
Although nowhere stated by the author, the present work appears, to all intents and purposes, either an enlarged and revised or a shortened version of the author’s unpublished doctoral dissertation, entitled A History of the ‘Su‘udi State’ from 1233/1818 until 1308/1891, which he submitted to the Princeton University in 1950. As the very title of the unpublished thesis indicates, the work under review relates to the second phase of the history of the Sa‘udi Kingdom from 1818 when the Egyptian forces under Ibrāhīm Pāsha, a son of the Khedive Muhammad Ali, drove the Sa‘ūdis out of the two holy cities of Islam—Mecca and Medina—and even captured Dir‘iyah, the family seat of the Sa‘ūdi rulers, until the closing years of the 19th century when the scales again turned in favour of the Sa‘ūdis. This phase of the Sa‘ūdi history is important inasmuch as it underlines the heroic struggle put up by this family of brave and dauntless warriors for regaining their lost independence, marked as usual by the vicissitudes of fortune and the uncertainties of an armed conflict. It is this period which groomed the scions of the Sa‘ūdi dynasty into the arts of both war and statesmanship. The training thus acquired enabled that doughty warrior, the late King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Āl Sa‘ūd in ruling his regained kingdom firmly, wisely and efficiently. It was he who, in fact, laid the foundations of a stable and prosperous Sa‘ūdi State that flourishes today under the rule of his second son, the present King Fayṣal.

The book opens with an Introduction dealing with a short geographical sketch of Sa‘ūdi Arabia, the periodization of Sa‘ūdi History, as the author conceives it, and the Wahhabi Doctrine, Practice and Influence. It is the third and the last part of the Introduction with which it is proposed to deal here. This part while giving a brief historical description of the rise of Wahhābism also attempts a delineation of the religious beliefs, dogmas and ideas of the so-called Wahhabis—a term wrongly applied by Western scholarship to the I‘tīhadīn of Arabia. The author does not appear to have made a thorough study of ‘Wahhabiism’ as is clear from the statements that he makes. Writing of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb he observes: ‘Just as medieval Muslim philosophers dubbed Aristotel ‘the teacher’, so Sheikh (sic) Muḥammad became ‘the sheikh’ to his disciples’ (p. 9). Anyone familiar with Muslim philosophic terminology will immediately understand the difference between ‘al-Mu‘allim al-Awwal’ (the first teacher) and ‘the sheikh’. It is a favourite style of writing with Muslim religious and Sufi authors to refer to the founders of orders or leaders of thought and great authorities, not by their original names but by the laqabs and sobriquets that their followers and admirers confer upon them by way of respect and regard. To bracket the phrase ‘the sheikh’ with the generally known title of Aristotle, therefore, sounds a bit jarring. In most of the Persian and Urdu works on mysticism and hagiology one comes across frequently such expressions as ‘the mentor’, ‘the guide’ etc. The expression Shāykh al-Ra‘īs for Avicenna (Ibn Sinā) and Shāykh al-Īslām for the saint-sufi, ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawi are too well-known to need any comment.

While speaking of the basic dogmas of the Wahhābis the author says: “After the Prophet, Wahhabis rank the Companions of the Prophet as the noblest of men. [And so do all the Sunnis.].” The Koran is naturally of fundamental
importance to Wahhabism and is viewed as *something actually spoken by God*” (p. 9, italics ours). This is rather an astounding statement. Not only the Wahhabis but the entire Muslim Community believes in the Qur'an as the Word of God. The divine origin of the Qur'an and its contents has never been denied.

The author then goes on to say that to the Wahhabis, “the Sunna, or tradition of the Prophet, is second in importance only to the Koran,” as if this is something peculiar to the Wahhabis! Such statements, though perfectly in order and above reproach, give the impression to the layman not fully acquainted with the basic teachings of Islam and the beliefs of its various sects that the Wahhabis are a sect totally different from the generality of the Muslims or that they profess tenets which constitute a separate creed in themselves. This impression is evidently both erroneous and misleading and the author cannot be congratulated on creating it. The Wahhabis, in fact, entertain the same beliefs and hold the same dogmas as are held and practised by the Sunnite Muslims anywhere in the world excluding the illiterate among them whose knowledge of the faith is mostly based on what has come down to them through the ages mixed with popular belief, local customs and usages. A distinction should, therefore, be clearly made between *historical* Islam and *classical* Islam as it would be unwise to mix them both.

The author’s remarks on *jihād* are equally reflective of his general attitude towards the fundamental beliefs of the Muslims. Says he: “In Wahhabi theory *jihād* is by no means limited to the narrow concept of ‘holy war’” (p. 11). Here again, he correctly gives the classical view. But why call it the ‘Wahhabi theory’? If by it he means that ‘Wahhabism’ is identical with classical Islam, he is right. But if his attempt is directed towards painting the followers of Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhab as fanatics or reactionaries, this is unfair both to the Wahhabis and Islam itself. It can be safely asserted that ‘Wahhabism’ is Islam and Islam is ‘Wahhabism’.

The author’s dubbing of Wahhabism as “a distant ancestor of later Arab nationalism” (p. 14) is seriously open to question. The “appeal for a return to the earlier ways” does not necessarily mean an outright rejection of all that is new and progressive. It merely means in Wahhabi terminology rejection of all that is repugnant to the Qur’an and the Sunnah, a provision which is also enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The present reviewer regrets that the learned author has not been able to make a dispassionate and objective study of Wahhabism and that his knowledge of this reformatory movement in Islam seems to be based on the French study of Henry Laoust and some other studies by European authors. Had he made his study from original Arabic sources including the works of Ibn Taymiyah, some of which are still in manuscript, and those of the Shaykh himself he would have been in a much better position to make an appraisal of what Wahhabism stood for.

The rest of the book is a mere narration of historical events as they unfolded: a story of the ups and downs of the Sa’ūdi dynasty and their final emergence as victors and successful claimants to the territories nestling the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

The author has done well to write in a readable form on a phase of the Sa’ūdi Arabian history which was not yet easily accessible to non-Arabic-knowing readers.

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