

# DECONSTRUCTING WAHHĀBISM

BILAL IRFAN

## Introduction

When addressing the rise of Wahhābism, particularly its distinction from the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence, one must dive into the prevailing narratives that were propagated by the former that enabled it take to this new identity. In the contemporary era,<sup>1</sup> many Wahhābis self-identify as Salafis,<sup>2</sup> due to the negative connotations associated with the former term in alleged links to extremism or fundamentalism.<sup>3</sup> Some have chosen to label it (the movement) as the *Najdi Dawah*,<sup>4</sup> in the view that Muslims should not use the word “Wahhābi”

---

1. Lacey, *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Sa'ud*, 56.

2. House, *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines and Future*, 150. Some scholars contend that the term “Wahhābi” is also used by people for self-identification. See Metz, Helen. 1992. *Saudi Arabia: A Country Study*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.

3. MacFarquhar, *A Few Saudis Defy a Rigid Islam to Debate Their Own Intolerance*.

(Wahhābi-inspired xenophobia dominates religious discussion in a way not found elsewhere in the Islamic world. Bookshops in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, for example, sell a 1,265-page souvenir tome that is a kind of “greatest hits” of fatwas on modern life. It is strewn with rulings on shunning non-Muslims: don’t smile at them, don’t wish them well on their holidays, don’t address them as “friend”. A fatwa from Sheik Muhammad bin Othaimen, whose funeral last year attracted hundreds of thousands of mourners, tackles whether good Muslims can live in infidel lands. The faithful who must live abroad should “harbor enmity and hatred for the infidels and refrain from taking them as friends”, it reads in part.); DeLong-Bas, *Wahhābi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 124. (“Wahhābism has become such a blanket term for any Islamic movement that has an apparent tendency toward misogyny, militantism, extremism, or strict and literal interpretation of the Quran and hadith.”)

4. Commins, *The Wahhābi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 41 (“Official Egyptian correspondence expressed sectarian hostility to the Najdi reform movement”); Ibid., 141. (“Nevertheless, significant differences separate the Najdi movement from the modern revivalist agenda because the former stemmed from Muhammad ibn Ad al-wahhab’s distinctive views on doctrine, whereas the

---

**Contact:** Bilal Irfan <birfan@umich.edu>

in a derogatory sense, as is prevalent,<sup>5</sup> due to its similarity with the name of Allah (al-Wahhāb).<sup>6</sup> Wahhābi is used as an identifying feature, thus, for those Salafis who may call themselves “simply Muslim” (*muslimūn*) or rightly guided monotheists (*muwahhidūn*)<sup>7</sup> and, at times, are self-proclaimed to be within the parameters of the Ḥanbalī *madhhab* (a school of thought) in matters related to *fiqh* (Islamic law), which, according to critics, follow the teachings of Muhammad ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb.<sup>8</sup> The 18th-century preacher and theologian articulated a drastically different approach,<sup>9</sup> constituting a separate school of thought, in regard to methodology, the use and parameters of *qiyās*,<sup>10</sup> *ijtihād*,<sup>11</sup> and *ijmā*,<sup>12</sup> from the Ḥanbalī school they claim to be members of and the other three major Sunnī schools of *fiqh*.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Wahhābism could be classified as being akin to a new *madhhab*, though such a label would find critics among Wahhābis.<sup>14</sup> Despite their internal resistance, they would fall under the paradigm of a *madhhab*, on account of either their belief of following only the true literalist words of the

---

Muslim Brothers were a reaction against European domination and cultural invasion.”); *Ibid.*, 152. (“The Wahhābi leadership of the World Muslim League made it an instrument for exporting the Najdi doctrine.”); *Ibid.*, 204. (“The present debate signifies that the Najdi mission has become part of a globalized Muslim discourse.”); Qadhi, *On Salafī Islam*, 3.

5. Bilal Philips, *The Evolution of Fiqh (Islamic Law & The Madh-habs)*, 135. (“As a corollary to these beliefs, it has been stated that anyone who dares openly to deny the infallibility of all four Madh-habs or the obligation to follow one to these Madh-habs is considered an accursed innovator and apostate. In the 20th century the most commonly used epithet for describing such an apostate has been the label Wahhābi.”)

6. Qadhi, *On Salafī Islam*, 3.

7. Glasse, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, 469. (“Adherents . . . prefer to call themselves Muhwahhidun (Unitarians). However, this name is not often used, as [it] is associated with other completely different sects extant and defunct.”); Mattar et.al., *The Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa*. (“Definition of Muwahhidun: The movement was started by a religious scholar from Najd (Saudi Arabia), Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), schooled by ulama (Islamic clergy) in what is now Iraq, Iran, and the Hijaz (western Arabia).”); Lacey, *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Sa’ud*, 56.

8. See, for example, Sulaymān ibn ‘Abdi’l-Wahhāb’s critique of his brother’s teachings, *Al-Ṣawā’iq al-ilāhiyyah fī al-radd ‘alā al-Wahhābiyyah*, as quoted in Zargar, *Origins of Wahhābism from Hanbali Fiqh*, 66.

9. De Bellaigue, *Cairo*, 15–16.

10. Deductive analogy.

11. Independent legal reasoning.

12. Scholarly consensus.

13. The Shāfi‘ī, Mālikī, and Ḥanafī schools are considered (alongside the Ḥanbalī) to constitute Sunni Islam per the 2005 Amman Message.

14. Bederka, *Wahhābism and Boko Haram*. (“Followers of Wahhābism will always agree that they are Sunni Muslims, but emphatically reject the label of ‘Wahhābist’. [. . .] Calling them Wahhābis implies that they learned ideas from a man—Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab—instead of the Qur’an and Sunnah, the two great sources of Islam.”); Wiktorowicz, *Anatomy of the Salafī Movement*, 235; Qamar, *Wahhābism, Understanding the Roots and Role Models of Islamic Extremism*.

salaf (the pious predecessors) or their apparent reliance on *taqlīd*.<sup>15</sup> What sets them apart from the traditional four schools of fiqh, or *madhhabs*, is the implicit,<sup>16</sup> and at times explicit, rejection of the authority and the legitimacy of the other *madhhabs*.<sup>17</sup> Much of the early focus of Ibn Wahnāb's teachings, ascertained by the numerous books he wrote on the subject,<sup>18</sup> had been on condemning the practices that many Muslims conducted during their visitation of the graves of saints, companions, or prophets. His view was radically different from the consensus of preceding Islamic jurists, given he considered practices such as kissing or wiping graves to be actions of a people who are astray from the truth. He went so far as to pass *takfīr* on those who sought aid of any kind from a deceased saint or prophet,<sup>19</sup> considering them to have left the fold and protection of Islam and thereby deserving of death. Crucially, this was a violent chain of thought, in that it utilized certain non-violent actions to justify the classification of another recognized Muslim to be an apostate. This position was in stark contrast to the consensus established by the other four schools of fiqh and the Ḥanbalī school that many Wahnābis claim to be members of. However, there needs to be a concentrated attempt at analyzing the development of the stances on Ziyārah by Ḥanbalī and other Muslim jurists who paved the way for this blanket *takfīr* passing.

Naturally, it comes to mind the underlying reasons and methods as to how and why Ibn 'Abdu'l-Wahnāb was able to amass a following to propagate his view on the essence of *tawhīd*.<sup>20</sup> It would be a mischaracterization to claim that this remote Najdi scholar went about to formulate new categories of Islamic theology (apart from hailing within the Athari creed) that may have caused further controversy. Rather, the inauguration of debate centered around his person, and ideas stemmed from how rigid and unbending they were in practice and interpretation. They shattered the confines of what it meant to be truly Muslim, with

---

15. For all the criticism leveled by Wahnābi scholars against the followers of the four schools of Sunni fiqh for considering their scholars near-infallible, many Wahnābis have been noted to consider the words of scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn 'Abdu'l-Wahnāb, and contemporary Al-Fawzan (and their interpretations) to be supreme in Islamic law.

16. Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, 57. ("The Wahnābis used to label themselves *al-Muslimun* (the Muslims) or *al-Muwahhidun* (the monotheists), intimating that those who did not accept their creed were neither Muslims nor monotheists")

17. Algar, *Wahnābism: A Critical Essay*, 1–2. (Wahnābis themselves prefer the titles *al-Muwahhidun* or *Ahl al-Tauhid*, "the asserters of the divine unity". But precisely this self-awarded title springs from a desire to lay exclusive claim to the principle of *tawhīd* that is a foundation of Islam itself; it implies a dismissal of all other Muslims as tainted by *shirk*. There is no reason to acquiesce in this assumption of a monopoly, and because the movement in question was ultimately the work of one man, Muhammad b. abdal-Wahnāb it is reasonable as well as conventional to speak of "Wahnābism" and Wahnābis.)

18. See *Kitabul-Kabair* (The Book of Great Sins).

19. To excommunicate a person from the fold of Islam, to label them a *Kafir* (disbeliever).

20. Oneness of God.

the collateral effects of this line of questioning being reminiscent of the early days of Islam.

Something that Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb frequently decried was that a large chunk of Muslims during his time and preceding him had all but left the fold of Islam, due to their failure in professing true *tawhīd* given their reliance on saints and righteous figures to intercede on their behalf. He makes a case akin to that of Ibn al-Qayyim, who was far more willing to make *takfir* than many of his contemporaries, on the basis of the veneration of Sunnī mystics and saints, the belief of intercession, and reliance on objects and praises for protection. Ibn Suḥaym penned a famous epistle to Muslim jurists, scholarly figures and the public,<sup>21</sup> wherein he narrates some of the perceived innovations that the Wahhābi sect has brought about,<sup>22</sup> including the claim that Muslims have ceased to be members of the Islamic community for over six centuries.<sup>23</sup> Yet, Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb’s understanding of *tawhīd* ran parallel in many ways to the Taymiyyan understanding where it was separated largely into two distinct categories, one being the belief of the existence of one and only God and the other consisting of the actions and unequivocally of God’s nature, power, and might that cannot be manifested or by human means.

The militant groups in the recent era that lay their claim to power and spiritual and political authority cite scripture and Ibn Taymiyya extensively as the backdrop toward presenting a justification to other members of the Sunnī Muslim community. A completely baffling problem presents itself regarding the role of Ibn Taymiyya in shaping Wahhābist ideology or militantism, given that Muhammad ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb frequently draws upon Ibn Taymiyya as the source and credibility for his arguments, especially when labeled to be one without formal knowledge or scholarship. His Ḥanbalī opponents have often asserted that he misunderstood and misrepresented, at times deliberately, Ibn Taymiyya’s positions on key issues. Interestingly enough, his Shāfi‘ī opponents have no qualms about grouping him with Ibn Taymiyya, forwarding the notion that such heretical ideas have their roots in an already-defamed and distrusted theologian in Ash‘arī circles.

Ibn Taymiyya’s famous *fatwā*,<sup>24</sup> which stipulated the legality of declaring *takfir* on the Mongols for alleged apostasy and failing to hold on to the tenets of Islam, has been used systematically to justify a call to arms against Sunnī Muslim governments that fail to follow a specific, rigid interpretation of Islamic law and are viewed as having been corrupted by Western customs. Although much of these underpinnings became vital to the propagation of Wahhābism, including

---

21. *ilā man yaṣīlu ilayhi min ‘ulamā’ al-Muslimīn.*

22. *min bida’ihī waḍalālātihī.*

23. *al-nās min sitt mi’at sana laysū ‘alā shay’*

24. A legal opinion made by a muftī or a high-ranking Muslim jurist.

the “defense” of the Saudi state,<sup>25</sup> the political implications of Ibn Taymiyya’s works were not the foundational basis of Muhammad ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb’s message. In his eyes, the duration since the final revelation gave more room for heresy and deviation from the correct method to worship God, as displayed by the daily occurrence of the visitation of graves and the veneration of saints, which was considered to be impeding upon the meaning of being a Muslim, one who submits. *Iqtidā’ al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm li-mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm* (Requiring the Straight Way against the Adherents of Hellfire), penned by Ibn Taymiyya, serves as the much sought out scholarly justification for Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb to advance his *takfir* on his contemporary Muslims, be they laymen or those in positions of authority, for failing to quell what he considered to be manifestly un-Islamic practices. This paved the way for the ensuing struggle between proponents and detractors of Wahhābism who attempted to frame their understandings of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya’s works.

Muhammad ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb reopened a contentious topic regarding the right to refer to the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* directly, paving the way for even more scholarly feuds and dissenting opinions. It crossed the confines of scholarship, oral and written arguments, into one that engulfed the livelihood of every Muslim in a world fragmented across social and political boundaries in an attempt to ascertain what constituted *tawḥīd* and *shirk*.

## Taymiyyan Origins

Muhammad ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb definitely gained a wide breadth of interaction with the works and interpretations of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya due to his origins in Najd. The region, which has remained poorly defined, stayed largely out of the clutches of Ottoman sovereignty for the better part of the second millennium. Ḥanafī jurists maintained formidable control over Ottoman functionaries, given it was the preferred *madhhab* for many governments, in part due to its flexibility and emphasis on public welfare in making judgments. However, in the midst of inner Arabia, Ḥanbalī thought remained as the predominant force in matters of jurisprudence and theology, dated to as early as the 8th/14th century.<sup>26</sup> Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya were considered great figures in scholarly circles in al-Aḥsā’ and Najd, and thus, Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb’s perceived mischaracterization of their

25. It is abundantly clear that the various incarnations of the Saudi state spearheaded by members of the eponymous dynasty have conducted offensive operations under the guise of defending true Islam.

26. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Shuqayr, “al-Madhhab al-Ḥanbalī fi Najd: dirāsa tārikhiyya,” al-Dāra 28 (1423/2002): 71–102, esp. 92–93, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 113.

opinions was shut down by many Ḥanbalī contemporaries of the era. Although geographic proximity definitely did play a role in the refutations made against Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb’s ideas, its relevance in terms of whose duty it fell to curtail this thought process was also present. Much of the early refutations to Wahhābism seem to have origins in Shāfi‘ī or Ḥanbalī critics, which can be attributed to some of the historical narratives surrounding Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb’s messages. Shāfi‘īs had faced a plethora of issues in tackling Ibn Taymiyya’s rejection of the authority of Ash‘arī theology and viewed him with much distrust in terms of his ability to handle issues pertaining to the classical traditions of Sunnī Islam. His views on the veneration of saints were a serious point of contention for other Sunnī scholars, relegating him a position of noteworthy mention while living in much infamy until the rise of contemporary Wahhābism. Many Ḥanbalīs, however, recognized the pivotal role Ibn Taymiyya played in reshaping their school of jurisprudence and lending it an authority to talk on a wide range of issues and thus were quick to rebut much of Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb’s preaching. Due to the minority position that the Ḥanbalī school occupied for much of the better part of Islamic history, many of its jurists began to shift the internal consensus to accept methods of ruling that were accepted by the other schools of fiqh. In that vein, criticism of Ibn Taymiyya’s ideas can be found in abundance in Ḥanbalī texts, yet he was viewed with a sense of awe and esteem. Such was the compelling force for Ibn ‘Afāliq, who practiced as an expert of his school in the territory of al-Aḥsā’, to bandwagon with other Ḥanbalī scholars in guarding Ibn Taymiyya and his student’s legacy, even if it meant essentially repudiating the tone of his earliest refutation of Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb, which highlighted Taymiyya’s erred views on Ṣūfī saints.<sup>27</sup>

Al-Qabbānī remained one of the most steadfast opponents of Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb, which can easily be attributed to his Shāfi‘ī allegiance and established negative perception of Ibn Taymiyya. In an open message addressed to Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb, he accuses him of being led astray by Ibn Taymiyya and being guided by his reprehensible views on *tawassul* (a means to obtain something by, in this case favor with God) and *istighātha* (seeking out the dead for assistance).<sup>28</sup> He claims that Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb has made the egregious error of following suit in Ibn Taymiyya’s positions that were among his most volatile and highly critiqued.<sup>29</sup> It is equally clear that al-Qabbānī makes no effort to

27. Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 114.

28. al-Qabbānī, *Faṣl al-khiṭāb*, f. 104a, (“*imāmuka wa-muqtadāka* (your leader and your guide)”), as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 114.

29. There is frequent mention in *Faṣl al-khiṭāb* denoting that Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb had conducted what constituted reprehensible imitation (*al-taqlīd al-radī*). See, for example, *ibid.*, f. 52b (four instances); *idem*, *Kashf al-ḥijāb*, ff. 107b (two instances), 109b (two instances), as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 115.; *fa-min al-ma’lūm alladhī lā miryata fīhi annaka qalladta ‘bn Taymiyya fimā ‘addathu asāfīn al-‘ulamā’ al-a’lām ‘an [read: min] hafawātihi wa-khurāfātihi wa-tabi’tahu fī maqālatihi*

hide his disdain for the perceived crime Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb had committed, by making mention of how Ibn Taymiyya was excommunicated from the fold of Islam by numerous scholars of the highest authority of this time.<sup>30</sup> It was done no doubt to make it clear to the public audience of scholarship and others that Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb’s actions of *takfīr* passing, more or less, made him too a prime victim of it in this circular paradigm. Yet, al-Qabbānī’s criticism for Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb was not only reserved to the realm of refutation and attributing Ibn Taymiyya’s heretical ideas to this new preacher but also crossed the boundaries into an attack on his academic and scholarly standing. This is apart from the long-established tradition-like critiques of Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb’s peculiar lack of education in matters of complex fiqh and theology. He launches a claim that Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb copied verbatim proofs, textual evidence, and phrases from a *fatwā* of Ibn Taymiyya.<sup>31</sup> In attempting to draw a comparison between the *Kalimāt* published by Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb and the *Majmū’ fatāwā*, al-Qabbānī makes it clear to the learned audience of Ibn Taymiyya’s works that he has not done an extremely thorough check into what actually constituted Ibn Taymiyya’s preaching.<sup>32</sup> For if he had, he would have recognized perhaps quite quickly that the parallelisms he drew between Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb’s epistle were tangential to say the least. Thematic similarities cannot be ignored, but rephrasing and the expanding upon the ideas could not be classified easily as simply the sort of copy-pasting al-Qabbānī was alleging. Of course, given Ibn Taymiyya’s glory was largely confined to the Ḥanbalī school, al-Qabbānī’s knowledge of him was based upon many of the refutations of Ibn Taymiyya or those by other refuters of Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb who drew a similar comparison.<sup>33</sup> Al-Qabbānī was clearly driven by a sense of extreme hatred for the likes of Ibn Taymiyya and those who shared his doctrines, claiming that the numerous

---

*’l-shanī’a allatī šarraha mashāyikh al-Islām bi-annahu lā yanbaghī dhikruhā* (“It is absolutely clear that you [i.e., Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb] have emulated Ibn Taymiyya in what the most distinguished scholars counted among his faults and his fictions. You have followed him in this abominable doctrine of his that the scholars of Islam declared to be unmentionable.”), *al-Qabbānī, Faṣl al-khiṭāb, f. 52b*, as quoted in, *Bunzel, Manifest Enmity*, 96.

30. *min hafawātihi ’llatī lā yanbaghī dhikruhā . . . qālū bi-kufrihi bi-sababihi* (“one of his unmentionable faults . . . because of it they called for his excommunication.”), *ibid.*, ff. 108b-109a; cf. *idem, Faṣl al-khiṭāb, f. 52b.*, as quoted in, *Bunzel, Manifest Enmity*, 115.

31. It is considered one of his canonical *fatwās* and can be found even in the famous collection of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings known as *Majmū’ fatāwā*.

32. Compare al-Qabbānī, *Faṣl al-khiṭāb*, ff. 31b, 45a and Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū’ fatāwā*, 27:77, 82, respectively, as quoted in, *Bunzel, Manifest Enmity*, 116.

33. Within al-Qabbānī’s criticism of Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb, in attempts to prove similar doctrines between Ibn Taymiyya and the new preacher, he quotes extensively from the refutations by Shāfi’ī scholars, such as ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Munāwī, Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī. Despite Shāfi’ī taking the lead in anti-Taymiyyan rhetoric at the time, a Ḥanafī scholar such as Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī has influenced al-Qabbānī’s refutation.

refutations of Ibn Taymiyya was only a positive thing and something merited on account of the preaching that he and his pupils conducted.<sup>34</sup> He frequently bands together Ibn Taymiyya and his contemporary followers into a group worthy of condemnation,<sup>35</sup> as well as those emulating him to this day.<sup>36</sup> In one such remark, he laments that no one would be worthy to be saved on the Day of Resurrection save for Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb and Ibn Taymiyya, as well as those few, 12 in all,<sup>37</sup> who do follow him. Nevertheless, al-Qabbānī cannot be said to have been completely blinded by his dislike for Ibn Taymiyya, given that he acknowledged at times the differences in the approach, whereby Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb was labeled as even more extreme in *takfīr* passing. Without going into length at it, he was able to note that the new movement, in essence, declared *tawassul* and *istighātha* as acts of *kufr* that made one leave the fold of Islam.<sup>38</sup> Yet, for al-Qabbānī, similar to his peer Ibn ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, Ibn Taymiyya was still the source to blame at the bottom.<sup>39</sup> To draw too much on the differences between the two doctrines would not assist the claims being made by these scholars, as their goal was to draw kinship between someone who was already despised in their circles and the ideas of Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb. It can be inferred that Ibn ‘Abd al-Laṭīf considers it a noble quality, one worthy of praise and a display of excellence, to go out of one’s way to refute Ibn Taymiyya’s doctrines in whatever form it takes. He refers to the contemporaries of Ibn Taymiyya who worked earnestly to refute him as “the leading lights and stars of his time,” whose bright rays evidently shine through to have compelled Ibn ‘Abd al-Laṭīf to author a refutation.<sup>40</sup>

34. al-Qabbānī, *Kashf al-hijāb*, f. 215b, (“*wa-hurwa haqīq bi-dhālika* (He [i.e., Ibn Taymiyya] deserves it)”), as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 117.

35. al-Qabbānī, *Kashf al-hijāb*, f. 122a, (“*Ibn Taymiyya wa-talāmidhatuhu* (Ibn Taymiyya and his students)”), as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 117.

36. al-Qabbānī, *Faṣl al-khiṭāb*, f. 122, (“*Ibn Taymiyya wa-man qalladahu* (Ibn Taymiyya and his emulators)”), as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 117.

37. See Bunzel’s comment on this at length explaining the number 12, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 117. (“Why the number twelve is not clear to me.” The comment is surrounded by quotations from several *ḥadīth*, describing how the Prophet will lead mankind to Paradise on the Day of Judgment. Al-Qabbānī accuses Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb of seeing himself in this prophetic role. For these *ḥadīth*, see Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, ed. Muḥammad Rawwās Qal‘ajī and ‘Abd al-Barr ‘Abbās, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā’is, 1406/1986), 1:65–66, nos. 23–25. Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb seems to refer to this comment in one of his letters, saying of al-Qabbānī, “He writes in his work that he only opposes in his work Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim, and ten others, I being the tenth of them, and the total being twelve” (*wa-yaqūlu fī taṣnīfihi innahu lam yukhālif fī taṣnīfihi illā ‘bn Taymiyya wa ‘bn al-Qayyim wa-‘ashara anā ‘ashiruhum wa ‘l-jamī’ ithnā ‘ashar*). See Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh*, 1:425 (letter to Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm). The comment is noted in Cook, “Origins of Wahhābism,” 20087.)

38. *zidta ‘alayhi bi-kawon al-tawassul wa ‘l-istighātha kufran qāṭi ‘an lil-Islam* (“you have surpassed him in making *tawassul* and *istighātha* an act of unbelief terminating one’s Islam.”), *Kashf al-hijāb*, f. 108b, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 118.

39. al-Qabbānī, *Faṣl al-khiṭāb*, f. 23b, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 118.

40. *wa-lā yughtarra bi-man istanada ilayhi ḥādḥā ‘l-jāhil al-kāri’ min al-jahālāt fī murr [read: amarr] almanāhil mithl Ibn Taymiyya wa-man naḥā naḥwahu . . . fa-aṭlaqa a ‘imma a ‘lām fīhi ‘l-alsina . . . ‘ulamā’*



‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Aḥmad Barakāt al-Ṭandatāwī, another Shāfi‘ī scholar, in his *Kitāb rad‘ al-dalāla wa-qam‘ al-jahāla*, goes about mentioning one short of a dozen well-known jurists of the four schools of Sunnī Islam, making mention of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn al-Jawzī as prominent figures in the Ḥanbalī school.<sup>41</sup> Al-Ṭandatāwī is notably different from many of the early Shāfi‘ī refuters of Wahhābism, in that he does not go out of his way to condemn Ibn Taymiyya, as some of the other scholars hailing from modern-day Iraq did.

It is interesting to note that many later Shāfi‘ī critics of Wahhābism seem to rely on juristic and theological viewpoints held by their schools and the Ash‘arīs to counter this new form of Aṭharī-based textualism. It is attributable, in part, due to the staunch defenses of Ibn Taymiyya presented by Ḥanbalī scholars who render the likes of Sayyid al-‘Alawi ibn Ahmad ibn Hasan ibn ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Alawi al-Ḥaddād and al-Rāwī to not draw as many similarities between Taymiyyan and Wahhābist philosophy.<sup>42</sup> Al-Ḥaddād authored *Miswabah al-Anam wa Jala‘ az-Zalam fi Radd Shubah al-Bid‘i an-Najdi allati Adalla biha al-‘Awamm* in 1325/1907 and does not expand upon a corrupt Taymiyyan undertone.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Ahmad ibn Zayni ad-Dahlan who served as Grand Mufti of Mecca authored a treatise known as *Fitnat al-Wahhābiyya* in 1878 and did not mention the Taymiyyan influence in this famous work nor at length in the chapter regarding the *fitna* of Wahhābism in *Khulaswat al-Kalam fi Bayan Umara‘ al-Balad al-Haram*.<sup>44</sup>

While Ḥanafī and Mālīkī refuters who were contemporaries of Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb were scarce, Ḥanbalī jurists from Najd and inner Arabia were relentless. They spoke with a similar vehemence over the alleged misreading and misrepresentations of Ibn Taymiyya’s works, with his own brother Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb being a vocal critic of him till his region came under Wahhābi influence and he was prosecuted into silence. He claims that his brother plucked what he wanted from Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim’s works to apply how he pleased to his own doctrinal advancement. Something worth mentioning is that in *al-Ṣawā‘iq al-ilāhiyya*, he does not explicitly state the names

---

*‘aṣrihi wa-maṣābiḥ al-wujūd wa-nujūm ‘aṣrihi alzamū ‘l-sulṭān bi-qatlihi aw qahrihi fa-ḥubisa ilā mawtihi* (“One should not be misled by those relied on by this ignorant man, who laps up follies in the bitterest pools, such as Ibn Taymiyya and those following him . . . Eminent scholars unleashed their tongues against him . . . The scholars of his time, and the leading lights and stars of his time, prevailed upon the sultan either to kill or coerce him, and he was imprisoned till his death.”), quoted in al-Nuwaysir, *Mu‘araḍa*, 221, as quoted in Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 118.

41. *Rad‘ al-Dalāla wa-Qam‘ al-Jahāla*, 19a, as quoted in, Traboulsi, *An Early Refutation of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s Reformist Views*, 385.

42. al-Ḥaddād addressed here is the great-grandson of Abd Allah ibn ‘Alawi al-Ḥaddād, the famous Yemeni scholar.

43. See name translation, *The Lamp of Creatures and the Illumination of Darkness Concerning the Refutation of the Errors of the Innovator from Najd by Which He Had Misled the Common People*.

44. See name translation, *The Wahhābi Fitna, The Summation Concerning the Leaders of the Holy Sanctuary*.

of the aforementioned scholars, but the context allows for it to be read so that one can infer that.<sup>45</sup> Respect for Ibn Taymiyya can be seen through the reference to Ibn Taymiyya as a *Shaykh al-Islām* in a number of Ḥanbalī refutations, with Ibn ‘Afāliq considering Ibn al-Qayyim to be among the greatest scholars of the Islamic tradition in his letter to ‘Uthmān ibn Mu‘ammar.<sup>46</sup> Ibn ‘Afāliq further writes in an open message to the aforementioned individual that he will go about to explain the true meaning of the words of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim due to how badly distorted they have become under Muhammad ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb. He accuses Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb of simply finding whatever in a certain chapter of Ibn Taymiyya’s works he likes to adopt, while disregarding the rest including any peculiar points or restrictions on the unfiltered mode,<sup>47</sup> in a quest to make *takfīr* easier upon all. Among the students of Ibn Fayrūz was a particular Najdi known as Al-Razīnī who embarks on the practice of name-calling Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb with epithets, such as *tāghūt*, in explaining how he has lulled a large chunk of people to misrepresent Ibn Taymiyya and his student’s works.<sup>48</sup>

*Tāghūt* has been used in Islamic discourse to talk about a tyrant or someone who has reached the pinnacle of oppression and cruelty. It has been used to refer to those who worship beings or ideas other than God, leading people astray from the height of their power. It has been said to be a creature who commits the crime of rebelling against God and then defying his will. While its Arabic

45. *akhadhtum min qawlihim mā jāza lakum dūn ghayrihi* (“You have taken from their words what is agreeable to you to the exclusion of what is not.”), Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *al-Ṣawā’iq al-ilāhiyya*, 6, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 119.

46. *iftarā ‘alā ahl al-‘ilm*, Ibn ‘Afāliq, *Risāla II*, f. 54b, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 119.

47. *wa ‘lladhī awqa‘a hādihā ‘l-rajul fī hādhihi ‘l-warta al-‘azīma annahu yanzuru fī kutub Ibn al-Qayyim faya ‘khudhu minhā mā wāfaqa hawāhu wa-yatruku mā khālafahu wa-ya ‘khudhu min awal al-faṣl wayatruku ākhirahu wa-nadhkuru lakum jumlat kalām Ibn al-Qayyim wa-shaykhihi ‘bn Taymiyya li-ta ‘lamū anna ‘bn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ḡalla wa-aḡalla* (“What brought this man into this terrible abyss is that he looks at the books of Ibn al-Qayyim and takes from them what suits his fancy, disregarding what contradicts it; he takes from the beginning of a chapter and disregards the end of it. We will relate for you the entirety of Ibn al-Qayyim’s words and those of his teacher, Ibn Taymiyya, so that you know that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb has gone astray and led [others] astray.”), idem, *Risāla I*, ff. 45b-46a, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 119.

48. *fa-yā ‘ibād Allāh hādihā ‘l-tāghūt fatana ba ‘ḍ al-nās bi-kalām hādhayn al-shaykhayn fī awal amrihi yajidu lahumā min al-kalām mā huwa madhkūr fī ‘l-Jahm ibn Ṣafwān wa-Bishr al-Marīsī wa-atbā ‘ihimā min al-Jahmiyya wa ‘l-Mu ‘tazila wa-yaqra ‘uhu ‘alā hā ‘ulā ‘i ‘l-juhhāl al-‘awāmm ‘indahū fa-yazunnūna annahu ya ‘nī ahl al-sunna fa-fatānahum bihi ‘an dīnihim fa-yuḡammilū kalāmahumā mā lā yaḡtamilū*, *al-Bassām* (“O servants of God, this *tāghūt* misled a number of people with the words of these two shaykhs early on. He would find words of theirs that were uttered in respect of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān and Bishr al-Marīsī, 87 and their followers from among the Jahmiyya and the Mu ‘tazila, reciting this to those ignorant commoners round about him so they would think that the Sunnīs were intended by it. Thus he led them away from their religion, causing their words to carry a meaning that they do not bear.”), “Min asbāb al-mu ‘ārāḍa,” 39 (transcription), 74 (manuscript photo), as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 120.

three-letter root origins amounting to one who crosses limits are likely,<sup>49</sup> certain Orientalists have offered an alternative explanation by claiming it comes from the Ethiopic word *amlāka gēbt* (strange, foreign god), derived from the Greek *theos prospatos*,<sup>50</sup> allegedly used by some to describe a false deity other than Allah.<sup>51</sup> It is mentioned eight times in the Qur'ān<sup>52</sup> and was used before the advent of Islam to refer to high deities in the pagan culture, including *al-Lāt* and *al-'Uzzā*.<sup>53</sup> To date, it has been used to describe individuals who are considered apostates or are holding on to a dogmatic ideology that oppresses others.<sup>54</sup>

The fact that Al-Razīnī employed this word to describe his scholarly opponent is reminiscent of the days of the critiques of Ibn Taymiyya. He seems to have failed to recognize that even Ibn Taymiyya did commit the heinous evil he casts Ibn 'Abdu'l-Wahhāb as having done, which is decrying one's opponents as Jahmiyya or Mu'tazila. To be clear, Ibn Taymiyya frequently considered his opponents to be the followers of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān and Bishr al-Marīsī, perhaps not truly so but as an epithet to discredit whosever's views he did not favor. Both figures were controversial in the prevailing consensus of Sunnī Islam, with the Mu'tazila being sponsored by numerous Abbasid Caliphs and leading to clashes with many of the prominent scholars of their time. To date, many whose doctrines are inspired by Taymiyyan philosophy utilize the term Jahmī to cast other Sunnīs as having gravely erred.<sup>55</sup> Yet Al-Razīnī's view on the matter was not without opposition, as Ibn 'Afāliq was of the opinion that no deliberate misrepresentation had occurred. Ḥanbalī scholars were keen to take this approach, as evidenced by Ibn Dāwūd essentially stating that Ibn 'Abdu'l-Wahhāb was simply in another valley in relation to Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim.<sup>56</sup> The independent reading exercised by Ibn 'Abdu'l-Wahhāb was viewed by Ibn al-Amīr al-Ṣan'ānī of Yemen as having opened the door to misreading and misrepresentations of the works of the earlier scholars<sup>57</sup> and that the lack of scholarly guidance to this young preacher led to him adopting whatever fit of Taymiyyan doctrines into his views despite its blind emulation being disliked.<sup>58</sup>

49. Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture*, 55.

50. Bellamy, *A Textual Criticism of the Koran*, 3.

51. A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 100, as quoted in, Bellamy, *A Textual Criticism of the Koran*, 3.

52. See Qur'ān, 4:51, 2:256, 4:76, 2:257, 4:60, 5:60, 16:36, 39:17.

53. Fahd and Stewart, *Tāghūt*.

54. Zahid, *Deconstructing Thoughts and Worldviews of Militant Ideologue Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai*, 9; Othman Alkaff, *Using Theology to Legitimise Jihadist Radicalism*, 7; Parvez, *The Khilafah's Soldiers in Bengal*, 7, 9.

55. Özervarli, *The Qur'anic Rational Theology of Ibn Taymiyya and His Criticism of the Mutakallimun*.

56. Ibn Dāwūd, *al-Ṣawā'iq wa'l-ru'ūd*, f. 39b, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 121.

57. al-Amīr, *Irshād*, 108, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 121.

58. *wa-ghālib mā a' mā 'ayn baṣīratihi wa-awqa'ahu fi zayghihī wa-hayratihi kutub Ibn Taymiyya wa'bn alQayyim fa-innahu 'ntahala 'l-muṭāla'a fihā min ghayr 'ilm wa-lā baṣīra wa-lā shaykh wa-lā dirāya*

It is evidently clear to many early critics of Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb that Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim’s ideas have played a central role in shaping his thought. Taymiyyan ideology was placed on a pedestal, considered foolproof and almost as evidence itself. Muḥammad ibn Ḥumayd, the *muftī* of Mecca, who served during the 13th/19th century, claimed within his biographical dictionary of a Ḥanbalī nature that Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb was unwilling to even accept differing interpretations of texts produced by the aforementioned scholars if it contradicted his own doctrinal view.<sup>59</sup>

Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb himself did not go to any lengths to hide his admiration for Ibn Taymiyya and his students. He went at length on praising them, claiming to not be calling people to follow a specific school of jurisprudence but that he looks up to the likes of Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Dhahabī, and Ibn Kathīr.<sup>60</sup> In addition, Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb praises Ibn Rajab for taking a steadfast position in condemning the practices of much of the masses.<sup>61</sup> Their frequent condemnation of actions being ascribed as polytheism was looked favorably upon, with Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb making frequent attempts to shore up his credibility by claiming to be following in the footsteps of some of the best scholars who arose in later generations.<sup>62</sup>

It is definitely worth exploring the life of Taqī ad-Dīn ‘Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Numayrī al-Ḥarrānī, otherwise known as Ibn Taymiyya, who lived in the mid-13th century to early 14th century and arose as a jurist and theologian from the Ḥanbalī school. He spent a large portion of his life in Damascus, with much of his teachings in the Levant that spread in the Islamic world being a root cause of controversy to his person during the Mamlūk Sultanate. He was subject to a lot of criticism and refutations in his lifetime, and his name and works have rose again in the contemporary era and are often cited in

---

*munīra fa-kāna ya’khudhu minhā mā yatakḥayyaluhu muwāfiqan li-hawāhu wa-yatruku mā khālafahu* (“The thing that most blinded him and caused him to fall into his perversion and his confusion was the books of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim. He read them without knowledge or discernment, and without a teacher or clear understanding. Thus he would take from them what he imagined to be in accord with his fancies and leave aside what went against them.”), Ibn Dāwūd, *al-Ṣawā’iq wa’l-ru’ūd*, f.35b, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 121.

59. *yarā kalāmahumā naṣṣan lā yaqbalu ’l-ta’wīl*, Ibn Ḥumayd, *al-Suḥub al-wābila*, 2:678, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 122.

60. *wa-lastu . . . ad’ū ilā madhhab ṣūfī aw faqīh aw mutakallim aw imām, al-a’imma alladhīna u’azzimuhum*, Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh*, 1:248 (letter to ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Abd al-Laṭīf), as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 122.

61. *al-muta’akhhirīn, sādātuhum wa-a’immatuhum wa-a’lamuhum wa-a’baduhum wa-azhāduhum, qad ishtadda nakiruhum ’alā ahl ’aṣrihim*, Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh*, 1:248–49, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 122.

62. *sādāt al-muta’akhhirīn wa-qādatuhum, wa-kalāmuhum fī inkār ḥādḥā akthar min an yuḥṣara*, Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh*, 1:446 (letter to ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn ‘Īsā), as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 122.

theological circles. He was widely respected for his immense knowledge that spanned different genres of the Islamic sciences, with many of his critics conceding to the near-prodigy status that he had obtained. A fervent engager in the polemics and refutation culture, Ibn Taymiyya authored numerous refutations of the Mu'tazila and Shī'a, as well as other philosophers and theologians, particularly those who dabbled in *kalām*. Ibn Taymiyya received much backlash from the contemporary Sunnī scholars of the time, particularly those based in Egypt or Syria and of Ash'arī and Shāfi'ī background. As a result, he spent many years battling prison sentences and court trials, wherein he absolved himself of any deviation by claiming to follow the Qur'ān, the *sunna*, and the words and deeds of the *salaf*, that is, the earliest generation of Muslims.

In some ways, it can be noted that Ibn Taymiyya was expanding on an already-developed base of Ḥanbalī thought, which was literalist and claimed to reject speculative theology (*ilm al-kalām*, or simply *kalām*), in direct opposition to the thought processes of much of the Ḥanafī, Shāfi'ī, and Mālikī scholars who had accepted Kullābī thought via Ash'arism or the synthesized branch of Ḥanafī-Māturīdism arising from Transoxiana. Opposition to the rationalism championed by the followers of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, known as *mutakallimūn*, was led by the those known as *ahl al-ḥadīth*. This traditionalist and literalist approach was embodied within the Ḥanbalī school, who by and large stressed their following of only the Qur'ān, the *sunna*, and the *salaf*. Issues of creed were handled by blind *taqlīd* of those *salaf* that championed a literalist approach, with utter and unequivocal rejection of other forms of theological development or forms of thinking. The Ḥanbalī school, the smallest in comparison to the Ḥanafī, Shāfi'ī, and Mālikī schools, was considered synonymous with the traditionalist approach, with many recognizing its distinction as a school of law and theology. This was a largely unique feature for the Ḥanbalīs, though some have contested the Ḥanafī school that enjoyed the position of being a school of theology as well.<sup>63</sup> This was embodied in the person of Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh al-'Alawī, a Moroccan ruler who identified himself as Mālikī in matters of jurisprudence and as Ḥanbalī in matters of creed.<sup>64</sup> Within his famous work of *ḥadīth* collection, al-'Alawī goes on to describe Ḥanbalī theology as being pure, in that it refrains from indulging in the *kalām* within its paradigms and considers it to be consistent with the thinking of the major Sunnī *imāms*.<sup>65</sup> This

63. See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*.

64. al-'Alawī, *al-Futūḥāt al-ilāhiyya fī aḥādīth khayr al-bariyya*, 2nd ed. (Rabat: al-Maṭba'a al-Malakiyya, 1400/1980), 1, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 125.

65. *ṭarīq al-Ḥanābila fī 'l-i'tiqād sahlāt al-marām munazzaha 'an al-takhayyulāt wa 'l-awḥām muṭwāfiqa li 'l-i'tiqād al-'imma kamā sabaqa ma'a 'l-salaf al-ṣāliḥ, sadda ṭarīq al-khawḍ fī 'ilm al-kalām*, al-'Alawī, *al-Futūḥāt al-ilāhiyya fī aḥādīth khayr al-bariyya*, 2nd ed. (Rabat: al-Maṭba'a al-Malakiyya, 1400/1980), 457–58, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 125.

outlook at the Ḥanbalī school, also known as Aṭharism, was viewed by many as being free of Judeo-Christian influences that tainted the development of Kullābī thought. In the eyes of Ibn Taymiyya, dwelling into *kalām* itself was something of a heresy. He frequently cited the remarks of prominent scholars of the four major Sunnī schools of jurisprudence to back his claims, including the Ḥanafī Abū Yūsuf by asserting that the founders all in essence agreed with his view.<sup>66</sup>

It is worth analyzing Ibn Taymiyya's claim regarding the Sunnī *imāms* and the positions of the founders of the schools of jurisprudence who have been lauded by a consensus of Muslims for their great works. Al-Shāfi'ī authored two books on the subject of theology, *Tashīḥ al-Nubuwwah* (The Validation of Prophecy) and *al-Radd 'alā al-Barāhimah* (The Refutation of Brahmanism).<sup>67</sup> Despite engaging in debate with Ḥanafīs such as Bishr al-Mirīsī, he was reported to have adopted a harsher tone toward *kalām*. It is claimed he said, "If people knew the heretic tendencies *kalām* contains, they would flee from it as they do from a lion. It is better for a man to meet Allah with any sin save *shirk* than to meet Him with something of *kalām*."<sup>68</sup> Imam Mālik bin Anas is reported to have been among the first to stipulate the principle of *bilā kaiḥ*<sup>69</sup> yet did not engage in persistently harsh condemnations of *kalām* as can be seen in the case of the eponymous founder of the Ḥanbalī school. Later scholars have attributed some of these positions as reflecting views on Mu'tazila thought, which remained the predominantly articulated example of *kalām* in Islamic theology, rather than on the science of it as a whole. In al-Baghdādī's eyes, Imam Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Shāfi'ī were among the first jurists and founders of schools of jurisprudence to engage in theology.<sup>70</sup> Abū Ḥanīfa has a book attributed to him refuting the Qadarites, which is known as *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*. There is also the case of treatises, such as where he defended the view of the perceived Sunnīs at the time by declaring that one's ability to act is formulated simultaneously with action itself, in opposition to the prevailing view among the Mu'tazila, which granted the capacity to conduct an action as existing before any tangible action is taken.<sup>71</sup> It was, however, stipulated that this position could be perceived as being valid for two opposing ways, which would still fall

---

66. *man ṭalaba 'l-dīn bi'l-kalām tazandaqa* ("Whoso seeks [knowledge of] religion by means of *kalām* has become a heretic"), Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' fatāwā*, 16:473, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 126.

67. Uṣūl, p. 308, as quoted in, Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 63.

68. *Ishārāt*, p.36, as quoted in, Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 63.

69. Literally translates to "without how." It is usually used to mean "without asking how," "without knowing how or what," "without modality," "without considering how and without comparison," or "in a manner that suits His majesty and transcendence." It essentially stipulates a non-committal approach to God's attributes and essence and was used frequently in response to verses of the Qur'ān that literally translate to the face or the hand of God.

70. Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 63.

71. *Ibid.* 63–64.

under the views of the established Sunnī community at the time.<sup>72</sup> In the view of Qubaiṣah bin ‘Uqbah, Imam Abū Ḥanīfa had engaged in theological disputes with heretics to the extent that he was a renowned expert in the field of such refutations until eventually choosing to step back from that science and position his focus in the matters of jurisprudence where he became further acclaimed in.<sup>73</sup> In the case of Abū Ḥanīfa’s students, this dwelling into *kalām* only becomes significantly more evident, whose views cannot be discounted as they were integral to the shaping and early leadership of the Ḥanafī school. It is noted by Ibn al-Nadīm that a Khārijite by the name of al-Yamān bin Ribāb authored a book, titled *Kitāb al-Radd ‘alā Ḥammād b. Abī Ḥanīfa* (The Refutation of Ḥammād b. Abī Ḥanīfa), which showcased that Ḥammād definitely engaged in the *kalām* discussions to have an opponent critique his views.<sup>74</sup> Al-Shaibānī is thought to have written a book titled *‘Aqā’id al-Shaibāniyyah*, which is found in the poetic format of *Qaṣīdah Alfiyyah*, which dwells into theological matters. Despite doubts having been raised with regard to exact authorship, given that commentators from the Shāfi‘ī school seem to have engaged in this work a significant amount and that its report stems only from Ḥajjī Khalīfah,<sup>75</sup> it is still evident this displays that al-Shaibānī did at the very least engage in issues pertaining to *kalām*, even if the precise book is a compilation of his views at a later date by another Sunnī scholar.<sup>76</sup> In the case of al-Ḥasab b. Ziyād al-Lu‘lu‘ī, one finds that he authored at least two books relating to the subject of *kalām*, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt* and *Ma‘ānī al-Īmān* (Meaning of Faith).<sup>77</sup> Bishr b. Ghayyāth al-Mirīsī spent a lot of time with Abū Ḥanīfa, and following his demise with his advanced student, Abū Yūsuf. Al-Mirīsī was so involved in *kalām* that a distinct school known as al-Mirīsīyyah formed out of his views. Despite being later rejected for its Murji‘ah tendencies, views on the Qur’ān’s createdness, and the position on faith being solely an internal matter of the heart, what it does reveal is that al-Mirīsī along with other early scholars, including the *imāms* and those who studied under them, dwelled into theological matters and *kalām*.

Apart from Ibn Taymiyya’s extensive working in Islamic theology and utilizing an array of devices to defend his views, he also notably presented a new strain of thought within the Ḥanbalī approach that significantly altered the frame of thinking and responses to Ash‘arī thought, which was considered an innovation and a deviancy of sorts. Many of these alterations found a prominent place within Wahhābism. His writings are extensively filled with emphasis on establishing a rapport

72. *Uṣūl*, p. 307, as quoted in, Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 64.

73. *Manāqib*, vol. 1, p.59, as quoted in, Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 64.

74. Cf. *Fihrist*, vol. i, p.452, as quoted in, Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 64.

75. Ali, p.235, no.1., as quoted in, Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 65.

76. Cf. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, pp.122–124, as quoted in, Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 65.

77. *Fihrist*, p. 506., *Tāj*, p.22, as quoted in, Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 65.

between revelation (*naql*) and reason (*'aql*). Some have attributed the Ash'arī Universal Principle (*al-qānūn al-kullī*), as postulated by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, as constituting the notion that rational proofs must be given a higher weight in determining something in the event of a perception of conflict with proofs that have been revealed.<sup>78</sup> In attempts to refute Ash'arīs, Ibn Taymiyya broke with a long-standing tradition in Ḥanbalī thought by engaging in reason-based arguments, especially when it came to the topic of God's attributes. His bid to showcase that no conflict of any sort exists between revelation and reason can be seen in the work titled *Dar' ta'āruḍ al'aql wa'l-naql* ("Averting Conflict between Reason and Revelation"). Ibn Taymiyya advances the notion that the *fiṭra*,<sup>79</sup> which is relegated a great stature, enables one to have monotheistic inclinations and recognize God's existence due to it being an innate sense within a person.<sup>80</sup> With that train of thought, dwelling into *kalām* to prove the existence of God is considered unnecessary in Taymiyyan ideals.<sup>81</sup> Several scholars have suggested that the break with Ḥanbalī tradition by dwelling into reason-like arguments was not well received by the contemporaries of Ibn Taymiyya from among the aforementioned school. At the very least, it did not reflect the earliest sentiments of Ḥanbalī scholarship as evidenced by the statements from a strong proponent of Ḥanbalī thought, one who engaged in a lot of refutations himself, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Rajab. Located in Damascus, he was from a period slightly after Ibn Taymiyya and can be viewed as scorning the tendency to engage in disputation or arguments on such delicate topics regarding God.<sup>82</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya's view on divine creation and its relationship with free will, in terms of viewing the former as encompassing of the position and conception of the latter, as well as being with distinct purpose is sharply different from the

78. Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 127.

79. *Fiṭra* can be described as original disposition, natural constitution, or innate nature. See Encyclopedia of Islam 3, s.v. "Fiṭra" (Jon Hoover).

80. Hoover, Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy, 39–44, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 128.

81. M. Sait Özervarlı, "Divine Wisdom, Human Agency and the *fiṭra* in Ibn Taymiyya's Thought," in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law*, 37–60, at 45–54; Livnat Holtzman, "Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the *Fiṭra* Tradition: The Use of Hadith in Theological Treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, 163–88, at 165–78, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 128.

82. *al-taṣaddī li-radd kalām ahl al-bida' bi-jins kalāmihim min al-aqyisa al-kalāmiyya wa-adillat al-'uqūl . . . yakrahuhu 'l-imām Aḥmad wa-a'immat ahl al-ḥadīth . . . wa-innamā yarawna al-radd 'alayhim bi-nuṣūṣ al-kitāb wa'l-sunna wa-kalām salaf al-umma in kāna mawjūdān wa-illā ra'aw al-sukūt aslam*, Ibn Rajab, *Majmū' rasā'il al-Hāfiẓ Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī* ("The imām Aḥmad [ibn Ḥanbal] and the leaders of the ahl al-ḥadīth detested . . . refuting the innovators by partaking of their opponent's discourse, that is, the use of *kalām*-like analogies and rational proofs . . . They deemed refutation appropriate only by the texts of the Qur'ān and the sunna, and by the words of the pious ancestors, if such were to be found. Otherwise they deemed silence to be preferable."), ed. Ṭal'at ibn Fu'ād al-Ḥulwānī, 2nd ed., 5 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha 1434/2012), 2:637–38; translation borrowed from Caterina Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya *wa-Jamā'atu-hu*: Authority, Conflict and Consensus in Ibn Taymiyya's Circle," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, 23–52, at 36, with minor changes, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 128.



Ash‘arī or Ḥanbalī positions articulated previously. Ash‘arism remained a strong proponent of the doctrine of voluntarism and emphatically rejected the notion that God creates with a specific cause (‘illa) or purpose. It was stipulated that such an underlying purpose or cause formulates the implication that such a purpose or cause would need to have existed before it engages in subsisting in God. In a bid to downplay the deterministic attitudes displayed by the proposition that God creates all good and bad things, which encompasses human acts (*af‘āl*), the Ash‘arīs forwarded the doctrine of acquisition (*kasb*) wherein human beings would engage in acquiring acts, regardless of them being good or bad, immediately prior to enacting them. In this way, God’s omnipotence was affirmed while being able to comfortably reject a needed purpose to God’s acts.<sup>83</sup> On the contrary, the Ḥanbalīs at the time were known to have engaged in a literalist affirmation of passages of the Qur‘ān that dealt with matters at hand while abstaining from any inquisitive outlooks into their meanings.<sup>84</sup> Matters pertaining to creation and predestination are encapsulated in statements such as “He guides whom He wills” (*yahdī man yashā‘u*).<sup>85</sup> Ibn Taymiyya articulated a vastly different outlook on the subject, affirming that God does indeed act on behalf of a purpose that befits his wisdom (*ḥikma*), which, in turn, would render people to be responsible for their individual acts. In some accounts, it is viewed that Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim were of the view that hellfire could not be eternal, in contrast to paradise, as it would not fit the wisdom of God. Naturally, this train of thinking necessitated the use for independent interpretation of what would befit the wisdom of God.

## Conclusion

As one looks at the legacy of Muhammad ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb, it is difficult to not draw parallels with the works of Ibn Taymiyya. Perhaps what sets apart this strand of thought the most was its unapologetic approach to accepting elements of Taymiyyan thought that were different from those found in the Ḥanbalī tradition prior to that. The 14th-century scholar’s views on theology, jurisprudential issues ranging from triple talaq to the state’s role in governance, and the visitation of the

83. Özerverli, “Divine Wisdom,” 38–39; Jon Hoover, “God’s Wise Purposes in Creating Iblīs: Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah’s Theodicy of God’s Names and Attributes,” *Oriente Moderno*, Nuova Serie, Anno 90 (2010): 113–34, at 117–18, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 129.

84. Daniel Gimaret, “Théories de l’acte humain dans l’école ḥanbalite,” *Bulletin d’études orientales* 29 (1977): 157–78, at 157–61; Livnat Holtzman, “Debating the Doctrine of jabr (Compulsion): Ibn Qayyim alJawziyya Reads Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law*, 61–93, at 63, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 128.

85. Qur‘an 2:272, amongst other verses. *arāda mā ‘l-‘ālam fā ‘ilūhu* (“He wills what people do”), *khalāqa ‘l-khalā‘iq wa-af‘ālahum* (“He creates creatures and their acts”), Ṣāliḥ ibn Fawzān al-Fawzān, *Sharḥ Lum‘at al-i‘tiqād al-hādī ilā sabīl al-rashād*, 157–58, as quoted in, Bunzel, *Manifest Enmity*, 129.

tombs of the prophets and the saints (*ziyarah*) set him in stark contrast to much of the rest of existing Sunnī scholarship. Contemporary Wahhābism continues to undergo shifts and changes yet has begun formulating the premises of a system of *taqlid* (imitation) of scholarship dating back to Ibn ‘Abdu’l-Wahhāb and, at times, Ibn Taymiyya. Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanbalī critics’ differences on Wahhābism’s classification in relationship to Sunnīsm are one that seem to rest on the extent to which parallels are drawn to Ibn Taymiyya and the defining parameters of orthodoxy as it relates to theology. It is not unprecedented for a movement to be theologically misaligned with Sunnī thought while still adhering to some jurisprudential principles and acceptance of the Four Caliphs, as seen in the case of the Mu’tazila. Further research needs to be conducted to look at contemporary and historical definitions of Sunnīsm and what matters of jurisprudence and theology are vital components for inclusion or exclusion. While it may be unclear whether Wahhābism could be considered a *madhhab*, it is undoubtedly visible for many Sunnī critics that it is a strand of Islam that needs to be recognized as heterodox in nature.

The exploration of Wahhābism and its Taymiyyan origins is not merely an academic exercise; it holds profound significance for both Islamic and world history. The rise of Wahhābism has had lasting impacts on religious, political, and social landscapes, shaping ideologies and influencing relations among various Islamic communities and the wider world. Understanding its historical roots provides crucial insights into contemporary issues and conflicts, helping to navigate the complex interplay of tradition, reform, and modernity. By examining this phenomenon, we can better appreciate the multifaceted nature of Islamic thought and its role in global affairs, answering the vital question: why should we care? The study thus transcends the boundaries of historical scholarship, becoming a touchstone for policymakers, scholars, and anyone interested in the interconnectedness of religion and global dynamics.

## References

- Abu El Fadl, Khaled M. 2005. *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*. San Francisco: HarperOne.
- Algar, Hamid. 2002. *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*. Oneonta, New York: Islamic Publications International.
- Bederka, Alan. 2014. *Wahhabism and Boko Haram*. Student Center for African Research and Resolutions.
- Bellamy, James A. 2001. "Textual Criticism of the Koran." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* CXXI: 1–6.
- Bilal Philips, Abu Ameenah. 1990. *The Evolution of Fiqh (Islamic Law & The Madh-habs)*. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House.
- Bunzel, Cole Michael. 2018. *Manifest Enmity: The Origins, Development, and Persistence of Classical Wahhābism (1153–1351/1741–1932)*. PhD Thesis, Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University.

- Cerić, Mustafa. 1995. "Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abū Maṣṣūr Al-Māturīdī (d.333/944)." (International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization).
- Commins, David. 2006. *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. I.B. Tauris.
- De Ballaigue, Christopher. 2017. "Cairo." Chap. 1 in *The Islamic Enlightenment: The Struggle Between Faith and Reason – 1798 to Modern Times*, by Christopher De Ballaigue. New York, New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation.
- DeLong-Bas, Natana J. 2004. *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fahd, T, and Stewart F.H. 2012. "Ṭāghūt." Edited by Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. P. Bearman. *Encyclopedia of Islam*.
- Glasse, Cyril. 2001. *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*. AltaMira Press.
- House, Karen Elliott. 2012. *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines and Future*. Knopf.
- Lacey, Robert. 1981. *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Sa'ud*. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- MacFarquhar, Neil. 2002. *A Few Saudis Defy a Rigid Islam to Debate Their Own Intolerance*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/12/world/a-few-saudis-defy-a-rigid-islam-to-debate-their-own-intolerance.html>.
- Mattar, Philip, Charles E Butterworth, Neil Caplan, Michael R Fischbach, and Eric Hoggund,. 2004. *Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa*. 2nd. IV vols. Macmillan Reference USA.
- Metz, Helen. 1992. *Saudi Arabia: A Country Study*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.
- Mir, Mustansir. 2007. *Understanding the Islamic Scripture*. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Othman Alkaff, Syed Huzaifah Bin. 2018. "Using Theology to Legitimise Jihadist Radicalism." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses X*: 6–7.
- Ozervarli, M. Sait. 2010. "The Qur'anic Rational Theology of Ibn Taymiyya and his Criticism of the Mutakallimun." *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* 78–100.
- Parvez, Saimum. 2019. ""The Khilafah's Soldiers in Bengal": Analysing the Islamic State Jihadists and Their Violence Justification Narratives in Bangladesh." *Perspectives on Terrorism XIII*: 22–38.
- Qadhi, Yasir. 2014. "On Salafi Islam." 22 April. [https://muslimmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/On-Salafi-Islam\\_Dr.-Yasir-Qadhi.pdf](https://muslimmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/On-Salafi-Islam_Dr.-Yasir-Qadhi.pdf).
- Qamar, Zubair. 2012. "Wahhabism, Understanding the Roots and Role Models of Islamic Extremism."
- Rudolph, Ulrich. 2014. "Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand." *Islamic History and Civilization*.
- Traboulsi, Samer. 2002. "An Early Refutation of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's Reformist Views." *Die Welt des Islams* (Brill) 42 (e): 373–415.
- Wiktorowicz, Quintan. 2006. "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism XXIX* (3): 207–239.
- Zahid, Farhan. 2018. "Deconstructing Thoughts and Worldviews of Militant Ideologue Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses X* (7): 8–11.
- Zargar, Cameron. 2017. "Origins of Wahhabism from Hanbali Fiqh." *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law* 65–114. doi:10.5070/N4161038736.