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Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (/wəˈhɑːb/; Arabic: محمد بن عبد الوهاب; 1703 – 22 June 1792) was a religious leader and theologian from Najd in central Arabia who founded the movement now called Wahhabism.^{[2][3][4][5][6]} Born to a family of jurists, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's early education consisted of learning a fairly standard curriculum of orthodox jurisprudence according to the Hanbali school of law, which was the school of law most prevalent in his area of birth.^[1] Despite his initial rudimentary training in classical Sunni Muslim tradition, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab gradually became opposed to many of the most popular Sunni practices such as the visitation to and the veneration of the tombs of saints,^[1] which he felt amounted to heretical religious innovation or even idolatry.^[1] Despite his teachings being rejected and opposed by many of the most notable Sunni Muslim scholars of the period,^[1] including his own father and brother,^[1] Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab charted a religio-political pact with Muhammad bin Saud to help him to establish the Emirate of Diriyah, the first Saudi state,^[7] and began a dynastic alliance and power-sharing arrangement between their families which continues to the present day in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.^[8] The Al ash-Sheikh, Saudi Arabia's leading religious family, are the descendants of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, and have historically led the ulama in the Saudi state,^[9] dominating the state's clerical institutions^[10]

Contents

Early years Early preaching

Emergence of Saudi state Pact with Muhammad bin Saud Emirate of Diriyah (First Saudi State)

Family

Teachings

On Sufism Non-Muslims Saints

Reception By contemporaries By modern scholars

Contemporary recognition Works See also Sources

References

Further reading

Early years

Muhammad ibn Abd al- Wahhab	
المجمر ولوقار بن جبر ولوقار	
Born	1703 (1115 A.H) 'Uyayna, Najd
Died	22 June 1792 (1206 AH)(Aged 88-89)
Religion	Islam
Denomination	Sunni
Jurisprudence	Hanbali ^[1]
Movement	Wahhabi movement
Main	Aqeedah
interest(s) Notable idea(s)	Views on innovations within Islam and Tawhid
Influenced by	
Influenced	
Arabic name	
Personal (Ism)	Muhammad
Patronymic (Nasab)	ibn `Abd al- Wahhab ibn Sulayman ibn Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rashid
Teknonymic (<i>Kunya</i>)	Abu Abdullah
Toponymic	al- Tamimi

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab is generally acknowledged^[11] to have been born in $1703^{[1][12]}$ (Nisba)

into the sedentary and impoverished Arab clan of Banu Tamim^{[13][14]} in 'Uyayna, a

village in the <u>Najd</u> region of central Arabia.^{[12][15]} Before the emergence of Wahhabism there was a very limited history of Islamic education in the area.^{[14][16]} For this reason, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab had modest access to Islamic education during his youth.^[14] Despite this,^{[14][17][18][19]} the area had nevertheless produced several notable jurists of the <u>Hanbali</u> school of orthodox Sunni jurisprudence, which was the school of law most prominently practiced in the area.^[1] In fact, Ibn 'Abd-al-Wahhab's own family "had produced several doctors of the school,"^[1] with his father, Sulaymān b. Muḥammad, having been the Hanbali jurisconsult of the Najd and his grandfather 'Abd al-Wahhāb, having been ajudge of Hanbali law^[1]

Ibn 'Abd-al-Wahhab's early education consisted of learning the <u>Quran</u> by heart and studying a rudimentary level of <u>Hanbali</u> jurisprudence and theology as outlined in the works of <u>Ibn Qudamah</u> (d. 1223), one of the most influential medieval representatives of the Hanbali school whose works were regarded "as having great authority" in the Najd.^[1] As the <u>veneration of saints</u> and the belief in their <u>ability to perform miracles by the grace of God</u> had become one of the most omnipresent and established aspects of Sunni Muslim practice throughout the Islamic world, being an agreed upon tenet of the faith by <u>the vast majority of the classical</u> <u>scholars</u>,^{[20][21][22][23][24][25][26]} it was not long before Ibn 'Abd-al-Wahhab began to encounter the omnipresence of saint-veneration in his area as well; and it is probable that he chose to leave Najd and look elsewhere for studies in order to see if the honoring of saints was as popular in the neighboring places of the Muslim worl^[4].

After leaving 'Uyayna, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab performed the <u>Greater Pilgrimage</u> in <u>Mecca</u>, where the scholars appear to have held opinions and espoused teachings that were unpalatable to him.^[1] After this, he went to <u>Medina</u>, the stay at which seems to have been "decisive in shaping the later direction of his thought."^[1] In Medina, he met a Hanbali theologian from Najd named 'Abd Allāh b. Ibrāhīm al-Najdī, who had been a supporter of the neo-Hanbali works of <u>Ibn Taymiyyah</u> (d. 1328), the controversial medieval scholar whose teachings had been considered heterodox and misguided on a number of important points by the vast majority of Sunni Muslim scholars up to that point in history^{[27][28][29][30]}

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's teacher Abdallah ibn Ibrahim ibn Sayf introduced the relatively young man to <u>Mohammad Hayya Al-Sindhiin</u> <u>Medina</u> who belonged to the <u>Naqshbandi</u> order (tariqa) of <u>Sufism</u>^{[31][32]} and recommended him as a student.^{[33][34][35]} Mohammad Ibn Abd-al-Wahhab and al-Sindhi became very close and Mohammad Ibn Abd-al-Wahhab stayed with him for some time.^[33] Muhammad Hayya also taught Mohammad Ibn 'Abd-al-Wahhab to reject popular religious practices associated with <u>walis</u> and their tombs that resembles later Wahhabi teachings.^[33]

Following his early education in Medina, Ibn Abdul Wahhab traveled outside of the peninsula, venturing first to Basra.^{[17][36]}

Early preaching

After his return home, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab began to attract followers, including the ruler of 'Uyayna, Uthman ibn Mu'ammar. With Ibn Mu'ammar, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab came to an agreement to support Ibn Mu'ammar's political ambitions to expand his rule "over Najd and possibly beyond", in exchange for the ruler's support for Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's religious teachings. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab began to implement some of his ideas for reform. First, he persuaded Ibn Mu'ammar to help him level the grave of <u>Zayd ibn al-Khattab</u>, a <u>companion of Muhammad</u> whose grave was revered by locals. Secondly, he ordered the cutting down of trees considered sacred by locals, cutting down "the most glorified of all of the trees" himself. Third, he organised the stoning of a woman who confessed to having committed adultery^{[37][38]}

These actions gained the attention of Sulaiman ibn Muhammad ibn Ghurayr of the tribe of <u>Bani Khalid</u>, the chief of <u>Al-Hasa</u> and <u>Qatif</u>, who held substantial influence in <u>Najd</u>. Ibn Ghurayr threatened Ibn Mu'ammar with denying him the ability to collect a land tax for some properties that Ibn Mu'ammar owned in <u>Al-Hasa</u> if he did not kill or drive away Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Consequently, Ibn Mu'ammar forced Ibn'Abd al-Wahhab to leave.^{[38][39]}

Emergence of Saudi state

Pact with Muhammad bin Saud

Upon his expulsion from '<u>Uyayna</u>, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab was invited to settle in neighboring <u>Diriyah</u> by its ruler <u>Muhammad bin Saud</u>. After some time in <u>Diriyah</u>, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab concluded his second and more successful agreement with a ruler.^[40] Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad bin Saud agreed that, together, they would bring the Arabs of the peninsula back to the "true" principles of Islam as they saw it. According to one source, when they first met, bin Saud declared:



This oasis is yours, do not fear your enemies. By the name of God, if all Nejd was summoned to throw you out, we will never agree to expel you.

Madawi al-Rasheed, <u>A History of Saudi Arabia</u>:
16

Muhammad ibn'Abd al-Wahhab replied:

You are the settlement's chief and wise man. I want you to grant me an oath that you will perform jihad (Struggle to spread Islam) against the unbelievers. In return you will be imam, leader of the Muslim community and I will be leader in religious matters.

- Madawi al-Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia: 16

The agreement was confirmed with a mutual oath of loyalty (*bay'ah*) in 1744.^[41] Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would be responsible for religious matters and Ibn Saud in charge of political and military issues.^[40] This agreement became a "mutual support pact" ^{[42][43]} and power-sharing arrangement^[44] between the <u>Al Saud</u> family, and the <u>Al ash-Sheikh</u> and followers of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, which has remained in place for nearly 300 years^[45] providing the ideological impetus toSaudi expansion.^[46]

Emirate of Diriyah (First Saudi State)

The 1744 pact between Muhammad bin Saud and Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab marked the emergence of the first <u>Saudi</u> state, the Emirate of <u>Diriyah</u>. By offering the <u>Al Saud</u> a clearly defined religious mission, the alliance provided the ideological impetus to <u>Saudi</u> expansion.^[10] First conquering <u>Najd</u>, <u>Saud's</u> forces expanded the <u>Salafi</u> influence to most of the present-day territory of <u>Saudi</u> <u>Arabia</u>,^[10] eradicating various popular practices they viewed as akin to <u>polytheism</u> and propagating the doctrines of 'Abd al-Wahhab.^{[10][47]}

Family

According to academic publications such as the Encyclopædia Britannicawhile in Baghdad, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab married an affluent woman. When she died, he inherited her property and wealth.^{[48][49]} Muhammad ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab had six sons; Hussain, Abdullah, Hassan, Ali and Ibrahim and Abdul-Aziz who died in his youth. All his surviving sons established religious schools close to their homes and taught the young students from Diriyah and other places. The descendants of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, the Al ash-Sheikh, have historically led the <u>ulama</u> in the Saudi state,^[9] dominating the state's religious institutions.^[10] Within Saudi Arabia, the family is held in prestige similar to the <u>Saudi royal family</u>, with whom they share power, and has included several religious scholars and officials.^[50] The arrangement between the two families is based on the Al Saud maintaining the Al ash-Sheikh's authority in religious matters and upholding and propagating <u>Salafi</u> doctrine. In return, the Al ash-Sheikh support the Al Saud's political authority^[51] thereby using its religious<u>moral authority</u> to legitimise the royal family's rule.^[52]

Teachings

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab considered his movement an effort to purify Islam by returning Muslims to what, he believed, were the original principles of that religion. He taught that the primary doctrine of Islam was the uniqueness and unity of God (*Tawhid*).^{[53][54]} He also denounced popular beliefs as polytheism (shirk), rejected much of the medieval law of the scholars (ulema) and called for a new interpretation of Islam!^{55]}

The "core" of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's teaching is found in *Kitab al-Tawhid*, a short essay which draws from material in the Quran and the recorded doings and sayings (*hadith*) of the Islamic prophet <u>Muhammad</u>^[56] It preaches that worship in Islam includes conventional acts of worship such as the five daily prayers (*salat*); fasting (*sawm*); supplication (*Dua*); seeking protection or refuge (*Istia'dha*); seeking help (*Istiana* and *Istighatha*) of Allah.^[57]

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab was keen on emphasizing that other acts, such as making *dua* or calling upon/supplication to or seeking help, protection or intercession from anyone or anything other than Allah, are acts of *shirk* and contradict the tenets of <u>tawhid</u> and that those who tried would never be fogiven.^{[57][58]}

Traditionally, most Muslims throughout history have held the view that declaring the testimony of faith is sufficient in becoming a Muslim.^[59] Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab did not agree with this. He held the view that an individual who believed that there could be intercessors with God was actually performing <u>shirk</u>. This was the major difference between him and his opponents^[60] and led him to declare Muslims outside of his group to be apostatest<u>6kfir</u>) and idolators (mushrikin).^[61]

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's movement is today often known as <u>Wahhabism</u>, although many adherents see this as a derogatory term coined by his opponents, and prefer it to be known as the <u>Salafi movement</u>^{[62][63][64][65]} Scholars point out that Salafism is a term applicable to several forms of puritanical Islam in various parts of the world, while Wahhabism refers to the specific Saudi school, which is seen as a more strict form of Salafism. According to Ahmad Moussalli, professor of political science at the American University of Beirut, "As a rule, all Wahhabis are Salafists, but not all Salafists are Wahhabis".^[66] Yet others say that while Wahhabism and Salafism originally were two different things, they became practically indistinguishable in the 1970^{[67][68]}

On Sufism

At the end of his treatise, *Al-Hadiyyah al-Suniyyah*, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's son 'Abd Allah speaks positively on the practice of tazkiah (purification of the inner self).^{[69][70]}

Non-Muslims

According to author <u>Dore Gold</u>,^[71] in *Kitab al-Tawhid*, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab described followers of both the Christian and Jewish faiths as sorcerers who believed in devil worship, and cited a <u>hadith</u> of Muhammad stating that punishment for the sorcerer is `that he be struck with the sword.^[72] Wahhab asserted that both religions had improperly made the graves of their prophet into places of worship and warned Muslims not to imitate this practice.^[73] Wahhab concluded that `The ways of the people of the book are condemned as those of polytheists.^[74]

However author Natana J. DeLong-Basdefends Abdul Wahhab, stating that

despite his at times vehement denunciations of other religious groups for their supposedly heretical beliefs, Ibn Abd al Wahhab never called for their destruction or death ... he assumed that these people would be punished in the Afterlife ...'^[75]

Historical accounts of Wahhab also state that, "Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab saw it as his mission to restore a more purer and original form of the faith of Islam. ... Anyone who didn't adhere to this interpretation were considered polytheists worthy of death, including fellow Muslims (especially Shi'ite who venerate the family of Muhammad), Christians and others. He also advocated for a literalist interpretation of the Quran and its laws^[76]

Saints

Despite his great aversion to venerating the saints after their earthly passing and seeking their intercession, it should nevertheless be noted that Ibn 'Abd-al-Wahhab did not deny the existence of saints as such; on the contrary, he acknowledged that "the miracles of saints (*karāmāt al-awliyā*') are not to be denied, and their right guidance by God is acknowledged" when they acted properly during their life.^[77]

Reception

By contemporaries

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's teachings were criticized by a number of Islamic scholars during his life for disregarding Islamic history, monuments, traditions and the sanctity of Muslim life.^[78] One scholar named Ibn Muhammad compared Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab with <u>Musaylimah the liar alayhi la'na^[79]</u> He also accused Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab of wrongly declaring the Muslims to be infidels based on a misguided reading of Qur'anic passages and Prophetic traditions^[79] and of wrongly declaring all scholars as infidels who did not agree with his "deviant innovation"^[79]

The traditional <u>Hanbali</u> scholar Ibn Fayruz al-Tamimi (d. 1801/1802) publicly repudiated Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's teachings when he sent an envoy to him and referred to the Wahhabis as the "seditious <u>Kharijites</u>" of Najd.^[80] In response, the Wahhabis considered Ibn Fayruz an idolater (mushrik) and one of their worst enemies.^[80]

According to the historian Ibn Humayd, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's father criticized his son for his unwillingness to specialize in jurisprudence and disagreed with his doctrine and declared that he would be the cause of wickedness.^[81] Similarly his own brother, Suleyman ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab wrote one of the first treatises' refuting Wahhabi doctrine^[81] claiming he was ill-educated and intolerant, and classing Ibn'Abd al-Wahhab's views as fringe and fanatical.^[78]

The <u>Shafi'i mufti</u> of Mecca, Ahmed ibn Zayni Dehlan, wrote an anti-Wahhabi treatise, the bulk of which consists of arguments and proof from the <u>sunna</u> to uphold the validity of practices the Wahhabis considered idolatrous: Visiting the tombs of Muhammad, seeking the intercession of saints, venerating Muhammad and obtaining the blessings of saints.^[82] He also accused Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab of not adhering to the Hanbali school and that he was deficient in learnin^[82]

By modern scholars

Pakistani Muslim scholars such as Israr Ahmed have spoken positively on him^[83] Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab is accepted by Salafi scholars as an authority and source of reference. 20th century Albanian scholar <u>Nasiruddin Albani</u> refers to Ibn Abdul Wahhab's activism as "Najdi da'wah.'^[84]

A list of scholars with opposing views, along with names of their books and related information, was compiled by the Islamic scholar Muhammad Hisham^[85]

Contemporary recognition

The state <u>mosque</u> of <u>Qatar</u> is named after him.^[86] The "<u>Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab Mosque</u>" was opened in 2011, with the <u>Emir of Qatar</u> presiding over the occasion.^[87] The mosque can hold a congregation of 30,000 people.^[88] There has been request from descendants of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab that the name of the mosque be changed.^[89]

Despite Wahhabi destruction of many Islamic, non-Islamic, and historical sites associated with the first Muslims (therophet's family and <u>companions</u>) and the strict prohibition of visiting such sites (including mosques), the Saudi government renovated the tomb of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab at <u>Diriyah</u>, turning it into a major tourist attraction and an important place of visitation within the kingdom's modern borders!^{90][91]} Other features in the area include the *Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab Foundation* which will incoprorate a light and sound presentation^[92] located near the *Mosque of Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulwahab*^[93]

Works

- Risālah Aslu Dīn Al-Islām wa Qā'idatuhu
- Kitab al-Quran (The book of Allah)
- Kitab at-Tawhid (The Book of the Oneness of God)
- Kashf ush-Shubuhaat(Clarification of the Doubts)
- Al-Usool-uth-Thalaatha" (The Three Fundamental Principles)
- Al Qawaaid Al 'Arbaa' (The Four Foundations)
- Al-Usool us Sittah (The Six Fundamental Principles)
- Nawaaqid al Islaam(Nullifiers of Islam)
- Adab al-Mashy Ila as-Salaa(Manners of Walking to the Prayer)
- Usul al-Iman (Foundations of Faith)
- Fada'il al-Islam (Excellent Virtues of Islam)
- Fada'il al-Qur'an (Excellent Virtues of the Qur'an)
- Majmu'a al-Hadith 'Ala Abwab al-Figh(Compendium of the Hadith on the Main Topics of the Figh)
- Mukhtasar al-Iman (Abridgement of the Faith; i.e. the summarised version of a work on Faith)
- Mukhtasar al-Insaf wa'l-Sharh al-Kabir(Abridgement of the Equity and the Great Explanation)
- Mukhtasar Seerat arRasul (Summarised Biography of the Prophet)
- Kitaabu I-Kabaair (The Book of Great Sins)
- Kitabu I-Imaan (The Book of Trust)
- Al-Radd 'ala al-Rafida (The Refutation of the Rejectionists)

See also

- Abdul-Aziz ibn Abdullah Al ash-SheikhGrand Mufti of Saudi Arabia and a descendant of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab
- Destruction of early Islamic heritage sites in Saudi Arabia

Sources

There are two contemporary histories of Muhammed ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and his religious movement from the point of view of his supporters: Ibn Ghannam's Rawdhat al-Afkar wal-Afham or Tarikh Najd (History of Najd) and Ibn Bishr's Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd. Husain ibn Ghannam (d. 1811), an alim from al-Hasa was the only historian to have observed the beginnings of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's movement first-hand. His chronicle ends at the year 1797.^{[94][95]} Ibn Bishr's chronicle, which stops at the year 1854, was written a generation later than Ibn Ghannam's, but is considered valuable partly because Ibn Bishr was a native of Najd and because he adds many details to Ibn Ghannam's account.^[94]

A third account, dating from around 1817 is Lam' al-Shihab, written by an anonymous Sunni author who respectfully disapproved of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's movement, regarding it as a *bid'ah*. It is also commonly cited because it is considered to be a relatively objective contemporary treatment of the subject. However, unlike Ibn Ghannam and Ibn Bishr, its author did not live in Najd and his work is believed to contain some apocryphal and legendary material with respect to the details of Ib_Abd al-Wahhab's life.^{[19][96]}

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- 23. Al-Shaʻrānī, *Lațā'if al-minan*, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Maţbaʻa al-ʿĀmira, 1311/1894), 1:218: "Believing in the miracles of saints is a required truth (*wājib ḥaqq*)."
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- 25. Ibn Qudamah: "As for the people of the Sunna who follow the traditions and pursue the path of the righteous ancestors, no imperfection taints them, not does any disgrace occur to them. Among them are the learned who practise their knowledge, the saints and the righteous men, the God-fearing and pious, the pure and the good, those who have attained the state of sainthood and the performance of miracles, and those who worship in humility and exert themselves in the study of religious lawlt is with their praise that books and registers are adorned. Their annals embellish the congregations and assemblies. Hearts become alive at the mention of their life histories, and happiness ensues from following their footsteps. They are supported by religion; and religion is by them endorsed. Of them the Quran speaks; and the Quran they themselves express. And they are a refuge to men when events afflict them: for kings, and others of lesser rate, seek their visits, regarding their supplications to God as a means of obtaining blessings, and asking them to intercede for them with God" (cited in Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 132).
- 26. 'Alī Hujwirī: "God has saints (*awliyā*) whom He has specially distinguished by His friendship and whom He has chosen to be the governors of His kingdom... He has made the saints governors of the universe... Through the blessing of their advent the rain falls from heaven, and through the purity of their lives the plants spring up from the earth, and through their spiritual influence the Muslims gain victories over the truth concealers" (cited in Radtke, B., Lory, P., Zarcone, Th., DeWeese, D., Gaborieau, M., F.M. Denny, Françoise Aubin, J. O. Hunwick and N. Mchugh, "Walī", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P.Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs).
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