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The Controversy over the Law Schools (*lā madhhabīyya*) in Twentieth-Century Syria

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Abstract

The validity of the established schools of law (sing. *madhhab*) is a major bone of contention between contemporary Salafis and Traditionalists. The controversy reached its peak around 1970 in a famous exchange between Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, who called for direct reliance on authenticated hadith, and Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, who favored the jurists' legal expertise. In this essay, I chart the course of the *lā madhhabīyya* debate in Syria by analyzing the polemical writings of three generations of Syrian ulama from 1870 to 1970. I argue that the seeds of the controversy were sown in the late Ottoman period in the Salafi challenge to *taqlīd*. I also uncover the central role of the Indian Ahl-i Hadith in mediating the anti-*madhhabī* position to the core Arab lands, and the part of Syrian Ḥanafī-Naqshbandī 'ulamā' in defending the *madhhabs*. Finally, I allude to the political split among the Traditionalist 'ulamā' between the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and the Ba'th regime.

Keywords

Salafism – Traditionalist Islam – *taqlīd*, *lā madhhabīyya* – Ahl-i Hadith, Naqshbandiyya – Muslim Brotherhood

Introduction

The ongoing campaign against the law schools (*lā madhhabīyya*) is closely associated with the “*muḥaddith* of the age” Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī. Along with the Wahhābī-Ḥanbalī jurists ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Bāz, Saudi Arabia’s Grand Mufti, and Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn, his second in command on the Committee of Senior Scholars, Albānī was one of the three pillars of late twentieth-century Salafism.¹ His most celebrated adversary was the prominent Traditionalist² Muḥammad Sa’īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, whose education combined Shāfi’ī jurisprudence, Ash’arī theology and Naqshbandī Sufism.³ Their rivalry, which surfaced in the early 1970s, merits attention as a key episode in the Islamic resurgence of the time. Albānī refused to adhere to any of the four Sunni schools of law (*madhhabs*) and urged his students to directly follow the Prophet’s way through authentic *ḥadīth*. In his view, human institutions such as the law schools were sources of factionalism that contributed to the decline of the Muslim community.⁴ In his response, Būṭī charged that circumventing the *madhhabs* was “a most dangerous innovation” and stressed the essential role of jurists in providing sound methodology for interpreting the scriptures. He accused the “new Salafi *madhhab*” of being responsible for the disunity of the Muslim world and the rise of Islamic extremism.⁵

1 On Albānī, see Stéphane Lacroix, “Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and his Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism”, in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 58–80; Jacob Olidort, “In Defense of Tradition: Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī and the Salafī Method” (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

2 There is considerable confusion in the literature between traditionalists, i.e., those for whom the living tradition is the framework of reference and the basis of identity and authority, and traditionalists, i.e., *ḥadīth* specialists. Naturally, some traditionalists specialized in the Prophet’s traditions, most prominently, in twentieth-century Syria, “the great *ḥadīth* scholar” *al-muḥaddith al-akbar* Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī (1870–1935).

3 On Būṭī, see Andreas Christmann, “Islamic Scholar and Religious Leader: a Portrait of Shaykh Muḥammad Sa’īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 9 (1998), 149–169; Jawad Anwar Qureshi, “Sunni Tradition in an Age of Revival and Reform: Sa’īd Ramadan al-Buti (1929–2013) and His Interlocutors” (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2019).

4 Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *al-Ḥadīth ḥujja bi-naṣīhi fi al-‘aḳā’id wa-l-aḥkām* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma’ārif, 2005).

5 On Būṭī’s position in this debate see Muḥammad Sa’īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *al-Lā Madhhabīyya akḥṭar bid’a tuḥaddid al-sharī’a al-Islāmīyya* (Damascus: Dār al-Farābī, 2005); idem, *al-Salafīyya: marḥala zamanīyya mubāraka, lā madhhab Islāmī* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1988).

The *madhhab* controversy touches on issues of legal methodology, scholarly authority, as well as visions of history, identity and politics. In his typology of legal hermeneutics (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) Aron Zysow distinguishes between Formalists who exercise independent reasoning to achieve the most probable results and Materialists who demand certainty based on authentic *ḥadīth*.⁶ These categories were already discernible in the conflict between the early factions of *ahl al-ra'y*, who were dominated by the Ḥanafis, and *ahl al-ḥadīth*, the Ḥanbalis' precursors. Jonathan Brown notes the differences between the realistic need for expertise that characterizes mainstream Sunni jurisprudence and the iconoclastic egalitarianism of the minority current of Salafism.⁷ The split between the Formalists' expertise and the Materialists' iconoclastic egalitarianism has never been clear-cut. Socially, however controversial, Salafi scholars were habitually recognized as part of the ulama class and, like other ulama, put forward their own authoritative interpretation of the scriptures. Historically, the Salafī doctrine (*madhhab al-salaf*) was integrated into mainstream Sunni Islam (*ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā'a*), although as the radical fringe of the broad scholarly consensus, it tended to challenge accepted legal, theological and Sufi methods and doctrines, as well as the practices of the cult of saints on the opposite fringe.

In the legal hermeneutics literature, references to the *madhhabs* are embedded in sections devoted to *ijtihād* and *taqlīd*.⁸ The Salafis denounce *taqlīd* because it results in unquestioning acceptance of others' opinions, and they regard it (along with the veneration of saints) as a deviation from the scriptures and the way of the ancestors. Instead, they advocate *ijtihād* in the sense of extracting a ruling directly from the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, and they encourage lay individuals to verify the textual evidence adduced by jurists (an exercise known as the intermediate degree of *ittibā'*).⁹ From the point of view of their Traditionalist adversaries, the precedents established by the four law schools lie at the heart of the collective effort that has built and maintained

6 Aron Zysow, *The Economy of Certainty: An Introduction to the Typology of Islamic Legal Theory* (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2013), 2–3, 22–23. See also Thomas Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 94ff.

7 Jonathan A. C. Brown, "Is Islam Easy to Understand or Not?: Salafis, the Democratization of Interpretation and the Need for the Ulema," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 26 (2015), 117–119.

8 Bernard Weiss, "The *Madhhab* in Islamic Legal Theory," in Peri Berman, Rudolph Peters and Frank E. Vogel (eds.), *The Islamic School of Law: Evolution, Devolution, and Progress* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1.

9 Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, "Rethinking the *Taqlīd-Ijtihād* Dichotomy: A Conceptual-Historical Approach," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136 (2016), 285–288.

the edifice of Islamic jurisprudence throughout the ages. The Traditionalists see no inherent contradiction between *ijtihād* and *taqlīd* since qualified jurists regularly use independent reasoning within their specific *madhhab* and lesser jurists and laypersons without the requisite knowledge should imitate their rulings.¹⁰

My treatment of the question of the *madhhabs* in this article is predicated on two premises. The first is that the modern transition of Islam produced a shift in emphasis within the Sunni juristic mainstream from the *taqlīd*-oriented *madhhabs-ṭarīqas* nexus to *ijtihād*-bound Salafism. As Talal Asad has suggested, one should approach Islam as a tradition that “consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history.”¹¹ One such discourse, which, according to Asad, was neither imitative nor homogenous, is reflected in the notion of renewal and reform (*tajdīd wa-iṣlāh*). And as John Voll and Nehemia Levtzion have noted, the contemporary Islamic resurgence is only one of many instances of dramatic revival within the Muslim world. Regarding the long eighteenth century, they observed remarkable common features and lines of continuity among reformist movements, based on their ties to a Muslim-wide network of masters and students who shared a growing interest in the study of *ḥadīth* and a Prophet-oriented Sufism.¹²

Voll and Levtzion's view of revival and reform in the eighteenth century has been criticized on both spatial and temporal grounds. Ahmad Dallal has dismissed the idea of a premodern united Islamic revivalism; he has argued that each reformist project had distinctive features and must be studied in its specific context.¹³ Be that as it may, while acknowledging the differences between the various eighteenth-century reformers, one should not ignore their family resemblance in terms of the basic components of their teachings. Junaid Quadri has rejected the idea of a continuous Islamic tradition; he has maintained that the dramatic changes that took place in the intellectual assumptions and currents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' transition to modernity among reformers as well as mainstream jurists amounted to a radical transformation, detraditionalization and, indeed, to the

10 Emad Hamdeh, *Salafism and Traditionalism: Scholarly Authority in Modern Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 152–156.

11 Talal Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1986, 14.

12 Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll (eds.), *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 3–20.

13 Ahmad Dallal, “The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750–1850,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 113 (1993), 341–359.

death of the tradition.¹⁴ The continuing debate over the *madhhabs* suggests that although challenged and weakened, the law school tradition is alive and well. Guy Burak has referred to the official canonization of the Ḥanafī school in the early Ottoman Empire as the second formation of Islamic Law.¹⁵ In this vein, the modern transformation of Ḥanafism that began with its codification in the *Mecelle* and promotion to the “new orthodoxy” in the service of the Ḥamīdian ideology of the caliphate,¹⁶ can be seen as its third formation. This discussion is yet another formulation of the perennial question of continuity and change, which, in my view, should be addressed through a dialectical-perspectival approach that transcends this dichotomy. Following Waldman’s depiction of tradition as a modality of change,¹⁷ I suggest that twentieth century ulama and lay religionists, consciously or unconsciously internalized modern ideas of progress, science, individuality and identity using concepts and methodologies derived from the classic and latter day Salafi discursive tradition.

The second premise is that the *lā madhhabiyya* controversy between Albānī and Būṭī in the 1970s not only transformed but also perpetuated the doctrinal and sociopolitical split that began in the 1870s between Salafi reformers and Traditionalist conservatives. Lauzière, who has traced the history of the concept of Salafism, attributed its beginnings to an orientalist (mis)construal of the 1920s and discussed the parallel development of its two apparently opposite versions: modernist Salafism, which is open to compromise and reform, and purist Salafism, which rejects all religious innovations. In his view, until World War I, the term ‘Salafi’ continued to refer to adherents of classical Ḥanbalī theological doctrine, rather than to Modernists, who were rather “balanced reformers,” and only in the 1970s did the purist conception of Salafism become dominant.¹⁸ In his seminal study of the ulama, Zaman distinguished traditionally educated Muslim scholars from Modernists and

14 Junaid Quadri, *Transformations of Tradition: Islamic Law in Colonial Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 84–85. For a similar argument, see Bettina Dennerlein, *Religion als Reform: Iṣlāḥ und Gesellschaft in Marokko, 1830–1012* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2018), 18–23.

15 Guy Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: the Hanafi School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

16 Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimization of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1914* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 1999), 46–52.

17 Marilyn Robinson Waldman, “Tradition as a Modality of Change: Islamic Examples,” *History of Religions* 25 (1986), 318–340.

18 Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 19–25.

Islamists schooled in modern secular institutions. In the South Asian context, he noted, Ahl-i Hadith, the Indian-Pakistani version of Salafism, and its rivals, the Ḥanafī Deobandis and the saint-revering Bareilwis, emerged in response to the loss of Muslim rule after the fall of the Mughal Empire in 1857. Following Asad, but focusing on the institutional aspects and on the relations of power and contestation inherent in his concept of the discursive tradition, Zaman charted the different ways in which the ulama mobilized their respective traditions during the colonial and postcolonial periods to defend religion, reconstitute their authority, reform the individual, and Islamize the state.¹⁹

My understanding of Salafism is similar to Zysow's and Brown's understanding of *ḥadīth*-based certainty and iconoclastic egalitarianism. Salafism refers to the Sunni discursive tradition that emerged from the *ahl al-ḥadīth* faction, and which in its differing manifestations over time adhered to some or all of the following tenets: a literalist reading of scriptures, a critique of the theological reason, condemnation of popular Sufi practices, and promoting *ijtihād* at the expense of *taqlīd*. According to my view, the *lā madhhabī* position constitutes a subset of the broad Salafi tradition. As in South Asia, both Salafi and Traditionalist ulama in the Arab lands were products of the Muslim project of modernization and, in alliance with Modernists and Islamists, appropriated concepts, methodologies and arguments from their respective juristic traditions to defend and reform their religion.

Albānī and Būṭī were both based in Syria.²⁰ They viewed themselves as links in the long chain of eminent men of religion who embodied the Prophetic saying “the heartland of the abode of Islam is al-Shām.”²¹ Syria became a major hub of Islamic learning during the Mamluk period, when Damascus replaced Baghdad as the center of Ḥanbalism, and was also the birthplace of modern Salafism's spiritual fathers, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.²² During the nineteenth century, Damascus hosted two of the most outstanding religious thinkers and activists of the time. One was Shaykh Khālid (1776–1827) of the Naqshbandī Sufi order, the leading force of renewal and reform at the beginning of the century, who supported Ottoman state modernization. The other was Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī (1808–1883), who offered a reinterpretation of

19 Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 3–16.

20 Albānī and Būṭī were both sons of immigrant families who went to Damascus when they were young and were raised and educated in the city.

21 Farah El-Sharif, “The Rhetoric of Twentieth-Century Damascene anti-Salafism,” *Contemporary Levant* 5:2 (2020), 113–114.

22 Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 145–150.

Ibn 'Arabī's theosophy, the building block of the Muslim theory of sainthood, to accommodate Islam to the Western-dominated world. Their successors in the twentieth century were divided between conservatives who defended the old notion of renewal and reform, and modernists who used the Salafi doctrine as the foundation for a new concept of reform.²³

This essay examines my two premises – the modern shift to Salafism, and continuities in the doctrinal positions of both Salafis and Traditionalists – by tracing the evolution of the *lā madhhabiyya* controversy in Syria from 1870 to 1970. My aim is not merely to examine the ideas of both groups against the background of religious and sociopolitical developments in Syria, but rather to uncover their sources of inspiration, interconnections, and impact on the overall debate over the *madhhabs* that raged in the major centers of Islamic thought in the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula and South Asia. To this end I analyze polemical exchanges between three generations of Salafis and Traditionalists whose lifetimes spanned the stormy period from the final decades of the Ottoman Empire through the French Mandate to the rise of the Ba'th regime.

An Ambiguous Legacy

The roots of the minority current of Salafism go back to the *ahl al-ḥadīth* faction and its successors in the Ḥanbalī theological-legal school. Its efflorescence under the Mamluks in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE took place in the context of the final consolidation of the four Sunni schools of law, and the concomitant popularization of the Sufi orders.²⁴

Ibn Taymiyya adopted an ambiguous position towards the *madhhabs*. Hailing from a Ḥanbalī family of ulama, he generally acknowledged the validity of Ḥanbalī legal principles and cited many of its scholars.²⁵ Nevertheless, he objected to strict adherence to a particular school (*al-ta'aṣṣub li-l-madhhab*) and rejected the infallibility of the *madhhabs*' eponymous founders. Ibn Taymiyya was also averse to *taqlīd*, and he allowed laypersons as well as jurists to adhere to whatever school they preferred. He stressed the priority of the Qur'an and Sunna over the schools as sources of legal authority and advocated

23 Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 5–9.

24 Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (3rd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 220–226.

25 Abdul Hakim I. Al-Matroudi, *The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict or Conciliation* (London: Routledge, 2006), esp. 56–91.

direct examination of the revealed sources. In his view, people may engage in *ijtihād* according to their abilities, and every *mujtahid* deserves a reward even if he is mistaken, provided his intention was good. In addition, Ibn Taymiyya acknowledged the use of reason through both analogy (*qiyās*) and public interest (*maṣlaḥa*), so long as these do not contradict the revealed texts. He also acknowledged consensus (*ijmā'*), although only that of the first three generations of the Muslim community – the standard definition of the *salaf*. These principles were manifested pragmatically in his *fatwas* written to resolve the daily problems of ordinary people.²⁶

Ibn Taymiyya's foremost disciple, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, systematized his master's legal methodology, although he did not always follow his specific rulings. From the Salafi perspective, following one's teacher entails the exercise of one's own *ijtihād* rather than blind imitation.²⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim was also less committed than Ibn Taymiyya to the Ḥanbalī school, and more critical than he was of *madhhab*-based *taqlīd*.²⁸ By positioning himself between the rationalist Mu'tazila and the literalist Zāhirīs, he reasserted the supremacy and self-sufficiency of divine scriptures, the harmony of reason and revelation, and the authority of the *salaf*.²⁹

Numerous puritan thinkers and movements espoused the Salafi doctrine in the following centuries.³⁰ On the eve of modernity, the Wahhābī movement in Central Arabia and the Zaydī movement for Sunnitization in Yemen developed two distinct understandings of this doctrine.³¹ In Arabia, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792) was primarily interested in theology. In the legal domain, he embraced Ibn Taymiyya's view that one should adopt the position of whichever school is, in his opinion, most closely based on the Qur'an and Sunna, while in practice he fell back on the Ḥanbalī tradition of Najd.³² By

26 Yossef Rapoport, "Ibn Taymiyya's Radical Legal Thought: Rationalism, Pluralism and the Primacy of Intention," in Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (eds.), *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 191–226.

27 Al-Matroudi, *The Hanbali School*, 131–136.

28 Christopher Melchert, "The Relation of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya to the Ḥanbalī School of Law," in Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer (eds.), *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 156–160.

29 Abdul-Rahman Mustafa, *On Taqlīd: Ibn Al Qayyim's Critique of Authority in Islamic Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 37–59.

30 See Caterina Bori, "Ibn Taymiyya (14th to 17th Century): Transregional Spaces of Reading and Reception," *The Muslim World* 180 (2018), 87–123.

31 On the Zaydi reaction to Wahhābism, see Ahmad S. Dallal, *Islam without Europe: Traditions of Reform in Eighteenth-Century Islamic Thought* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 34–38, 44–54.

32 Michael Crawford, *Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab* (London: Oneworld, 2014), 54.

contrast, in the Yemen, Ibn al-Amīr al-Ṣan'ānī (1688–1769) and Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Shawkānī (1759–1834), who were closer to Ibn al-Qayyim, paid more attention to legal hermeneutics. Not bound by any of the Sunni schools of law, they used *ḥadīth* to transcend their differences. Although both late Ottoman modernist Salafis and today's purist Salafis have often been denounced as Wahhābīs, their critique of the legal tradition (*lā madhhabiyya*) follows the reformist Zaydī position.³³

Sunnitized Zaydī legal theory was transmitted to the central Arab lands via the Indian Ahl-i Hadīth movement. Its leaders, who borrowed the ancient faction's name and revered Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, called for a return to the Prophet's traditions, denounced all later innovations, and derided popular customs.³⁴ Like other modern Islamic reform movements in South Asia, Ahl-i Hadīth claimed to be inspired by Shāh Waliullah of Delhi (1703–1763), the foremost Indian representative of the eighteenth-century renewal and reform tradition. Waliullah approved of the schools of law (although regarding the Ḥanbalī school as the least reliable), but considered *ḥadīth* the sole criterion for selecting an appropriate ruling.³⁵ He emphasized the ease with which *ijtihād* can be practiced, which only increased in later generations, and the ability of common Muslims to understand the scriptures themselves, or at least ask specialists to provide them with textual proofs.³⁶ Still, Ahl-i Hadīth favored Shawkānī, who was more emphatic in his disavowal of adherence to a particular school, his rejection of *madhhab* authority, and the use of *taqlīd* and *ijmā'*. The main difference between Shawkānī and Waliullah was the Yemeni scholar's literalist interpretation of the scriptures as compared to his Indian counterpart's reliance upon reason through *qiyās*.³⁷ Like Ahl-i Hadīth,³⁸ the

33 See Frank Griffel, "What Do We Mean By 'Salafi'? Connecting Muḥammad 'Abduh with Egypt's Nūr Party in Islam's Contemporary Intellectual History," *Die Welt des Islams* 55 (2015), 204–209.

34 Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 269–277.

35 J. M. S. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shāh Walī Allāh Dīhlawī, 1703–1776* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 165–170.

36 Rudolph Peters, "Idjtiḥād and Taqlīd in 18th and 19th Century Islam," *Die Welt des Islams* 20:3–4 (1980), 131–145.

37 Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: the Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 86–102; Johanna Pink, "Where Does Modernity Begin? Muḥammad al-Shawkānī and the Tradition of *Tafsīr*" in Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink (eds.), *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 348–351.

38 Martin Riexinger, "Ibn Taymiyya's Worldview and the Challenge of Modernity: A Conflict among the Ahl-i Ḥadīth in British India," in Krawietz and Tamer, *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law*, 495–499.

early, modernist, Salafis tended to combine the reformist ideas of the radical Shawkānī and mainstream Waliullah.³⁹

The first source I could find that signals the late Ottoman ulama's awareness of the newly formulated anti-*madhhabī* position is a polemical treatise penned in 1876 by the Baghdadi Naqshbandī Sufi scholar Dā'wūd ibn Jirjīs (1812 or 1816–1881).⁴⁰ In it Ibn Jirjīs reports with indignation that an Indian student informed him that “there are people among them who claim [to exercise] absolute *ijtihād*, that they have no need for recourse to the four *madhhabs* ... that God most exalted and his Prophet did not enjoin the people to follow them, and that they themselves rely directly on the Qur'an and Sunna.”⁴¹ In his rebuttal of these “new Wahhābīs,” Ibn Jirjīs argued that given the superior qualities of the founders of the four Sunni schools, their rulings must be imitated. After them, absolute *ijtihād* ceased, which explains why ignorance and wickedness have come to prevail. Thus, according to Ibn Jirjīs individuals who claim to be *mujtahids* today have de facto excluded themselves from the community of scholars who continue the path of the ancestors (*al-salaf*).⁴²

Two years later, in 1878, Nu'mān Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (1836–1899), the head of the small reformist faction in Baghdad, came across books of Ahl-i Hadith leader Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān (1832–1890), the Nawwab of the princely state of Bhopal. These books echo the views of Shawkānī that Khān had discovered in the 1860s, when two Yemeni disciples were invited to teach in the local Dar al-Hadith.⁴³ In 1881, Ālūsī completed a learned defense of Ibn Taymiyya against his sixteenth-century detractor Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (1503–1566). The first of its kind in print, this treatise heralds the modern Salafi movement.⁴⁴ The

39 See Ahmad Dallal, “Appropriating the Past: Twentieth-Century Reconstruction of Pre-Modern Islamic Thought,” *Islamic Law and Society* 7 (2000), 325–358.

40 On Ibn Jirjīs, see Itzhak Weismann, “The Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya and the Salafi Challenge in Iraq,” *Journal of the History of Sufism* 4 (2004), 229–240; Cole M. Bunzel, *Wahhabism: The History of a Militant Islamic Movement* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023), 250–253.

41 Dā'wūd al-Mūsawī al-Baghdādī, *Ashadd al-jihād fi ibtāl da'wā al-ijtihād* ([Bombay], 1305 AH), 2.

42 Ibid., 10–18.

43 Claudia Preckel, “Screening Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān's Library: The Use of Ḥanbalī Literature in 19th-Century Bhopal,” in Krawietz and Tamer, *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law*, 162–219. On Khān's Yemeni connection and its impact on his legal opinions, 178–180; Seema Alavi, “Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān (1832–90) and the Creation of a Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the 19th century,” *Journal of the Economic & Social History of the Orient* 54 (2011), 1–38.

44 Nu'mān Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Jalā' al-'aynayn fi muḥākamat al-Aḥmadayn* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Madanī, 1961 [first ed. Cairo, 1881]), see Basheer Nafi, “Salafism Revived: Nu'mān al-Ālūsī and the Trial of two Aḥmads,” *Die Welt des Islams* 49 (2009), 49–97.

Baghdadi reformers had been long aware of Ibn Taymiyya's doctrines through their ties with the Wahhābīs of Najd. They shared their condemnation of tomb visitation and saint worship, though not their practice of excommunication (*takfīr*).⁴⁵ In this book, however, Ālūsī refers to Waliullah and Shawkānī but not to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb.⁴⁶ Fearing the reactions of Traditionalists such as Ibn Jirjīs, he refrained from mentioning his Indian mentor's position against the schools of law and his aversion to *taqlīd*.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Ālūsī equated the *mujtahid* with the *faqīh*, lauding the *mujtahid* as "a judicious scholar who uses his faculty of reason ('*aql*')."⁴⁸ Drawing not only upon Ibn Taymiyya but also Ghazālī and Ibn 'Arabī, he attempted to show why applying absolute *ijtihād* is necessary, and not only within the *madhhab*. To do so, Ālūsī claimed that it is permitted to follow *mujtahids* other than the founders of the four established schools of law, but not permitted to forbid an adherent of one school from embracing the opinion of another.⁴⁹

Recasting the *ijtihād-taqlīd* Divide

In the Syrian lands, the Ottoman state reforms known as the *Tanzīmāt* (1839–1876) created a new class of religious scholars whose intellectual formation combined the renewal and reform scholarly-Sufi tradition and the modern sciences. These men studied in newly established public schools and read newspapers and works translated into Arabic that were printed in the fledgling provincial and private presses. Hailing mostly from urban middle class *ulama* families, they occupied new positions in the expanding Ottoman administration as well as in journalism. They promoted religious reform based on a selective adoption of the Western ideals of reason, progress and constitutional government, through a reinterpretation of the scriptures.⁵⁰ Dissatisfied with the idea of returning to the origins of Islam as championed by the Modernists Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838–1897) and Muḥammad Abduh (1849–1905), they combined the idea of return with the Salafi tradition of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.

45 Butrus Abu Manneh, "Salafiyya and the Rise of the Naqshbandiyya-Khālidiyya in Baghdad in the Early Nineteenth century," *Die Welt des Islams* 43 (2003), 349–372.

46 Ondřej Beránek and Pavel Ťupek, *The Temptation of Graves in Salafi Islam: Iconoclasm, Destruction and Idolatry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 92–93.

47 Ālūsī, *Jalāl al-'aynāy*, 45–50.

48 *Ibid.*, 164–165.

49 *Ibid.*, 176–181.

50 David Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 14–19.

The reformist Damascene faction learned about Ahl-i Hadith and its anti-*madhhabī* position from their Baghdadi counterparts at a time when they too were beginning to take an interest in Ibn Taymiyya and his doctrines. Circa 1885, 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Bīṭār (1839–1917), the doyen of the Salafi group in Damascus, “began to call for reliance solely on the Qur'an and Sunna and to avoid approving any opinion or ruling without evidence”.⁵¹ He also included an entry on Ḥasan Khān in his biographical dictionary.⁵² His younger colleague, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (1866–1914), expressed his admiration for Nu'mān al-Ālūsī's book and requested an *ijāza* (authorization) from him to contact the Indian reformer.⁵³ Qāsimī's Qur'an exegesis, *Maḥāsīn al-ta'wīl*, draws on Ḥasan Khān's commentary, which itself borrows extensively from Shawkānī's *tafsīr* that combines methods of *ḥadīth* transmission and personal interpretation.⁵⁴ By the first decade of the twentieth century, Qāsimī was corresponding with Maḥmūd Shūkri al-Ālūsī (1857–1924), Nu'mān's nephew and leader of the next generation of Baghdadi reformers, and with like-minded religious intellectuals in Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula, in an effort to find, edit and publish classical texts.⁵⁵

Qāsimī's censure of the mainstream legal tradition far exceeded that of Ālūsī.⁵⁶ In his private notes, Qāsimī castigated *taqlīd* as ‘an infectious disease’ and charged that strict adherence to the schools was sowing divisions among believers, obstructing the search for truth, and imposing hardships. In his view, the *mujtahid* is synonymous not only with the *faqīh*, as Ālūsī maintained, but also with the *muftī*, who must take into account contemporary circumstances when issuing a *fatwā*.⁵⁷ In public, Qāsimī was more circumspect, and he usually cited mainstream authorities to revive the study of *uṣūl al-fiqh* in support of his critical ideas.⁵⁸ To rebuff the claim that the qualities of the *madhhab*s' founders were unsurpassable, he cited, in addition to Ibn al-Qayyim, the Egyptian Sufi

51 Muḥammad Bahjat al-Bīṭār, “Tarjamat al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Bīṭār,” *al-Manār* 21 (1919), 318–319.

52 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Bīṭār, *Ḥilyat al-bashar fī ta'rīkh al-qarn al-thālith 'ashar*, 3 vols. (Damascus: Maṭbū'at al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī, 1380–1383/1961–1963), 1: 486–487.

53 Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 60.

54 Pink, “Where Does Modernity Begin?,” 355.

55 Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 172–181.

56 This interpretation is based on Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 70–76.

57 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Kitāb al-fatwā fī al-Islām* (Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Muqtabas, 1911), 12, 42.

58 Pieter Coppens, “A Silent *Uṣūl* Revolution? Al-Qāsimī, *Ijtihād*, and the Fundamentals of *Tafsīr*,” *Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire (MIDEO)* 36 (2021), 21–61.

scholar 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī (1493–1565),⁵⁹ who pointed out that the founders themselves insisted that they should not be emulated without proof from the Qur'an and Sunna.⁶⁰ He also referred to Waliullah's historical account, in which he decried the establishment of the schools of law as the outcome of the deterioration of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate.⁶¹ In 1906 the Damascene reformer published two collections of post-classical texts on legal hermeneutics by authors who professed to adhere to a specific school but actually engaged directly with the texts of revelation. Notable among these was Ibn Taymiyya's disciple Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī (1276–1316), a proponent of the principle of *maṣlaḥa*, which modern Islamic reformers have used ever since to circumvent school precedents and adopt useful Western ideas and technologies.⁶² In another treatise, in which he argued against the separation of worshippers according to the legal schools, Qāsimī called those who denounce it, including not only Shawkānī and Ḥasan Khān but also 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī, *mashrab al-athariyyīn*, 'the tendency of *ḥadīth* followers'.⁶³

Critique of the *madhhabs* and their practice of *taqlīd* was not the only possible interpretation of Ibn Taymiyya's legacy. Such critique could also lead to adherence to the Ḥanbalī school of law. This was the case of the traditionally educated 'Abd al-Qādir ibn Badrān (1848–1927), Bīṭār's comrade in Jazā'irī's Sufi circle and Qāsimī's revered colleague.⁶⁴ Ibn Badrān was a Shāfi'ī from the village of Duma who immersed himself in the recently discovered manuscripts

59 See Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, "Al-Sha'rānī's Response to Legal Purism: A Theory of Legal Pluralism," *Islamic Law and Society* 20 (2013), 110–140. On the Sufi underpinnings of his theory, see Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 1982), 236–241.

60 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-taḥdīth min funūn muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1987), 302–303, 377–378. On Sha'rānī's significance for the reformers, see Leila Hudson, "Reading al-Sha'rānī: The Sufi Genealogy of Islamic Modernism in Late Ottoman Damascus," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15 (2004), 39–68.

61 Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-taḥdīth*, 341–346.

62 Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī, "Risāla fi al-maṣāliḥ al-mursala," in Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (ed.), *Majmū' rasā'il fi uṣūl al-fiqh* (Beirut: al-Maṭba'a al-ahliyya, 1324/1926), 38–70. Ṭūfī gave *maṣlaḥa* precedence over the text (*naṣṣ*) and consensus (*ijmā'*) in social matters (*mu'amalāt*), see Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abdūh and Rashīd Riḍā* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 97–102.

63 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Risāla fi iqāmat al-ḥujja 'alā al-muṣallī jamā'tan qabla al-imām al-rātīb min al-kitāb wa-l-sunna wa-aqwāl sā'ir a'imāt al-madhāhib* (Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Ṣadaqa, 1340/1921–2), esp. 38–39. This question led to the split between Naṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī and his Ḥanafī father.

64 'Abd al-Qādir ibn Badrān, *Munādamat al-aṭlāl wa-musāmarat al-khayāl: al-athār al-dimashqiyya wa-l-ma'āhid al-'ilmīyya* (2nd ed. Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1980), kalam (introduction by Muḥammad Bahjat al-Bīṭār).

of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, along with books of *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth*. He presented his adoption of Ḥanbalism as a revelation: “God opened my eyes and guided me to search for the truth without privileging one school over the other. I realized that the Ḥanbalī school is the most faithful to the text and meaning of the holy Qur’an and pure Sunna, so from that time on I became a Ḥanbalī.”⁶⁵ Ibn Badrān thus professed the creed of his fellow Salafis but practiced a different legal hermeneutics. Like adherents of the other schools, he emphasized the difficulty of practicing full or partial *ijtihād*,⁶⁶ and argued that the obligation of non-*mujtahids* and common people to perform *taqlīd* is based on *ijmā’*.⁶⁷ This position makes Ibn Badrān much closer to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s interpretation of Ibn Taymiyya than to Shawkānī’s.

Little is known about how the new Salafi attitude to *ijtihād* and *taqlīd* was disseminated outside Damascus. In his autobiography, Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935) says that he discovered Ibn Taymiyya’s work while in school in Tripoli in the 1880s. He formed an initial negative impression of Ibn Taymiyya after reading al-Haytamī’s critique, but Ālūsī’s book made him realize that he was far superior to all other ulama.⁶⁸ In his *Umm al-Qurā*, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī (1848–1904) does not mention Ibn Taymiyya or Ibn al-Qayyim, but he was well acquainted with their Wahhābī and Zaydī successors and strongly championed their rejection of strict adherence to the *madhhab*:

Brothers! I believe you will agree that we should leave aside the differences among the law schools (*ikhtilāf al-madhāhib*) which we follow through blind imitation (*taqlīd*), since we do not know the sources of many of their rulings. We must rely on what we know with certainty from the Qur’an, the correct Sunna and firm *ijmā’*, so that our opinions will not diverge, and our decisions will be accepted by all Muslims. The ancestors’ doctrine (*madhhab al-salaf*) is the core and the *umma* must return to it and base its principles on it ... This view is not new among Muslims. All the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, except for the mixed population of the Ḥaramayn, concur. They are all Salafis in their creed and most of them are Ḥanbalīs or Zaydīs in legal hermeneutics.⁶⁹

65 Muḥammad al-‘Ajāmī, *Allāmat al-Shām ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Badrān al-Dimashqī: ḥayātuhu wa-athāruhu* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 1996), 24.

66 ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Badrān, *al-Madkhal ilā madhhab al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1985), 367–374.

67 Ibid., 388–393.

68 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Manār wa-l-Azhar* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Manār, 1353/1934), 178–179.

69 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī, *Umm al-Qurā* (Beirut: Dār al-Rā’id al-‘Arabī, 1982), 13–14.

Kawākibī adds that the Zaydī legal system was divided between ulama who practice *ijtihād*, readers who follow (*yatba'ūna*) one of the ancient or contemporary ulama without committing themselves exclusively to him, and common people who receive guidance from a contemporary alim supported by textual proof. Like most reformers, Kawākibī maintained that the skills required to engage in *ijtihād* consist of a mastery of Arabic, the Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, and the basics of Muslim legal hermeneutics. Like them, he pointed out that the eponymous founders of the *madhhabs* themselves forbade others to imitate them and that later scholars should build on the efforts of their predecessors to improve their rulings.⁷⁰

Reaffirming the Tradition

The Traditionalist rebuttal to the criticism of the schools of law was consolidated under the rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909). In Syria, counterattack was led by ulama and Sufi shaykhs who were either members of high-ranking scholarly families or upstarts from local or immigrant backgrounds. Although they had been exposed to Modernist and Salafī discourses during their schooling, they chose to defend customary practices and beliefs, and thus fortify the mainstream trend towards renewal and reform. Their aversion to European customs and ideas prompted the Traditionalist ulama to support Abdülhamid's Islamic policies, including his claim to the caliphate and patronage of the popular Sufi orders. In a few cases, they tried to enlist government support against the Salafīs but to little avail.⁷¹

The prototypical adversary of the early Salafī current was Abū al-Hudā al-Şayyādī (1850–1909), who rose from rural origins in the Hama region to become Abdülhamid II's chief Sufi Shaykh.⁷² Abū al-Hudā, who maintained ties with the reformist factions in Aleppo and Damascus, was primarily interested in promoting his Rifā'ī Sufi order in the service of the Sultan-Caliph, and he paid little attention to legal questions.⁷³ His protégé and later rival Yūsuf al-Nabhānī (1849–1932) sought to transcend the *ṭarīqas* and combine Sufism with legal and theological scholarship. A native of the village of Ijzim near Haifa, he completed his studies in Cairo and was appointed chief judge in Beirut, the two major hubs of the Arab Renaissance (*nahḍa*). As the most eloquent anti-Salafī polemicist of

⁷⁰ Ibid., 115–125.

⁷¹ Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 104–107.

⁷² Butrus Abu-Manneh, "Sultan Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda al-Sayyadi," *Middle Eastern Studies* 15 (1979), 131–153.

⁷³ Thomas Eich, "The Forgotten Salafī – Abū al-Hudā al-Şayyādī," *Die Welt des Islams* 43 (2003), 61–87, esp. 83.

the late Ottoman era, Nabhānī was acutely concerned with the Western threat to Islam and the Ottoman state, and he therefore targeted primarily Islamic modernists such as 'Abduh and Riḍā. He was, however, familiar with the ideas of Ḥasan Khān, the two Ālūsīs and Qāsimī and spent considerable effort in defending *madhhab*-based *taqlīd* and refuting *ijtihād*.⁷⁴

In the wake of the Young Turk revolution in 1908, the Traditionalist current in Damascus coalesced around the monthly journal *al-Ḥaqqā'iq*. Cognizant of the new winds of science and progress, the contributors adopted the modernist Salafī vocabulary as well as the new style of journalism, but turned them to their own advantage.⁷⁵ The initiative came from 'Abd al-Qādir al-Iskandarānī (d. 1943), the son of an immigrant family who studied with both Traditionalist and reformist ulama.⁷⁶ Iskandarānī described *al-Ḥaqqā'iq* as a religious, scientific and moral publication designed to counsel the Muslim *umma* during its difficult period of decline, ignorance and disunity. He assured his readers that, whereas other journals extolled and emulated (*qalada*) Western civilization, his journal would draw on the Qur'an, Sunna and the opinions of erudite Muslims.⁷⁷ Among the latter, Iskandarānī singles out the jurists (*fuqahā'*), "who made the greatest contribution to religion by establishing its principles, fortifying its structures and extracting its rules." He contrasts them with contemporary reformers, whom he denigrates as latter-day scholars (*khalaf*) who possess only superficial knowledge. He argues that their call to open the gates of *ijtihād* is tantamount to abandoning the rulings of the great *imāms*. In its *fatwā* section, *al-Ḥaqqā'iq* issued legal opinions, again with a modernist bent. The journal pledged to expound the rulings of the founders of the four *madhhabs*, along with evidence from the Qur'an and Sunna, *ijmā'* or *qiyās*, supported by reason and the principles of civilization.⁷⁸

74 Amal Ghazal, "‘Illiberal’ Thought in the Liberal Age: Yusuf al-Nabhani (1849–1932), Dream-Stories and Sufi Polemics against the Modern Era," in Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (eds.), *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Toward an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 214–233. Nabhānī's arguments against those who claimed the right to exercise *ijtihād* are summed up in a treatise that appeared after the Young Turk revolution of 1908, which led to his resignation. See Yūsuf al-Nabhānī, *al-Sihām al-ṣā'iba li-aṣḥāb al-da'āwi al-kādhība fī al-radd 'alā muda'ī al-ijtihād* (n.p., n.d.).

75 For an analysis of the content of *al-Ḥaqqā'iq*, see Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 118–122.

76 Muḥammad Muṭī' al-Ḥāfiẓ and Nizār Abāza, *Ta'rikh 'ulamā' Dimashq fī al-qarn al-rābi' 'ashar al-hijri* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1986), 2: 573.

77 "Fātiḥat al-sana al-'ulā," *al-Ḥaqqā'iq* 1:1 (1328/1910), 1–3.

78 "Kalima fī al-fiqh wa-l-fuqahā'," *al-Ḥaqqā'iq* 1:1 (1328/1910), 10–12. On continuities and changes relating to the issuance of fatwas in modern times, see Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick and David S. Powers (eds.), *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and their Fatwas* (Cambridge Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 26–32.

The Theological Interlude

Allegations of “Wahhābism” were leveled already at the *Mujāhidīn* movement, the precursors of the Indian Ahl-i Hadith, which made a failed attempt to overthrow the Sikhs and create a purist Islamic state in the Northwest Frontier in the 1830s. To demonize this indigenous movement, which sprang up in the circle of Shāh Waliullah’s descendants, its adversaries targeted its Wahhābī-style condemnation of popular practices, as well as its use of *ijtihād*.⁷⁹ In the 1880s, Ḥasan Khān himself wrote an apologetic treatise in which he argued that the state of Bhopal, and Indian Muslims in general, were loyal subjects of the British Raj and had nothing in common with the rebellious Wahhābīs.⁸⁰ Similar accusations were levelled in the first decade of the twentieth century against the Salafis, when Traditionalist ulama harassed the reformists by fueling the Ottoman fear that the Saudis would recover Najd. These efforts led to an attempt to deport Shūkrī al-Ālūsī from Baghdad in 1905,⁸¹ an investigation against Bīṭār in 1906, and a riot against Riḍā when he visited Damascus in 1908.⁸² Still, scholars such as Nabhānī made a clear distinction between Ḥanbali Wahhābīs in the Najd and urbanite non-*madhhabī* Salafis, who used the press to disseminate their own doctrines.⁸³

The charges against the modernist Salafis were not entirely unfounded. Kawākibī acknowledged the affinity between Wahhābīs and Salafis as regards their strict adherence to the Qur’an and Sunna, and like the Wahhābīs, he denounced the excesses of the Sufi and legal traditions. But he was also aware of the differences and favored a moderate Salafi tendency (*mashrab*) that shunned *takfīr* and included rational deliberation.⁸⁴ Ālūsī was also ambivalent. In an imaginary debate between an Iraqi and a Najdi scholar included in his *History of Najd*, his sympathies lie clearly with the latter. He also censures the Wahhābīs’ excessive zeal and use of *takfīr*, but implicitly concurs with their denunciation of saint veneration and tomb visitation as sheer disbelief.⁸⁵ Salafi-Wahhābī

79 See Shah Ismail Shaheed, *Taqwiyat-ul-iman* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1995), esp. 249–256.

80 Sayyad Muhammad Siddik Hasan Khan Bahadur, *An Interpreter of Wahhabism* (Calcutta: Author’s publication, 1884), 4–5.

81 Hala Fattah, “Wahhabi Influences, Salafi Responses: Shaikh Mahmud Shukri and the Iraqi Salafi Movement, 1745–1930,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 138–144.

82 Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 110–112, 130–133.

83 Ghazal, ““Illiberal” Thought,” 225.

84 Itzchak Weismann, *Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi: Islamic Reform and Arab Revival* (London: Oneworld, 2015), 75–78, 92.

85 Maḥmūd Shūkrī al-Ālūsī, *Ta’rīkh Najd* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, n.d. [originally al-Maṭba’a al-Salafiyya, 1343/1924]), 73–76.

ties strengthened after 1908, when Riḍā adopted the Arabist cause and devised a political strategy to combine forces in the Arabian Peninsula to challenge the Young Turk regime.⁸⁶ After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, he resumed his plans, this time in opposition to the colonial schemes of the victorious allies to seize Arab lands. His disappointment with Sharīf Ḥusayn of Mecca and his sons' collaboration with the British ultimately thrust him into the arms of Amīr 'Abd al-'Azīz Ibn Sa'ūd.⁸⁷

In Syria, the adoption of modern professions under the French Mandate by members of old religious notable families cleared the way for newcomer ulama of humbler backgrounds. To curb the influence of missionary and public schools, in Damascus this new brand of Traditionalist ulama set up the al-Gharrā' network of Muslim communal schools in the 1920s, while their counterparts in Aleppo opened the Khusrawiyya secondary Islamic seminary. These institutions helped conservative scholars preserve traditional conceptions of religious knowledge and strengthened their influence over society.⁸⁸ The Salafis remained a small minority within the religious class, although their audience expanded as a result of the growth of the modern school system, the circulation of Egyptian Salafi journals, and Wahhābī proselytizing. In the 1930s they set up two associations: the intellectual *al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī* and the activist *al-Shubbān al-Muslimūn*.⁸⁹ In 1938 Conservatives, Salafis and Muslim Youth united to oppose French anti-religious measures under the umbrella of the *Jam'iyat al-'ulamā'* Association.⁹⁰

The controversy between Syrian Traditionalists and Salafis was reignited as early as 1919 by the publication of Wahhābī books by Riḍā's *al-Manār* Press. Enraged by the free distribution of these works in Damascus, Iskandarānī responded with three anti-Wahhābī treatises,⁹¹ which he published after the expulsion of King Faysal from Syria and the establishment of the French Mandate. In them he reiterated the arguments used against Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb by its opponents from the very beginning of his movement, and underscored the atrocities perpetrated by his followers against fellow

86 Eliezer Tauber, "Rashid Rida as Pan-Arabist before World War I," *The Muslim World* 79 (1989), 102–111.

87 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Wahhābiyyun wa-l-Hijāz* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Manār, 1344/1925–6).

88 Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 23–35.

89 *Ibid.*, 102–105.

90 *Ibid.*, 166–168.

91 David Commins, "Wahhabis, Sufis and Salafis," in Meir Hatina, *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama' in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 238–240.

Muslims. Like Nabhānī, Iskandarānī's principal concern was to repel criticism of intermediation to God (*tawassul*) and related Sufi practices.⁹² However, he did not relate these issues to the *madhhabs*. In his brief remarks on the legal field, he merely depicted Wahhābīs as false Ḥanbalīs and underscored their rejection of *ijmā'*, *qiyās* and *taqlid* of *mujtahids*.⁹³ He wondered how "the enlightened Salafis of Damascus" could follow such a rustic band of ignorant Bedouin and their simplistic doctrines.⁹⁴

Iskandarānī's attack elicited a swift rebuttal from the leading Salafi of interwar Damascus, Qāsimī's foremost student, the religious scholar and Arabist historian and linguist Muḥammad Bahjat al-Bīṭār (1894–1976). The two treatises he published under a pseudonym attest to the weakening of the reformist camp in the wake of the debacle of Faysal's Arab government (1918–1920).⁹⁵ In one, Bīṭār rectifies what he characterizes as widespread misconceptions about Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb and his creed, including his alleged anthropomorphism, neglect of reason, prohibitions of tomb visits, intercession and miracles, as well as his opposition to the legal tradition.⁹⁶ In the other treatise, Bīṭār denies that his Salafi group adheres to the Wahhābī creed or opposes the schools of law. Nevertheless, he contrasts Wahhābī zeal with the corrupt and self-seeking Damascene ulama whom he blames for the backwardness and lack of creativity of contemporary Islamic civilization (*madaniyya wa-ḥaḍāra*).⁹⁷ In 1926, Bīṭār accompanied Riḍā to the Mecca Congress, where they sought to rehabilitate Wahhābism, and he subsequently stayed several times in the Hijaz helping set up the modern Saudi education system.⁹⁸

Bīṭār's new affinity with the Wahhābīs drew him towards theology and away from the modernist Salafi emphasis on legal hermeneutics. This shift is implied in his 1938 response to Meḥmed Zāhid Kevserī (al-Kawtharī, 1879–1952), the

92 'Abd al-Qādir al-Kilānī al-Iskandarānī, *al-Nafḥa al-zakiyya fī al-radd 'alā shubah al-firqa al-Wahhābiyya; al-Minḥa al-ilāhiyya fī al-radd 'alā mazā'im al-tā'ifa al-Wahhābiyya; al-Ḥujja al-murḍiyya fī ithbāt al-wāsiṭa ālatī nafathā al-firqa al-Wahhābiyya* (all three Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Fayḥā', 1340/1922).

93 Iskandarānī, *al-Nafḥa al-zakiyya*, 17.

94 Idem, 6–8.

95 Itzchak Weismann and Rokaya Adawi, "Muḥammad Bahjat al-Bīṭār and the Decline of Modernist Salafism in Twentieth-Century Syria," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 32 (2021), 240–242.

96 Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ḥijāzī al-Atharī, *al-Nafkha 'alā al-nafḥa wa-l-minḥa* (Damascus: Dār al-Taraqqī, 1340/1922), esp. 5–10, 16–21, 34–43.

97 Abū al-Yasār al-Dimashqī al-Maydānī, *Naẓra fī al-nafḥa al-zakiyya fī al-radd 'alā shubah al-wahhābiyya* (Damascus: Dār al-Taraqqī, 1340/1922), esp. 4–9, 22–23.

98 Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 62–75.

former Ottoman deputy Sheikh ül-Islam, who led the Traditionalist assault on Ibn Taymiyya and his modern followers from his place of exile in Cairo. The Ḥanafī Kawtharī coined the term *lā madhhabīyya* and derided it as a route to atheism (*lā dīniyya*).⁹⁹ Bīṭār, on his part, chose to focus on the theological questions of God's attributes and His ascension to the throne.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, in his life-long study of Ibn Taymiyya and his work, he mentions the *madhhabs* only in passing in the context of his polemic with the Shi'a. According to Bīṭār, Ibn Taymiyya's position in this text was restrained approval of the four schools of law:

As for the *madhhabs*, the four [founders] did not live at the same time. None of them imitated the other or ordered the people to follow him. On the contrary, each called to follow the Qur'an and Sunna, thus reinforcing each other. When one says that the people follow the four, this is mere convention. The four did not invent knowledge out of a vacuum ... and the people of the Sunna do not maintain that the agreement of the four is infallible or that the truth is confined to them and what is beyond them is false.¹⁰¹

It should thus come as no surprise that Bīṭār's influence on Albānī was minimal. The young *ḥadīth* expert attended the modernist Salafi's classes after his return from Saudi Arabia in 1931, but soon parted ways when his own purist anti-*madhhabī* views crystalized.¹⁰²

The Saudi Effect

The anti-*madhhabī* position of Ahl-i Hadith influenced not only the Salafi reformers in late-nineteenth century Iraq and Syria, but also their contemporaries, the Wahhābīs in Najd. Several Wahhābī ulama traveled to

99 Andrew Hammond, *Late Ottoman Origins of Modern Islamic Thought: Turkish and Egyptian Thinkers on the Disruption of Islamic Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 135–137.

100 Muḥammad Bahjat al-Bīṭār, *al-Kawtharī wa-ta'liqātuhu* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Imām, 1938).

101 Idem, *Ḥayāt Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya* (2nd ed., n.p.: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1972), 139–141.

102 Nizar Abāza, *'Ulamā' Dimashq wa-a'yānuhā fī al-qarn al-khāmis 'ashar al-hijrī* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2007), 393–403.

India to study with Ḥasan Khān and his comrades during the final turbulent years of the second Saudi state.¹⁰³ Among them was Sa'd ibn 'Atīq (1850–1930), who spent the 1880s in Bhopal and Delhi. Appointed *qāḍī* and *imām* of the Grand Mosque of Riyadh by Ibn Saud, he used his position to shape a new generation of Wahhābī ulama who defied Ḥanbalī law by direct reliance on the scriptures.¹⁰⁴ The All-India Ahl-i Hadith Conference, founded in 1906, rallied to support Ibn Saud after his conquest of the Hijaz. Several Ahl-i Hadith scholars participated, along with Riḍā and Bīṭār, in the Mecca Conference of 1926.¹⁰⁵ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Dihlawī (d. 1955), who remained in the Hijaz, established one Dar al-Hadith in Medina and, together with two of Riḍā's disciples, another in Mecca – both in the early 1930s. The Islamic University in Medina incorporated in its curriculum a mix of official Ḥanbalī law and the opinions of the three other schools that accorded with the Qur'an and Sunna.¹⁰⁶ These Dar al-Hadiths became part of the University when it was founded in 1961 by the then vice-president, Ibn Bāz, who had been a student of Ibn 'Atīq.¹⁰⁷ Both Ibn Bāz and Ibn 'Uthaymīn were sympathetic to the anti-*madhhabī* position.¹⁰⁸

Another resident of Saudi Arabia, the Tajik scholar Muḥammad Sulṭān al-Ma'ṣūmī al-Khundajī (1880–1960), provided Albānī with the legal support he was looking for to revive the controversy over the schools of law in Syria. Khundajī was a self-proclaimed autodidact who adopted Salafism under the influence of Riḍā's *al-Manār*. Fleeing persecution in the Soviet Union, he settled in Mecca and joined the staff of Dar al-Hadith. In 1939 Khundajī issued a fatwa, published as a booklet a decade later, in which he depicted adherence to a specific law school as a display of ignorance and misguidance, sectarian partisanship and unbelief, and urged Muslims to disregard the four schools

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- 103 David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 145.
 104 Alexander Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 46–52; Lacroix, “Between Revolution and Apoliticism,” 61–62.
 105 Yoginder Sikand, “Stoking the Flames: Intra-Muslim Rivalries in India and the Saudi Connection,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27 (2005), 97–98.
 106 Chanfi Ahmed, “For the Saudi Kingdom or for the Umma? Global ‘ulamā’ in the Dār al-Ḥadīth in Medina,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 32 (2012), 72–76.
 107 Michael Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith: Migration, Education and the Wahhabi Mission* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 81.
 108 Frank E. Vogel, *Islamic Law and Legal System: Studies of Saudi Arabia* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity*, 125–128.

and to follow (*ittibā'*) the literal meaning of the authenticated *ḥadīth*.¹⁰⁹ Albānī, who also promoted his image as an autodidact, taught for two years at the Islamic University in Medina.¹¹⁰ At the beginning of his career in the 1950s, he chose Ḥasan Khān's commentary on Shawkānī's legal compendium for teaching and advice. In its introduction he praised the author for following the way of the people of *ḥadīth* by providing evidence and proof and for avoiding both imitation and his own opinion.¹¹¹ In 1969, Albānī reissued Khundajī's book under the title *Is the Muslim Required to follow one of the Four Schools?*, leading to the showdown with Būṭī.¹¹²

In Defense of the Law Schools

Following Syrian independence in 1946, the Mandatory religious associations were consolidated into two religio-political organizations: the Traditionalist-dominated League of Ulama and the Islamist Muslim Brothers. The League operated independently in each city as a syndicate of clerics that pressured policymakers to support its conservative agenda; the Brothers were a nationwide *da'wa* party that competed for power in Syria's parliamentary democracy. Significantly, Bahjat al-Biṭār and the *al-Tamaddun* modernist Salafi group joined the League of Ulama to pursue their shared professional interests. By contrast, the ulama who led the Muslim Brothers functioned as modern educators and *du'a*. Muṣṭafā al-Ṣibā'ī (1915–1964), the founder and first General Intendent of the Brotherhood, was also the founder and first dean of the Sharia Faculty at the University of Damascus.¹¹³ After the 1963 coup, the Ba'th regime put an end to the League of Ulama and secured the election of the loyalist Naqshbandī shaykh Aḥmad Kuftārū (1915–2004) as Grand Mufti of Syria. After brutally quelling the Hama riots of 1964, the regime also outlawed the Muslim Brothers. In the escalating conflict with the regime, the Syrian Muslim Brothers split into a northern wing, affiliated with the Naqshbandiyya,

109 Muḥammad Sulṭān al-Ma'ṣūmī al-Khujandī, *Hal al-muslim mulzam bi ittibā' madhhab mu'ayyan min al-madhāhib al-arba'a?* (Amman: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, 1984). On Ma'ṣūmī and his book see, Qureshi, "Sunni Tradition," 167–180.

110 Emad Hamdeh, "The Formative Years of an Iconoclastic Salafi Scholar," *The Muslim World* 106 (2016), 411–432.

111 Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *al-Ta'līqāt al-raḍīyya 'alā al-rawḍa al-nadiyya li-l-'Allāma Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān* (Cairo: Dār Ibn 'Afān, 1999), 3, 12.

112 Hammond, *Late Ottoman Origins*, 169–171.

113 Pierret, *Religion and State*, 168–170.

and a modernist Salafī-oriented Damascene wing.¹¹⁴ In the 1950s, both Albānī and Būṭī frequented the Damascene headquarters and taught at the University of Damascus, but whereas Albānī developed his own Salafī method (*manhaj*), Būṭī became an anti-Salafī Traditionalist.

Būṭī was not the first to respond to Albānī's criticism of the *madhhabs*. He was preceded by a group of Syrian Ḥanafī jurists who joined hands in an endeavor to defend the law schools and expose the dangers of *lā madhhabiyya*.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the collective volume they published in 1968 may have been the motive behind Albānī's reissuing of Khundajī's booklet a year later.¹¹⁶ Most of the contributors were Naqshbandī-Khālīdī Sufi scholars, and thus heirs to the discourse of renewal and reform, who worked as high school teachers and were affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. They belonged to the circle of the eminent Aleppine scholar, 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (1917–1997), who had been one of Kawtharī's favorite students at al-Azhar in the 1940s. Like his nemesis Albānī, Abū Ghudda devoted his career to editing and commenting on classical works of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*.¹¹⁷ During his stay in South Asia in 1962, he became an enthusiastic supporter of the Deobandi school and its traditionalist educational reformism.¹¹⁸ After the Ba'th takeover of Syria in 1963, Abū Ghudda fled to Saudi Arabia, where he clashed with Albānī and, in the late 1960s, he was elected supreme head of the northern wing of the Muslim Brothers following the split in its ranks.¹¹⁹

114 Arnaud Lenfant, "L'évolution du salafisme en Syrie au XXe siècle," in Bernard Rougier (ed.), *Qu'est-ce que le Salafisme?* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), 165–167; Raphaël Lefèvre: *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (London: Hurst & Co., 2013), 82–96.

115 Aḥmad 'Izz al-Dīn al-Bayānūnī (ed.), *al-Ijtihād wa-l-mujtahidūn wa-ḍarūrat al-'amal bi-madhāhib al-a'immā al-arba'a wa-khatar al-lāmadhhabiyya al-ḍālla* (Aleppo: Maktabat al-Shabāb al-Muslim, 1968).

116 al-Khujandī, *Hal al-muslim mulzam*, 10–11.

117 On Abū Ghudda and his rivalry with Albānī, see Emad Hamdeh, "The Role of the 'ulamā' in the Thoughts of 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda," *The Muslim World* 107 (2017), 359–375. For lists of his teachers, students and writings, see Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh Āl Rashīd, *Imdād al-fattāḥ bi-asānīd wa-murūyyāt al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Fattāḥ* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī, 1999).

118 On Ahl-i Hadīth – Deobandi polemic in India see, Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 76–86. On their ramifications in Syria, see *ibid.*, 55–56; Olidort, "In Defense of Tradition," 221–223.

119 Itzchak Weismann, "The Hidden Hand: The Khālidiyya and the Orthodox–Fundamentalist Nexus in Aleppo," *Journal of the History of Sufism* 5 (2007), 41–59.

The initiative for the volume in defense of *madhhabīyya* came from Aḥmad ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Bayānūnī (1913–1975). Son of the leading Naqshbandī in Aleppo during the French Mandate who had been Abū Ghudda’s teacher, Bayānūnī was active in the ulama association of the city. Following the rise to power of the Ba’th, he founded and headed the activist Abū Dharr Society.¹²⁰ Of the five respondents to Bayānūnī’s initiative, two had a clear Naqshbandī background. One was Muḥammad al-Ḥāmid (1910–1969), who helped establish a branch of the Muslim Brothers in Hama before becoming the spiritual father of the local opposition to the Ba’th regime.¹²¹ The second, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ḥāfiẓ Dibs wa-Zayt (1892–1969), was a recluse who avoided the Salafi-dominated Damascene branch.¹²² The other three respondents, Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Salqīnī (1934–2011), then a teacher of *fiqh* in Aleppo, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Uyūn al-Sūd (1916–1979), *amīn al-fatwā* in Homs, and ‘Abdallāh Khayrallāh, the mufti of the Jabal Sam’ān region, hailed from established notable families of ulama. There is no information available on their Sufi or political affiliations.¹²³

Bayānūnī challenged his comrades by citing several statements attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa that appear to support the anti-*madhhabī* position. In one, the founder of the Ḥanafī school is reported to have said, “If a *ḥadīth* is reliable, this is my school.” In another he said, “It is not permissible to anyone to follow our opinion without knowing from where we took it.” Bayānūnī mentions two additional arguments against the law schools. One is that if Abū Ḥanīfa had lived after the *ḥadīth* collections had been compiled he would have abandoned *qiyās*. The other was that since the early *imāms* considered the *ḥadīth* in their practice of *ijtihād*, why would later scholars not do the same? The first authority Bayānūnī cites as a source of his citations is the Damascene Ḥanafī jurist Ibn

120 On ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Bayānūnī, see ‘Abd al-Majīd Bayānūnī, *Aḥmad ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Bayānūnī, al-dā‘iyah al-murabbī, 1329–1395H/1913–1975M* (Beirut: al-Dār al-Shāmiyya, 2006).

121 Itzchak Weismann, “The Politics of Popular Religion: Sufis, Salafis, and Muslim Brothers in Twentieth-Century Hamah,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37 (2005), 50–53. On Ḥāmid see, ‘Abd al-Ḥāmid Ṭahmāz, *al-Allāma al-mujāhid al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ḥāmid* (Damascus and Beirut: Dār al-qalam, 1391/1971). His responsa was later expanded into a full-length book, Muḥammad al-Ḥāmid, *Luzūm ittibā’ madhāhib al-a’imma ḥasm li-l-fawḍā al-dīniyya* (Hama: Maktabat dār al-da’wa, 1970).

122 Itzchak Weismann, “The Forgotten Shaykh: ‘Īsā al-Kūrdī and the Transformation of the Naqshbandī-Khālīdī Order in Twentieth Century Syria,” *Die Welt des Islams* 43 (2003), 387–388. On Dibs wa-Zayt, see Muḥammad Hishām al-Burhānī, *Lamḥa min ḥayāt al-marḥūm faḍlat al-‘allāma al-kabīr al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Dibs wa-Zayt* (Damascus, n.p., n.d.).

123 On Salqīnī, see Muḥammad ‘Adnān Kātībī, *‘Ulamā’ min Ḥalab fī al-qarn al-rābi’ ‘ashar* (Aleppo: n.p., 2008), 179–181, 548–552; on ‘Uyūn al-Sūd, see Ḥāfiẓ and Abāza, *Ta’rīkh ‘ulamā’ Dimashq*, 2: 942–945.

‘Ābidīn (1784–1836), a disciple of Shaykh Khālid al-Naqshbandī, who censured the ulama of his day for using summaries and abridgements rather than examining the sources directly.¹²⁴ The second is the aforementioned Sha‘rānī, who targeted the ulama for their division into competing schools of law.¹²⁵ The others are “Salafis” such as the eighteenth-century opponent of *taqlīd* Ṣāliḥ al-Fūllānī,¹²⁶ the eleventh-century Mālikī traditionist Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr,¹²⁷ and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.¹²⁸

The respondents deployed a three-pronged strategy to rebut the reformers’ claim that Abū Ḥanīfa favored *ijtihād*. First, they point out that not only the founders of the *madhhabs*, as acknowledged by the Salafis, but also their successors adhered faithfully to the Prophet’s Sunna. Ḥāmid sets the tone by extolling the jurists for building the imposing edifice of Islamic jurisprudence with its general principles and derived rulings, and he blames those who purport to exercise *ijtihād* for seeking to undermine it.¹²⁹ Khayrallāh explains apologetically that the *imāms* always strove to rely on *ḥadīth*, and that when they inadvertently failed to do so, their successors were careful to correct this omission.¹³⁰ ‘Uyūn al-Sūd asserts that: “we imitate ... because we know that they, viz. the *mujtahids*, are the best followers of the Qur’an and Sunna”; it follows that abandoning *taqlīd* and claiming to exercise *ijtihād* is tantamount to disregarding the way of the *salaf* and borders on renouncing Islam. In his view, to follow *ḥadīth* is to imitate those who determined which report is reliable and which is not.¹³¹ Ḥāfiẓ’s trust in the *ijtihād* of the *imāms* is so complete that, in a reversal of the literal meaning of Abū Ḥanīfa’s statement, he argues that “any *ḥadīth* that contradicts [a ruling of] the *madhhab* must not be followed.”¹³²

124 Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 67–75, esp. 69–70.

125 Hudson, “Reading al-Sha‘rānī,” 52–53.

126 On Fullānī and his work, see John O. Hunwick, “Ṣāliḥ al-Fūllānī (172/3-1803): the Career and Teachings of a West African ‘*alim* in Medina,” in A.H. Green (ed.), *In Quest of an Islamic Humanism: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Memory of Mohamed al-Nowaihi* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1984), 139–153.

127 On the preference for *ḥadīth* among Mālikīs in Andalusia, see Maribel Fierro “Proto-Maliki, Maliki and Reformed Maliki in Al-Andalus,” in Peri Bearman, Rudolph Peters and Frank E. Vogel (eds.), *The Islamic School of Law: Evolution, Devolution and Progress* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 70–75.

128 Bayānūnī, *al-Ijtihād wa-l-mujtahidun*, 75–77.

129 *Ibid.*, 91.

130 *Ibid.*, 82–83, 87.

131 *Ibid.*, 148–152, 155.

132 *Ibid.*, 175–174.

Second, the authors concur with the Salafi claim about the closing of the gate of *ijtihād* in the fourth/tenth century, but they regard it as a positive move designed to prevent unqualified people, including contemporary pretenders, from applying it. They emphasize the strict preconditions and vast knowledge required for exercising *ijtihād*, which only a few in the past and virtually none in present possess, even within their own schools. Salqīnī includes among these *madhhab*-bound *mujtahids* al-Ghazālī, as well as prominent jurists of the Mamluk and early Ottoman eras such as al-Kamāl ibn Humām, Khayr al-Dīn al-Ramlī and Ibn Taymiyya's detractor, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī.¹³³ At the same time, the authors narrow the application of *ḥadīth*. 'Uyūn al-Sūd argues that prophetic traditions unknown at the time of the four rightly guided caliphs, or unheard of by (proto-)Mālikīs in the Hijaz, or by Ḥanafīs in Iraq, are unreliable, as are unit-report *ḥadīths* (*aḥād*), which may be subject to error or omission.¹³⁴

Finally, the authors warn against the grave religious and social consequences of the reformers' claims to exercise independent reasoning, particularly when dealing with secularist ideologies. Here again Ḥamid is perhaps the most eloquent: he associates *ijtihād* by those unqualified to exercise it with chaos (*fawḍā*). In his view, opening the gate of *ijtihād* would lead to a proliferation of pretenders who would tear apart the *umma*.¹³⁵ Similarly, 'Uyūn al-Sūd maintains that the call to *ijtihād* and the decision to ignore the rulings of the great *imāms* would result in the spread of ignorance and the disruption of social relations.¹³⁶ Ḥāfiz, who cites at length "our shaykh Kawtharī", concludes that abandoning *taqlīd* would result in immorality and unbelief.¹³⁷

Būṭī entered the fray two years later, when he responded to Khundajī's arguments by asserting the necessity of *taqlīd* and adherence to the law schools. Taking a broader perspective as a Shāfi'ī, he referred to "Salafism" in general and its *lā madhhabi* position in particular as modernist slogans that combine the Wahhābī criticism of traditional learning and Sufism with Albanī's *ḥadīth* methodology.

133 Ibid., 135.

134 Ibid., 152–154. On the differences between Ḥanafī and Ḥanbali attitudes toward unit-report *ḥadīth*, see Zysow, *Economy of Certainty*, 22–34.

135 Bayānūnī, *al-Ijtihād wa-l-mujtahidūn*, 92–93.

136 Ibid., 149–150.

137 Ibid., 184.

Conclusion

The controversy over the *madhhabs* has engaged Syrian men of religion since the emergence of the modern Salafi movement in the late Ottoman period. The critique of this pillar of Islamic legal hermeneutics was instigated by a new class of religious intellectuals who combined a background in the tradition of renewal and reform, which in Ottoman Syria was primarily associated with the *shari'a*-minded activist Naqshbandī order, with modern education. To legitimize their challenge to the prevailing legal authority, methodology and vision, they revived and creatively appropriated the doctrines of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, particularly as interpreted by Shawkānī, as transmitted to them by the Indian Ahl-i Hadith movement. Modernist Salafis argued that the law schools, along with theological schools and Sufi orders, had deviated from the way of the *salaf* and thus were responsible for the decline of Islamic civilization and its subjugation to the West. Influenced by modern notions of science and progress, and aided by print culture, Qāsimī, Kawākibī, Riḍā and their contemporaries defined *ijtihād* as independent reasoning based on direct engagement with the scriptures, and *taqlīd* as imitation of others' opinions.

Syria's Traditionalist ulama, many of them connected to the Ottoman-Turkish Ḥanafī law school, regarded themselves as part of a hallowed line of religious experts who have elaborated the methods and rules that constitute the great edifice of the sacred Law. Operating within the bounds of the Sunni mainstream renewal and reform tradition, they argued that the law schools must be maintained to safeguard the straight path in the face of the Western onslaught, while the pretense to make do without them was sheer arrogance. However, in their polemics, Traditionalists incorporated the Salafi vocabulary as well as modern notions of reason and progress, which they proceeded to turn against their rivals. The contributors to conservative journal *al-Ḥaqā'iq* thus approved of creative engagement with the scriptures (*ijtihād*) within the limits of the *madhhabs* and denounced the blind imitation (*taqlīd*) of Western civilization.

The *lā madhhabiyya* debate abated in Syria during the French Mandate, when a new generation of upstart Traditionalists strengthened its influence over society while the weakened Arabist Salafis formed an alliance with the Saudi state and its theology-oriented Ḥanbalī Wahhābīs. Rekindled in the era of independence, both sides to the controversy maintained but also transformed their predecessors' arguments and methodologies. Threatened by the expanding state-run public education system and the secular ideologies of nationalism and socialism, Albānī revived the anti-*madhhabī* campaign, but

also used it as a springboard for an innovative legal methodology that replaced *taqlīd* with his own Salafi method (*manhaj*) based on authenticated *ḥadīth*. His opponent Abū Ghudda and his associates reiterated the call for adherence to legal precedents within the *madhhabs* and the adoption of modern vocabulary, while emphasizing the role of the law schools as the last bastion against the spread of ignorance and anarchy, and the futility of exercising absolute *ijtihād* in the face of secularism. Būṭī went a step further when he blamed Salafis for Muslim disunity and Islamic extremism. When faced with the oppressive secular Alawi-dominated Ba'th regime, Albānī opted for an apolitical position, whereas the loyalties of his Traditionalist adversaries were divided, like their late Ottoman Naqshbandī predecessors, between the regime and the Muslim Brothers' opposition to it.