



A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE FOUNDER OF WAHHABISM

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Wahhabism is named after its founder, Muhammed ibn (son of) Abdul-Wahhab. Since the Wahhabis have proven to be the most fanatical of all so-called Islamic extremists (Islam never advocates extremism), it is not out of place here to introduce the reader to the founder of Wahhabism while narrating the mischief he and his ignorant Bedouin zealots committed against the shrine of Imām Hussain عليه السلام in Kerbalā' and that of his father, Imām Ali عليه السلام, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet of Islam ﷺ, in Najaf, Iraq.

Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab was born in 1115 A.H./1703 A.D. in the small town of Uyayna in Najd, the southern highland of Arabia's interior, and died in 1206 A.H./1791-92 A.D. He belonged to the tribe of Tamim. His father was a lawyer and a pious Muslim adhering to the Hanbalite sect founded by Imām Ahmed ibn Hanbal who, with the most rigid consistency, had advocated the principle of the exclusive validity of the *hadīth* as against the inclination among the older sects to make concessions to reason and commonsense, especially since Islam is the religion of commonsense. In Baghdad,

Muhammed learned the jurisprudence of the Hanbali Sunni sect which remains to be predominant among the people of Najd and Hijaz: Whabbis constitute no more than 8% of the entire population of today's Saudi Arabia, the only country in the world named after its ruling clan. The reader has already come to know how much distortion exists in *hadīth* and can appreciate the danger of believing in each and every *hadīth* as though it were the inviolable and irrefutable gospel truth. He also studied jurisprudence at Mecca and Medīna where his mentors were admirers of Ibn Taymiyyah who, in the 7th Century A.H./the 14th Century A.D., had revived the teachings of Imām Ahmed ibn Hanbal. The founder of the sect, the last in the series of the four Sunni sects, namely Ahmed ibn Hanbal, was a theologian born in and died in Baghdad; the year of his birth is 164 A.H./780 A.D. and that of his death is 241 A.H./855 A.D.

Since his childhood, Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab was influenced by the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah¹ and, therefore, looked askance at many religious practices of the people of Najd (southern section of today's kingdom of the Wahhabi Al Saud clan). Such an influence convinced him that the dominant form of contemporary Islam, particularly among the Turks of his time, was permeated with

¹Ibn Taymiyyah, mentor of Wahhabis and Takfiris, is Ahmed ibn Abdul-Halim ibn Abdul-Salam ibn Abdullāh al-Khidr, "Taqiyy ad-Din," "Abul-Abbās," a Hanbali scholar who was born in Harran (ancient Carrhae where Mudar Arabs lived, a town built by Harran brother of prophet Abraham [ع] from whom it derived its name), Iraq, in 661 A.H./1263 A.D. and died inside a Damascus, Syria, prison in 728 A.H./1328 A.D. He had his own radical and un-orthodox way of interpreting *hadīth* which was different from everyone else's, distinguishing him from all other scholars of jurisprudence. Those who adopt his views are called "Salafis," followers of the "salaf," the "pious" predecessors. He is on the record as the first person to disbelieve in intercession (*shafaa*). For more details, refer to the 463-page book titled *Ibn Taymiyyah* by Sa'ib Abdul-Hamid, published in Arabic in Qum, Islamic Republic of Iran, by the Ghadīr Center for Islamic Studies. There are many fanatical groups in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan that adopt this "Salafi" ideology disseminated by government-sponsored Saudi missionary activities and funded by petrodollars.

abuses. He, therefore, sought to restore the original purity of the doctrine and of life in its restricted milieu. The facts that the Wahhabis are the minority of all Muslim minorities, and that the people of Najd and Hijaz are still predominantly Hanbalites who do not subscribe to Wahhabism by choice, prove that he did not achieve his objective and, most likely, such an objective will never be achieved despite all Saudi Arabia's petro-dollars and the abundance of those who solicit such dollars, the ruler-appointed preachers most of whom are Salafis.

Having joined his father, with whom he debated his personal views, Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab caused a seriously violent confrontation to erupt from such an exchange of opposite views, for his father's views were consistent with mainstream Hanbali Muslim thought. He performed the pilgrimage for the first time, visiting Mecca and Medīna where he attended lectures on different branches of Islamic learning. His mentors included Abdullāh ibn Ibrahim ibn Saif and Hayat as-Sindi, who both were admirers of Ibn Taymiyyah. They both rejected the principle of *taqlid* (imitation) which is commonly accepted by all four Sunni schools of jurisprudence as well as by Shī'a Muslims. These men's teachings had a great impact on Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab who began to take a more aggressive attitude in preaching his views and, hence, he publicly expressed his denunciation of the sanctification of the holy precincts of the Prophet's shrine and of the shrines of any "saint." Then he went back home and decided to go to Basra, Iraq, on his way to Damascus, Syria. During his stay in Basra, he expressed the same views, whereupon its people kicked him out of the city. He almost died of thirst once, due to exhaustion and to the intensity of the heat in the desert, when he was on his way from Basra to the city of Zubair but was saved by a Zubairi man. Finding his provisions insufficient to travel to Damascus, Muhammed had to change his travel plan and to go to the (Saudi) al-Ahsa (or al-Hasa) province then to Huraymala, one of the cities of Najd, to which his father and the entire family had to move because of the public's denunciation of young Muhammed's views, reaching it in 1139 A.H./1726-27 A.D. By then, Muhammed's good and pious father had lost his job as *qadi* (judge) on account of his son's radical preaching. The denunciation continued till his father's death in 1153 A.H./1740

A.D.

His father's death emboldened him to express his thoughts more freely and consolidate his movement. His preaching found an echo among some of the people of his town, and his fame started on the rise, so much so that he was welcomed by the ruler of his home town Uyayna, namely Othman ibn Muammar Al Hamad, who offered him protection and appointed him as his personal assistant. In order to cement his ties with Othman, Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab married Jawhara, Othman's aunt. Othman ordered his townsmen to observe the Wahhabi teachings, and Muhammed now felt strong enough to demolish the monument erected on the burial site of Zaid ibn al-Khattab. But the new alliance between Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab and Othman ibn Muammar Al Hamad disturbed the scholars of Najd who complained against the first to the emir (provincial governor) of the al-Ahsa province. The emir wrote Othman reprimanding and warning him of dire consequences for encouraging Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab to revolt against the established authority and creed. Finding himself in a precarious situation and his job in jeopardy, Othman dismissed Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab from his service and asked him to leave the town.

In 1160 A.H./1746-47 A.D., having been expelled from Uyayna, Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab sought refuge in Dar'iyya, only six hours away from Uyayna, at the invitation of its ruler, Muhammed ibn Saud¹, ancestor of the Al Saud dynasty now ruling Saudi Arabia. Muhammed ibn Saud lived in a fortified settlement as chief of the Unayza clan. Soon, an alliance was forged between both men, each promising the other glory, fame, and riches for his support. The people of that town lived at the time in utter destitution, and something was needed to bring them relief. Muhammed ibn Saud rejected any veneration of the Prophet ﷺ or of other men of piety. It was there that Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab stayed for more than two years. Both men felt that it was time to declare "jihad" against all those who rejected the new Wahhabi dogma, forming a small

¹The correct pronunciation of "Saud" is Sa'ood," but we will stick to the commonly used spelling of this word.

band of raiders mounted on horseback to invade various towns, kill and loot. The lives and property of all those who did not subscribe to the views of these two men were now in jeopardy for they were considered as guilty of being pagans fighting against whom is justified by the Qur'ān until they converted or extirpated. These raids extended far beyond Dar'iyya to include all of Najd and parts of Yemen, Hijaz, Syria and Iraq. In 1187 A.H./1773 A.D., the principality of Riyadh fell to them, marking a new era in the lucrative career of Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab.

During a short period of time, the destitute of Dar'iyya found themselves wearing sumptuous clothes, carrying weapons decorated with gold and silver, eating meat, and baking wheat bread; in short, they found their dreams come true, going from rags to riches, thanks to those raids which continued till Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab died in 1206 A.H./1791-92 A.D., leaving his band to carry out more and more raids and his form of "Wahhabism" embraced by the Al Saud clansmen who eventually ascended to power, due to the support they received from the British who used them to undermine the last Islamic power, the Ottoman Sultanate. Al Saud became the sole rulers of Najd and Hijaz, promoting and publicizing for Wahhabism by any and all means, spending in the process funds which belong to the Muslim masses, not to them.

After the death of Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab, his band of raiders, under the leadership of the Al Saud dynasty, pursued their campaigns in the pretext of disseminating Wahhabism. In the years that followed Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab's death, the Wahhabis gradually became burdensome to their neighbors. They pursued their northward advance; therefore, the Pasha of Baghdad found himself compelled to take defensive measures against them, having heard about their ruthlessness and disregard for the lives of all non-Wahhabis. He, therefore, led an army of about seven thousand Turks and twice did his army of mostly Arabs attacked them in their richest and most fertile oasis, that of al-Ahsa, in 1212 A.H./1797 A.D. but did not move on their capital, Dar'iyya, at once, as he should have, laying a siege for a month to the citadel of al-Ahsa. When Muhammed ibn Saud himself advanced against the Pasha, the latter did not dare to attack him but concluded a six-year peace treaty with

him, a treaty for which the Wahhabis later demonstrated their disregard. By then, they had already set their eyes on plundering the shrine of Imām Hussain ﷺ and all the valuable relics it contained.

On the anniversary of the historic Ghadīr Khumm incident, that is, Thul-Hijja 18, 1216 A.H./April 21, 1801 A.D.¹, Prince Saud mobilized an army of twenty thousand strong and invaded the holy city of Kerbalā'. First they laid a siege of the city then entered the city and brutally massacred its defenders, visitors and inhabitants, looting, burning, demolishing and wreaking havoc ... The city [Kerbalā'] fell into their hands. The magnificent domed building over the grave of Hussain was destroyed and enormous booty dragged off.²

More than five thousand Muslims were slaughtered. Then the Saudi prince turned to the Kerbalā' shrine itself; he and his men pulled gold slabs out of their places, stole chandeliers and Persian rugs and historical relics, plundering anything of value. This tragedy is immortalized by eulogies composed by poets from Kerbalā' and elsewhere. And the Wahhabis did not leave Kerbalā' alone after this massacre; rather, they continued for the next twelve years invading it, killing and looting, taking advantage of the administrative weakness of the aging Ottoman Sultanate responsible for protecting it. During those twelve years, more and more Bedouin tribes joined them for a "piece of the action." In 1218 A.H./1803 A.D., during the time of hajj (pilgrimage), the Wahhabis, led by Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, attacked Mecca, which surrendered to them after putting up a brief resistance. They looted whatever possessions the pilgrims had had. The governor of Mecca, Sharif Ghalib, fled to Jiddah which was shortly thereafter besieged, and the leader of the Syrian pilgrim caravan, Abd-Allāh Pasha of Damascus, had to leave Mecca, too. On

¹Other references consulted for this book indicate that the said attack was carried out on Thul-Hijja 14, 1215 A.H./April 28, 1801 A.D., but we are of the view that the above date is more accurate.

²Carl Brockelmann, ed., *History of the Islamic Peoples* (London, 1980), p. 354.

Rajab 19, 1218 A.H./November 4, 1803, Abdul-Aziz Al Saud paid with his life for what he had committed; he was killed in Dar'iyya. His son, Saud ibn Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, lifted the siege of Jiddah and had Sharif Ghalib sent back to Mecca as his vassal in exchange for Jiddah's customs revenue.

In 1220 A.H./1805 and 1221 A.H./1806 A.D., Mecca and Medīna fell to the Wahhabis¹ respectively. The Wahhabis unleashed their wrath on both holy cities, committing untold atrocities and razing the cemetery, where many relatives and *sahāba* (companions) of the Prophet (ص) were buried, to the ground². Having spread their control over Riyadh, Jiddah, Mecca and Medīna, all of today's Saudi Arabia became practically under their control.

The next major invasion of the holy city of Kerbalā' by the Wahhabis took place on the 9th of the holy month of Ramadan of 1225 A.H., corresponding to October 8, 1810 A.D. It was then that both Kerbalā' and Najaf (where the magnificent shrine of Imām Ali ibn Abū Talib عليه السلام is located) were besieged. Roads were blocked, pilgrims were looted then massacred, and the shrines were attacked and damaged. The details of this second invasion were recorded by an eyewitness: Sayyid Muhammed Jawad al-Āmili, author of the famous book of jurisprudence titled *Miftah al-Karama* which was completed shortly after midnight on the very first day when the siege was laid. The writer recorded how terrified he and the other residents of Kerbalā' felt at seeing their city receiving a major attack from the

¹*Ibid.*

²The Wahhabis have carried out their campaigns against the burial grounds of the Prophet's family and companions well into the next century. For example, in 1343 A.H./1924 A.D., they demolished the grave-sites of many family members and companions (*sahāba*) of the Prophet ﷺ against the wish and despite the denunciation of the adherents of all other Muslim sects world-wide. And in 1413 A.H./1993, they also demolished the house of Khadija, wife of Prophet Muhammed ﷺ, as well as the house where the Prophet ﷺ had been born, which stood approximately 50 meters northward from Khadija's house, turning both of them into public bathrooms...

Wahhabis. A large number of pilgrims were killed. Their number varies from one account to another, and the most realistic figure seems to be the one provided by Sayyid Muhammed Jawad al-Āmili who puts it at one hundred and fifty.

The Wahhabis no longer attack and demolish Imām Hussain's shrine, but they have been relentlessly attacking the creed of those who venerate him through a flood of books written and printed world-wide. They fund their writing, publication and circulation. They sometimes distribute them free of charge during the annual pilgrimage season while prohibiting all pilgrims from carrying or distributing any literature at all... During recent years, they have been beheading Shī'ite scholars wherever they can find them, destroying Shī'ite shrines, such as the famous 'Askari Shrine in Samarra, Iraq, which was bombed and destroyed in February of 2006 and in June of 2007; it houses the remains of both Imām Ali al-Hadi and Hassan al-'Askari, peace be with them, who descended from the immediate family of the Prophet of Islam, peace and blessings of the Almighty be with him and his progeny. Many other Shī'ite mosques and Hussainiyyas were bombed by the Wahhabis and are still targets of their mischief, yet these rogues will never be able to destroy Shī'ite Islam till the Resurrection Day. They have plenty of money, so they send their filthy money to Iraq to get the Muslims to kill each other, the Shī'ite to kill the Sunni and vice versa, thus making Satan the happiest being on earth, for nothing pleases this damned creature more than seeing Muslims at each other's throats. Such is the desire of all the enemies of Islam and Muslims. Actually, due to the barbarism of these fundamentalist Wahhabis, more and more Muslims are getting to be curious about Shī'ite Islam, so they study it and many of them end up eventually switching their sect from Sunni to Shī'ite Islam. There is no harm in a Sunni becoming Shī'ite or in a Shī'ite becoming Sunni: Islam is one tree stalk having two major branches. After all, religions of the world have sects, and people change the sect they follow according to their personal convictions and satisfaction. It happens every day, and nobody fusses about it. Thus, the Wahhabis' mischief is actually having the opposite result of what these fundamentalist fanatics, who have ruined the reputation of Islam and Muslims worldwide, anticipate.



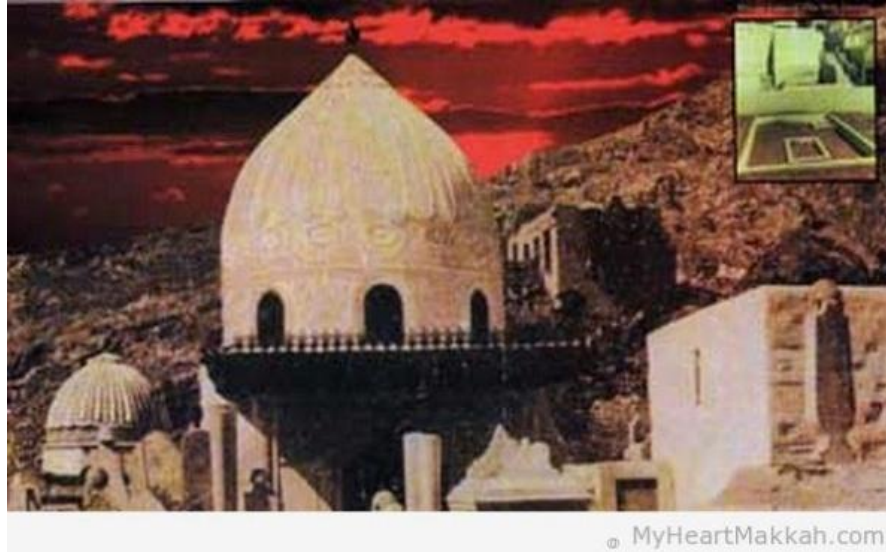
Interior of the Shrine of Imam al-Hussain عليه السلام, more magnificent than ever

AL-BAQEE` GRAVES DEMOLISHED

On March 11, 1922, when some Iraqi tribesmen were letting their cattle graze in a place south of Nasiriyya, thirty miles from the rail tracks, a large force of the Wahhabi Ikhwan [*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimoon*, the Muslim Brotherhood] of Ibn Saud staged a raid led by Faisal al-Duweesh that went to extremes in killing and looting. Iraqi references estimated the number of those killed at about seven hundred, estimating the loot at 130 horses, 2,530 camels, 3,811 donkeys, 43,010 she-camels and 781 homes.¹

¹Abdul-Razzaq al-Hassani, *Al-Thawra al-Iraqiyya al-Kubra* (the great Iraqi revolution), Saida, 1972, Vol. 1, p. 59.

This incident stirred a great panic in Iraq especially among the mid and central Euphrates tribes, and many people thought that it was the prelude for a sweeping Wahhabi attack on Iraq and that the Ikhwan



would slaughter humans as they slaughter cattle and will demolish the holy shrines, violate the privacies of women and destroy everything. It is worth mentioning that Iraq had before then suffered from Wahhabi raids and witnessed the looting and bloodshed in those raids. Moreover, the Iraqi tribes received exaggerated reports about the fierceness of the Ikhwan and their excessive desire to loot and shed blood. This led to the spread of a wave of panic among the public.

In the next morning, the 30th of March, the Iraqi *Iraq* newspaper carried on its front page an editorial under the heading “About the Ikhwan’s Attack on Tribes of al-Muntafiq” in which it pointed out that the owner of the newspaper met Nouri al-Sa`eed after his return with his fellow committee members from Nasiriyya and asked him several questions. The newspaper published Nouri’s answers, and in them there was a strong attack on the Wahhabis and a scathing criticism of the ministers who refused to strengthen the Iraqi army. Nouri al-Sa`eed frankly said that at his return, he found senior government officials unwilling to expand the army in the pretext of insufficient financial resources, declaring that this is regretful, and

that the cause behind it is that they did not familiarize themselves with how critical the situation was, and that had they indeed done it, they would have changed their mind.¹

On the same day, the *Istiqlal* newspaper published on its front page a very violent editorial signed by “al-Alawi” under the heading “Defense! Defense!” underneath which is a line of poetry in this meaning:

*If one does not defend his territory
With his own weapon,
It shall be demolished,
And if one does not shun
Taunting, he shall be taunted by everyone.*

The article violently assaulted Ibn Saud and his followers and those who support him in Iraq, giving Ibn Saud the title of “leader of the Peninsula’s Bolsheviks” and “Najd’s Lenin”! It said that there are persons who have nothing to do with this country and who spread rumors saying that the Ikhwan’s raid was simple in order to keep the nation inattentive, thus it would be taken by surprise, knowing that the raid was a big attack in which much blood was spilled, women, widows and children displaced; so, does the Iraqi nation, which is known for its self-esteem and pride, accept all of this?²

When the crisis in Baghdad was at its peak, the mid-Euphrates was about to produce a strong movement to gather all tribes and mobilize them to defend Iraq in the face of the Ikhwan’ attacks. Some chiefs of tribes were behind it, such as Abdul-Wahid al-Hajj Sikar, Alwan al-Yasiri and Qati` al-Awwadi.

Al-Najaf’s scholars, headed by Sayyid Abul-Hassan al-Isfahani [1861 – 1946 A.D.] and Mirza Hussain Naeeni [1857 – 1936 A.D.], held meetings to discuss this subject. They finally decided to hold a

¹*Al-Iraq* newspaper of March 30, 1922.

²*Al-Istiqlal* newspaper in its issue dated March 30, 1922.

conference in Kerbala to be attended by chiefs of tribes and city dignitaries in order to discuss putting a plan to defend the country.

A chapter about the Wahhabis in the book by [the Hanafi Sunni *faqih* Muhammed Ameen ibn Omer] Ibn Abidin¹ is quite interesting. A paragraph of that book says that anyone who sheds the blood of Muslims is *kafir* (apostate) fighting whom is permissible. It was the custom of the Wahhabis to take women captive and have sexual intercourses with them although they are Muslim women. There were voices throughout the Islamic world in general and the Arabian Peninsula to discipline those Wahhabis by all means. But nobody could do it due to the Saudi government protecting them and adopting their "cause".

In April of 1926, the *ikhwan*, or *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimoon*, the Muslim Brotherhood, a group of fanatics gathered by Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, better known as Ibn Saud, intensified their activity against anyone who violated the Sunnah, as they understood it. Ibn Saud was forced to issue instructions to define violations and to set a penalty for each. *Umm al-Qura* newspaper published those instructions; they were as follows:



- 1) Anyone who deliberately does not attend congregational prayers must be punished with imprisonment from one to ten

¹The full name of Ibn Ameen's book is *رد المختار على الدر المختار* which was published in Beirut, Lebanon, by Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya. I could not find the year of birth of Ibn Ameen, but he died in 1252 A.H./1836 A.D. Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab, founder of Wahhabism, was born in 'Uyayna, a small Najd town, in 1115 A.H./1703 A.D. and died in 1206 A.H./1791-92 A.D. Abdul-Wahhab belonged to the Tamim tribe, and he was very much influenced by the philosophy of Ibn Taymiyya, namely Ahmed ibn Abdul-Halim ibn Abdul-Salam ibn Abdullah al-Khidr, "Taqiyy ad-Din," who was born in Harran, ancient Carrhae, a town built by Harran brother of prophet Abraham from whom it derived its name. Harran at the time was part of Iraq, but it is now within Turkey's borders. Ibn Taymiyya was born in 661 A.H./1263 A.D. and died inside a Damascus, Syria, prison in 728 A.H./1328 A.D.

days in addition to the payment of a fine.

- 2) Anyone who drinks wine is to be penalized according to the rulings of the Shari`a then jailed from one to six months in addition to paying a fine, and if he does it again, he is to be banished from the Haram land from two to three years.
- 3) Anyone who makes or sells wine or prepares a place for drinking it is to be jailed from six months to two years and his place must be confiscated. If he does it again, he is to be expelled from the Haram land from two to three years.
- 4) Smoking is bad; it harms the body, the wealth and the mind, and some scholars have prohibited it; therefore, the sacred places must be purged of this evil. Anyone who smokes publicly must be imprisoned from one to three days in addition to being fined.
- 5) Anyone who participates in a meeting for the purpose of disseminating false rumors, or to plot against the policy of the government, must be jailed from two to five years or banished from Hijaz.
- 6) Anyone who helps shelter criminals mentioned in the previous article is to be regarded as their equal and must receive their same penalty.
- 7) Anyone who participates in a meeting that violates the Shari`a is to be jailed from three to six months and to be fined.
- 8) The government must be notified of any meeting intended for some benefit and must be informed of its location in order to obtain a permit for it.
- 9) The concerned officials must carry out these articles with extreme care, and any of them who is negligent must be severely punished.¹

Al-Baqee` used to be Medina's cemetery during the time of the Prophet ﷺ and thereafter; therefore, al-Abbas, uncle of the Prophet, caliph Othman, the Prophet's wives and many *sahaba* and *tabi`een* were all buried in it and so were four of the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt عليه السلام: al-Hassan ibn Ali, Ali ibn al-Husain, Muhammed ibn Ali and

¹ Public Records Office, London, FO 371/11442.

Ja'far ibn Muhammed عليه السلام. The Shi'as built for the last four Imams a magnificent shrine similar to the ones known in Iraq and Iran, but on a smaller scale. The Shi'as were used to visit this shrine, kissing it, seeking blessings at it and praying there just as they do at shrines in Iraq and Iran.



These graves remained safe during the Saudi era for more than four months without anyone harming them. Grumbling started spreading among the *ikhwan* as a result, and they started criticizing Ibn Saud and accusing him of leniency in carrying out the “Commandments” of Allah.¹ Ibn Saud, therefore, had in mid-April of 1926 to send the senior theologian of Najd, namely Sheikh Abdullah bin Sulayman bin Blaihid², to Medina for the purpose of demolishing the graves. When bin Blaihid reached Medina, he met with its scholars and asked them this question:

“What do Medina’s scholars, may Allah increase their understanding and knowledge, say about building on graves and using them as

¹ *Ibid.*

² See image above, according to a web site, shows this man standing on the right of King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, founder of the Saudi kingdom. I searched for any information in English about this sheikh on the Internet but could not find anything, not even in the Internet’s Wikipedia, but I found a good deal of information about him on an Internet site; therefore, I decided to briefly state a word about him, perhaps his name will one day enter future encyclopedias. His full name is عبدالله بن سليمان بن سعود بن سليمان بن سالم بن محمد بن بليهد الخالدي Abdullah ibn Sulayman ibn Saud ibn Sulayman ibn Salim ibn Muhammed ibn Blaihid al-Khalidi, the first chief judge رئيس القضاة (justice or chief judge) in Mecca whom King Abdul-Aziz (Ibn Saud) placed in charge of religious and some political affairs. A detailed biography of him is included in a book titled من أعلام القضاة *Among Famous Judges* by Muhammed ibn Abdullah al-Muqrin محمد بن عبد الله المقرن who tells us that the sheikh was born in al-Qar’a north of the Qaseem area. His exact date of birth is unknown but must be placed around the year 1277 A.H./1860 A.D. based on his age, which is said to be over 80, at the time of his death in 1359 A.H./1940 A.D.

mosques, is it permissible or not? If it is not permissible, perhaps even prohibitive and strongly banned, should they be demolished and prayer banned there? If the building is on a pedestrians' path, as is the Baqee`, which prevents using the area according to what is built on it, is it usurpation which must be lifted because it oppresses those who have a right to it, preventing them from the use of what belongs to them? What about what is done by the ignorant folks at these shrines, i.e. rubbing them and pleading to Allah and seeking nearness to Him through offerings and pledges, lighting lanterns on them, is it permissible or not? What is being done at the chamber of the Prophet ﷺ, i.e. directing the faces towards it when pleading to Allah and doing other things, circling it, kissing and rubbing it, and the same is done at the Mosque, seeking blessings and reciting *thikr* between the *athan* and the *iqama*, before dawn and on Fridays, is it legitimate or not? Issue your *fatwa* (verdict), may you be rewarded, and explain to us the evidences on which you rely, may you remain the refuge of those who seek benefits."

Seventeen men from among those who were present there and then agreed that it was obligatory to demolish the graves and wrote their *fatwa* in this regard then signed it. This is the text of their *fatwa*:

"As regarding building on the graves, it is unanimously prohibited due to authentic *ahadith* (traditions) regarding its prohibition; therefore, many scholars have issued their verdicts that they must be demolished, relying on one *hadith* by Ali who said to Abu al-Hiyaj, **أَلَا أُبْعَثُكَ عَلَى مَا بَعَثَنِي عَلَيْهِ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص)؟ أَنْ لَا تَدْعَ تَمْثَالًا إِلَّا طَمَسْتَهُ وَلَا قَبْرًا إِلَّا سَوَّيْتَهُ** "Shall I send you to what the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had sent me [to do]? You should not let any statue without burying it or a grave high in structure without leveling it with the ground." This is narrated by Muslim. As for using graves as mosques to pray and lighting lanterns in them, it is prohibitive based on one *hadith* by [Abdullah] Ibn Abbas: **لَعَنَ اللَّهُ زَائِرَاتِ الْقُبُورِ وَالْمُتَخَذِينَ عَلَيْهَا الْمَسَاجِدَ وَ السَّرَجَ** "The curse of Allah be on those [females] who visit the graves, who use them as mosques and place lanterns in them." The author of *sunan* books have narrated it. As regarding what is done by ignorant folks at the shrines, i.e. rubbing them, seeking nearness to them by slaughtering animals, making pledges and pleading to those in them

as they plead to Allah, it is prohibitive and banned by the Shari`a, it must not be done at all. As regarding the chamber of the Prophet ﷺ and praying there, it is better to ban it as it is known to be advocated in the sect's books, and because the best directions is that of the *qibla*. As regarding circling, rubbing and kissing it, it is absolutely prohibitive. As regarding making *thikr*, seeking Allah's mercy and peace during the said times, it is an innovation; such is concluded according to our knowledge."¹

Following the issuing of this *fatwa*, the Baqee` graves were quickly demolished. Reports of this act sent tremors throughout the Islamic world, and the outrage in Shi`ite countries was, of course, the most intense.

INCIDENT'S ECHO IN IRAQ:

A letter was received by one of the Shi'a *`ulema* (scholars of theology) sent by a Shi'i man who was in Medina when the graves were demolished. It was dated Shawwal 8, 1344 A.H./April 21, 1926; here below is its text:

"I submit to you the fact that all Hijazi lands are oppressed under the

¹ Muhsin al-Ameen, *Kashf al-Irtiyab* (Unveiling the Doubt), 3rd ed., pp. 359-360. [Shi'ites, by the way, reject the *ahadith*, Prophet's statements, cited in this "fatwa" and say that they are fabricated. Most importantly, they are not supported at all by a single verse of the Holy Qur'an. Shi'ites also ask the Wahhabis: The domes and other structures over the graves of the Prophet's wives, *sahaba* and *tabi`een* remained intact during the entire period of the "righteous caliphs" whose era is described as the golden period of Islam. This period extended from 632 to 661 A.D., that is, for 29 years. Why neither those caliphs nor those who succeeded them up to the time of Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab, founder of Wahhabism, that is, from 632 to 1926, i.e. one thousand and two hundred and ninety-four years, ever ordered their demolition? Were they waiting all those years for the Wahhabis to do it? Why did none of the four main founders of the Sunni sects, i.e. Abu Hanifah, Malik, Ibn Hanbal and al-Shafi'i, ever issue a *fatwa* to demolish those graves? Were those major Sunni imams, Founders of the Sunni sects, waiting for the Wahhabis to do it? Do the Wahhabis know better than those major Sunni imams, their mentors...?!]

control of Ibn Saud and his absolute rule in them. Nobody in these lands, from their furthestmost point to their nearest, one individual, be he a resident of the cities or of the deserts, who can oppose his orders and commands. Few days ago, the chief judge of the Wahhabis—meaning Sheikh Abdullah ibn Blaihid—came to Medina. As his meeting place was crowded with its theologians, he declared to them the prohibition of visiting the graves, that doing so was an innovation in the creed and an association with Allah, that an agreement must be obtained from all scholars of the four [Sunni] sects to completely destroy them and obliterate the last of their traces from the face of earth. Because of that, visiting all sacred resting places was banned and their gates were closed. For the past twenty days, we do not dare to go, see and visit these honored sites since the Wahhabis' soldiers (the *ikhwan*) monitor the Prophet's Purified Haram and prevent any pilgrim from being honored by visiting the Chief Lady of the Women of the World¹ ﷺ or get close to the shrine of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The Wahhabis' chief judge could not get the desired consensus he wanted from Medina's theologians except after days, having used to pressure them intimidation and coercion. Some others readily agreed. So, they ruled according to his desire, absolutely prohibiting the visiting of graves, the pleading to Allah near them and the seeking of their intercession with Allah or even recite the *ziyara* there. An order was issued to demolish and efface the sacred shrines, so the soldiers started first to loot all the contents of those sacred buildings in the Baqee' from the flooring, draperies, hung items, lanterns and other items. Then they started demolishing those sacred sites, forcing all the builders of Medina to participate in the demolishing and effacing. The objective [behind this letter] now is that all the believers who rest their hopes on the intercession of these pure Imams to bring them closer to Allah Almighty, and they are all in this matter, be they Arabs, Persians, Indians, Turks, etc. Each and

¹ This is a reference to Khadija daughter of Khuwaylid, first wife of the Prophet of Islam ﷺ. But this title is usually used for the Prophet's daughter, Fatima, for whom there is no known grave at all. Shortly before her death, she willed that she must be buried at night and her grave be obliterated...

every one of them must plead to his government to interfere to lift this momentous injustice and to rectify what has taken place. Today, the eighth of the month of Shawwal, the demolishing and effacing of the sacred dome in the Baqee` started, so there is neither will nor strength except in Allah, the most Exalted One, the most Great. You must inform all scholars of Iraq about this painful incident.”¹

At the same time, telegrams started coming one after the other to Shi`a `ulema in Iraq. We quote here the one sent to Sayyid Hassan al-Sadr in al-Kadhimiyya: عَظَّمَ اللَّهُ أَجُورَكُمْ فِي مَصِيبَةِ الرَّسُولِ وَ أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ الوهابيون خَرَّبُوا الْقُبُورَ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ “May Allah magnify your divine rewards on the calamity of the Prophet and his Ahlul-Bayt. The Wahhabis have demolished the sacred graves.”

Having received these reports, the Shi`a `ulema decided to declare a period of grief, demonstrate the signs of sadness, suspend classes and hold a congregational prayer service. In the courtyard of the Kadhimiyya Grand Shrine, a meeting was held and attended by a large crowd of people. Incoming telegrams and letters on this occasion were recited. Telegrams were composed to send to the kings and scholars of the Islamic world in their various countries. The same took place in Kerbala and Najaf. We would like here to quote the text of the telegram which Najaf’s `ulema sent to [then emperor] Ridha Shah in Tehran:

“According to authentic reports, after having looted the sacred area of the Baqee` Imams, the Wahhabis’ chief judge ordered the demolition and effacing of the sacred Baqee`, including the domes and sacred shrines. This action started on the eighth of Shawwal. It is certain that the safeguarding of the canons of the Islamic faith in general and those of the Ja`fari sect in particular is entrusted to the Ja`fari King. The public’s hopes hinge and rely on the zeal and ardor of Your Majesty. We are patiently waiting your undertaking the most important obligation at the fastest time by the will of Allah.”²

¹ *Al-Iraq* newspaper of May 25, 1926.

² *Al-Murshid* magazine of June 1926.

Iraqi newspapers kept publishing essays denouncing Ibn Saud and protesting his actions. *Al-Iraq* newspaper wrote an editorial in which it said, “The matter is settled, Ibn Blaihid issued the well known *fatwa*, thus affording his master, Ibn Saud, the greatest service without knowing that his effort was like an arrow that rested in the heart of the Islamic world, causing it pain the like of which there is none.”¹ It published another article by Isma`eel Al Yasin from al-Kadhimiyya titled “The greatest tyrant and the holy places in Hijaz” in which this statement existed: “O Muslims! What is this hibernation, and what is this stagnation that led you to remain silent rather than pay attention to this painful issue and shameful roles of that tyrant in the holy lands...?”²

On June 4, 1926, *Al-Iraq* newspaper published an interview between one of its editors and Sayyid Mahmoud al-Gailani, chief Sharifs of Baghdad, in which the latter announced his criticism of what the Wahhabis had done, i.e. the demolition of the Baqee` graves. He has stated that building domes over graves does not violate the Prophet’s Sunnah because the Prophet himself was buried in the chamber of Aisha, and it is a chamber having walls and a roof built like a dome. He also stated that kissing the shrines is akin to kissing a loved person, which is not prohibited by Islam.

Al-Iraq published after that three verses of poetry, asking the poets to add a fourth and a fifth line to it; they were:

لَعْمَرِي اِنْ فَاجَعَةَ الْبَقِيعَ	يَشِيْبُ لِهَوْلِهَا فَوْدُ الرَضِيعِ
وَسَوْفَ تَكُوْنُ فَاتِحَةُ الرِّزَايَا	اِذَا لَمْ نَصْخُ مِنْ هَذَا الْهَجْوِ
فَهَلْ مِنْ مَسْلَمٍ لِّلّٰهِ يَرْعٰى	حَقَّوْقَ نَبِيِّهِ الْهَادِي الشَّفِيعِ؟

Here is a rough translation of these lines:

¹ *Al-Iraq* newspaper of May 27, 1926.

² *Al-Iraq* newspaper of May 29, 1926

*By my life! The Baaqee` calamity
Causes an infant's hair to turn grey,
And it will be the start of shameful deeds
Unless we wake up from this slumber.
So, is there any Muslim at all who safeguards
The rights of his Prophet who guides and intercedes?*

A number of poets took part in adding a fourth and a fifth line to these lines, including Mustafa Jawad, Isma`eel Al Yasin, Kamal Nasrat, Abdul-Mahdi al-Azri and “a Muslim from al-Kadhimiyya in pain”.¹

The month of Muharram that year started on July 12, so the speeches of mourning gatherings and chants of grief of the Husaini processions mostly centered round the “Baaqee` Calamity”, appealing to the Occult Imam to reappear to seek revenge against Ibn Saud.

It is worth mentioning that the 8th of Shawwal—the day when the Baaqee` graves were demolished—became an anniversary for mourning in the next years in Najaf and Kerbala when all markets shut down and chest beating processions come out as they are accustomed to doing on anniversaries of the death of the Imams. It is said that the people of Kerbala continued to do that for several years, calling the 8th of Shawwal “the death of al-Baaqee`”.

Shi`ites still hope that they will have the opportunity to rebuild the Baaqee` graves. Had they been granted such an opportunity, they would have built them many times better than they used to be. A trusted friend told me once that Bohra Shi`ites in India collected plenty of money and put the designs for rebuilding the graves. I remember during my 1958 visit of the Twelver (Ithna-Asheri) Shi`ite mosque in Karachi, I saw in it a precious gold shrine. When I asked about it, I was told that it was the Baaqee` graves shrine, and it was made possible through the donations of the Shi`ites in Pakistan and India and was waiting permission to be moved to Medina when

¹ *Al-Iraq* newspaper of September 2, 1926 and of September 16, 1926.

the opportunity comes, and I wonder if such an opportunity will ever come.

DURING THE PILGRIMAGE SEASON:

In the month of June of 1926, the first pilgrimage season under the Saudi era started. Many pilgrims went to Hijaz. Their number was more than those who had performed the pilgrimage the year before. This led to many clashes and altercations between the pilgrims and the *ikhwan*. The pilgrims wanted to perform their rituals as they had always been doing, but the *ikhwan* regarded those rituals as violating the Sunnah, so they prevented them.

Ibn Saud had appointed Hafiz Wahba as his deputy in administering the affairs of Mecca in order to temper the zeal of the *ikhwan*. Hafiz Wahba says the following in his book: “The *ikhwan* were cruel in their treatment of anyone who in their view committed a transgression or violated one of Allah’s commandments, for each of them regards himself as the judge of it. The stick was doing its job in the name of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.” Hafiz Wahba narrates that late in the month of Thul-Qa`dah of 1926, while he was at the government house in Mecca, Egypt’s consul, the deputy consul of India and Holland’s deputy consul accompanied by about ten pilgrims came with blood dripping from them. The *ikhwan* had assaulted those pilgrims, so Hafiz promised to deal with the matter, stressing that such matters happened everywhere in the world. But they protested saying that such assaults were in the name of religion and with support from the government, that they happened as the policemen looked on. Hafiz assured them that the government had no knowledge of such incidents and did not endorse this transgression. Hafiz Wahba further says that he went to Ibn Saud to explain to him the seriousness of the matter and the chaotic repercussions of the *ikhwans’* actions, but Ibn Saud did not pay attention to what he said, so he had to resign from his post. Ibn Saud later realized the extent of the extremism of the *ikhwan*, so he instructed his guards to discipline the *ikhwan* and to appoint a judge to look into the problems they were causing.¹

The Egyptian loader incident was the most serious incident that

¹ Hafiz Wahba (Op. Cit.), pp. 306-308.

season which caused a friction between the *ikhwan* and the pilgrims. It almost led to a general massacre. This is the summary of it: The Egyptian government was accustomed for a long time to send every [pilgrimage] season a loader [carrier, sedan] called the Prophet's loader accompanied by soldiers, cannons, a military music band and a commander called the emir of the pilgrimage. All those were matters which the *ikhwan* very strongly denounced, for they regard the loader as being "pagan" and "worshipped" instead of Allah, and they called the trumpet that goes ahead of it as the "voice of Satan".

When the season of pilgrimage drew nigh in 1926, the Saudi government wrote the Egyptian government asking it to commit itself to three terms at the time when the said loader and the pilgrims were in Hijaz: 1) Music must not accompany the loader after leaving Jidda, 2) There must be no smoking, and 3) There must be no visits to the graves or circling them. The Egyptian government wrote the Sheikh of the Azhar and the *mufti* of the Egyptian lands asking for their opinion in this regard. Both men issued their verdict that the three things which the Saudi government mentioned as being prohibitive did not violate the Book (Holy Qur'an) or the Sunnah, stating the evidences which they derived from the Shari'a [Islam's legislative system] to support their *fatwas*.¹

Early signs of the crisis appeared when the loader arrived at the Haram's courtyard in Mecca. The loader was taken down on the yard, and some pilgrims came seeking its blessings, so the *ikhwan* were outraged. Ibn Saud sent a message to the [Egyptian] emir of the pilgrimage requesting him to let the loader be put at a veiled place in order to avoid sedition, so the Pasha responded after repeated intense pleas by some intercessors.

In the afternoon of Thul-Hijjah 8, 1344 A.H./June 19, 1926 A.D., the loader left Mecca heading towards the Arafat Mountain. At 7:30 in the evening of that day, when the loader was stopped near Mina, a group of the *ikhwan* came close to it and kept cursing it as they screamed **هُبَل! هُبَل! Hubal! Hubal!** [chief pagan deity during the pre-

¹ Public Records Office, London, FO 371/11442.

Islamic period], throwing rocks and stones at it, so Mahmoud Azmi Pasha ordered his soldiers to line up in a military formation then asked the *ikhwan* to disperse, but they did not pay him any attention. The Pasha, therefore, ordered his soldiers to shoot in the air in order to scare the *ikhwan*, but it had no effect on them. It is said that the *ikhwan* fired at his soldiers¹. It was then that the Pasha order to use bombs and bullets to shoot at the *ikhwan* directly. Twenty-five of them were killed and a larger number were wounded².

That year, about sixty thousand persons from Najd performed the pilgrimage, setting up their tents in Mina. When these men heard about what had happened to their brothers, they rushed to the site of the incident carrying their rifles. Ibn Saud heard about it, and he was camping near the site, so he went running then stopped between both groups calling at them "I am Abdul-Aziz! I am Abdul-Aziz!" The shooting stopped. Ibn Saud ordered his soldiers to hide and protect the loader, then he sent it to Jidda under the heavy guard of Saudi soldiers commanded by Prince Mishari ibn Saud [ibn Abdul-Aziz] ibn Jilwi³.

Armstrong narrates the following: "Ibn Saud came close after the incident from the Egyptian emir of the pilgrimage, Mahmoud Azmi Pasha, and started rebuking him for what he had done, so the Pasha responded to him saying, with some pride and arrogance, 'With all due respect to Your Majesty, I stopped the shooting; otherwise, I would have wiped out all of those mobsters.' Ibn Saud controlled his nerves and said to him, 'This is not the time for bragging. This is a sacred place which Allah ordered that nobody is to be killed in it, and you are our guests and under our protection; otherwise, I would have punished you.'"⁴

¹ *Ibid.*

² Armstrong, *Lord of Arabia*, London: 1938, p. 193.

³ Khair ad-Din al-Zurakli, *Shibh al-Jazeera fi Ahd al-Malik Abdul-Aziz* (The Peninsula During the Time of King Abdul-Aziz), Beirut: 1977, Vol. 2, p. 663.

⁴ Armstrong (Op. Cit.), p. 193.

When the news reached King Fuad of Egypt, he was furious and ordered to stop sending the Ka`ba *kiswa* [drapes] which Egypt was accustomed to sending every year. He also ordered to stop sending funds from Egypt to Hijaz from the share of both Harams. On May 13, 1927, when the second pilgrimage season approached, the *Ahram* newspaper of Egypt published an official notification that said, "The Egyptian government has decided not to send the loader this year, and it announces to the Egyptian pilgrims that they may face some dangers during their travel to Hijaz, and it is not responsible for their protection; so, if they wish to travel, it will be at their own risk."

The Egyptian government kept following this policy towards the pilgrimage up to the last days of King Fuad. It is narrated that when King Fuad was lying on his deathbed in 1930, the head of his *diwan*, Ali Mahir Pasha, entered and said to him, "Are you not going to enter in your Record of Deeds negotiating with the land of the Two Holy Harams?" The King made a sign which meant "There is no harm in doing so."

The friendly ties between Egypt and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia resumed after the death of King Fuad, and the Egyptians were permitted to perform the pilgrimage. The sending of the *kiswa* to the Ka`ba every year was resumed, too. But the loader remained banned from entering Hijaz. The Egyptians kept celebrating the loader every year, but they do not go with it beyond the Suez city.¹

ISLAMIC CONFERENCE HELD:

Letters and telegrams kept reaching Ibn Saud from India and other lands demanding the holding of the Islamic Conference which he had promised to do before. Hafiz Wahba, on his part, used to repeat his insistence on Ibn Saud to do it. Ibn Saud finally agreed to hold the conference provided it would not mention anything about the system of government in Hijaz. On March 26, 1926, an invitation was sent to all Islamic boards and governments to attend the

¹ Khair ad-Din al-Zurakli (Op. Cit.), Vol. 2, p. 669.

Conference which was to be held on the 20th of Thul-Qa`da of 1344 A.H./June 2, 1926.

Representatives from various Islamic countries, with the exception of Iran and Iraq, responded to the invitation. Brothers Muhammed Ali and Shawkat Ali arrived to represent the Islamic Caliphate Society, and Dia ad-Din ibn Farid ad-Din arrived to represent the Muslims of the Soviet Union. The Saudi side was represented by four men: Hafiz Wahba, Yousuf Yasin, Abdul-Aziz al-Ateeqi and Abdullah bin Blaihid, senior theologian of Najd [see footnote about him above].

The inauguration of the conference took place in Mecca on the 7th of June. Hafiz Wahba delivered the inauguration speech on behalf of Ibn Saud. The speech mentioned the reasons that prompted Ibn Saud to accept the allegiance swearing as King of Hijaz, and they are summed up thus: The people who tie and untie in Hijaz and Najd obligated him to do so, and he in the beginning refused their request, then he agreed in response to the ruling of the Shari`a “because we, Al Saud, are not despotic kings, nor do we rule in person; rather, we in our land are tied by the rulings of the Shari`a and the viewpoint of those who tie and untie... If we oppose them without a legitimate argument which they accept, they will not obey me, and there will be corruption in that, as is quite obvious. The masses of the cities and the heads of the desert tribes are regarded among those who tie and untie because their tribes follow them during the time of peace or of war.” Then Ibn Saud asked those present for the conference to consult regarding the religious and construction interests of Hijaz, purging it of innovations, superstitions, immoralities and abominations which nobody doubted existed. Then he said to them, “You have the absolute freedom in what you discuss except two matters from which you should stay at bay: One of them is to discuss international politics; the other is discussing the dispute between the Islamic nations and their governments, for these concern those nations themselves.” Ibn Saud concluded his sermon saying, “The Muslims have been exhausted by differences in sects and tastes, so enjoin each other regarding bringing them closer and cooperate for serving their common public interests and not let the differences

among sects and races be the cause of hostility among them...”¹

The conference’s sessions went on for ten days. On June 17, its sessions were delayed in order to give the delegates the opportunity to perform the pilgrimage rituals. Meanwhile, two delegations from Egypt and Turkey arrived, so the conference’s sessions were resumed anew on the 22nd of the month. The last sessions witnessed sharp arguments and altercations in which the Egyptian delegation played the main role.

EGYPTIAN DELEGATION’S CONFERENCE ACTIVITY:

The Egyptian government had in the beginning ignored the invitation to attend the conference. This took place when the cabinet of Zayyur Pasha² was ruling. When this administration fell, and when a new administration was formed headed by Adli Pasha, it was decided to send a delegation representing Egypt at the conference. The delegation was comprised of Sheikh Muhammed al-Zawahiri as its head, Muhammed al-Maseeri Beg and Muhammed Tawfeeq Beg as members. The delegation faced difficulty to reach Mecca since it was late after all pilgrim ships had already sailed. Adli Pasha, therefore, instructed to prepare Aida, the official Egyptian government ship, to transport the delegation to Hijaz as soon as possible. The delegation was able to reach Mecca and to participate in the last sessions of the conference as stated above.

It seems that Sheikh Muhammed al-Zawahiri, head of the Egyptian delegation, was sent to the conference for a certain purpose: to criticize the extremism of the Wahhabis and to denounce their actions. This is why we saw him going to the conference charged with cited and logical evidences that rebut the Wahhabis’ pretexts. The first thing he did in the conference was submitting a written proposal, asking the delegates to support it; this is what is said:

“Since the Revered Hijaz is a general religious center for all those

¹ Hafiz Wahba, *Khamsson Aman fi Jazeerat al-Arab* (Fifty Years in the Arabian Peninsula), pp. 140-144.

² I could not trace this name, so it is likely a misprint.

who direct their faces towards the *qibla*, one to which the Muslims come from everywhere regardless of the differences of their *fiqhi* and logical sects in order to worship their Lord and perform their rituals, the Conference determines that they all must be enabled to perform their ways of worship and rituals according to their sects, and they must not be prevented from doing anything so long as it does not harm the dignity of anyone, be he alive or dead, nor does it violate the consensus which is agreed on by the scholars of *usool al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence). And it must determine that each pilgrim must perform what agrees with the sect to which he belongs, while doing so may disagree with the scholars of other sects.”

Sheikh al-Zawahiri delivered an extemporal speech in which he urged the delegates to accept his resolution. He said, “... Let me say it frankly, and I hope nobody will suffer pain. Quite few people have said that the folks of Najd call them *kafir* (apostate) in doing this or that. We have come to ascertain this matter, to get together and to clear the air... I saw with my own eyes something which hurt me. I was inside the Haram passing behind the Maqam [of Ibrahim] after the *tawaf* [circling of the Ka`ba] when I saw a group of men who surrounded an Egyptian man and kept saying this to him with extreme violence and cruelty: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! ‘Did you say: O Messenger of Allah!’? Here, the man was scared, so he denied saying it, shrunk and was petrified to the degree that brought tears to my eyes. He came to me after that accompanied by many Egyptians and said, ‘Did you see how they prevent us?’ I calmed those who came to me and said to them, ‘Be calm, do not be afraid and be patient until the truth becomes clear; surely the guidance is Allah’s guidance.’ This, Gentlemen, is part of what prompts me to endorse this proposal which I hope will be endorsed [by you all]. I plead to you in the name of Allah and His Messenger... And if I say “... and His Messenger’, I hope nobody objects, for this is my belief which I follow as I worship Allah. I plead to you in the Name of Allah and His Messenger to act upon tolerance and patience, perhaps we will eradicate the reasons behind these differences which have harmed the Muslims very seriously.”

The conference discussed al-Zawahiri’s proposal. After deliberations on it, it was endorsed. This caused Ibn Saud and his protégés to be

angry. It prompted Ibn Saud to deliver a speech in which he explained his position thus: "... I do not want to interfere in your actions, nor do I wish to curtail the freedom of the Conference in its research, as I had promised in the inauguration speech. But I wish to direct your attention to some matters in my capacity as one of the leaders of Islam on whom the responsibility of the matters of this land has been placed. I do not aspire to be high in the land or to corrupt, but I want the Muslims to return to their first [Islamic] era, the era of happiness and strength, the era of the *sahaba* and those [*tabi`een*] who followed them in goodness... We do not force anyone to follow a particular sect or take a certain route in the religion, for this is entrusted to the scholars of the religion and to those who bear the Shari`a. but I do not accept under any circumstance the appearance of innovations and superstitions which the Shari`a does not regard and which sound nature rejects. Nobody is asked about his sect or belief, but it is not right that someone openly does what opposes the consensus of the Muslims or stirs a blind sedition among the Muslims. It is better for us to look at righteous Muslims and to leave these secondary matters to the scholars, for they are more keen than we are in their regard..."

Sheikh al-Zawahiri wrote a memorandum in response to Ibn Saud's speech. It is lengthy, so we would like to quote excerpts from it:

- 1) His Majesty the King expressed his desire to leave the religious matters to the scholars, but this is not possible because the scholars differ among themselves; when they meet, they argue and wake up sectarian fanaticism.
- 2) His Majesty said he did not accept the appearances of innovations and superstitions, and this is right if it means what is determined [to be as such] by *all* scholars of the Islamic sects, not what is determined by a single group from among them rather than by another.
- 3) His Majesty said that it is not right for anyone to demonstrate something which opposes the consensus of the Muslims or stirs a blind sedition, but this expression is broad in its scope, unlimited in its meaning, and some people may understand it to mean preventing people from matters that are permissible according to their sect as leading to stirring a blind sedition.

Take, for example, smoking. Sheikh Ibn Blaihid says, “We do not ban it because it is *haram* (prohibitive)..., rather, we prevent it because if the people of Najd see someone smoking, they behead him.” So, who are those who really cause the blind sedition? Are they the ones who do what their sect permits or those who behead them?!

- 4) His Majesty has said, “It is better for us to look into the Muslims’ interests and leave these secondary issues to the scholars.” We wish this principle had been observed in the beginning so monuments and other things would not have been demolished before the scholars of Islamic sects express their opinion in their regard.

This memorandum gained reputation among the delegates before being submitted to the conference, and they all, with the exception of the Saudi delegate, appreciated it. Members of the latter delegation went to Sheikh al-Zawahiri to request him not to submit the memorandum to the conference. Al-Zawahiri said to them that he would do that on the condition the King withdrew his speech. It was agreed on doing so, and the King did, indeed, withdraw his speech from the conference.

The last day of the conference was charged with intense discussions. On that day, Shawkat Ali submitted a proposal which he had presented before and which contained three matters: (1) the rebuilding of the domes and demolished monuments as soon as possible, (2) the safeguarding and maintaining of the graves that have not been demolished yet, and (3) commissioning the rebuilding of the demolished graves to a Sunni and Shi`ite committee of scholars of the sects, and the opinion of this committee shall be final.

Sheikh Muhammed al-Zawahiri talked about this proposal saying, “This day is the last of the conference days, and we want to leave in peace and tranquility. I see that a movement from the side of our Indian brothers indicates some anger. I also see a movement opposing it from the government’s side that indicates some toughness; so, I hope this will not be the case. Let there be looking into the proposal relevant to the graves and monuments.” Yousuf Yasin responded to him saying, “If you do not wish there will be a

dispute and desire the matter to end peacefully, I hope this proposal will not be looked into because it by itself opens a door for schism and dispute.” Al-Zawahiri responded to him saying, “We want to remove the misunderstanding. As regarding keeping silent about what we have, it is harmful. We want tranquility to reach the depths of hearts. What is right is right for everyone. Among what is right is what is bitter and must be allayed. You know best and see best the consequences of angering the hearts. So, I request the submission and recitation of the proposal.” Here, the secretary of the conference stood up and recited the text of the proposal. Shawkat Ali stood up to explain it. Then the conference agreed to refer the proposal to the board of *`ulema* to see what they would decide about it. Sheikh Abdul-Aziz al-Ateeqi then stood up and said, “I would like to draw attention to our disagreement on using the graves as idols, and what took place did not affect a corpse but stones.” Al-Zawahiri responded to him saying, “Far it is from Allah that one can say that the Muslims have undertaken the graves as idols, and we want some people from among ourselves not be extremists and exaggerate in what is useless.”

The conference came to an end without the participants in it being able to reach a decisive result. In the evening of the last day of the conference, Ibn Saud threw a banquet for the delegates. Al-Zawahiri took that opportunity to deliver a statement in which he demanded to rebuild the monuments which were demolished due to their having been mosques and are now areas where the dogs urinate.” When Ibn Saud heard this statement, he stood up and left...¹

The British consul says the following in his secret report to his government: “It is believed that the conference cost Ibn Saud no less than twenty thousand pounds some of which were fuel expenses and the others were bribes to the conferees.” The consul also stated that the members of the delegations, with the exception of few, received bribes from Ibn Saud, each according to his importance. Sheikh Rasheed Ridha, for example, received two thousand pounds, Ameen

¹ Fakhr ad-Din al-Zawahiri, *Al-Siyasa wal Azhar* السياسة والأزهر (Politics and al-Azhar), Cairo: 1945, pp. 240-250.

al-Husaini received one thousand, Abu al-`Azaaim received three hundred. Ibn Saud meant by so doing to woo their hearts and ensure good publicity for himself in their countries.¹

IBN SAUD'S DILEMMA:

We saw how Ibn Saud defended the *ikhwan* during the conference and justified their actions, but deep down, he was not pleased with them. It can be said that Ibn Saud was in a two-fold bewilderment towards the *ikhwan*, which is called scientifically “dilemma”, i.e. standing between two options each of which is bad. On the one hand, he was indebted to the *ikhwan* for the sacrifices they had offered for him and the wars they waged. But he was, on the other hand, a man of politics who walked according to what was dictated to him to do. He, therefore, saw in the *ikhwan* a fanatical movement stirring problems and placing obstacles in the way of the state's growth. It is right to reword it thus: Ibn Saud was suffering from a psychological struggle towards the *ikhwan*, for he could not tolerate their fanaticism on the one hand, nor could he, on the other, do without them.

We have said that Ibn Saud was deep down displeased with the *ikhwan*, and in fact they, too, were not pleased with him. Since the beginning of their movement, they were critical of Ibn Saud because he was wearing the *iqal* rather than the turban, letting his moustache grow and wearing long outfits. They also criticized the sheikhs—scholars of theology in Najd—whom they accused of falling short of their religion, for flattering Ibn Saud while hiding the truth from him.

In the beginning, Ibn Saud followed with the *ikhwan* the principle of tolerance and leniency. He used to always say, “The *ikhwan* must be tolerated. No matter what they have done, their condition now is better than in the beginning. As regarding fanaticism and toughness, time ensures to allay its intensity.” When some of his friends advised him to control the *ikhwan*'s extremism, he said to them, “These are my sons, and it is my duty to bear with them and overlook their bad

¹ Public Records Office, London, FO 371/11442.

actions and mistakes. I must advise them. I do not forget their actions, and I think they have good intentions and what is right will be revealed to them.”¹

Ibn Saud used to think that the *ikhwan*’s extremism would wear out by the passage of time, but he finally found out that their extremism intensified instead of winding down. In 1914, Ibn Saud had to hold a meeting for Najd’s *‘ulema* in order to discuss this matter. The theologians met on September 30. After the discussion, they issued a circular advising the *ikhwan* to be moderate. The circular included the matters that were discussed and which the *ikhwan* were accustomed to accuse people, because of them, of being *kafir*, apostate. They were five matters as follows:

FIRST: Does the term “kafir” apply to Muslim Bedouins who are firm on their religion and follow Allah’s commandments and prohibitions?

SECOND: Is there a difference between one who wears the *iqal* and that who wears the turban as long as their belief is the same?

THIRD: Is there a difference between the first urban dwellers and the later immigrants?

FOURTH: Is there a difference between the sacrificial animal (*zabiha*) of the Bedouin who lives as a Muslim subject, whose route is theirs, whose belief is their belief, and that of the early urban dwellers or of the immigrants in as far as *halal* and *haram* issues are concerned?

FIFTH: Do the immigrants have an order or a permit to attack those who did not migrate, so they would beat, discipline, intimidate or force them to migrate? Does anyone have the right to displace anyone, be he a Bedouin or a city dweller, without a clear matter or obvious apostasy or one of the actions because of which he must be

¹ Hafiz Wahba, *Jazeerat al-Arab fil Qarn al-Ishreen* (The Arabian Peninsula in the Twentieth Century), pp. 293-294.

expelled, without the permission of *wali al-amr* (person in charge) or the Shari`a-appointed judge?

At the conclusion of the circular, it was stated that the scholars had issued their *fatwa* as follows: “All these matters violate the Shari`a and its commandments. The individual who does them is to be forbidden and rebuked. If he repents and admits his error, he is to be forgiven, but if he continues to do what he was ordered not to do and resorts to stubbornness, he must be disciplined before the Muslims; he is neither to be treated as an enemy nor befriended except as ordered by the said *wali* or ruled by the Shari`a-appointed judge. Anyone who does the opposite, his route is not that of the Muslims. This is what we believe and invoke Allah to testify to it. We hope He will enable us and your own selves to goodness; Allah blesses Muhammed, his Progeny and companions and sends him salutations.” Signed in the year 1337¹. Signatures and Seals.²

This circular was distributed in the *ikhwan*’s villages and another circular was also distributed with it signed by Ibn Saud advising them to follow the verdicts of the scholars of religion since they know the Shari`a better. Apparently, both circulars did not have any serious impact on the *ikhwan*. Anyhow, the *ikhwan* intensified their extremism when Hijaz was conquered. Hafiz Wahba says, “The extremism of the *ikhwan* increased after the fall of Jidda and the surrender of all of Hijaz. Many times did Ibn Saud become strict with them and clear himself of their extremism, but their transgression never stopped while their cruelty continued.”³

Actually, the *ikhwan* did not stop at interfering in people’s affairs but started interfering in Ibn Saud’s affairs himself. In the month of

¹ This is what the Arabic text reads, but this date does not seem to me to be right. The Hijri year 1337 is the equivalent of the Anno Domini year 1918. The text suggests a continuation of the events that took place in 1926, so why do we go back so many years? Most likely, there is a mistake here.

² Ameen al-Rayhani (Op. Cit.), pp. 433-434.

³ Hafiz Wahba (Op. Cit.), pp. 307-308.

October of 1925, when Sir Gilbert Clayton was negotiating with Ibn Saud at Bahira near Jidda, his [Ibn Saud's] aides went for a walk outside the camp, and there was a group of the *ikhwan* praying. Their imam started threatening them and saying that they defiled the land on which they were praying. When Ibn Saud heard about it, he summoned the chief of the group and kept rebuking him saying, "According to what right do you speak to my guests like that? And according to what right do you monopolize the sacred land to yourself and your fellows? You, dog, must know that the land, all of it, belongs to Allah, and it is all a place for prayers." Then he ordered that man whipped so he would serve as a lesson to others.¹

When Ibn Saud started using some modern inventions in Mecca, such as the telephone and bicycle, the *ikhwan* denounced it. The bicycle in their view moves by the force of magic and is an act of Satan by the token if the rider gets down off it, it does not stop, and they call it "Satan's carriage" or "the carriage of Eblis". It happened once that a servant of Ibn Saud was riding his bicycle and going on an errand when one of the *ikhwan* intercepted and beat him.

When Ibn Saud ordered to stretch telephone cables between Mecca and his camp outside it, the *ikhwan* kept cutting the cables in the pretext the telephone was an abomination.² Ibn Saud was forced to postpone the stretching of the cable for several weeks, and he kept trying to convince them that the telephone was not made by Satan by the token it transfers verses of the Holy Qur'an when it receives them, knowing that Satan flees from the recitation of the Qur'an, according to their belief. They were finally convinced of the soundness of his statement, and the cables were stretched.³

¹ Armstrong (Op. Cit.), pp. 199-200.

² Hafiz Wahba (Op. Cit.), p. 293.

³ Khair ad-Din al-Zurakli (Op. Cit.), Vol. 2, p. 742.



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