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CLAIMING THE PIOUS ANCESTORS

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To say that a doctrine or practice is Salafi is to claim the authority of Islam's Pious Ancestors. The claim has been part of theological discourse since the ninth century, and in modern times, Salafism has attained a firm grip on the Sunnī Muslim imagination as a marker for Islam in its true pristine form.¹ But variation in which beliefs and practices Muslims count as Salafi makes it difficult to define. In particular, there is the question of how two very different religious tendencies came to be associated with the term.

One tendency is the modernist project associated with Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, and Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi. They believed that Muslims could escape subjugation to Western powers by reviving Islam as practiced by the Pious Ancestors. The modernists sought general principles in authoritative texts that permit flexible adaptation to novel forms of governance, law, and education. A second tendency is represented by the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia. They focused on fidelity to what they construed as the creed and cult of the Pious Ancestors.

Today some Muslims regard the modernists as the true Salafis and dismiss the Wahhabi claim to be Salafis as spurious. According to this view, Salafism stood for a modernist outlook until Saudi religious scholars decided to claim the Salafī mantle to validate their teachings; in doing so, the critics

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¹ For a concise discussion of classical and contemporary manifestations of Salafism, see Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafī Thought and Action", in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 33-57

contend that the Saudis reduced Salafism to dogmatism.² While such a narrative may gratify an urge to discredit Wahhabism, it fails to account for three relevant facts: First, early twentieth-century modernists defended Wahhabis as fellow Sunnis. Second, during the colonial era, modernists started referring to Wahhabis as Salafis, *before* Wahhabis themselves adopted the label. Third, Wahhabi writers presently brand the Abduh-Rida modernists as blind imitators of Europe.

In this paper, I argue that we can get a better understanding of Salafism in modern times if we focus on political contexts surrounding shifts in how Muslims described and defined the terms Wahhabi and Salafi. We can trace those shifts by distinguishing five historical frameworks.

The first framework is Najd under the first two Saudi states when Wahhabi religious leaders purged their domain of other Islamic tendencies and erected barriers against interaction with the rest of the Muslim world.

The second framework is the Arab East in the late Ottoman period when religious modernists outside Saudi Arabia defended Wahhabis against their critics by referring to them as Sunni adherents of the Hanbali madhhab.

The third framework is the colonial period when Saudi Arabia began its integration into the Muslim world and Wahhabism's defenders began to call it Salafi.

The fourth framework is the early decades of the third Saudi state when Ibn Saud annexed Hijaz and the Wahhabi leadership kept modernist Salafis arms length.

² Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publications International, 2002), 46-49. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: HarperSan Francisco, 2005), 74-94. Henri Lauziere reinforces Algar and Abou El Fadl in an article that argues that the concept of modernist Salafism is the product of Orientalist misconception. See "The Construction of Salafiyya: Reconsidering Salafism from the Perspective of Conceptual History", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010) 369-389

The fifth framework is the postcolonial period when Saudi Arabia's integration with the Muslim world reached a stage that prompted its religious estate to claim the Salafi mantle for itself.

Because I have written previously about the first two frameworks, in this paper I summarize them and give more attention to the last three frameworks.

1. The First and Second Saudi States: *Ahl al-Tawhid and al-Da'wa al-Najdiyya*:

When Wahhabism emerged in the mid-1700s, its earliest adversaries in Najd and the Ottoman Empire classified it as a Kharijite heresy. The name that stuck, *Wahhabi*, stigmatized the doctrine as the ravings of a misguided preacher. Naturally, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and his disciples preferred other names for themselves and their movement: in the early Saudi chronicles, the folk who profess God's unity (*Ahl al-Tawhid* and *al-Muwahhidun*), in nineteenth century religious treatises, the Najdi call (*al-Da'wa al-Najdiyya*). Wahhabi treatises are sprinkled with references to the Pious Ancestors, and in that respect they showed their affiliation with the Hanbali madhhab and the legacy of Ibn Taymiyya, but they did not refer to their mission as Salafi.

2. The Late Ottoman Framework: *Wahhabis as Sunnis*:

In the late Ottoman period, ulama in the Arab East were divided between a majority that was hostile to Wahhabism and a small number of modernist Salafis who defended it. There was a political dimension to the controversy over Wahhabism because of the Saudi conquest of the Holy Cities in the early 1800s, which linked Wahhabism with sedition. In religious terms, the modernist Salafis and Wahhabis both opposed the cult of saints and strove to revive the intellectual legacy of Ibn Taymiyya. In the Ottoman context, when ulama debated the legitimacy of venerating saints, defenders of the practice denounced the Salafis as Wahhabis.³

³ For controversy over the cult of saints in Baghdad, see Itzhak Weismann, "The Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya and Salafi Challenge in Iraq", *Journal of the History of Sufism* 4" (2003-2004): 229-240. For the Damascus setting, see David Commins,

Critics of saint veneration not only denied they were Wahhabis but defended them as well. They argued that defenders of saint veneration distorted and lied about Wahhabi beliefs. They also argued that Wahhabis followed the Quran, the Sunnah, and the teachings of the four Sunnî imams. They declared that if you read treatises by Wahhabi scholars, you would find nothing contrary to historical Sunnî consensus and the Hanbali madhhab. Wahhabism's defenders described it as Sunnî, not as Salafi. That was because in the Ottoman context, Sunnî was synonymous with legitimate doctrine while Salafi represented a challenge to established authority.⁴

Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi was the leader of Salafis in Baghdad in the late Ottoman period.⁵ His defense of Wahhabism contained religious and political threads. He rejected the charge that Wahhabis disrespected the Prophet and major ulama of the classical era. He asserted that they were, in fact, *muwahhid* Muslims upholding the beliefs of the Pious Ancestors, adhering to Hanbalism, and respecting believers who followed the Sunnî law schools.⁶ Moreover, Al Saud deserved credit for their political achievements,

Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 129-131. On connections among Damascus, Baghdad, and Najd, see David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: IB Tauris, 2006), 132-134. The same rhetorical dynamics operated in Egypt, where defenders of saint veneration labeled Muhammad 'Abduh a Wahhabi. *Fatawa al-Imam Muhammad Rashid Rida*, vol.1, eds. Salah al-Din al-Munajjid and Yusuf Khuri (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid, 1970), 380

⁴ Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 109. On Ottoman promotion of Sunni Islam and the Hanafi law school as the official religion, see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: IB Tauris, 1998), 44-92

⁵ Hala Fattah, "Wahhabi influences, Salafi responses: Shaikh Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi and the Iraqi Salafi movement, 1745-1930", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14 (2003): 127-148. Edouard Metenier, "Que sont ces chemins devenus? Reflexion sur les evolutions de la Salafiyya Irakienne de la fin du xviiiè au milieu du xxe siècle", in *Le Courant Reformiste Musulman et sa Reception dans les Societies Arabes*, eds. Maher Charif and Salam Kawakibi (Damas: IFPO, 2003), 99-107

⁶ Fattah, "Wahhabi influences", 145-146

such as ending tribal warfare and bringing security to Arabia. He admitted that they went astray in the early 1800s when they rejected Ottoman authority and interfered with the pilgrimage. Later Saudi rulers, however, concentrated on their own domain and sent religious teachers to instruct Bedouin in correct religion.⁷

The Damascus controversy over Wahhabism exhibited similar contours to the debate in Baghdad: arguments over correct religious practice, attacks on Salafis for holding Wahhabi sympathies, and allusions to Ottoman sensitivities over loyalty to the sultan. The Damascus setting differed from Baghdad's in one important respect: Young men educated in state schools represented a dynamic, new element in culture and politics. As youths, they had come under the influence of the modernist Salafis, who blended the call for religious purification with a progressive outlook on education, science, and politics.⁸ Modernist Salafis also transmitted a favorable disposition toward Wahhabism.

For example, in 1909, one of the young educated set, Salah al-Din al-Qasimi, published an article about Wahhabism in a popular Egyptian magazine where he noted that "*Wahhabi*" had become a catchall term for denouncing reformist religious leaders, newspapers (such as Egypt's *al-Ahram* and *al-Muqattam*), and literary societies. In fact, he contended, the Wahhabis were merely pious Hanbali Muslims renowned for their moral rectitude and avoidance of idolatry in worship.⁹

Qasimi belonged to a cohort of Syrians whose outlook took shape in late Ottoman institutions that naturalized the culture of nationalism.¹⁰ Their

⁷ Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi, *Tarikh Najd* (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Salafiyya, 1929), 90-105

⁸ Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 95-103

⁹ Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, *al-Duktur Salah al-Din al-Qasimi, 1305-1344: Safahat min tarikh al-nahda al-'arabiyya fi awa'il al-qarn al-'ishrin* (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Salafiyya, 1959), 250-256. The Egyptian publication was *al-Muqtataf*.

¹⁰ James L. Gelvin, "Modernity and its Discontents: On the Durability of Nationalism in the Arab Middle East", *Nations and Nationalism* 5 (1999): 71-89

adoption of the modernist Salafi outlook was congruent with the project for Arab national revival. Their chief concern was not the restoration of religion according to the Pious Ancestors but the political destiny of the Arabs, freshly conceived as a national community. Religion mattered to them, but more as an emblem of national authenticity than the foundation of thought and action.

3. The Colonial Framework: *Wahhabis as Salafis*:

The passing of the Ottoman Empire and the deepening of European colonial domination altered the political context of writings about Wahhabism and Salafism in three ways. First, Salafism no longer implied opposition to legitimate authority embodied by the Ottoman sultan. Second, the anti-colonial atmosphere pressed on writers to formulate arguments in terms of national interest rather than classical Islamic texts, therefore nationalist themes appeared in arguments over religious doctrine. Third, Al Saud gained respectability by virtue of their independence of foreign rule. Under these conditions, writings about Saudi Arabia and Wahhabism mixed political and religious themes, and we see a shift from arguing that Wahhabism was part of the Sunnî tradition to claiming that it was Salafi.

The best-known defender of Saudi Arabia in this period was Rashid Rida, publisher of *al-Manar*. Due to *al-Manar*'s wide circulation, Rida essentially "owned" the Salafi brand, and his position on Wahhabism was bound to be influential. One of his first comments on the Wahhabis appeared in the late Ottoman period, in a 1904 issue. A reader wrote to ask about the standing of the Shiite, Zaydi, and Wahhabi madhhabs. Rida responded that they were all Muslim (contrary to the Wahhabi view of the others as idolaters). He added that the Wahhabis were the closest of all Muslims to acting according to the Sunnah.¹¹ At that point, Rida did not refer to them as Salafis, but during the 1920s, his terminology shifted in tandem with his political sympathies: He was supporting the Saudi cause against the Hashemites in the struggle for Hijaz. Consequently, his articles about the Wahhabis cast them

¹¹ Article from *al-Manar*, 1904, cited in *al-Munajjid*, *Fatawa al-Imam*, 1: 111-112

in favorable light, speaking of them as Salafi in creed and Hanbali in madhhab, and as “*Salafi Sunnis*.”¹²

Other defenders of Wahhabism in Egypt inscribed new meaning in “*Salafi*” and “*Wahhabi*” to make them suit the rhetorical purposes of nationalist anti-colonialism and state-building discourses. Such rhetorical sculpting is evident in a 1935 essay on the history of Wahhabism by Muhammad Hamid al-Fiqi, founder of a pro-Wahhabi organization in Egypt. Fiqi’s essay is notable for its emphasis on nation-building. He praised early Saudi rulers for establishing secure, lawful conditions in Hijaz. He also attributed to Wahhabism the modern aspiration for mass education that would make it possible for each Muslim to have direct contact with scripture rather than relying on the mediated authority of religious experts. That notion became a commonplace in writings that were sympathetic to Wahhabism even though it was not part of writings by Wahhabi ulama. Along similar lines, Fiqi’s discussion of the ills caused by *taqlid* (imitation of established legal opinions) asserted that it destroyed the spirit of independent thinking, leaving Muslims vulnerable to imperialist conquest. Instead of placing *taqlid* in the scales of Islamic legal theory, he related it to the nation’s welfare, a common trope in modernist Salafi discourse.¹³

A year after Fiqi’s brief history of Wahhabism came out, a writer from Saudi Arabia, Abdallah al-Qasimi, published a treatise with the striking title, *The Wahhabi Revolution*.¹⁴ This work embodies the assimilation of

¹² “Al-Wahhabiyya wa-l-‘Aqida al-Diniyya li-l-Najdiyyin,” *al-Manar* 27 (1926): 275-278; “al-Wahhabiyya wa Da’wat al-Manar ila Madhhab al-Salaf,” *al-Manar* 28 (1927): 3-5; “Rasa’il al-Sunna wa-l-Shi’a,” *al-Manar* 29 (1928): 683. Hamadi Redissi, “The Refutation of Wahhabism in Arabic Sources,” in *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia’s Political, Religious, and Media Frontiers*, ed. Madawi Al-Rasheed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 174-175

¹³ Muhammad Hamid al-Fiqi, *Athar al-Da’wa al-Wahhabiyya fi al-Islah al-Dini wa-l-‘Umrani fi Jazirat al-‘Arab wa Ghayriha* (Cairo: Matba’at al-Nahda, 1935), 6, 33, 43-46

¹⁴ Qasimi came to Egypt from Saudi Arabia to study at al-Azhar. His first writings were fierce attacks on the ulama of al-Azhar and arguments for Wahhabi prohibi-

Wahhabism to nationalist and state-building purposes. Qasimi referred to Wahhabism as the *Najdi Salafi da'wa* and the modern *Salafi nahda*, mixing the nationalist emphasis on rebirth (*nahda*) with religious call (*da'wa*). Instead of terms used in conventional Saudi-Wahhabi historical narratives to describe Najd before Wahhabism ---*idolatry, innovations, jahiliyya*--- he drew on nationalist concepts to characterize the old order as one of weakness, misery, and ignorance.¹⁵

Qasimi's narrative of the Saudi-Wahhabi enterprise made it a nationalist saga. In his account, at a time when Christians were invading Muslim lands, Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab established a model not only of zeal for religion, but of revolution against oppression and for democratic equality. Najdis became attached to Al Saud leadership, which enjoyed divine support in vanquishing Arabian foes to form a single kingdom out of petty principalities. Qasimi called Ibn Saud the genius of the twentieth century, the first Superman, and compared him to Hitler and Mussolini, claiming his accomplishments were greater because they occurred in a backward land immersed in chronic warfare. Thanks to him and to Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia enjoyed complete independence from foreign influence.¹⁶

Nationalist logic is also evident Qasimi's defense of the Wahhabi ban on tobacco. He stated that Wahhabism bolsters the believer's will to refrain from temptations like tobacco and drugs that harm body and mind, wealth and freedom. But rather than citing proof-texts from scripture, he argued that smoking is a waste of money, especially in poor developing countries. Workers who earn a few piasters a day cannot afford to squander them on rolled poison that burns their sick lungs when they have dependents to provide for. Furthermore, when Egyptians and Syrians buy cigarettes, they put

tions on innovations in worship. On Qasimi's life, see Salah al-Din al-Munajjid, *Dirasa `an al-Qasimi* (Dir`awn, Lebanon: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid, 1967). For his criticism of al-Azhar, see `Abdallah ibn `Ali al-Qasimi, *Shuyukh al-Azhar wa-l-Ziyada fi al-Islam* (Cairo, 1932/33)

¹⁵ `Abdallah ibn `Ali al-Qasimi, *al-Thawra al-Wahhabiyya* (Cairo: al-Matba`a al-Rahmaniyya, 1936), 1, 3

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15, 30-35, 44, 47, 70-71, 79-83

money into the pockets of foreign companies at the expense of local enterprises.¹⁷

Besides putting a nationalist spin on Wahhabi Puritanism, Qasimi attributed Ibn Saud's efforts to introduce modern technology to the goals of Wahhabism, when, in fact, Ibn Saud had to overcome Wahhabi leaders' objections to technical advances. Qasimi claimed that Wahhabism was open to benefit from industrial techniques and inventions because no religious text contradicts the natural sciences. In fact, that was a modernist Salafi position typical of the 'Abduh-Rida school. Qasimi praised the Saudi ruler for the spread of hospitals, doctors, scholars and schools, and for introducing scientific inventions like the telegraph, telephone, automobile, and aircraft.¹⁸

4. Early Decades of the Third Saudi State: *Hijazi Salafis, Najdi Wahhabis:*

The tendency for Muslims outside Saudi Arabia to frame Wahhabism in terms of Salafism with a nationalist accent was in part a token of Saudi Arabia's incorporation into the cosmopolitan Muslim sphere. That process had various facets. Abdulaziz ibn Saud paid subsidies to publish collections of Wahhabi treatises and distribute them in other Muslim lands, making them widely available outside their homeland for the first time. Of more relevance to this discussion, Ibn Saud employed foreign Muslims as advisers in his court and his annexation of Hijaz meant the absorption of that region's modernist Salafi current.

Modernist Salafism found a foothold in Jeddah among merchants and educated youth. A leading voice of educated youth, Muhammad Hasan 'Awwad, expressed modernist Salafi ideas in the 1920s. In an essay con-

¹⁷ Ibid., 18-20

¹⁸ Qasimi, *al-Thawra*, 26, 66. On Wahhabi ulama opposition to wireless telegraphy at the time Qasimi was writing, see Hafiz Wahbah, *Arabian Days* (London: A. Barker, 1964), 57-60. Observing the ostensible paradox of positing compatibility between Wahhabism and nationalism, Werner Ende referred to a "mismatch of national consciousness and neo-Hanbalite convictions." Cited by Redissi, "The Refutation of Wahhabism," 174-175, n. 57

demning conservative ulama, he declared that they were incapable of giving straight answers to simple questions about the health benefits of fasting; they had no comprehension of Western scientific thinking and technical advances; and their books on grammar and law were confused and full of contradictions. If Muslims wanted insight into such matters, they should ignore today's ulama and consult the books of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim, and al-Shafi'i among the ancients, the works of Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab, and the books of Muhammad Abduh and Farid Wajdi among the moderns.¹⁹

The scion of a wealthy merchant family, Muhammad Nasif, participated in a letter-writing network of Salafi ulama and publicists, and recruited Saudi royalty to advance his project to gather, edit and publish classical texts deemed part of the Pious Ancestors' legacy.²⁰ From the 1920s until the 1970s, he was a pivotal figure connecting Saudi Arabia to Salafi scholars and publishers in Arab countries and South Asia. His most enduring connections were with Rida's Cairo associates and with Muhammad Bahjat al-Bitar's circle in Damascus. On the Saudi Arabian side, Nasif was in touch with prominent scholars like Hasan ibn Abdallah Al al-Shaikh, head of the Hijazi religious estate for nearly thirty years, and Muhammad ibn Salih al-`Uthaymin.²¹

Ibn Saud enlisted Hijazi and immigrant Salafis to defend Wahhabism in the official Saudi newspaper, *Umm al-Qura*, directed by Yusuf Yasin, a Syrian comrade of Rashid Rida.²² Mingled with reports on political developments, a common theme in the newspaper's early issues was "clarification" of the true nature of Najdi religious doctrine. The first issue, published in De-

¹⁹ Muhammad Hasan `Awwad, "Khawatir Musraha," and "Muda`aba ma`a al-`Ulama", in *A`mal al-`Awwad al-Kamila* (Cairo: Dar al-Jil li-l-Tiba`a, 1981)

²⁰ Muhammad ibn Ahmad Sayyid Ahmad, Muhammad Nasif: *Hayatuhu wa Atharuhu* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1994), 20-24, 199, 302-304

²¹ An extensive sample of Nasif's correspondence is reproduced in Ahmad, Muhammad Nasif. *Contacts with Rida*, 20-24; *Bitar*, 431-438; *`Uthaymin*, 331-332, 457-460, 525; *Hasan ibn Abdallah*, 505

²² On Yusuf Yasin's connection to Rashid Rida, see Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia, 1916-1936* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 105

ember 1924, reproduced a speech by Ibn Saud stating that Najdis followed Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab only to the extent that the Quran and the Sunnah supported his ideas.²³ Six months later, the newspaper published an article explaining that few people knew the truth about the religion of the Arabs of Najd; some imagined the Najdis to follow a new madhhab or even a new religion. In fact, the Najdi madhhab adhered to the Quran and the Sunnah, adding nothing and leaving nothing out, preserving the way of the Prophet and the Salaf. In short, the Arabs of Najd followed Islam; there was no other name for it.²⁴ During the pilgrimage of 1925, Ibn Saud gave a speech to Indian pilgrims, explaining that his folk were loyal to the doctrine and madhhab of the Salaf.²⁵

For several decades, Salafis and Wahhabis mingled on the pages of *Umm al-Qura* and in publishing and educational endeavors. But Salafism and Wahhabism remained distinct currents, the former flourishing as a cosmopolitan tendency and the latter retaining a parochial Najdi accent, albeit with increasing influence outside Arabia. The cosmopolitan tenor of Salafism is reflected in the geographical reach of Muhammad Nasif's correspondence and the range of his interests. In addition to promoting classical works in religious fields like exegesis, *hadith*, *law*, and *theology*, he collaborated on publishing books about modern agricultural techniques, improving journalistic Arabic, and the politics of Mandate powers in the Arab world.²⁶ That Nasif's outlook coincided with the modernist Salafi agenda is clear from his correspondence.²⁷ Wahhabism, on the other hand, still had the connotation of narrow-minded dogmatism. Nasif's grandson recalled that when he was

²³ *Umm al-Qura*, no. 1, December 12, 1924

²⁴ *Umm al-Qura*, no. 27, June 26, 1925. The same point is in no. 59, February 12, 1926

²⁵ *Umm al-Qura*, no. 28, July 10, 1925. He expressed the same idea in his annual address to pilgrims in later years. Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Rahman al-Khamis, *`Inayat al-Malik `Abd al-`Aziz bi-l-`Aqida al-Salafiyya* (Riyadh: al-Amara al-`Amma li-l-Ihtifal bi-Murur Mi'at `Amm, 1999), 20-22

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 216-217, 242-243, 531

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 160, 230-231, 260-263, 306-307, 339, 365, 368

growing up in Jeddah, where a pluralist Sunnî milieu, including sûfi orders, had long been the norm, classmates called him a Wahhabi. He also mentioned that his grandfather had welcomed and held discussions with all sorts of people, implying that a Wahhabi would have shunned others.²⁸ Suspicion on the part of the Wahhabi establishment toward the Salafis emerged in a letter Nasif wrote to the leading Wahhabi sheikh of the early 1960s, Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Al al-Shaikh. Nasif asked why the Syrian Salafi and defender of Wahhabism Muhammad Bahjat al-Bitar had been excluded from recent meetings in Mecca and Medina concerning the Muslim World League and the Islamic University in Medina.²⁹ It seems that Wahhabi ulama recognized the gaps between their doctrine and that of modernist Salafis, and therefore limited their role in Saudi Arabia's religious institutions.

5. The Postcolonial Framework: *Wahhabis Claim the Salafi Mantle:*

In 1971, a leading member of Al al-Shaikh published a magazine article about Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's life and doctrine. In it, he wrote that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's followers preferred to be known as *al-Salafiyyun* or *al-Muhammadiyyun*.³⁰ Recent editions of older Wahhabi treatises exhibit the same shift to calling the Najdi doctrine Salafi. For example, where a nineteenth-century Wahhabi treatise used the term "*Najdi call*" (*al-da'wa al-najdiyya*), the modern editor substituted "*the Salafi call in Najd*" (*al-da'wa al-salafiyya fi najd*).³¹ The Wahhabi establishment had come to

²⁸ Ibid., 398-399

²⁹ Ibid., 232-233. On the Wahhabi shaikh Muhammad al-'Uthaimin's corrections to Bitar's monograph on Ibn Taymiyya, see 457-460. On Bitar's essays defending Wahhabism, see David Commins, "Wahhabis, Sufis and Salafis", in *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama' in the Middle East*, ed. Meir Hatina (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 241-243.

³⁰ Hasan ibn 'Abdallah Al al-Shaikh, "al-Wahhabiyya wa Za'imuha al-Imam Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab," *al-'Arabi* (Kuwait) no. 147 (February 1971), 26, 29. The author spent most of his career in Hijaz.

³¹ Salih ibn Muhammad ibn Hamad al-Shithri, *Ta'yid al-Malak al-Mannan fi Naqd Dalalat Dahlan* (Riyadh: Dar al-Habib, 2000). The original phrasing is on 123; the modern alteration is in the list of contents on 144

embrace the Salafi label. The underlying political context for the shift in terminology was Al Saud's decision in the 1960s to open the kingdom to foreign Muslims to develop public institutions. Newly established religious universities were sites of contact and exchange among non-Saudi religious scholars, their Wahhabi counterparts, Saudi students, and foreign Muslim students.³²

The influx of non-Saudi scholars had the potential to undermine the authority of Wahhabi ulama, especially among pious youth. The case of the Syrian Salafi scholar Nasir al-Din al-Albani illustrates that point. When he arrived for a teaching position at the University of Medina in 1961, he was known for his command of *hadith* science. It did not take long for it to become evident that even though Albani was not a modernist, he differed with Wahhabism on matters of principle, such as his rejection of following any madhhab, as opposed to Wahhabi adherence to Hanbalism, and on practices, such as his view that women were not obliged to cover their faces. To be rid of Albani's irritating independence, the head of the Wahhabi establishment, Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Al al-Shaikh, allowed his teaching appointment to lapse in 1963, compelling him to leave the country.³³ It seems that such challenges to Wahhabi doctrine may have provided an incentive to reaffirm it in the rhetorical currency of the day.

In the 1970s, Saudi intellectual production took a new turn as students and graduates of the religious faculties constructed a Salafi patrimony for Wahhabism in three sorts of publications. First, there were new editions of classical texts. An early artifact of the Saudi project to trace a Salafi ancestry is a 1971 volume, *The Saudi Scholarly Anthology: From the Pearls of the*

³² On Syrian Salafis moving to Saudi Arabia, see Arnaud Lenfant, "L'évolution du Salafisme en Syrie au xx^e Siècle", in *Qu'est-ce que le Salafisme?* ed. Bernard Rougier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), 163, 167-169

³³ Stéphane Lacroix, "L'Apport de Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani au Salafisme Contemporaine", in *Qu'est-ce que le Salafisme?* 51-54. On the emergence of the Salafi Group and Juhayman al-'Utaybi's splinter group from al-Albani's following, see Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-'Utaybi Revisited", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (2007): 103-122

Ulama of the Pious Ancestors.³⁴ The editor gathered together five classical creeds (by al-Tabari, al-Tahawi, al-Maqdisi, Ibn Qudama, and Ibn Taymiyya), presenting them in chronological order, followed by five essays by Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, including *The Book of God's Unity (Kitab al-Tawhid)*. No modern authorities are included in the collection, implying a direct, exclusive line from the authoritative formulators of Salafi theology to Najd. The point is captured succinctly in the title of a 1999 monograph, *The Call of Imam Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab: Salafi, not Wahhabi*.³⁵

Second, monographs on facets of belief and practice "according to the Salaf" became common. Examples include books dealing with morality,³⁶ loyalty and dissociation,³⁷ political practice and Islamic law,³⁸ and ruling on the basis of secular principles and the causes of excommunication.³⁹

Third, there were biographies of historical and contemporary luminaries in the Salafi tradition, as defined by Saudi ulama. Saudi writers published books about early authorities in the Salafi theological tradition: Sufyan al-Thawri,⁴⁰ Ibn Rajab,⁴¹ and al-Marwazi.⁴² Monographs on the tradition's

³⁴ 'Abdallah ibn Muhammad ibn Hamid, al-Majmu'a al-'Ilmiyya al-Sa'udiyya: Min Durar 'Ulama al-Salaf al-Salih (Mecca: Matba'at al-Nahda al-Haditha, 1971)

³⁵ Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abdallah al-Husayyin, Da'wat al-Imam Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab Salafiyya la Wahhabiyya (Riyadh: Dar 'Alam al-Kutub, 1999)

³⁶ 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Nasir Jalil and Baha' al-Din 'Aqil, Ayna Nahnu min Akhlaq al-Salaf (Riyadh: Dar al-Taiba, 1993)

³⁷ Muhammad ibn Sa'id ibn Salim Qahtani and 'Abd al-Razzaq 'Affi, al-Wala' wal-Bara' fi al-Islam: min Mafahim 'Aqidat al-Salaf (Cairo, 1985); original Umm al-Qura University Master's Thesis

³⁸ Khalid ibn Ali ibn Muhammad 'Anbari, Fiqh al-Siyasa al-Shar'iyya fi Daw' al-Qur'an wa al-Sunna wa Aqwal Salaf al-Umma; Buhuth fi al-Nizam al-Siyasi al-Islami (Riyadh, 1997). This publication has an appendix containing fatwas by leading Saudi religious authorities, Ibn Baz, 'Uthaymin, and Fawzan

³⁹ Khalid ibn 'Ali ibn Muhammad 'Anbari, al-Hukm bi Ghayr ma Anzala Allah wa Usul al-Takfir fi Daw' al-Kitab wa al-Sunna wa Aqwal Salaf al-Umma (Saudi Arabia, 1996)

⁴⁰ Muhammad ibn Matar Zahrani, Safahat Mushriqa min Hayat al-Salaf: Sufyan ibn Sa'id al-Thawri (Riyadh: Dar al-Khudairi, 1998)

modern revivers include Siddiq Hasan Khan and his position on the doctrine of the Salaf;⁴³ Muhammad al-Shinqiti and his affirmation of the doctrine of the Salaf;⁴⁴ the late Ottoman Meccan scholar Abu Bakr Khuqir and his defense of the doctrine of the Salaf;⁴⁵ and 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Baz, heir of the Salaf.⁴⁶

It is notable that the Wahhabi version of the Salafi legacy excludes Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. One account treats them as Muslim thinkers who came under the spell of European thought, along with Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, Khair al-Din al-Tunisi, and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. These thinkers began with the assumption that social justice and democratic rights were valid ideas and then searched for texts in the Quran and the Sunnah that supported their assumption.⁴⁷ To make matters worse, Afghani and Abduh joined the Freemasons and disguised their rationalist and modernist convictions in Salafi garb. It was therefore inevitable that when Rida fell under Abduh's spell, he would pass along his master's misguided views. They all promoted rationalism under the banner of Salafism, and Western writers gullibly credited them with reviving Salafism when in fact they exploited the call for returning to the Pious Ancestors as a slogan for their purely political

⁴¹ 'Abdallah ibn Sulaiman al-Ghufaili, *Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali wa Atharuhu fi Tawdih 'Aqidat al-Salaf*, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Dar al-Masayyar, 1998)

⁴² Mawsim ibn Munir Ibn Mubarak al-Nufai'i, *al-Imam Muhammad ibn Nasr al-Marwazi wa Juhuduhu fi Bayan 'Aqidat al-Salaf* (Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, 1996)

⁴³ Akhtar Jamal Luqman, *al-Sayyid Siddiq Hasan Qinnawji: Ara'uhu al-I'tiqadiyya wa Mawqifuhu min 'Aqidat al-Salaf* (Riyadh: Dar al-Hijrah, 1996).

⁴⁴ 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Salih Tuwayyan, *Juhud al-Shaikh Muhammad, al-Amin al-Shinqiti fi Taqrir 'Aqidat al-Salaf* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-'Ubaykan, 1998)

⁴⁵ Badr al-Din Nadirin, "al-Shaikh Abu Bakr Khuqir wa Juhuduhu fi al-Difa' 'an 'Aqidat al-Salaf", Thesis, Umm al-Qura University, Mecca, n.d.

⁴⁶ Mani' ibn Hammad Juhani, *al-Shaikh Ibn Baz: Baqiyat al-Salaf wa Imam al-Khalaf: Safahat min Hayatihi wa Asda Wafatihi* (al-Ahsa': al-Nadwa, 1999)

⁴⁷ "Historical Development of the Methodologies of al-Ikhwaan al-Muslimeen and their Effect and Influence upon Contemporary Salafee Dawah", Version 2.01, (March 2003), www.salafipublications.com, Part One, 13-15

anti-colonial agenda.⁴⁸ Thus do today's Wahhabi-Salafis reject Rida, one of the early defenders of Wahhabism as a Salafi revival?

Revision of Salafism's patrimony served the official religious establishment in its competition with the Muslim Brotherhood and kindred activist organizations vying for the mantle of authenticity. In the early 1990s, Saudi religious dissidents, known as *sahwa* sheikhs, influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood's political analysis and activism, clashed with the government. The Wahhabi religious estate responded by depicting a modern sort of innovation (*bid'a*) that stemmed from European influence on nineteenth-century Muslims, an influence that ran from Afghani, Abduh, and Rida to Hasan al-Banna and the *sahwa* sheikhs Salman al-'Awda and Safar al-Hawali. In the Saudi version, Salafism shed the set of modernist, nationalist and state-building meanings that prevailed earlier. Salafism was reworked to suit circumstances of time and place, this time to legitimate the official creed through the construction of a narrative that emphasized its unique connection to the Pious Ancestors.

Conclusion:

One hundred years ago, neither Najdi Sunnis nor Ottoman religious reformers wanted to be called Wahhabis. Apart from one Saudi writer of the early twentieth century, nobody wanted to be called a Wahhabi.⁴⁹ The connotations of fanaticism and heresy associated with that name had staying power. By contrast, Salafi became associated with purity and authenticity, giving it a positive connotation in modernist, nationalist, and contemporary religious discourses. But if Salafi can refer to a flexible conception of religion as a set of general principles that allow for adaptation according to time and place, or to a firmly fixed creed that allows for no tampering and regards

⁴⁸ "Historical Development", Part Eight, 2, 5

⁴⁹ Sulaiman ibn Sahman embraced the Wahhabi label in a 1916 essay, *al-Sawa'iq al-Mursala al-Shihabiyya 'ala al-Shubuh al-Dahida al-Shamiyya*. (Bombay: al-Matba'a al-Mustawfiyya, 1916). In the essay, he gave the title as *al-Sawa'iq al-Mursala al-Wahhabiyya* and twice used the term "Wahhabi" as a positive referent defined as those who follow the Quran, the Sunnah, the Pious Ancestors, and the founders of the law schools. Ibn Sahman, 81, 196-197

change with suspicion, is it possible to define the term and classify Muslims who claim it? Without suggesting that Salafi is an infinitely elastic term, we might interpret its permutations as an instance of the ways political context shapes arguments over religious rectitude.

First: As notions of progress and decline in civilizations took root in the Muslim world, Salafi shifted from a term in theological debates to a modernist temperament seeking a foundation for remaking education, law, and politics as religious scholars looked to the Pious Ancestors for principles that harmonized with the impulse to adapt to new conditions.

Second: In the emergent culture of nationalism, the call to return to the way of the Pious Ancestors fulfilled two purposes. It anchored a narrative of the community's rebirth through rediscovering the values and virtues of the Pious Ancestors, and it affirmed the community's special place in the world, in this instance, as bearer of a universal divine mission.

Third: Wahhabism's rebranding as Salafi accompanied Saudi Arabia's integration with the Muslim world. From its rise until the late Ottoman era, Wahhabism was a regional phenomenon, quarantined from the outside by the stigma of sedition and heresy, and from the inside by a strict view of other Muslims as idolaters. The fall of the Ottoman Empire removed the political support for containing the spread of Wahhabism. Ibn Saud's pragmatic outlook opened Saudi Arabia to other Muslims, turning a new page in interactions between his domain and the Muslim world.

Returning to the accusation that Wahhabism's claim to be Salafi is illegitimate, we see that it is part of a struggle over who speaks for Islam. The urgency of the controversy owes something to the reversal in power relations between Saudi Arabia's Wahhabis and their Muslim critics. If we think of Muslim religious discourse operating in a political space, we could say that from the mid-1700s until the mid-1900s, Saudi Arabia was in a weak position, possessing sufficient resources to defend its native religious discourse but definitely in a defensive posture, deflecting a steady stream of polemical aggression from surrounding Muslim lands. Saudi Arabia's accumulation of wealth in the second half of the twentieth century altered the balance of pow-

er, making it possible to project its native religious discourse to other Muslim countries through proselytizing and hosting students from other countries at its universities.⁵⁰ The critics are correct that Saudi religious scholars have constructed an intellectual pedigree that runs from the early Islamic period to Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab to themselves, excluding modernists like Abduh and Rida. But such rhetorical sleight of hand is not exceptional; rather, it is part of the impulse to garner authority by staking a claim to the authenticity represented by the Pious Ancestors, be it for the sake of theology, modernism, nationalism, or state-building.

⁵⁰ An overview of Saudi proselytizing is in Saeed Shehabi, "The Role of Religious Ideology in the Expansionist Policies of Saudi Arabia", in *Kingdom Without Borders*, 183-197