. And therefore what they did became a humiliation for them and upon the people of Sana'a and Sa'dah. This is the case for whoever put himself forward and did not know the true value of his own self...' <sup>264</sup>

In this instance, Shawkānī praises Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb for his work, calling him a truthful scholar who refuted the scholars from the cities of Sana'a and Sa'dah from Yemen, thus

---

<sup>263</sup> Previously, Shawkānī also wrote a poem when he heard of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's death, praising his efforts regarding *tawhīd* and abolishing *shirk* based on the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*.

<sup>264</sup> Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, *Al-Badr At-Tāl' bi Muhāsin Min B'da al-Qur'ān As-Sāb'* (2 vols) (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 2012), 2:5-6 (author's translation).



emphasising that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was a senior scholar who used scholarly evidence to express his doctrine. But we need to take into account that they both shared a common understanding regarding *tawhīd* and *shirk*.

However, after the death of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, Shawkānī wrote a poem rejecting his doctrine. The poem addressed Abdul Aziz Ibn Muhammad al-Saud who was the second ruler of Dir'iyyah, ruling the first Saudi State from 1765 until 1803, i.e. during Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's lifetime and after his death in 1792. In this poem, Shawkānī addressed Abdul Aziz and the scholars of Najd after receiving an overwhelming report of the situation in Najd that mentioned the widespread slaughtering of fellow-Muslims who venerated graves or believed in Intercession. Shawkānī mentioned that the 'righteous predecessors' did not make *takfīr* of groups of Muslims and that this practice was characteristic of the Khawārij who labelled all Muslims who innovated as disbelievers. Moreover, he argued that the 'righteous predecessors' did not say that the *rāfida*<sup>265</sup> had fallen into disbelief (*kufr*), and explains that if the people of Najd rejected flattening the graves of saints, then that constitutes a sin and not disbelief (*kufr*). Though Shawkānī basically agrees with Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb about the prohibition of venerating graves, he reiterates that the Khawārij went astray regarding the matter of sin becoming disbelief.<sup>266</sup>

---

<sup>265</sup> *Rāfida*, meaning 'rejectors', are those who the Sunni Muslims refer to as a group from amongst the Shia Muslims who reject the first two caliphates, Abu Bakr and Umar Ibn Khattab.

<sup>266</sup> Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, *Diwān as-Shawkānī aslāk al-Jūhr* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr at-Tā'tu wa al-Tawzi' wa Nashr, 2012), pp. 160–163 (author's translation of the poem, trying to convey the meaning as closely as possible to the original): 'And they (i.e. the righteous predecessors or scholars) did not make *takfīr* on groups of people, who have black (i.e. dark) innovations in Islam, as the Khawārij did at their innovation, for which their hair would turn white. They (the righteous) did not say that the *rāfida* (*rāfida* meaning 'rejectors', whom the Sunni Muslims refer to as a group amongst the Shia Muslims who reject the first two caliphates, Abu Bakr and Umar Ibn Khattab) have fallen into disbelief (*kufr*) and innovation and killing. How can it be said that some of the people committed *kufr*, whose graves are conceived of having stones and sticks? If they said an authentic (or truthful) command had come regarding flattening the grave, there is no objection. That is a sin and not *kufr*, nor is it defiantly disobeying (*fisq*); are there any rejection on that? Except for the one who disobeys due to sin will be a disbeliever (*kāfir*) – indeed that is a deviant opinion. And certainly, this is how the Khawārij proceeded, and the likes of the Khawārij do not lead. This is opposing the consensus of the Muslim scholars, and there is no response to that, and no excuse...'. We need to take care of many interpretations regarding of this poem as they often aim to defend

When contextualising Shawkānī's poem, the reader will be aware that he did not disagree with Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhāb's doctrine. But he did disagree with the events in Najd: the first part of the poem identifies the objectives of Shawkānī. He wrote the letter to Abdul Aziz Ibn Muhammad al-Saud and his followers, regarding their actions in Najd, namely the killing of fellow Muslims because of alleged 'innovation' and veneration of the graves. Concerning seeking intercession from graves, Shawkānī argued that this constitutes a sin, but not disbelief (*kufr*) nor defiant disobedience (*fisq*); rather, it must be demonstrated with proof that the person has fallen into *kufr* (disbelief) before an Islamic ruling can be established, rather than generally condemning entire groups of people from the outset.

Shawkānī's argument in this poem consists of further points: First he argued that the righteous predecessors and scholars did not declare someone an apostate (*takfir*) for indulging in innovations in Islam, referring in particular to the Khawārij for whom major sin constituted disbelief. Second, innovation – like the veneration of graves – is argued to constitute sin and that only for groups, like the Khawārij, this sin was considered to be disbelief which served to legitimise killing. But Shawkānī made it very clear that this was 'a deviant opinion' which opposed 'the consensus of the Muslim Scholars'. In other words, he equated the Wahhabi movement in Najd with the Khawārij in this poem.<sup>267</sup>

Contrary to the claim by Shawkānī that the followers of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb have qualities of the Khawārij, like killing Muslims who commit a major sin, the Saudi historian Uthaymin (1936–2016) rejects the idea that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and his followers ever killed any Muslim for committing major sins or declared that they were infidels because

---

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine: see for example, an article, published in Jordan in 2018, arguing that Shawkānī's poem does not constitute a refutation: [https://salafcenter.org/2799/#\\_ftn2](https://salafcenter.org/2799/#_ftn2)

<sup>267</sup> For a translation of Shawkānī's poem, see footnote 266.

of their sins; instead, he asserts that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and his followers were following orthodox Islam.<sup>268</sup> This may be supported by a letter by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's writing to the people of al-Qasīm, 'I do not accuse any Muslim of being a disbeliever on account of his (or her) sins; consequently, we will not remove him (or her) out of the fold of Islam'.<sup>269</sup> But as we shall discuss in Chapter 4e, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's use of *takfīr wa qitāl*, i.e. declaring Muslim apostates and killing them.

### Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's Divine Bolts of Lightning

This leads us to Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb (1699–1794/5), Muhammad's older brother, who was amongst the early opponents debating against his doctrine. Sulaymān had written a public refutation in 1749, entitled *al-Sawā'iq al-ilāhīyah fī al-radd 'al'a al-Wahhābīyah* ('Divine Bolts of Lightning in the Refutation of Wahhābism'), that provides a systematic critique of his brother's teachings and his movement. When his refutation reached Muḥammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, who feared losing support, he responded with a rebuttal in an epistle to the people of al-Uyaynah, entitled *'Muḥīd al-mustafīd fī kufr tārik al-tawḥīd* ('That Which Benefits the One Who Seeks Concerning the State of Disbelief of One Who Abandons Monotheism').

In his 'Refutation', Sulaymān argued that Muhammad Ibn Al-Wahhāb was not qualified to impose any judgements over the scholars before him. He declared that his brother was not

---

<sup>268</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- 'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 113.

<sup>269</sup> Ahmad Ibn Hajar Ibn Muhammad al-Butami Al-Bin Ali, *Ash-Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb: Aqeeda as-Salafiyyahwa-Da'watuh al-Islahiyyah wa Thana al-Ulama Alaihi* (4<sup>th</sup> edition with introduction by Abdul Aziz Ibn Abdullah Ibn Baz) (Kuwait: Ad-Dar Ass-Salafiyyah, 1993), p. 47 (author's translation).

considered to be a *mujtahid Mutlaq*,<sup>270</sup> i.e. a scholar who was able to derive legislative laws that are not directly stated in the Qur’ān or Hadīth. This means that Islamic rulings should not be obtained from Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb.<sup>271</sup> Moreover, Sulaymān made it very clear that even if he had been qualified, his claims would not have stood under scrutiny as he proceeded to deconstruct them in his public refutation.<sup>272</sup> Abdul Aziz Gaye confirms that Sulaymān identified that his brother did not have the ‘expertise’ to pronounce any theological statements, thus emphasising that he was unqualified to express Islamic legal ruling.<sup>273</sup>

Above all, Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb argues that his brother misunderstood the theology of the traditionalist<sup>274</sup> scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah, regarding *shirk*. Sulaymān believed that Ibn Taymiyyah's application of *shirk* was referring to minor *shirk* as he never declared *takfir* on a large group of Muslims.<sup>275</sup> In this respect, Ibn al-Qayyim – a contemporary and student of Ibn Taymiyyah – elaborated that minor association (*shirk*) includes the following:

‘A hint of ostentation; taking oath by someone other than God, as the Prophet Muhammad said, “Whosoever takes an oath by other than God has ascribed an equal [to Him]”; and saying to someone, “Whatever God wishes and you wish [will

---

<sup>270</sup> Literally means ‘striving’ and technically means juridical endeavour and competence to infer expert legal rulings from foundational proofs within or without a particular school of law.

<sup>271</sup> Sulaymān, Ibn ‘Abdi’l-Wahhāb, *Al-Sawā‘iq al-ilāhiyyah fī al-radd ‘alā al-Wahhābiyyah* (Beirut: Dār Dhū’l-Faqār, 1997), p. 43 (author’s translation).

<sup>272</sup> Sulaymān Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Al-Sawā‘iq al-ilāhiyyah fī al-radd ‘alā al-Wahhābiyyah* (Istānbūl: Maktabat Ishīq, 1975), p. 6 (author’s translation): ‘...from where did you confirm the declaration of faith? If they invoke the deceased or someone who is not present, make a oath in his name, offer a sacrifice to others besides God, seek blessing from a grave, or take a piece of earth from it, then this is Greater *shirk* which renders the persons good deeds nil and void, their wealth is no longer sanctified nor is their life, and that such a person is addressed in the aforementioned Qur’ānic verse? If your response is that you derived this from the Qur’ān and the Prophetic traditions according to your understanding, you should know that your understanding is not reliable as there is a consensus that deriving ruling is the exclusive right of ‘*Mujtahid Mutlaq*’, and even in the case in the *Mujtahid Mutlaq* making such claims, it is still subject to scrutiny. Ibn Taymiyyah says that anyone who imposes the opinion of an Imam as an obligation should be asked to recant; if he/she fails to comply, they should be executed’.

<sup>273</sup> Abdoul Aziz Gaye, The violent Wahhabism and the Use of Islamic Texts to Justify Armed Violence Against Muslims and Non-Muslims, in *The (De)Legitimization of Violence in Sacred and Human Contexts*, ed. by Muhammad Shafiq and Thomas Donlin-Smith (New York, London et al.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p. 212.

<sup>274</sup> Traditionalist scholars are those who entirely based on Islamic scriptures and his monolithic understanding of the first three generations of Islam.

<sup>275</sup> Sulaymān Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Al-Sawā‘iq al-ilāhiyyah fī al-radd ‘alā al-Wahhābiyyah* (Istānbūl: Maktabat Ishīq, 1975), p. 45 (author’s translation).

happen]” or “This is from God and you” or “I have none but God and you” or “I rely on God and you” or “If it were not for God and you, such and such...” Such statements may be considered major association (*shirk*), depending on the context and the intent.<sup>276</sup>

Ibn al-Qayyim explains how minor *shirk* could be established as major *shirk*, depending on the individual’s intentions. For example, if one believes and attributes human quality to be equal to God, or places their reliance on a creation other than God, then one would have indulged into major *shirk*. By contrast, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb concluded that Ibn Taymiyyah regarded those who sought help and protection from the dead as disbelievers, arguing that capital punishment should apply. Amidst the exchanges between the two brothers, Sulaymān put forward to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb his brutal declaration of *takfir* – declaring Muslim’s infidels – which was rejected by Muslim scholars, as it was not sanctioned to claim one an infidel merely by engaging in innovative actions.<sup>277</sup>

Sulaymān plainly contested that his brother’s claim of scholarly precedence with reference to Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim was intellectually misleading. He asserted that the aforementioned scholars claimed that the acts of worship if misdirected were tantamount to the *lesser shirk* and not of the type that would expel any wrongdoer from the fold of Islam.<sup>278</sup>

---

<sup>276</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abī Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ranks of the Divine Seekers*, Vol 1, translated by Ovamir Anjum (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2020), p. 720.

<sup>277</sup> Sulaymān, Ibn ‘Abdī’l-Wahhāb, *Al-Ṣawā‘iq al-ilāhiyyah fī al-radd ‘alā al-Wahhābiyyah*, (Beirut: Dār Dhū’l-Faqār, 1997), p. 45 (author’s translation).

<sup>278</sup> Sulaymān Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Ṣawā‘iq al-ilāhiyyah fī al-radd ‘alā al-Wahhābiyyah* (Istānbul: Maktabat Ishīq, 1975), p. 6 (author’s translation): ‘Should you say that you have derived these ideas from scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim because they called it *shirk*, my response would be that this is correct and I agree that the aforementioned scholars’ authoritative opinions should be adopted and this is tantamount to *shirk*. However, your opinion is inconsistent with theirs as you claimed that this is the *greater shirk*, one which expels the person from the fold of Islam, and that all regions that these practices prevail in are deemed apostates, thus making the laws of apostasy applicable to them. Additionally, you claim that failing to excommunicate such people from Islam is also tantamount to disbelief. However, they (Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim) did state that this is *shirk*; they took a harsh stance against it; they were vocal in their prohibition regarding it, but they did not say a fraction of what you have said, and you have been selective in your reference to their work, and you chose to use that which is consistent to your agenda as there is proof that these acts are no more than the lesser *shirk*’.

Sulaymān challenged his brother's rejection of religious pluralism in society and declaring Muslims as infidels. He further engaged with the scholarly arguments that his brother had used to declare *takfīr*. Although Sulaymān accepted Ibn Taymiyyah's statements, he accused his brother of inconsistency in his excommunication legislation to a large group. Sulaymān believed his brother had a personal agenda that was part of his reformist goals. Sulaymān, along with other scholars in Arabia, may have believed Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb wanted power and authority across the lands of Arabia. It seems to be that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's excommunication of apostates in Islamic law was not limited to those who had converted to another religion, such as Christianity and Judaism, but the same legislation was charged upon those who claimed to be Muslims but engaged in practices contrary to what he believed to be 'puritanical' Islam. In the view of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, a simple utterance of faith was not sufficient in proving that you are a Muslim.

Unsurprisingly, Sulaymān argued that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's verdict on excommunication was misinterpreted according to both the Qur'ān and the Prophetic traditions and was in opposition to his findings and those of other scholars. He stressed that his brother was not a scholar who could derive legislative laws that were not directly stated in the Qur'ān or Hadīth. Based on Ibn Taymiyyah's statement that 'anyone who imposes the opinion of an Imam as an obligation should be asked to recant' and if he does not, should be executed, Sulaymān also requested his brother to retract his words or fear execution.<sup>279</sup>

He added that the author of '*Rawdah al Talibīn*' argued that a Muslim cannot fall into disbelief as a result of invocation or in any case as long as there is a confusion in interpretation of the

---

<sup>279</sup> See footnote 272.

texts and this is the opinion that was more supported by Ibn Taymiyyah.<sup>280</sup> Sulaymān then directly challenges Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb by stating,

‘Do you think that the invocation of the deceased is tantamount to disbelief and that the scholars of Islam were unaware of this? Do you believe that sufficient proof is established on the person solely based on what you say?’<sup>281</sup>

This suggests that those who believe in Islamic monotheism and do not indulge in ‘polytheism’, even if they make invocation to other than God because they misinterpret the Qur’ānic texts, continue to be Muslims. He asserted that the Islamic scholars in the past had been very much aware of these acts being committed and did not excommunicate entire groups of Muslims or even engage in waging war against them, killing them and confiscating their properties.<sup>282</sup> He applied Ibn Taymiyyah’s work to support his reasoning as, too, did Muhammad Ibn Abd-al-Wahhāb:

‘Ibn Taymiyyah in *Iqtida Sirāt al-mustaqīm li Mukhalafā Ashāb al-Jahīm* (‘Following the Straight Path in Opposing the People of the Hell-Fire’) says, “whoever travels to a place hoping to attain some spiritual gain by seeking this place, while the *shariah* does not encourage it, has committed a reprehensible act. Some are worse than others, whether it is a tree, a stream, a river, a mountain or a cave. And it is worse to seek out such places as a result of an oath”’.<sup>283</sup>

He insisted that according to Ibn Taymiyyah, the act of travelling to a destination assuming it would bring spiritual gain is at most reprehensible, and nowhere has the medieval scholar stated it to be *shirk* or even pronounced excommunication on those who seek it as a result of an

---

<sup>280</sup> See footnote 272.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35 (author’s translation): ‘The author of *Rawdah al Talbeen* said “the correct position is that a Muslim cannot fall into disbelief as a result of invocation – in any case – as long as there is a confusion in interpretation [of the texts]” and this is the opinion that was more supported by Ibn Taymiyyah. Do you think that the invocation of the deceased is tantamount to disbelief and that the scholars of Islam were unaware of this? Do you believe that sufficient proof is established on the person solely based on what you say?’.

<sup>282</sup> Based on Islamic law, Muhammad Ibn Abd-al-Wahhāb advised the al-Saud family that the confiscation of properties and land (as a result of warfare) is to be preferred over taxation of individuals.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36 (author’s translation).

oath.<sup>284</sup> Here again, Sulaymān questioned the validity of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine through scholarly discourse and rejected the outright *takfīr* his brother was espousing.

In 1751, Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, then a judge of al-Huraymila, urged the town's residents to repudiate his brother's doctrine, leading to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's supporters being forced to leave al-Huraymila.<sup>285</sup> Uthaymin mentions that after many rebuttals amongst both brothers, which led to provincial wars in Najd, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's followers dominated the majority of Najd. Many years later, in 1776, Sulaymān returned to al-Dir'iyyah where his brother and Abdul Aziz Ibn Muhammad accepted him on his arrival. His stay in al-Dir'iyyah was financially supported by both leaders from the public repository until he died in the year 1793.<sup>286</sup> This suggests that after the struggle with his brother, Sulaymān had not been able to resist the overwhelming force of his brother and Abdul Aziz Ibn Muhammad, and he had no choice but to surrender and live under their rule. It may also imply that after years of opposition, he may have had no alternative than to embrace his brother's doctrine and in return was taken care of until his death.

Had the dispute remained confined to a heated exchange between the brothers, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's mission might have been overlooked by Muslims outside Arabia. But the accompanying victorious Saudi military conquest forced Muslim communities around the world, including the Ottoman Empire, to be alerted of the reformist movement.

---

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36 (author's translation).

<sup>285</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- 'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 62.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.



## Ibn Taymiyyah

As we mentioned in Chapter 3, Ibn Taymiyyah – still today one of the most influential Sunni scholars – was amongst the most important textual influences on Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb. His focus was on literal interpretations of the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*, while rejecting Islamic traditions that were not mentioned in the primary sources.<sup>287</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah was from the Hanbalīte school of Sunni Islam. He was from a family of scholars, succeeding his father in 1284 at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, where he taught exegesis of the Qur’ān. From a young age, he studied a number of books of Hadīth, particularly the *musnad*<sup>288</sup> of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855). Having studied and being influenced by the works of the founder of the Hanbalīte School of Jurisprudence, he proclaimed juridical verdicts according to the Hanbalīte School.<sup>289</sup> Taking great interest in studying and teaching theology, Ibn Taymiyyah openly rejected the Ash’arītes doctrine,<sup>290</sup> accused it of being a deviant Sufi doctrine.<sup>291</sup> He criticised all other schools of theology, including the Shi’ite doctrines, and objected and declared war against what he believed to be innovation and deviation.<sup>292</sup> Undoubtedly, Ibn Taymiyyah’s doctrine and verdicts influenced Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb as he, already in the early fourteenth-century, believed that corruption within Islamic practices was widespread and also objected against what he believed to be innovated customs, false Islamic creeds and careless considerations of Islamic law; he used his textual discourses to fight against common Sufi

---

<sup>287</sup> Jon Hoover, *Makers of the Muslim world: Ibn Taymiyya* (Oneworld Publications, 2019); Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet the Pharaoh*, (University of California Press, 1985), p. 194.

<sup>288</sup> A *musnad* is a transmission of Hadīth, which is detectable in a continuous ascending order to the Prophet Muhammad who transmitted it or reported it to establish its authenticity.

<sup>289</sup> Oliver Leaman, ed, *The Qur’ān: an Encyclopedia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 280.

<sup>290</sup> Founded by theologian Abu al-Hasan al-Ash’arī who died in 936 CE.

<sup>291</sup> Oliver Leaman, ed, *The Qur’ān: an Encyclopedia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 281.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

practices linked to saints' tombs and celestial objects,<sup>293</sup> clearly inspiring Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb.

This emphasises the resemblances between Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and Ibn Taymiyyah in their fight against what they believed to be 'corruption' in Islam. For instance, Ibn Taymiyyah publicly spoke against the mystical union with God,<sup>294</sup> which includes practices using objects and saints as an intermediary between the individual, who aims to become closer to God. Similarly, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb fought against what he believed to be 'corruption', which included practices associating and seeking intercession with saints. Despite the difference in time, they were both confronted to comparable societal and religious circumstances in which they reacted in a similar way, but it is important to take into account that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb utilised the works of Ibn Taymiyyah to justify his actions.

The veneration of tombs had a long tradition, having started with the death of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. As we have seen in this Section, scholarly debates regarding the concept of *tawassul* have been going on for many centuries – long before Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb started his movement with the aim to eradicate the practice of venerating graves. It is therefore no surprise that this was a very contemptuous challenge which created a lot of opposition among his contemporaries. While Shawkānī praised Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's dogma as it aimed to call people to what they believed to be orthodox Islam, he also clearly rejected the bloodshed that was taking place in Najd, though this critique only occurred after Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's death. By contrast, in his 'Divine Bolts of Lightning in the Refutation of Wahhābism' from 1749, Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb provided a detailed rebuttal of his brother's doctrine. Like his brother, he cited Ibn Taymiyyah's textual discourse

---

<sup>293</sup> Jon Hoover, *Makers of the Muslim world: Ibn Taymiyya* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2019), p. 21.

<sup>294</sup> Yossef Rappoport and Shahad Ahmed, eds, *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 19.

in order to disprove his brother's interpretations. Whilst Ibn Taymiyyah remains the main medium of interpretation of Qur'ān and Hadīth for all three of these prominent figures, their interpretation differs. Shawkānī, addressing a Zaydi community, an important branch of Shi'a Islam which had a firm belief in justifying the veneration of saints at graves, goes into more in-depth discussions compared to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb. What sets Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb astray from the rest of his contemporaries is his understanding of the veneration of graves to be major *shirk* which was used to legitimise *takfīr wa qitāl*.

#### 4d. *Tawassul* (Intercession )

With Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb considering that the Sufi practices in his society in Najd had fallen into polytheism, he particular focused his attention on the practice of *tawassul*, which refers to the means by which a person aims to seek 'nearness' to God. He quotes Ibn Mas'ud, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, who said:

‘I heard God’s Messenger saying,  
*“Ruqyā,<sup>295</sup> charm<sup>296</sup> and tiwalah<sup>297</sup> are shirk”*.<sup>298</sup>

From the compilation of Hadīth by Sunan an-Nisā'i,<sup>299</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb quotes a discussion between the Prophet Muhammad and one of his companions:

‘Perhaps you will live a long time after me. So, inform people: whoever ties a knot in his beard, places any string of cord around his neck (as a charm), or

---

<sup>295</sup> *Ruqyā* is known to be incantation.

<sup>296</sup> Amulets and other objects that were put on children and adults to ward off evil.

<sup>297</sup> *Tiwalah* is something that they did with the claim that it makes a woman or man love their partners.

<sup>298</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 46.

<sup>299</sup> Sunan As-Sughra, also known as Sunan an-Nasā'i, is collected by Abū 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Aḥmad Ibn Shu'ayb Ibn Alī Ibn Sīnān al-Nasā'i (829–915). Al-Nisā'i's methodology was to document all the various chains of narrators in a Hadīth, including weak narratives; he then records all the transmitters of a Hadīth while critically analysing narrators to distinguish a Hadīth that is weak from a Hadīth that is genuine, see John Burton, *An Introduction to Hadith* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p. 129.

cleans himself (after toilet) with animal dung or bone, then Muhammad has disowned him.’<sup>300</sup>

By utilising this Hadīth, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb endeavours to warn about the consequences of those who practice ‘sorcery’ and implies the importance of Muslims following the *Sunnah* – the *exempla* – of the Prophet Muhammad as it distinguishes between the followers and disbelievers of Islam.

Millie, an anthropologist in Islamic studies, defines Intercession (*tawassul*) as a ritual of invocation,<sup>301</sup> predominantly practised to make supplications upon graves and other Islamic sites. It consists of two acts: naming the mediators (*wasīlah*) who is between the worshipper and God. Another type of *tawassul* is making an offering for the benefit of the mediator.<sup>302</sup> The increasing popularity of practising *tawassul* may be explained due to its adaptability to many local situations; it may have assisted Muslims from various cultures and traditions by providing them with a physical space for their supplications to God via the intermediary of a saint: for example, a large or small gathering around a tomb where Muslims would congregate to supplicate, as it is believed that the deceased in the grave was a pious worshipper of God.

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb warns of the impermissibility of intercession:

‘Whoever makes intermediaries (*al-Wasā’it*) between himself and Allah in, supplicating to them, asking them for intercession (*shafa’ā*) and relying upon them, has already become an unbeliever (*Kāfirān Ijmā’an*).’<sup>303</sup>

---

<sup>300</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 47.

<sup>301</sup> Julian Millie, ‘Supplicating, Naming, Offering: ‘Tawassul’ in West Java’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, no. 1, 2008, pp. 107–122, at pp. 107–109.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., pp. 107–109.

<sup>303</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-ma‘rūf bi-majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-najdīyah : majmū‘at kutub wa-rasā’il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-‘āmmah lil-ihtifāl bi-murūr mi‘at ‘ām ‘alā ta’sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 177 (author’s translation).

He further claims that all Muslim scholars from the past to present are in consensus (*Ijmā'a*) in this opinion.<sup>304</sup> But this claim is incorrect as scholars in the past have disagreed regarding the permissibility of intercession from the dead. While the Qur'ān advises that all humankind will be gathered in the presence of God and that no individual can intercede to save one another,<sup>305</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb expressed that only God can intercede and none can intercede except by God's permission.<sup>306</sup> However, he can be disproved by the Hadīth of the Prophet Muhammad when he said:

'Make intercession to me, you will be rewarded, for Allah decrees what he wishes by the tongue of his Prophet.'<sup>307</sup>

Intercession may therefore be thought to be a part of a Muslim's worship in Islam as it is recognised by the Prophet Muhammad himself as argued among others by Sulaymān and the modern Kuwaiti-born scholar, born in 1932, Yūsuf Hāshim al-Rifā. Al-Rifā defends seeking intercession from the dead saints and supports his statement by invoking a Hadīth in which the Caliphate Uthmān Ibn Affān tells a man to seek aid from the late Prophet Muhammad. He further argues that since it is mentioned in *Sahih of al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, it cannot be rejected.<sup>308</sup> It is therefore important to cite as-Subkī's assessment on intercession in full:

'Know, that it is permissible and good to perform *tawassul*, *Istighāthah* (seeking aid) and *tashaffū* (seeking intercession) through the Prophet – May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him – unto his Lord, the most glorified, the most high. The permissibility and desirability of this is from the matters that are well known among

---

<sup>304</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū'at al-tawhīd al-ma'rūf bi-majmū'at al-tawhīd al-najdīyah : majmū'at kutub wa-rasā'il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-'āmmah lil-ihtifāl bi-murūr mi'at 'ām 'alā ta'sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 177 (author's translation).

<sup>305</sup> Surah Al-An'am 6:51; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, p. 134.

<sup>306</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 71 (author's translation): "Say: To Allah belongs all intercession." (39:44) Allah the Almighty said: "Who is he that can intercede with Him except with His permission..." (2:255) He said: "And there are many angels in the heavens whose intercession will avail nothing except after Allah has given leave for whom He wills and pleases." (53:26).

<sup>307</sup> Sulaymān Ibn al-Ash'ath Ibn al-Sijistānī Abū Dāw'ūd, *Sunan Abī Dāw'ūd* (Cairo: Darul-tāsyl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2015), 7:511, #5043 (author's translation).

<sup>308</sup> Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Hadīth Canon* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 213.

all those who have religion, and well known from the actions of the Prophets and Messengers, and the way of the righteous Salaf, the scholars, and the layman among the Muslims.

No one has rejected this from the people of religion, nor has anyone heard about (rejecting) this at any time until Ibn Taymiyyah came: So he spoke concerning this with words that deceive the weak and inexperienced ones, and he innovated that which no one from the generations before held.

This is the reason why he attacked the story which has been already mentioned from Malik – may Allah have mercy upon him – for it contains the statement of Malik to al-Mansur: “Seek intercession through him”. And we’ve already made its correctness clear.

And this is why we have also mentioned *Istighāthah* in this book because of the attack against it together with (the attack against) the visiting (of the grave of the Prophet – May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) – and it should be enough for you that the denunciation of Ibn Taymiyyah against *Istighāthah* and *tawassul* is a statement that no scholar before him had said and he created conflict among the people of Islam by it.<sup>309</sup>

Though as-Subkī lived long before Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, his arguments are important as he not only demonstrated the permissibility of performing *tawassul*, *Istighāthah* (seeking aid) and *tashaffū* (seeking intercession) through the Prophet Muhammad, but he also declared Ibn Taymiyyah, whom Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was heavily influenced by, as an innovator of Islam and that his words ‘deceive the weak and inexperienced ones’. We must put this in context: as-Subkī clearly defended seeking the dead to intercede on one’s behalf, in particular through the Prophet Muhammad. Considering that Ibn Taymiyyah died in 1328 and as-Subkī only 27 years later, in 1355, the permissibility of *tawassul* would have been

---

<sup>309</sup> Taqi al-Din al-Subkī, *Shifā al-Saqam fi Ziyarāt khayr al-Anām*, (Lebanon: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 2008), p. 357. (author’s translation): اعلم : أنه يجوزُ ، وَيَحْسُنُ التَّوَسُّلُ ، والاستغاثة ، والتَّشَفُّعُ بالنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم إلى ربه سبحانه وتعالى ، وجواز ذلك وَحُسْنُهُ ؛ من الأمور المَعْلُومَةُ لِكُلِّ ذي دين ، المعروفة من فعل الأنبياء والمرسلين ، وبسير السلف الصالحين ، والعلماء والعوام من المسلمين ، ولم يُنْكَرْ أحدٌ ذلك من أهل الأديان ، ولا سَمِعَ به في زمن من الأزمان ، حتى جاء ابن تيمية ؛ فَتَكَلَّمَ في ذلك بكلام يُلْطِشُ فيه على الضعفاء الأغمار ، وابتدع ما لم يُسبق إليه في سائر الأعصار ، ولهذا طعن في الحكاية التي تَقَدَّمَ ذكرها عن مَالِكٍ رحم الله تعالى ، فإنَّ فيها قول مَالِكٍ رحم الله تعالى للمنصور : « استشفع به » . ونحن قد بَيَّنَّا صِحَّتَهَا ، ولذلك أدخلنا الاستغاثة في هذا الكتاب ، لما تَعَرَّضَ إليها مع الزيارة ، وحسبك أن إنكار ابن تيمية للاستغاثة والتوسل قول لم يقله عالم قبله ، وصار به بين أهل الإسلام مُثَلَّةٌ

vastly excepted by the majority of Muslim scholars. This stands in clear contrast to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's claim that there was a consensus amidst Muslims regarding the impermissibility of *tawassul*, in particular in the Shafī'ī School of Jurisprudence, as as-Subkī served as a judge and was well recognised for his knowledge and expertise in Syria and Egypt. As-Subkī defends his statement by quoting Mālik Ibn Anas (711–795) from the holy city of Madina, who was a Muslim judge and a scholar of Hadīth; he played an important role in formulating early Islamic legal doctrines and was the founder of the Maliki school of jurisprudence. As-Subkī quotes his statement 'Seek intercession through him,' which means to perform intercession via the Prophet Muhammad.

By contrast, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb sought to find further support for his viewpoint and therefore elaborated on Ibn Taymiyyah's explanation by mentioning that the Qur'ān states, 'They will not be able to intercede except for him with whom He is pleased'.<sup>310</sup> This can be interpreted that those who associate partners with God will have their intercession rejected. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb explains that God accepts invocation of whomever He has permitted to intercede as an honour. In the Qur'ān, it is also written that those who take others to intercede will not be able to save themselves from God.<sup>311</sup> Ibn Kathīr mentions that the deities that are stated in the aforementioned verse are objects that will neither do any harm nor benefit. Moreover, their intercession will be of no use for him whatsoever, nor can they save anyone.<sup>312</sup> Similarly, it states in the Qur'ān that the intercession of the angels in heaven will be of no use until God gives permission to those He chooses.<sup>313</sup>

---

<sup>310</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, *Kitab At-Tauhid*, (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996), p. 72.

<sup>311</sup> Surah Ya Sin 36:23; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 442.

<sup>312</sup> Ismā'il Ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)* (Lebanon: Darussalam Publication, 2003), 8:184.

<sup>313</sup> Surah an-Najm 53:26; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 527.

According to these verses, it can be said that the people whose intercession will be accepted by God are whomever God wishes. Consequently saints, living or dead, have no special status with God in order to intercede for those requesting them to do so, as the Qur'ān emphasises the concept that intercession belongs to God alone without any other associates.<sup>314</sup> Taken out of context, the followers of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb use this to argue that the nature of intercession has been misinterpreted by two major groups, which were considered 'extreme' in 'Uthaymin's work: those who deny intercession altogether, the Mu'tāzilites, and those who consider it to be a personal right possessed only by the Prophet Muhammad, the Khārijites.<sup>315</sup>

Those who practise *tawassul* reject the idea that they would consider prophets or saints as divine. Instead, the prophets and saints are God's creation and are not to be worshipped. They affirm to seek blessing from the prophets or saints because they believe that they are God's beloved special chosen worshippers. To support this view, one can quote Surah 39:3: 'True devotion is due to God alone. [As for] those who choose other protectors besides Him, saying, "We only worship them because they bring us nearer to God", God Himself will judge between them regarding their differences. God does not guide any ungrateful liar'.<sup>316</sup> In other words, God will not accept any deeds unless they sincerely and purely worship him without any partners; by worshipping idols, people hoped that the saints will assist them to acquire a blissful life. But we need to emphasise that this Surah – together with similar verses – refers to the Time of Ignorance (*jahiliyyah*), prior to Islam, and therefore refers to polytheistic worshippers – and not to Muslims, as claimed, for example by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb.

---

<sup>314</sup> Surah az-Zumar 39:44; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 464.

<sup>315</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- 'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 123.

<sup>316</sup> Surah az-Zumar 39:3; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 459.



Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb therefore does not allow Muslims to seek intercession from the Prophet Muhammad as he classifies it as *shirk*.<sup>317</sup> The Qur'ān states: 'Those you (idolaters) call upon instead of God are created beings like you. Call upon them, then, and let them respond to you if what you say is true'.<sup>318</sup> In other words, if you worship idols, see if they answer to your call or supplication. It is important to notice that exegetes of the Qur'ān agree that this verse is limited to idol worshipping and that *tawassul* does not allow any human, including the Prophet Muhammad, to become a deity with God. However, this may be challenged as the Qur'ān states, 'It was only as a mercy that We sent you (i.e. the Prophet) to all people'.<sup>319</sup> For this reason, it permits those who seek intercession with the Prophet Muhammad as he is a mercy to humankind. The Qur'ān states:

‘Those you invoke besides Him do not even control the skin of a date-stone; If you call them, they cannot hear you; if they could hear, they could not answer you; on the Day of Resurrection, they will disown your idolatry. None can inform you [i.e. the Prophet] like the One who is all aware.’<sup>320</sup>

But on the other hand, the Prophet Muhammad is considered to be alive in his grave, being able to receive salutations and blessings. On first sight, this might be considered a confirmation for *tawassul*. But the Prophet Muhammad is limited to the state of *Barzakh*, the interim realm, in which he can receive salutations, carried to him by Angels; he can respond to the salutations, but not to the request made by the worshippers.<sup>321</sup> As-Subkī states:

‘I say: *tawassul* through the Prophet – May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him – is permissible in every situation, before his creation and after it, in the time of his

---

<sup>317</sup> Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 63–64.

<sup>318</sup> Surah al-A'raf 7:194; translation by Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 176.

<sup>319</sup> Surah al-Anbiya 21:107; translation by Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 332.

<sup>320</sup> Surah Fatir 35:13-14; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 437.

<sup>321</sup> Muhammad Ibn Yazīd Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*. (Cairo: Darul-tāsyl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2014), 2:209-10 #1620 (author's translation).

life in this world, as well as after his death in the period of the *Barzakh*, and after the resurrection on the day of reckoning and paradise...'<sup>322</sup>

To As-Subkī, the term *Barzakh* includes from the time of death to paradise. This means that one can seek *tawassul* during his lifetime and after his death. Regarding martyrs, the Qur'ān makes it clear that they are alive with their Lord, as we just discussed in the case of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>323</sup> Another Hadīth states that when the Prophet Muhammad stood at the well of Badr,<sup>324</sup> which contained the corpses of the pagans, he said, 'Have you found true what your Lord promised you?'; then he further said, 'They now hear what I say'.<sup>325</sup> From this, it may be insinuated that, if this Hadīth implies that the dead are able to hear, then also the saints in their graves would be able to listen to our calls and supplications.

In Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's lifetime, the debates amongst Muslims concerning *tawassul* were rather limited as the vast majority have accepted its practices. Moreover, the interpretation of these verses and Hadīth that were asserted by him was challenged by an array of important scholars who equally backed up their arguments with the Qur'ān and Hadīth, such as Sulaymān Ibn Suhaym, Abd Allah al-Muways (n.d–1761), Muhammad Ibn Afaliq (1688–1750), Abd Allah Ibn Abd al-Latif (n.d–1751/2) and Isa Ibn Abd al-Rahman Ibn Mutlaq (n.d–1784).<sup>326</sup>

---

<sup>322</sup> Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Shifā al-Saqam fī Ziyarāt khayr al-Anām* (Lebanon: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 2008), 358: *إِنَّ التَّوَسُّلَ بِالنَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ جَائِزٌ فِي كُلِّ حَالٍ ، قَبْلَ خَلْقِهِ ، وَبَعْدَ خَلْقِهِ ، فِي مَدَّةِ حَيَاتِهِ فِي الدُّنْيَا ، وَبَعْدَ مَوْتِهِ فِي مَدَّةِ : وَأَقُولُ : 358: البرزخ ، وبعد البعث في عرصات القيامة والجنة*

<sup>323</sup> Surah al-Imran 3:169; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 73.

<sup>324</sup> Badr is a town in Al Madina in the province of Al-Hijaz, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>325</sup> Aḥmad Ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī and Muḥammad Ibn Ismā'īl Bukhārī. *Fath al-bārī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. (Cairo: Dār ar-Rayān lit-turāth, 1986), 7:351, #3980-39801 (author's translation).

<sup>326</sup> Michael Crawford, *Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014), p. 75.

#### 4e. *Takfīr wa Qitāl*: Declaring a Muslim as an Apostate and killing

‘As for warfare, until today we did not fight anyone, except in defence of our life and honour. They come to our land and did not spare any effort fighting us. We only initiated fighting against some of them in retaliation for their persistent aggression, “And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it”<sup>327</sup> (...).’<sup>328</sup>

The subject relating to declaring one a disbeliever (*takfīr*) and killing (*qitāl*)<sup>329</sup> remains the most contentious discussion within Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrine, which intensified the rivalry and conflict between Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and his adversaries. It may be debated that the origin of his reformist movement was the interrogation of *takfīr*, i.e. declaring someone who claimed to be a Muslim an unbeliever. Muslims who either proclaimed their apostasy from Islam or were legally declared as disbelievers from an authority in Islam would face the death penalty. This ruling in Islamic law was based on the Hadīth ‘whoever changes his religion, kill him’,<sup>330</sup> and that ‘one who leaves his religion, abandoning the community should be punished with the death penalty’.<sup>331</sup>

In his letter to Ibn-‘id (n.d.), Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb claims that most of his adversaries accepted his opinions on the meaning of *tawhīd* and *shirk*, but rejected his arguments for *takfīr* and *qitāl*.<sup>332</sup> In his view, *jihād* was integral to the spread of monotheism

---

<sup>327</sup> Citing the Qur’ān 42:40. See Surah Ash-Shura 42:40; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’ān*, p. 488.

<sup>328</sup> Author’s translation of a letter written by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb – from: Nasir Ibn Ibrahim Ibn Abdullah At-Tuwaim. *Ash-Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab: ‘Hayatuh (His Biography) wa-Da’watuh (and Mission) fi Ar-Ru’yah Al-Istishraqiyah* (Riyadh: Al-Kitab Al-Islami, 2002), p. 102.

<sup>329</sup> *Qitāl* refers to ‘fighting’, the Qur’ān mentions ‘*kutiba alaykumul qitāl...*’ – ‘fighting has been ordained for you...’. See Surah Al-Baqarah 2:216; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’ān*, p. 35. Although the term means ‘fighting’ or ‘physical combat’, in the eighth century the term *jihād* was less frequently utilised by Islamic scholars, while the term *qitāl* was more frequently used to the extent it became synonymous to *jihād*. See Oliver Leaman, ed, *The Qur’ān: an Encyclopedia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 520.

<sup>330</sup> Ahmad Ibn Shu‘ayb al-Nasā‘ī. *Kitaab As-Sunan al-māgrūf bi-Sunan al-Kubrā*. (Cairo: Darul-tāsīl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglumāt, 2012), 5:556 #3717 (author’s translation).

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:535 #3672 (author’s translation).

<sup>332</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- ‘Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 129.

as long as it was based on the right motive. But his ideology, though he believed it to be based on the Prophet Muhammad's doctrine, caused divisions within the Muslim community.

According to Ibn al-Qayyim, *jihād* is of four types, *jihād An-Nafs* (*jihād* against One's Own-self), *Jihād Ash-Shaitan* (*jihād* against Satan), *Jihād Al-Kuffar wal-Munafiqin* (*jihād* against Infidels and Hypocrites), *jihād Arbab Adh-Dhulm wal-Bid'ah wal-Munkarat* (*jihād* against the Unjust, the Innovators and the Sinners).<sup>333</sup> The latter is explained by Ibn al-Qayyim as having three levels: the first level involves physical fighting – this is the highest rank. If one is incapable to participate in physical *jihād*, then one proceeds to the second level, which is to use words to fight against the 'Unjust, the Innovators and the Sinners'. If one is unable to do so, then one should proceed to the third level - which is to dislike the 'Unjust, Innovators and Sinners with their heart' without physically acting against it.<sup>334</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb understood *jihād* against Innovators as a critical concept in Islam, clearly influenced by Ibn al-Qayyim's work, where physical *jihād* is his most preferred way to prevent Innovation in Islam, which he considered to be an honourable act in the sight of God.

Delong-Bas argues that one must understand the use of the term *qitāl* that was preached by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, and not *jihād*. It is contested that the permission of fighting was not for killing, but to correct human behaviour to what was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>335</sup> Al-Rasheed remarks that *jihād* is an essential pillar to his doctrine, as Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb called *jihād* against all the unbelievers. Moreover, those who embraced his doctrine were expected to ally by supporting the cause of fighting against those

---

<sup>333</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abī Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Summarised by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb *Provisions for the Hereafter*. (Riyadh: Darussalam publishers Ltd, 2003), p. 249.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>335</sup> Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 64.

challenging his dogma, while those who resisted were subjected to attacks and raids. As a result, looting became common and also provided encouragement for tribes to support Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and his mission.<sup>336</sup>

Armed with his theory about *tawhīd*, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb issued a verdict (*fatwa*) and delivered sermons of the permissibility of holy fighting in order to spread his creed. For instance, he argued that Abu Bakr fought the first battle in Islam after the death of the Prophet Muhammad against those who believed in God and the Prophet Muhammad because they refused to pay *Zakah*.<sup>337</sup> He explained that if those who believed in both God and the Prophet Muhammad were fought against, it is necessary to consider those who commit ‘polytheistic’ acts to be even more deserving of being attacked. Furthermore, he elaborates that those who are being worshipped are neither saint nor pious, and that this practice needs to be stopped. With this theoretical understanding of Islam, he justifies his war against ‘hidden unbelievers’, stating that the act of fighting itself is a condition to belief.<sup>338</sup>

But we must confront this interpretation with other evidence from the Qur’ān and Hadīth. Scholars of the Qur’ān examine each verse in the Qur’ān in order to identify its purpose of revelation by studying its historical context; this is called *asbāb al-nūzūl* or the ‘causes of revelation’. For instance, the verse ‘Fighting has been ordained for you, though it is hard for

---

<sup>336</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A history of Saudi Arabia* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 17–18.

<sup>337</sup> Sunan an-Nasa’i 3973 ‘... When the Messenger of Allah died, and Abu Bakr (became Khalifah) after him, and the Arabs reverted to *Kufr*, ‘Umar said: “O Abu Bakr, how can you fight the people when the Messenger of Allah said: ‘I have been commanded to fight the people until they say *La ilaha illallah*, and whoever says *La ilaha illallah*, his wealth and his life are safe from me, except for a right that is due, and his reckoning will be with Allah, the Mighty and Sublime?’” Abu Bakr replied: “I will fight whoever separates Salah and Zakah, for Zakah is the compulsory right to be taken from wealth. By Allah, if they withhold from me a young goat that they used to give to the Messenger of Allah, I will fight them for withholding it.” ‘Umar said: “By Allah, as soon as I saw that Allah has expanded the chest of Abu Bakr to fighting, I knew that it was the truth”’.

<sup>338</sup> Dallal, A., ‘The origins and objective of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750–1850’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol. 113, no. 3, 1993, p. 351.

you’,<sup>339</sup> is a verse that many Muslim scholars contextualise by saying that it was only directed to the Prophet, his companions at that particular time and in a state of war, whereas those who would read this verse without taking into account its context may misinterpret it as a generic rule for all Muslims to observe.<sup>340</sup> This shows how Muslim scholarly disputes, deriving from different readings and understanding of the Qur’ān, can lead to diverging opinions amidst the Muslim authorities. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s interpretation of the Qur’ān set him on an unconventional path to his rivals; consequently, he uses the verses concerning fighting to justify and propagate his doctrine.

The Hadīth narrated by Jundub Bin ‘Abdullah is significant when analysing Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s controversial chain of arguments to justify the killing of fellow-Muslims. In this Hadīth, it is reported that the companion of the Prophet Muhammad, Usamah Bin Zaīd (615-673,<sup>341</sup> killed a man in the battlefield after he had uttered the words ‘There is no true god except Allah’. When news of this event reached the Prophet Muhammad, he summoned Usamah Bin Zaīd who had to explain what happened. The Prophet Muhammad then repeated the question: ‘What would you do with regard to (the utterance): *La ilaha illallah*, when it comes (before you) on the Day of Resurrection?’<sup>342</sup>

It is clear from this Hadīth that the Prophet Muhammad expressed his disappointment to a companion who had killed a Muslim in the battlefield, clearly expressing his disapproval. The question therefore arises how it can ever be permitted to kill those who utter the testimony of Islamic faith.

---

<sup>339</sup> Surah al-Baqarah 2:216; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’ān*, p. 35.

<sup>340</sup> Jeffrey T. Kenney and Ebrahim Moosa, eds, *Islam in the Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 54.

<sup>341</sup> He was born in the year 612 CE, but the date of his death is not known.

<sup>342</sup> Muslim Ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qushayrī an-Naysābūrī. *Sahīh Muslim*. (Cairo: Darul-tāsīl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2014), 1:438-9 #89 (author’s translation).

Furthermore, another narration stated that ‘Abusing a Muslim is *fusūq* (evildoing) and killing him is *Kufr* (disbelief)’,<sup>343</sup> while another Hadīth emphasises the severity of killing Muslims, ‘Killing a believer is more severe before Allah than the destruction of the whole world’.<sup>344</sup> Likewise, it is mentioned that ‘If two Muslims confront each other with their swords and one of them kills the other, both the killer and the slain will be in Hell’.<sup>345</sup> All these Hadīth clearly emphasise the impermissibility of killing another Muslim.

It is clear that these statements from the Hadīth provide a clear contradiction to what Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb asked his followers to fight for, to eradicate disbelief. It is therefore no surprise that his adversaries would argue that the real evildoers and disbelievers were Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and his followers as they would attack others in contradiction to the Qur’ān and Hadīth.

According to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, actions that are in opposition to *his* principles invalidate one’s Islamic faith: ‘Whosoever does not hold the polytheists to be disbelievers, or has doubts about their disbelief or considers their ways and beliefs to be correct, has committed disbelief’,<sup>346</sup> even for those who proclaimed the testimony of Faith through uttering *la ilaha illallah Muhammad rasulullah*. He further explains that *takfīr* or infidels are those who have specific knowledge of Islamic theology and yet speak against it, and prevent others from accepting it. It is clear that his dogma obliged his followers’ unconditional devotion to his co-

---

<sup>343</sup> Aḥmad Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī and Muḥammad Ibn Ismā‘īl Bukhārī. *Fath al-bārī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. (Cairo: Dār ar-Rayān lit-turāth, 1986), 1:135, #48 (author’s translation).

<sup>344</sup> Aḥmad Ibn Shu‘ayb al-Nasā‘ī. *Kitaab As-Sunan al-māgrūf bi-Sunan al-Kubrā*. (Darul-tāsīl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2012), 5:516 #3636 (author’s translation).

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:584 #3772 (author’s translation).

<sup>346</sup> Muḥammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū‘at al-tawḥīd al-ma‘rūf bi-majmū‘at al-tawḥīd al-najdiyyah: majmū‘at kutub wa-rasā’il* (al-Riyād: al-Amānah al-‘āmmah lil-iḥtīfāl bi-murūr mi‘at ‘ām ‘alā ta’sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 177 (author’s translation).

religionists and absolute separation from sceptics, i.e. the contemporary adversaries, like his brother.

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb divides infidels into four categories:

‘1. Those who know that *tawhīd* is the religion of God and His Prophet but seek refuge in other than God; has, in reality, refused *tawhīd*. 2. Those that hold these two principles but still prefer the common belief in saints to monotheism. 3. Those that believe and serve these principles, but feel hatred for others who do so and affection for those who do not. 4. Those who associate their townspeople in the war against monotheists.’<sup>347</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb stated that the Prophet Muhammad came to different people for the sole reason to worship God alone; he came to the worshippers of angels, prophets and the pious. Amongst them were people who worshipped trees, stones, the sun and the moon. He then explains that the Prophet Muhammad fought against them without making a distinction.<sup>348</sup> Again, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb not only equated his own time with the period of Prophet Muhammad, he also merged a wide range of religious activities under the heading of *shirk*, which, in his view, nullified the testimony of Islamic faith.

In this context, some scholars, like Mouline and Rundell, have suggested that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s *jihād* was not based on a brutally aggressive attitude, nor motivated by the expansion or desire to subject others by force, but that he was concerned with ‘defensive *jihād*’.<sup>349</sup> However, his opponents would argue that killing a Muslim is limited to what is explicitly mentioned in the Qur’ān or Hādīth which state three instances: ‘A man who commits adultery when he is a married person, then he should be stoned; a man who kills a soul, not in

---

<sup>347</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-’Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- ‘Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), p. 133.

<sup>348</sup> Husayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), pp. 14–15 (author’s translation).

<sup>349</sup> Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 66.



retaliation for murder; and a man who apostates after becoming Muslim'.<sup>350</sup> Being the 'defector' is the point where Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb sees that his actions are justified. Moreover, the Qur'ān remarks about the corruption of killing one another, driving people from their homes and helping one another in sin and aggression.<sup>351</sup> This verse explains that attacking one another is a type of sinful aggression, essentially attempting to prevent acts of transgression against one another. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb supports his concept of fighting by referring to the Prophet Muhammad's statement: 'I have been ordered to fight people until they confess that there is none to be worshipped except God and that Muhammad is His Prophet, till they keep up the prayers and pay the alms. Once they do so, they secure their lives and property'.<sup>352</sup> Additionally, the Qur'ān mentions 'kill them wherever you encounter them and drive them out from where they drove you out, for persecution is more serious than killing. Do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there. If they do fight you, kill them, this is what such disbelievers deserve'.<sup>353</sup>

In order to understand the above verses of the Qur'ān, it is crucial to contextualise the reason for the verse to be revealed. It was revealed after the peace treaty of al-Hudaybiyyah between the Quraysh leaders of Mecca and Muslims. According to the treaty, Muslims could visit Mecca and perform the Umrah in the following year. However, many Muslims were fearful that their enemies would not stick to the treaty and attack them in Mecca (a sacred sanctity) and would therefore be breaking the law. Ibn Kathīr contextualises the verse, stating that

---

<sup>350</sup> Muhammad Ibn Yazīd Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (Cairo: Darul-tāsīl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2014), 3:5 #2542 (author's translation).

<sup>351</sup> Surah al-Baqarah 2:85; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 14.

<sup>352</sup> Abd-Allah Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Muhammad Ibn- 'Abd-al-Wahhab: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), pp. 135–136.

<sup>353</sup> Surah al-Baqarah 2:191; Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, p. 31.

fighting is only permitted when fighting the enemies who are engaged in fighting Islam and its people. So, the verse means to fight those who fight you.<sup>354</sup>

Another of the Prophet Muhammed's statements reads:

'The Muslim is the brother to the Muslim, he does not cheat him, lie to him, nor deceive him. All of the Muslim is unlawful to another Muslim: his Honour, his wealth, and his blood. *At-taqwa* is here. It is enough evil for a man that he belittles his brother Muslim.'<sup>355</sup>

This Hadīth further warns Muslim followers of the danger of harming one another, which appears to be contradicting the attitude and approach of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb. Conceivably, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's method underwent several transformations to facilitate the spread of his doctrine, addressing those who rejected his dogma while preparing his followers against their adversaries.

#### 4f. Summary

In this Chapter, we have reviewed the various features of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine, notably monotheism, visiting graves, intercession, excommunication and killing of 'infidels'. They are all closely intertwined as he seems to provide a seemingly logical argument leading from one discourse – like *tawhīd*, 'Oneness' – to another, like *tawassul*, 'Intercession', and finally to *takfīr* ('excommunication') and *qitāl* ('killing').

Though his definition of 'monotheism', i.e. *tawhīd* 'Oneness', is not controversial at all, this cannot be said about his other interpretations. It already starts with his definition of what constitutes deviation of *tawhīd* and therefore *shirk*, but there is above all the controversy

---

<sup>354</sup> Ismā'īl Ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)* (Lebanon: Darusslam Publication, 2003), 1:527.

<sup>355</sup> Muḥammad Ibn 'Īsā Tirmidhī. *Sunan at-Tirmidhī*. (Cairo: Darul-tāsīl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2016), 3:153 #2052 (author's translation).

regarding the killing of fellow-Muslims which, as we have seen, is not allowed according to the Qur'ān and Hadīth. To legitimise his actions, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb therefore defined people who committed *shirk* as being outside the fold of Islam because of their practises. This was highly contested already during his time, leading to a debate about the interpretation of the Qur'ān and Hadīth regarding the killing of 'infidels' and fellow-Muslims.<sup>356</sup> One of the strongest statements was provided by Shawkānī who attributed the characteristics of the Khawārij to the movement of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb. Sulaymān refers to his brother as a non-*mujtahid*, i.e. not qualified to provide Islamic rulings, while he aimed to demonstrate that his policy regarding excommunication was inconsistent and not based on existing Islamic scholarship; for him, his brother had a political agenda, aspiring to political power that went beyond correcting non-Islamic practices.

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb is often perceived as a reviver and reformer of his society and of Islam in the eighteenth-century, and his influence concerning theology has surpassed the majority of the scholars of his era. Although we can identify scholarly discussions in his work, they are, however, limited, especially when compared with his teachers, like as-Sindi and his peers, such as Shawkānī, and his predecessors, like Ibn Taymiyyah. As his reformist movement attempted to establish 'puritanical' belief, he focussed on the rejection of theological matters that he believed to be contrary to Islamic doctrine, while attempting to propagate his doctrine. His single focus on *tawhīd* and on justifying his doctrine and actions seem to have prevented him from engaging in other judicial matters or in the science of Hadīth, in contrast to other Islamic scholars. As a result, he is considered to be a *mujtahid*, who did not create his own *madhab*, his own School of Jurisprudence.

---

<sup>356</sup> See Chapter 4e.

## 5. Conclusion

*'Praise belongs to God that I do not call to the school of jurisprudence of any particular Sufi, jurist, philosopher or the Imams that I revere, such as Ibn al-Qayyim, adh-Dhahabī, Ibn Kathīr and others. Rather, I call to God alone who has no partners and to the way of the Prophet, that which is bequeathed to the earlier part of his nation as well as the latter part. And I hope I do not reject the truth when it reaches me, in fact, I bear witness and His angels and His entire creation that if a word of truth comes from you to me, I will accept it wholeheartedly and I disregard anything that contradicts it that comes from one of my leaders. This Prophet (Muhammad) never spoke except truth...'*<sup>357</sup>

The aim of this research was to understand one of the most controversial figures in Islamic scholarship, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, aiming for a contextual analysis of the doctrine he developed in the eighteenth-century. Still today, many consider him to be the great reformer and the orthodox scholar who was teaching puritanism and taking Muslims back to the teachings of the first three generations of Islam. For others, he was – and still is today – the cause of division and extremism within Muslim societies around the globe. His monolithic, literal understanding of the Qur'ān and Hadīth as well as his *jihād* against fellow Muslims was a theme of contention amongst his contemporaries. Having been expelled from Basrah in 1740 and subsequently even from his hometown in Najd, he was also alienated from his own father and family and became a target for assassination attempts until he was aided by the al-Saud family.

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine about the absolute Oneness of God was not the only reason that the reform movements of the eighteenth-century began. As we discussed in Chapter 4, he was motivated by his disapproval of practices which he considered to be alien to

---

<sup>357</sup> Abdul Aziz Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ali al-abd Lateef, *D'āwī Al-Munāwe-īn Li-Dawa Al-Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb*, (Riyadh: Dārul al-Want Lil-Nashr, 1992), p. 5. (author's translation).

‘orthodox’ Islam, i.e. of the first three generations of Islam. He therefore criticised the worship of saints, the veneration of places and individuals, as well as pilgrimages to tombs and buildings, considering these practices a breach of *tawhīd*. He based his teachings against polytheistic acts of worship on his interpretation of the Qur’ān and Hadīth. However, his ‘challengers’ equally based their arguments on the Qur’ān and Hadīth, but coming to different interpretations, for example in their conclusion that the veneration of tombs was a permissible custom to seek to come closer to God. As a result, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb rejected Sufism, Shi’ism and all other strands of Islam that contradicted or challenged his doctrine. The ‘reform programme’, as set out by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine, was in response to specific mystical views and ‘superstitious’ practices within the spectrum of Sufism<sup>358</sup> along with what he believed to be an innovation and deviation from (his understanding of) orthodox or ‘puritanical’ teaching of the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*. From his viewpoint, he thought to have attacked all ‘non-Islamic’ doctrines in his endeavour of conveying *tawhīd* without any compromise in order to rid Islam of unconventional creeds. The objective of his campaign was to call people to what he believed to be the authentic Islam, focussing on (his definition of) monotheism and Islamic laws surrounding the worship of God.

Our textual analysis has demonstrated that the majority of reputable scholars of his generation in the garrison society heavily condemned Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s teachings and his doctrine. His antagonists were not limited to the general public – i.e. the worshippers who venerated tombs, trees and other sites – but above all they included prominent jurists and scholars, such as Sulaymān Ibn Suhaym, Abd al-Wahhāb Ibn Ahmad Barakat al-Shafi’i al-Azhari al-Tantawi (n.d) from Egypt, Ahmad Zayni Dahlan (n.d–1886) from Makkah, and Ali

---

<sup>358</sup> See sections 3c and 4d.

al-Shafi'i al-Basri al-Qabbani (n.d),<sup>359</sup> as well as his brother, Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, and their father, Abdul al-Wahhāb, who all repudiated his conceptions. In addition, his doctrine was criticised by principal Hadīth scholars, notably the Iman ash-Shawkānī (1759–1839).<sup>360</sup> Interestingly, many modern sources deliberately misquote or leave out critical aspects when citing his contemporaries. In the case of Shawkānī, his earlier support for Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's teachings on *tawhīd* is frequently emphasised, while many sources deliberately ignore his subsequent critique after having been informed about the killing of fellow Muslims, when he compared the movement in Najd with the characteristics of the Khawārij which is considered a deviant group.<sup>361</sup> It is interesting to note that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, in rectifying what he thought to be a corruption of Islam, seems to have aspired himself to resemble the Prophet Muhammad, both in his actions and his teachings, which itself might be considered to constitute *kufr* ('disbelief'), something which he heavily rejected.

As we have seen, he adopted a critical methodological approach in the interpretation and understanding of the Qur'ān and Hadīth, contrary to allegations – principally based on his brother's Sulaymān<sup>362</sup> – of him being an uncompromising religious leader who had treated all other than his followers as adversaries. For his critics, like Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb,<sup>363</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine represented not only a campaign leading to the disunity of the Sunni Muslim community, but it was also embedded in ideologies of fanaticism, bigotry and narrow-mindedness. His single-minded focus was on *tawhīd* while he strove to

---

<sup>359</sup> Samer Traboulsi's journal on 'An Early Refutation of Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's Reformist Views' does not state when the critic died, nor was I able to find it elsewhere. It states the year 1743 for the date he had copied and distributed the work of al-Tantawi.

<sup>360</sup> See section on Shawkānī in Chapter 4c.

<sup>361</sup> See discussion in Chapter 4c.

<sup>362</sup> See Chapter 4c for a detailed discussion of Sulaymān Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's refutation.

<sup>363</sup> Sulaymān Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Al-Sawā'iq al-ilāhīyah fī al-radd 'alā al-Wahhābīyah* (Istanbūl: Maktabat Ishīq, 1975), p. 6 (author's translation): '...you should know that your understanding is not reliable as there is a consensus that deriving ruling is the exclusive right of 'Mujtahid Mutalq', and even in the case in the *Mujtahid Mutalq* making such claims, it is still subject to scrutiny'.

eradicate pluralistic propensity that worked against Islamic unanimity, and this was encapsulated in his concept of monotheism.

His approach of conveying his doctrine continually changed. Sometimes he was very assertive, other times defensive, trying to clarify his position, for example when he responded to his brother's refutation. As the contextual situation was constantly changing, depending on his interlocutors and his audience, he also had to adapt to the given circumstances during the various stages of his struggle against what he defined as 'polytheistic' acts; he remained 'monolithic' while attempting to remain faithful to his teachings, supporting them with scriptural texts. For example, we have seen that at specific locations, such as Basrah, his approach was polemical concerning his dialogue against the Shi'ite Muslims.<sup>364</sup> At the same time, his attitude to Muslim religious leaders in Hijaz was scholarly, by utilising Islamic text and scholarly opinions in order to demonstrate his theological stance with certainty. Moreover, he was not merely influenced by his living teachers, like Muhammad Hayāt as-Sindi, but also inspired by the works of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim. However, we have shown that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine was not merely an elaboration of his teachers' theologies, but also, in the words of Gibb, a 'neo-Hanbali' doctrine because his work is very much embedded in the Hanbali School of Jurisprudence, though it went beyond existing Hanbali teachings.<sup>365</sup>

The style of his writing seems to change from being abrupt, when making a refutation, to a detailed analysis of the primary texts, when debating scholarly, legal opponents who were his contemporaries. His interpretations of the Qur'ān and Prophetic tradition were supported by scholarly commentaries indicating how Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was addressing and

---

<sup>364</sup> See chapter 3c.

<sup>365</sup> H.A.R. Gibb, *Islam: A Historical Survey* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 122.

debating with judges and scholars who rejected his dogma. The simple, direct note form of writing and citing a few primary texts appears to be an attempt to spread his doctrine to the general, even illiterate public, mainly using analogies from the Qur'ān and Hadīth rather than theologians' scholarly discussions.

It can be concluded that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's approach in the conveyance of his creed was coherent and adaptive. He was perseverant in propagating what he thought to be the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. His intellectual discourses were aimed in arming a community to fight against what he believed to be the foremost ill of society – as for him, returning the relationship between worshipper and God to its pure form was the key element to cure society from poverty, corruption and other worldly challenges. He also attacked theologians and rulers who prevented him from achieving his objective. He supported his theological understanding by the literal meanings of the Qur'ān, in occasions explained by the Hadīth rather than the latent meaning of the scriptures. It is worth noting that he believed his adversaries had misinterpreted both the Qur'ān and Hadīth from its apparent meaning.

However, if it were true that he was considered a reviver of Islam, it was perhaps his unprecedented approach in promulgating his doctrine, like his determination, assertiveness, resilience, his counter debates, his use of simple language to address the masses and his hostile – even bellicose – approach that together caused a division in the Muslim society. And where he failed to convince people and scholars, he sought aid from the al-Saud family. He frequently seems to have adopted appropriate Qur'ānic verses or Hadīth to support his agenda, especially when it came to subjects related to *jihād*, as he claims that those who did not support his doctrine were enemies of Islam and that it was therefore permitted kill them.<sup>366</sup> As we have

---

<sup>366</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Majmū'at al-tawhīd al-ma'rūf bi-majmū'at al-tawhīd al-najdīyah: majmū'at kutub wa-rasā'il* (al-Riyād : al-Amānah al-'āmmah lil-ihtifāl bi-murūr mi'at 'ām 'alá ta'sīs al-mamlakah, 1999), p. 153 (author's translation).



seen in Chapter 4, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb deliberately misconstrued the Qur'ān and Hadīth in order to serve his distinct objective in propagating his doctrine. His movement would continue to be controversial as many would understand his emergence and uncompromising attitude against his adversaries as a success for tribal, political and religious unity.

At the outset, it seems to be that the formation of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's theology was for political power as much as a religious expansion of his doctrine because he would not have been able to develop or expand his doctrine without political force to support his reform programme. This leads us to the role of the al-Saud family and their alliance with Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb. This alliance was a significant turning point for the expansion of his doctrine because, without their physical (and military) support, his doctrine would have remained limited in exposure and would have long been forgotten. The al-Saud family, too, required religious authority in order to consolidate and expand their economic and political influence across Arabia. Perhaps Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was merely in the right place at the right time, creating a partnership that was mutually beneficial for both sides. He was able to provide religious legitimization for the actions of the al-Saud family, imposing the concept of having only one authority and spreading his teachings across Arabia by force.

The reason why Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's works were promoted over and over again long after his death, was to fulfil the political-religious agenda in Saudi Arabia. The al-Saud family has made him the authority of the land, one who takes lead of all religious affairs. And his descendants, the Al-ash-Sheikh family, have been the main advisors in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia until today. As Saudi Arabia's leading religious family – second in rank after the royal family – we can see the continued importance of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, his 'reform' doctrine as well as his allegiance with the al-Saud family to this day.

The influence of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb today is evidenced by the virtual outburst of modern scholarship on his understanding of Islamic theology and law. The natural starting point for future research would be exploring and re-assessing how snippets of his works are constantly being taken out of context by twenty-first-century groups to suit their own ideology and propaganda. The influence of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb is distinctively notable by forums of Islamic cyberspace that have a thriving influence across diverse Muslim communities, primarily concerning religious authority,<sup>367</sup> whereby modern Muslims seek to find a judicial verdict concerning Islamic practice, for example, on the nullification of Islam. In addition, the oil-rich country, Saudi Arabia, actively supports Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine through outreach projects, for example, they mass produce multiple publications of his works which are eagerly taught in the two holy mosques of Islam by reputable modern scholars who, too, support Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine whilst financially being supported by the government.<sup>368</sup> Other future research could explore the influences of his doctrine in East Asia, enabling research to contrast his contemporaries with the likes of Shāh Walīullāh, who, too, was a student of the esteemed Muhammad Hayāt as-Sindī.<sup>369</sup>

The emergence of a scholar from the garrison society, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, will continue to be used as an 'authority', and proclaimed by many as a 'reviver of Islam, not merely because modern Muslim scholars from Arabia support the spread of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-

---

<sup>367</sup> Gary Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), p. 19.

<sup>368</sup> On the other hand, see: Hassan Hassan, "The 'Conscious Uncoupling' of Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia", *New Lines*, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2022 (<https://newlinesmag.com/argument/the-conscious-uncoupling-of-wahhabism-and-saudi-arabia/>), who discusses the attempt to 'disconnect[ing] the story of the [Saudi] state from the fight against un-Islamic practices initiated by a tribal-religious alliance between Muhammad bin Saud and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in 1744'; the author calls Wahhabism a 'hollowed out ideology'.

<sup>369</sup> Charles Allen, *God's Terrorists: The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad* (Boston: Da Capo Press Inc; 2006), pp. 48-49.

Wahhāb's doctrine, which will further increase its popularity. But as society is changing, societal norms are changing which have implications on the interpretation of the Qur'ān and how to implement Islamic law in contemporary societies. This will differ from location to location and from era to era. In this respect, for years to come, the application of the Qur'ān and Hadīth will have to be critically re-assessed. Instead of blindly following Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's authority, claimed to be established by the sacred Islamic texts, the primary texts themselves will be continuously studied and re-interpreted by future scholars and theologians, and therefore the position and place of his doctrine in society will change, too.

## Bibliography

- Abū Dā'ūd, Sulaimān Ibn al-Ash'ath Ibn Ishāq al-Azdī al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, edited by Abu Tāhir Zubair 'Alī Za'ī, translated by Nasiruddin al Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008).
- Abū Dāw'ūd, Sulaymān Ibn al-Ash'ath Ibn al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāw'ūd*, (Cairo: Darul-tāsīl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2015).
- Abu Hākimah, Ahmad Mustafa., *Kitāb lam' al-shihāb fī sīrat Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb / tahqīq Aḥmad Mustafā Abū Hākimah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1967).
- Abualrub, Jalal., *Biography and Mission of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab* (Medina: Madinah Publishers and Distributors, 2013).
- Adams, Charles and A. Kevin Reinhart., 'Kufr', *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*.  
<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0467> [accessed 02/03/2021].
- Ahmad, Aziz., *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857–1964* (London and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- Al-Asad, Mohammad (2004), and Yavuz, Yildirim (2001), *Wadi Hanifa Development Plan* (Riyadh: Ar-Riyadh Development Authority, 2007).
- Al-A'zamī, Muhammad M., *Studies in Hadīth Methodology and Literature* (Oak Brook, Illinois: American Trust Publication, 2012).
- Al-A'zamī, Muhammad M., *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: The Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies and the Islamic Text Society, 1996).
- Al-A'zamī, Muhammad. M., *The History of the Qur'ānic Text, from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Petaling Jaya: Islamic Book Trust, UK Islamic Academy, 2003).
- Al-Dajwi, Yusuf and Omar Abdullah Kaamil., *The Bid'ah and Perils of Trinity of Tawheed* (Darul-tahqiq, 2017).
- Al-Ghazali, M., *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife: Book XL of the Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din) with an introduction and note by T. J. Winter*, translated by T.J. Winter (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society al-Ghazali Series, 2015).
- Al-Matroudi, Abdul Hakim., *The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict or Concilation* (London and Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).
- Al-Rasheed, Madawi.. *A Jistory of Saudi Arabia* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

- Al-Rasheed, Madawi, Carool Kersten and Marat Shterin., *Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- Al-Semmari, Fahd., ed, *A History Of The Arabian Peninsula*, translated by Salma K. Jayyusi (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, in association with the King Abdul Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives, 2010).
- Al-Shawkānī, Muḥammad., *Al-Badr At-Tāl' bi Muhāsin Min B'da al-Qur'ān As-Sāb'*, 2 vols (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 2012).
- Al-Shawkānī, Muḥammad., *Diwān as-Shawkānī aslāk al-Jūhr* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr at-Tā'tu wa al-Tawzi' wa Nashr, 2012).
- Al-Subkī, Taqī al-Din., *Shifā al-Saqam fī Ziyarāt khayr al-Anām* (Lebanon: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 2008).
- Al-Yassini, Ayman S., 'Middle East and Central Asia', in *Religion and Societies*, ed. by Carlo Caldarola (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1983), pp. 59–79.
- Algar, Hamid., *Wahhābism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta: Islamic Publications International, 2002).
- Allen, Charles., *God's Terrorists: The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad* (Boston: Da Capo Press Inc., 2006).
- Anas, Mālik bin., *Al-Muwatta: bi-riwayt 'abi Musab al-Zuhri muqārtah bi-riwayah Yahyah bin Yahyah al-layth* (Cairo: Darul-tāsyl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2016).
- Armstrong, Karen., *Muhammad: Prophet for Our Time* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007).
- Atcil, Abdurrahman A., *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- Bernard, Lewis., *The End of Modern History in Middle East* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2011).
- Bishr, Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh., *Unwān al-majd fī tārikh Najd*, The British Library Board Or 7718, ff. 1-2, 1853.
- Bishr, Uthmān Ibn 'Abd Allāh., *Unwān al-majd fī tārikh Najd*, vol 1 (Riyadh, Dar al-Malik 'Abd al-Aziz, 1982).
- Bosworth, Clifford Edmund and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs., eds, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. VII (New York and Leiden: Brill, 1993).

- Brown, Jonathan., *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Hadīth Canon* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2007).
- Brown, Jonathan., *Hadīth: Muhammad's legacy in the medieval and modern world* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2011).
- Bukhārī, Muhammad Ibn Ismā'il., Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, Aḥmad Ibn `Alī, ed, *Fath al-bārī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Dār ar-Rayān lit-turāth, 1986).
- Bunt, Gary., *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).
- Burckhardt, John Lewis., *Notes of the Bedouins and Wahābys*. Vol. II (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1930).
- Burton, John., *An Introduction to Hadīth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994).
- Burton, John., *The Collection Of The Qur'an* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
- Commins, David., *The Wahhābi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006).
- Cook, Michael., 'The Historians of Pre-Wahhābī Najd', *Studia Islamica*, Vol. 76, 1992, pp. 163–176. JSTOR: [www.jstor.org/stable/1595666](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1595666) [accessed 02/06/2020].
- Crate, Susan A. and Mark Nuttall., eds, *Anthropology and climate change from encounters to actions* (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2009).
- Crawford, Michael., *Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab* (Series: Makers of the Muslim world) (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014).
- Crone, Patricia., *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, re-print 2002).
- Crone, Patricia, edited by Hanna Siurua., *Islam the Ancient Near East and Varieties of Godlessness. Collected Studies in Three Volumes*, Vol. 3 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1994).
- Crone, Patricia and Michael Cook., *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- Crone, Patricia and Martin Hinds., *God's Caliph, Religious authority in the first centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- Crone, Patricia., Wadad Kadi, Devin J. Stewart, Muhammad Qasim Zaman and Mahan Mirza, eds, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 2013).

- Dallal, Ahmad., 'The origins and objective of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750–1850', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 113, No. 3, 1993, pp. 341–359.  
JSTOR: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/605385> [accessed 01/11/2019].
- DeLong-Bas, Natana J., *Wahhābi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihād* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Doughty, Charles. M., *Travel In Arabia Deserta* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) (London: Cambridge University Press, 1925).
- Duderija, Adis., ed, *The Sunnah and its Status in Islamic law: The Search for Sound Hadīth* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
- Esposito, John L., *Islam The Straight Path* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Esposito, John L., *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- Facey, William., *Dir'iyyah and the First Saudi State* (London: Stacey International, 1997, reprint 2001).
- Faroghi, Suraya., *Another Mirror for Princes: The Public Image of the Ottoman Sultans and Its Reception* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2009).
- Fowzān, Sālih Ibn., *Al-Mulakhas Fi Sharh Kitāb At-Tawīd* (Saudi Arabia: Dārul āsiyah lilnushra wal Tāwzigh, 2001).
- Gaye, Abdoul Aziz., 'The violent Wahhabism and the Use of Islamic Texts to Justify Armed Violence Against Muslims and Non-Muslims', in *The (De)Legitimization of Violence in Sacred and Human Contexts*, edited by Muhammad Shafiq and Thomas Donlin-Smith (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 195–218.
- Ghannām, Husayn Ibn., *Tārīkh Najd, Rawdat al-afkār wa-al-afhām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985).
- Gibb, Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen., *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947).
- Gibb, Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen., *Islam: A Historical Survey* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).
- Gordon, Murray. *Slavery in The Arab World* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1998).
- Haleem, Abdel Muhammad A.S., *The Qur'ān: English Translation with Parallel Arabic Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

- Haleem, Abdel Muhammad A.S., *Understanding the Qur'ān: Themes and Style* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011).
- Hallaq, Wael B., *The origins and evolution of Islamic law* (4<sup>th</sup> edition) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- Hallaq, Wael B., *A history of Islamic legal theories: An introduction to Sunnī Uṣūl al-fiqh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997).
- Halverson, Jeffry R., *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam, The Muslim Brotherhood, Ash'arism and Political Sunnism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
- Hamid, Nasr., *Critique of Religious Discourse, Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini*, translated by Jonathan Wright, with an introduction by Carool Kersten (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2018).
- Hassan, Hassan., *The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological roots and Political Context* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016).
- Hassan Hassan., 'The "Conscious Uncoupling" of Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia', *New Lines*, 22 Feb. 2022, <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/the-conscious-uncoupling-of-wahhabism-and-saudi-arabia/> [accessed 12/04/2022].
- Hoover, Jon., *Makers of the Muslim world: Ibn Taymiyya* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2019).
- Hopper, Matthew S., *Slaves of one Master – Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015).
- Hourani, Albert., *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, Sulaymān., *Al-Ṣawā'iq al-ilāhiyyah fī al-radd 'alā al-Wahhābiyyah* (Beirut: Dār Dhū'l-Faqār, 1997).
- Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Sulaymān., *Al -Ṣawā'iq al-ilāhīyah fī al-radd 'al'a al-Wahhābiyyah* (Istānbūl: Maktabat Ishīq, 1975).
- Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, Muhammad., *Kitāb At-Tauhīd* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publication, 1996).
- Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, Muhammad., *Khutab al-imām Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb wa-ba'dih Ahfādihi* (al-Riyād: al-Amānah al-'āmmah lil-ihtifāl bi-murūr mi'at 'ām 'alā ta'sīs al-mamlakah, 1999).



- Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, Muhammad., *Majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-ma‘rūf bi-majmū‘at al-tawhīd al-najdiyyah : majmū‘at kutub wa-rasā’il* (Riyādh: al-Amānah al-‘āmmah lil-iḥṭifāl bi-murūr mi‘at ‘ām ‘alā ta’sīs al-mamlakah, 1999).
- Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, Muhammad., *Mu’llafāt al-shaykh al-imām Abd al-Wahhāb* (Riyadh: Jāmi‘ah al-imām Muḥammad Ibn Sa‘ūd al-islāmiyyah, 1976).
- Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, Muhammad., *Sharh Kasf ash-shubuhāt*, edited by Abdul-Rahman bin Nasir al-Barrak (Riyādh: Al-matab al-ilmi bishubkah nur al-Islām, 2015).
- Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, Muhammad., *Mufīd al-mustafīd fī kufri tariki al-Tauhīd* (Riyādh: Maktabah al-himmah, 2015).
- Ibn Kathīr, Ismā‘īl., *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)*, edited by Safiur-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri (Lebanon: Darusslam Publication, 2003).
- Ibn Khuzaymah, Muhammad Ibn Ishaq., *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* (Lebanon: Dar-Ibn-Hazm, 2004).
- Ibn Mājah, Muhammad Ibn Yazīd., *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (Cairo: Darul-tāsīl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2014).
- Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Muhammad Ibn Abī Bakr., *Ranks of the Divine Seekers*. Vol 1, translated by Ovamir Anjum (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2020).
- Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Muhammad Ibn Abī Bakr., Summarised by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb *Provisions for the Hereafter*. (Riyadh: Darussalam publishers Ltd, 2003).
- Ibn Rajab, Abd Al-Rahman Ibn Ahmad., *The Compendium of Knowledge and Wisdom*, translated by Abdassamad Clarke (London: Turath Publication, 2007).
- Ibn Taymiyyah, Ahmad., *Ziyārat al-Qubūr wa al-Istinjād bi’l-Maqbūr* (Ṭanṭā: Dār al-Ṣaḥābah lil-Turāth, 1992).
- Ibn Taymiyyah, Aḥmad., *Sharh Al-Aqeeda Al-Wāsatya*, with a commentary by Sālih Ibn Fawzān (Al-Riyād: Darul Al-āsiyah, 2005)
- Irving, Thomas B., Khurshid Ahmad and Muhammad Manazir Ahsan, *The Qur’ān: Basic Teachings* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1992).
- Juynboll, G.H.A., *Muslim Tradition: Studies in chronology, provenance and early authorship of early Hadīth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- Kadi, Wadad., ed, *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Text, Vol. 38. The Development of Early Sunnite Hadīth Criticism, The Taqdimā of Ibn Abī Hātim al-Rāzī (240/854-327/938)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).
- Kennedy, Hugh., *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press, 2007).

- Kenney, Jeffrey T. and Ebrahim Moosa., *Islam in the Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).
- Kepel, Gilles., *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet the Pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
- Khan, Muʿīnuddīn Aḥmad and Harford Jones., ‘A diplomat’s report on Wahhabism of Arabia’, *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 1, 1968, pp. 33–46, at p. 35. JSTOR: [www.jstor.org/stable/20832903](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20832903) [accessed 16/12/2020].
- Khatab, Sayed., *Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2011).
- Lane, Edward William., *Arabic- English Lexicon* (Lebanon: Beirut, 1968; reprint Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society 1984).
- Lawrence, Bruce., *The Qurʾān: A Biography* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007).
- Leaman, Oliver., ed, *The Qurʾān: an Encyclopedia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
- Lings, Martin, *Muhammad his life based on the earliest sources* (revised edition from 1991) (New York: Inner Traditions Internat. 1991, first edition from 1983).
- Martin, Richard C., ed, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Farmington Hills, Michigan: Macmillan Reference; Gale, Cengage Learning, 2016).
- Mehr, Husayn Alawi., *An introduction to the History of Tafsir and commentators of the Qurʾān*, translated by Hamid Hussein Waqr (Al-Mustafa International Translation and Publication Center, 2012).
- Melchert, Christopher., ‘Bukhārī and Early Hadīth Criticism’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 121, no. 1, 2001, pp. 7–19. JSTOR. [www.jstor.org/stable/606725](http://www.jstor.org/stable/606725) [accessed 03/11/2020].
- Messick, Brinkley., *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1992).
- Millie, Julian., ‘Supplicating, Naming, Offering: “Tawassūl” in West Java’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, no. 1, 2008, pp. 107–122. JSTOR: [www.jstor.org/stable/20071872](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20071872). p.107-9 [accessed 15/04/2021].
- Mouline, N., *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, translated by E. S. Rundell (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014).
- Munawar Ahmad Anees and Alia N. Athar., *Guide to Sira and Hadīth Literature in the Western Languages* (London and New York: Mansell Publication Limited, 1986).

- Murphey, Rhoad., *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty, Tradition, Images and Practice in the Ottoman Imperial Household 1400–1800* (London: Continuum, 2008).
- Muslim, Ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qushayrī an-Naysābūrī., *Sahīh Muslim* (Cairo: Darul-tāsyl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2014).
- Nafi, Basheer., ‘A Teacher of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: Muḥammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī and the Revival of Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth’s Methodology’, *Islamic Law and Society*, Vol. 13, no. 2, 2006, pp. 215–217. JSTOR: [www.jstor.org/stable/40377907](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40377907) [accessed 02/03/2020].
- Nahouza, Namira., *Wahhabism and the Rise of the New Salafists, Theology Power and Sunni Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).
- Nasāʾī, Ahmad Ibn Shu`ayb., *Kitaab As-Sunan al-māgrūf bi-Sunan al-Kubrā* (Darul-tāsyl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2012).
- Neuwirth, Angelika., Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx., eds, *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’ānic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
- Niebuhr, Carsten., *Beschreibung von Arabien aus eigenen Beobachtungen und im Lande selbst gesammelten Nachrichten* (Copenhagen: Hofbuchdruckerei, 1772). Available online, PURL: <http://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?PPN504575031> [accessed 13/04/2022].
- Olson, Robert W., ‘The Esnaf and the Patrona Halil Rebellion of 1730: A Realignment in Ottoman Politics?’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 17, no. 3, 1974, pp. 329–344. JSTOR [www.jstor.org/stable/3632175.337](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3632175.337) [accessed 07/07/2020].
- Palgrave, William Gifford., *Narrative of a Year's Journey Through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862-1863)*. 2 vols (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) (London and Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1866).
- Peirce, Leslie P., *The Imperial Harem, Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- Penrice J., *A dictionary and glossary of the Koran, with copious grammatical references and explanations of the text* (first published in 1873) (Delhi: Adam, 1991).
- Peters, Francis E., *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).
- Peters, Francis E., *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition*, Vol. II, *The Words and Will of God* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).

- Peterson, J. E., *Historical Dictionary of Saudi Arabia* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 2003).
- Philby, St. J. B. H., 'African Contacts with Arabia', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 86, no. 4438, 1937, pp. 90–102. JSTOR: [www.jstor.org/stable/41361168](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41361168) [accessed 22/01/2020].
- Philby, St. J. B. H., *The Heart of Arabia* (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1922).
- Rappoport, Yossef and Ahmed Shahad., eds, *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- R. Y. Ebied and M.J.L. Young., 'An Unpublished Letter from 'Alī Pasha, Ottoman Governor of Iraq, to the Sharif of Mecca', *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 17, no. 1/4, 1976, pp. 58–71. JSTOR: [www.jstor.org/stable/1570339](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1570339) [accessed 06/02/2020].
- Rentz, G.S., *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia: Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb (1703/4–1792) and the Beginnings of Unitarian Empire in Arabia: the Beginnings of Unitarian Empire in Arabia* (London: Arabian Publishing Ltd, 2004).
- Rosenthal, Franz (translator), *The History of al-Ṭabarī = Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l mulūk, Vol. 1, General introduction and from the creation to the flood* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989).
- Saeed, Abdullah., *Interpreting the Qur'ān* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
- Sardar, Ziauddin., *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim* (London: Granta, 2004).
- Schacht, Joseph., *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).
- Shafiq, Muhammad and Thomas Donlin-Smith, eds., *The (De)Legitimization of Violence in Sacred and Human Contexts* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
- Siddiqi, Z.M., *Hadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features* (2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition) (London: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993).
- Smith, Wilfred C., *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).
- Sulaymān Ibn al-Ash'ath Ibn al-Sijistānī Abū Dāw'ūd., *Sunan Abī Dāw'ūd* (Cairo: Darul-tāsyl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2015).
- Tirmidhī, Muḥammad Ibn 'Īsā, *Sunan at-Tirmidhī*, (Cairo: Darul-tāsyl, Markaz al-buhūth wa taqniyah al-maglūmāt, 2016).

- Traboulsi, Samer., 'An Early Refutation of Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhāb's Reformist Views'. *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 42, no. 3, 2002, pp. 373–415. JSTOR: [www.jstor.org/stable/1571420](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1571420) [accessed 08/09/2019].
- Ullah, Kifayat., *Al-Kashshaf: Al-Zamakhshari's Mu'tāzilītes Exegesis Of the Qur'ān* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2017).
- Uthaymin, Abd-Allah Salih., *Muhammad Ibn-'Abd-al-Wahhāb: the Man and his Works* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009).
- Valentine, Simon R., *Force and Fanaticism: Wahhābism in Saudi Arabia and Beyond* (London: Hurst and Company, 2015).
- Vasiliev, Alexei M., *The History Of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2000).
- Vincenzo, Oliveti., *Terror's Source: The Ideology of Wahhābi-Salafism and its Consequences* (Birmingham: Amadeus, 2002).
- Voll, John., 'Muḥammad Ḥayyā Al-Sindī and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhāb: An Analysis of an Intellectual Group in Eighteenth-Century Madīna', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 38, no. 1, 1975, pp. 32–39. JSTOR: [www.jstor.org/stable/614196](http://www.jstor.org/stable/614196) [accessed 03/07/2020].
- Watt, W. Montgomery., *Islamic Philosophy and Theology, An Extended Survey* (Edinburgh: University Press Edinburgh, 1985).
- Zahra, M.A., *The Four Imams their lives, works and their schools of thought* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (London: Dar Al-Taḳwa, 2000).
- Zarabozo, Jamal al-Din M., *The Life, Teachings and Influence of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhab* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, new edition, 2010).