

THE RISE OF WAHHABI SECTARIANISM AND ITS IMPACT IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

This article examines pre-modern reform movement Wahhabism emerged in the Najd region of current Saudi Arabia, in the eighteenth century. For the opponents, the Wahhabi term is derived from the name of its formulator, Muhammad b. Abdulwahhab (d.1792). However, Ibn Abdulwahhab and his followers call themselves as 'muwahhidun' (monotheists). The views and approach of Ibn Abdullwahhab to Islamic theology construct the ideology of the movement. The movement initially emerged as a religious initiative against innovations, but then transformed into a political movement. The article sheds light historical connections between Wahhabi and Saudi families that played vital role in the formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia, Islamic Theology, Monotheism, Sect

ÖZ

Vehhabi Fırkasının Doğuşu ve Suudi Arabistan'a Etkisi

Bu makalede on sekizinci yüzyılda bugünkü Suudi Arabistan'ın Necd bölgesinde modernite öncesi ortaya çıkmış olan yeniden yapılanmacı Vehhabi hareketi incelenmektedir. Bu mezhebin karşıtları Vehhabi adlandırmasını ekolün kurucusu ve fikir babası olan Muhammed b. Abdulvehhab (ö.1792)'a nisbetle yapmışlardır. Fakat İbni Abdulvehhab ve takipçileri kendilerini 'birleyen' anlamında 'muwahhidun' olarak nitelendirmişlerdir. İbni Abdulvehhab'ın kelâma dair fikir ve yaklaşımları bu hareketin temelini oluşturmaktadır. Vehhabilik ilk önce bid'atlere karşı dînî bir hareket olarak ortaya çıkmış daha sonraları ise siyasi bir amaca bürünmüştür. Ayrıca bu çalışmada bugünkü Suudi Arabistan Krallığı'nın oluşumunda hayati öneme sahip olan Vehhabi ailesi ve Suud hanedanlığının tarihsel ilişkilerine yer verilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Vehhabilik, Suudi Arabistan, Kelâm, Tevhit, Mezhep

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Introduction

Arabic word *madhab* (literally sect) is a way, principle, method, and a tradition in dictionary. As a technical term, it means a path that somebody or a leader of a thought school chose and kept ongoing on that way in terms of religious doctrine and practise. In general meaning, the word of *madhab* is used synonymously with *firqah* (plu. *fraq*). In medieval Islamic scholarship, books relevant to the field, in the history of Islamic sects, were written with this name (i.e. *al-farq bayn al-fraq* by al-Baghdadi). Schism in Islam has a number of variations, but in some definite point, there is an absolute unity among all sects or groups. For example, all of them accept that the holy Qur'an and Sunnah, the prophet Muhammad's words, behaviours, and approvals, are the sources of the religion. However, they differ from each other in some details; such as belief issues, daily religious rituals and practices; and methodology.¹

According to Muhammad Abu Zahra, well-known historian of Islamic sects, sects in Islam have different tendencies. We can classify them into three main groups: a) Belief sects, those are different from others in aspect of Islamic belief, such as human freedom, predestination, and Allah's acts. Islamic scholars, and hence faith schools, raised different views on that topics. At the same time, the main belief sects are agreed in the oneness of Allah (*tawheed*). b) Political sects, those differ from others about choosing a caliph to succeed the Prophet Muhammad. c) Jurisprudent sects, those regularize religious affairs between humans and they also explain rules related to daily religious life deriving rules and obligations from the sources of religion.²

Comparing sect term with Christian context will contribute to understand it more accurately. In English, it is a term that defines a religiously separated group, but in its historical usage in Christendom, it carried a distinctly pejorative connotation. A sect was a movement committed to heretical belief and often to ritual acts and practices that departed from orthodox religious procedures.³ Especially in societies with a dominant or established church, the label "sect" has been assigned to all religious organisations separated from church. For example, "in nineteenth-century Britain, 'the sects' were a collective label for such Nonconformist bodies as the Congregationalists, the Baptists, and the Methodists."⁴

1 Fiğlalı, Ethem Ruhi, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, Şa-to İlahiyat, İstanbul, 2001, p. 7.

2 Abu Zahra, Muhammad, *Tarihu'l-Mezahibi'l-Islamiyye* (translated by Sibgatullah Kaya), İstanbul Matbaacılık, İstanbul, 2003, p. 27.

3 Wilson, Bryan, *Religion In Sociological Perspective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1982, p. 89

4 Hill, Michael, 'Sect', in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol.13, Macmillan, London, 1987, pp.154-158.

Sects manifest a number of characteristics in Christianity: Wilson explains these characteristics as “exclusivity, monopoly, total commitment, voluntarism, protest orientation, accession by merit and so on.”⁵ Sects are religious organisations separated from church and they are against, protestant to the church and its dogmas. As far as I understood from encyclopaedia of religion, in the West the church lost its power after sectarian movements. In addition to this, the force of secularisation affected badly conventional religion. It was seen a decline about religious life and its impact in Western societies. As a result, “religion in the West has generally become a department of the social order rather than the pervasive, or even determinant, influence it once was.”⁶

Islamic sectarianism differs from Christian context in some points that Islamic sects do not include all characteristics like Christian sects have. Muslim schism is two main parts, *Sunni* and *Shi'a*. Sunnism consists of a number of sub sects that the majority of them accept others under an inclusive banner, *ahle Sunnah wa'l Jama'ah* (a group of people follow the path of Prophet). Shi'a emerged as a political sect initially, with the martyrdom of grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, Husayin b. Ali, at Karbala in 684. Later on, it gradually transformed into a belief sect, which includes some extremist sub sects within.

Both Sunni and Shi'a sects have existed since the seventh century. But, the stage of history witnessed a number of sects within each category. Here, I will focus on more recent one, Wahhabiyya movement emerged in the Najd region of Arabian Peninsula in the 18th century. Some questions bear in mind about this pre-modern sectarian movement: what factors led to the emergence of this sect? What was the aim of Ibn Abdulwahhab initially, and how, originally being, a faith sect transformed into political one? What is the influence of Wahhabiyya on current public life in Saudi Arabia? With this article I will try to find answers to the above questions.

This article begins to introduce Wahhabiyya as a new initiative to reform Islamic belief and practices with the ideology and view of its leading scholar, Muhammad b. Abdulwahhab (d.1792). The views and approach of Ibn Abdullwahhab to Islamic theology construct the second part of this article. Finally, it is illustrated how the movement transformed into a political organisation and ultimately formed current kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

5 Wilson, *Religion In Sociological Perspective*, p. 91-95.

6 Ibid, p. 160.

The Formative Period of Wahhabism

Wahhabism emerged in the province of Najd, a broad desert expanse located in central Arabian Peninsula, in the 18th century. It is generally defined as a reaction movement against extremist emotions about sanctifying saint people, already dead, and hoping blessing and intercession (*shafa'ah*) from them. Having visited their tomb, ordinary Muslims were aiming to be able to reach Allah through that *awliyaullah* (friends of Allah, literally). At that time, so many innovations were common that both religious doctrines and rituals transformed by local custom and pre-Islamic cultures. Thus, Wahhabism protested against all above-mentioned tendencies and revived Ibn Taymiyyah's thoughts in terms of both religion and worldview.⁷ The name of Wahhabi had been given to Wahhabis by those who against that group; while they name themselves as monotheists (*Muwahhidun*). Today, Wahhabism is the formal sect of The Saudi Arabia, and it is still called with the same name.⁸

The sect is known with "Wahhabi name" ascribed its formulator, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. He was born in the town of al-Uyaynah in the Arabian province of Najd, in 1702. He was descended from a prestigious family of Hanbali jurist and theologians. His grandfather was a *qadi* (judge) and recognized as the greatest scholar and authority on Hanbali jurisprudence in Najd during his lifetime. His uncle, Ibrahim ibn Sulayman, was a judge an issuer of legal opinions (*fatawa*), in the towns and settlements surrounding al-Uyaynah, where he often was called in to settle disputes. His father, Abd al-Wahhab ibn Sulayman, was the *qadi* of al-Uyaynah and served as his first teacher of both religion and jurisprudence (*fiqh*).⁹

Coming from such a scholar family, he was able to gain a traditional religious education. He showed his intelligence to his family in his early childhood. For example, when he memorized the whole Qur'an he did not reach to ten years old.¹⁰

In addition, he also studied sayings of the prophet Muhammad (*hadith* collection), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafseer*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and writings of various *ulama* on the fundamental principles of Islam. Of all of the literature he studied, the *hadith* and *tafseer* were the most influential

7 Abu Zahra, *Taribu'l-Mezahibi'l-Islamiyye*, 2003: p. 221.

8 Fiğlalı, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p. 105.

9 Comp. Kurşun, Zekeriya, *al-'Uthmaniyyun wa-Al Sa'ud fi al-arshif al-'Uthmani, 1745-1914*, Dar al-'Arabiyyah lil-Mawsu'at, Beirut, 2005, pp. 22-23; Delong Bas, Natana J., *Wahhabi Islam: from revival and reform to global jihad*, I. B. Tauris, Oxford University Press, London, 2004, p. 17-18.

10 Kurşun, *al-'Uthmaniyyun...*, p.34.

in developing his worldview. References to the Qur'an and the hadith are abundant in all of his written works.¹¹

Having an elite educational environment, he learnt all mentioned studies within a short time. He carried on studying in Maccah and Madinah after making Hajj pilgrimage to Maccah. There, he was affected by whom Ahmad Ibn al-Taymiyyah and Ibn Kayyim al-Cavziyyah, are accepted as two of the most important people from the Hanbali school. As a result of their ideas and views in religious life, he made a decision to focus on Qur'an and Sunnah, rather than wasting time to engage in jurisprudent and philosophical books. Then he travelled the other famous cities under the management of Ottoman Empire, such as Basra, Baghdad, and Damascus. When he was doing his journey, a tuberculosis disease occurred in Uyaynah and its governor died due to this killing illness. Moreover, the new governor did not follow his father's methodology and ended Ibn abd al-Wahhab's judge. Thereby, he went to Huraymila which is located in the north of Riyad.¹²

On his arrival in Huraymila, he resumed his studies with his father and began preaching against innovations (*bid'ah*) practiced there in both words and deeds. It was during this stay in Huraymila that he wrote his most famous treatise, *Kitab al-Tawheed* (the book of monotheism), copies of which circulated quickly and widely throughout Najd. Although his ideology and the movement he inspired have been dismissed by some, the historical record shows that Ibn abd al-Wahhab's influence spread over a wide area within a short period of time, suggesting that the message he preached found broad range of support.

After his father's death, he resumed preaching and teaching activities and he also tried to disseminate his views in Najd region by declaring the movement's motto "*al-amr bi'l-ma'ruf wa'n-nahy ani'l-munkar*" (enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong). But everybody did not agree with his ideas and, even some threatened to kill him. Consequently, Ibn abd al-Wahhab returned from Huraymila to his hometown Uyaynah, which had been rebuilt and governed by Uthman Ibn Hamid Ibn Muammar. Ibn abd al-Wahhab established a friendship with Ibn Muammar. He had promised to Ibn Muammar by inviting his personal views that Allah would make him a political authority in the region of Najd as long as he helped to Allah's religion. Furthermore, Ibn abd al-Wahhab married with the cousin of Ibn Muammar (aunt's daughter).¹³

11 Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Muhammad, *Kitab al-Tawheed*, Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo: 1974, p. 10

12 Kurşun, *al-Uthmaniyyun...*, p.36.

13 Delong Bas, *Wahhabi Islam...*, p. 23.

Close family relationship prepared a ground for later developments that they finally gave a decision about an alliance in both religious and political sphere. Accordingly, Ibn abd al-Wahhab was going to give support to Ibn Muammar for his political ambitions to disseminate his governance over Najd and possibly beyond. Ibn Muammar agreed, and Ibn abd al-Wahhab embarked on a broad public preaching campaign. DeLong Bas argues that this alliance was very important for several reasons:

First, it foreshadowed the later alliance between Muhammad Ibn Saud and Ibn abd al-Wahhab that led to the foundation of the first Saudi state, which remains intact today as the third Saudi state. This was a tactic adopted by many other eighteenth century reformers throughout the Muslim world. The formation was not unique to the Wahhabis. Second, this alliance made clear the religious basis for the political movement that grew out of Ibn abd al-Wahhab's religious teachings and ultimately became known as Wahhabism. What was important about this religious vision as it was translated into the political sphere was that the leader was to proclaim and adhere to the principle of tawheed. The third issue of importance with respect to this time period is the fact that three acts that have come to symbolize the Wahhabi movement occurred during it. These acts were cutting down of a sacred tree, the destruction of a tomb monument, and stoning of an adulteress.

Consequently, Ibn abd al-Wahhab became a famous person in Uyaynah. Nonetheless, ordinary Muslims were alarmed in worrying about his views. Worries found a place in the minds of some people who consulted to Beni Khalid Tribe's amir, Suleiman Ibn Uray'ir, and requested from him to find a solution this situation. He offered to kill Ibn abd al-Wahhab or to exile from that region. Thus, Ibn abd al-Wahhab was exiled to Dar'iyyah, where is very close to Riyad, and met there with Amir Muhammad Ibn Suud. As a result, as mentioned the above quote, the agreement between him and Ibn Suud, provided basis of Wahhabi state built in 1744. With this agreement, not only did Ibn abd al-Wahhab achieve good opportunities and supports in terms of power and finance to disseminate his views and defence, but also Ibn Suud gained intellectual support for expanding his state's borders and authority.

Ibn abd al-Wahhab began to spread his ideology and views had already existed in his book, *Kitab al- Tawheed* (the Book of Monotheism), and to

invite people to the true religion by giving up *shirk* (association) and all *bid'ah* (innovations). He insisted on calling innovators for the true religion even if by sword and fighting in aspect of his understanding the principles of Islam. He argued that people were in the wrong way by visiting tombs and participating in *Sufi* activities. According to him the last two acts caused to spoil monotheism and triggered it in the Muslim world.

As a result of that view, he announced that those innovators were *mushriks* (associate partner with Allah), so their goods and bloods were permitted (*halal*) for Muvahhidun (Wahhabis). Figlali quotes from Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, famous Ottoman historian, that all of discourses were excellent opportunity for people lived in Najd region. The society included various nation and tribes coming from Yemen, Aden, Iran, India, Iraq and Damascus.¹⁴ Therefore, it was a region that all turmoil and revolts against the first four caliphs appeared in there. For instance, just after the death prophet of Muhammad, a group of people argued themselves as prophet, such as Museylematu'l- Kezzab, Secah, Tulayha and Asvadu'l- Ansi. In brief, the character of society and historical connections played a crucial factor in the expansion of Ibn Abdalwahhab's view in that region, very quickly. Lack of education and a tendency toward to attack someone else's properties are some other hallmarks of Bedouins in that region. In what follows, I am going to focus on teachings and theology of Ibn Abdulwahhab.

Tawheed (absolute monotheism, oneness or uniqueness of Allah)

The *tawheed* doctrine constructs the fundamentality of Ibn abd al-Wahhab's theology.¹⁵ Other theological views, namely, *shirk* (associations) and *bid'a* (innovations), *saf'ah* (intercession), all are based on this principle.¹⁶ In Islamic theology, all theologians unanimously agree that *tawheed* is the oneness of Allah in terms of his personality, characters and actions. Thus, it becomes the first condition of faith. When we look at the content of the holy Qur'an, we notice from overwhelming majority of the verses that Allah takes our attention towards his absolute oneness. In the holy Qur'an, undoubtedly, all prophets invite their communities to pray for only Allah. Qur'anic verses highlight strongly the absolute monotheism by sampling examples from previous communities.

14 Figlali, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p. 107.

15 Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Kitab al-Tawheed*, p.7-11

16 Figlali, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p.110.

Having emphasised the message and importance of *tawheed*, Ibn abd al-Wahhab and his supporters called themselves as *Muwahhidun* or *ahl al-tawheed*. However, the movement's opponents derive the term Wahhabi from the name of Ibn abd al-Wahhab. According to Ibn Abdulwahhab, *tawheed* is three types: *tawheed* of lordship (*rububiyyah*), *tawheed* of divinity (*uluhiyyah*) and the *tawheed* of Allah's name and attributes.¹⁷ *Tawheed* of lordship refers to Allah's possession of absolute power over heaven and earth, life and death. The second type is divinity, requires devotion to service and worships merely for Allah. Muslims must recognize Allah alone as the ruler of the whole universe without associating anything to him. The third type of *tawheed* is that Allah's names and characteristics, established by the previous two types of *tawheed*. For instance, Allah's characteristics are defined by Allah's role as a Lord and Divine-being. Consequently, assigning Allah's characteristics to human beings, even if they are kings or masters of slaves, constitutes a violation to Allah's uniqueness. Only Allah truly possesses anything, and only Allah can truly educate human beings.¹⁸

Ibn abd al-Wahhab mostly emphasised the above issues in his books, *Kitab al-Tawheed* (the Book of Monotheism) and *Kasf' al-Shubuhah* (Discovering the suspicious things). He supports his views saying that, Cahiliyah Arabs violated monotheism when they in wealth and prosperity by refuting to angels, saint people and stones. However, when they faced any difficulty, they believed only in Allah displaying exact faith and asking help.¹⁹

In daily life, Ibn abd al-Wahhab and his supporters follow the view of Ibn Taymiyyah,²⁰ renowned Muslim theologian died in 1328. According to him, deeds are part of faith. For Wahhabis, consequently, if someone does not make his or her religious obligation because of laziness or apathy, (s)he will become an infidel (*kafeer*), whose blood and property is lawful (*halal*) for them. As Wahhabis believe that practical life is the part of faith, they admit those who do not practice one of absolute duties such as five pillars of Islam, praying five times in a day, fasting, pilgrimage, and alms-giving, as infidel departed from Islam. Furthermore, they see other Muslims who do not think like Wahhabis, as *mushriks* (associate partners to Allah). Thus, their bloods and goods are halal for Wahhabis, too.²¹

17 Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Kitab al-Tawheed*, p.7-11

18 Delong Bas, *Wahhabi Islam...*, p. 57.

19 Fiğlalı, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p. 112.

20 Fiğlalı, quotes from The Archive of Prime Ministry, Hattı Humayun no: 3799

21 Fiğlalı, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p.113-114.

A war to innovations (*bid'ah*)

Ibn abd al-Wahhab claims that anything not mentioned in the Qur'an or the authentic Hadith is a *bid'ah* (innovation). He also argues that adopting innovations or practising them means that to depart from the religion. He, thus, dishonours Muslims those do not give up innovations and claims from this aspect that the Muslim communities and public have been living coincidence with innovations for centuries.²²

Consequently, he declares a war toward three things very common at that time: 1) the issue of tomb visits and requests intercession from saint people; 2) building up shrines and tombs; and 3) all *hurafah* (superstitious practices) against the main principles of Islamic creed. Regarding the first, Ibn abd al-Wahhab devoted one-sixth of *Kitab al-Tawheed* to discuss visiting the tombs and graves. The book consists of sixty-six chapters: four discuss the prohibition against worship and prayer in graveyards and shrines; and seven discuss the prohibition against requesting intercession with Allah. Ibn abd al-Wahhab's discussion was not just a blanket condemnation of such practises but also served as an opportunity to remind his followers that Muslims must consider both their own intent and the potential response and reaction of other people to any actions they undertake prior to engaging in them. As a result of that vies, the first action towards such practices was seen in Uyaynah by destroying Zayd Ibn al- Hattab's tomb. Relating to this event, Wahhabis are called "the destroyers of temples or tombs" by Western writers.²³ Ibn abd al-Wahhab's opinions about this issue based on Ibn Taymiyyah's views that he introduced the well-known hadith²⁴ about visiting temples as an evidence to that view.

They see this hadith as evidence and claim that visiting tombs means equally *shirk* (associate a partner to Allah). Furthermore, to worship in a grave/tomb even if not shirk is uprising to Allah and His messenger, also against to the religion. As a result, these are the biggest *shirks* and fearful innovations.²⁵

Secondly, it is directly related to the first issue, according to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab building dome (*kubbah*), sacrificing animals in the tombs (*turbah*) and expecting *barakah* (blessing) from the *awliya* (lit. friends) are as the

22 Kurşun, *al-Uthmaniyyun...*, p. 41.

23 Fiğlalı, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p. 120.

24 The hadith is that Abu Hurairah reported: "Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: Do not undertake journey but to three mosques: this mosque of mine, the Mosque of Al-Haram and the Aqsa Mosque (Bait Al-Maqdis)." [Hadith number in Sahih Muslim (Arabic only): 2475]

25 Fiğlalı, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p. 121.

biggest innovation (*bid'ah*). Consequently, all mentioned actions are seen as *kufur* (blasphemy).²⁶ It could be said that there was indeed a fanatical behaviour to tombs and saint people at that time, and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was right for such practices. Thirdly, it is generally related to daily life and called *hurafah* (superstition), such wearing amulets, relying on sorcery and future tellers, adorning mosques, shrines, and so on.²⁷ Having impacted upon the public life, it had soon been realised that some views were extremely marginal. For instance, the cloth of Ka'bah was so ragged that pilgrims could not stand to look at the holy Ka'bah.²⁸ Although the third issue is a prohibition, is it truly applicable to daily life, or how many Wahhabis obey this prohibition in reality?

Wahhabis also claim that all verses including Allah's personal nouns and characteristics should be understood without making exegeses in any way and meant according to first/general meaning. They argue that the *Salaf* (the first three generations of the Muslim community) did not make any exegesis on such verses and accepted them originally coming from Allah and His messenger's interpretation in order to avoid making embody or reify them. As a result, for Wahhabis, to comment on these verses is a job of innovators. Fiğlalı points out that with this view Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had followed the steps of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal.²⁹ Conversely, accepting Allah's characteristics with the first meaning or literally is extremely dangerous and means absolutely embodiment. The majority of Ahl as-Sunnah va'l-Jama'ah scholars agree with the same idea about not to embody and say anything about Allah's characteristics.

We can conclude from the above information that for the issue of intercession and grave visits, communities tended to return old habits and pre-Islamic rituals. Thereby, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was truly right to warn and finally fight with them. However, it does not necessarily give a right for Wahhabis to kill other Muslims.

***Al-Amr bi'l Ma'ruf wa al-Nahy ani'l Munkar* (enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong)**

This title is a Qur'anic phrase and derived from the third surah, verse 110 and fifth surah, verse 99. All Islamic sects or groups have accepted this principle and tried to act accordingly. But in practice, it is differently understood among

26 Kurşun, *al-'Uthmaniyyun...*, p. 41; Fiğlalı, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p. 121.

27 Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Kitab al-Tawheed*, p. 68-75

28 Fiğlalı, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p. 124

29 Ibid, p. 124.

some sects like Wahhabis. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab disseminated his views with this slogan and was able to reach more and more people, but occasionally he used sword to do this and so many Muslims were killed. Fiğlalı argues that *Ahle Sunnah* scholars accept this issue with an admissible way in order not to cause any confusion, *fitnah* (provocation), and segregation. They also want to commit this work accordingly to every Muslim's conditions by doing all religious duties and being far from all prohibitions via middle way as it is mentioned in the fifth surah, verse 99.

Since Wahhabis think it is essential to fight against innovation, they have not been far from fighting and raising sword other Muslims do not think like Wahhabis. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab transmits Ibn Taymiyyah's views about this topic word by word. For him, "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong" should be done in three ways: to know what is right and wrong. The second is that to make or support goodness and to prevent badness and to be far from it. The third one is to be patient by giving effort while dealing with this issue. This issue composes of background principle of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's jihad understanding.³⁰ After giving this very brief account on Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's views, it is useful to resume the history of Wahhabism.

The Death of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Wahhabism's Expansion

When Ibn Abd al-Wahhab died in 1792, the other side of this movement, namely political, overbalanced to religious side. Commins mentions that:

In the 1780s and 1790s, the Saudi amirate's expansion brought it to the borders of Ottoman Empire's Arabian possessions in al-Hasa and Hijaz. In doing so, the Wahhabi mission assumed a more threatening aspect to Ottoman Ulama in those regions and they urged Istanbul to take action to suppress the Najdi movement. In 1793, for example, an Ottoman qadi in Medina collected the signatures of more than 50 officials on a letter to Istanbul. He compared the Wahhabis to a tenth-century Shiite sect, the Qarmatians, who were notorious in Islamic history for raiding Mecca and stealing the black stone embedded in the Ka'ba. By 1802, the Ottomans were mounting a doctrinal campaign, sending official tracts refuting Wahhabi positions and likening them to the Kharijites of early Islamic times.³¹

30 Kurşun, *al-Uthmaniyyun...*, p. 42).

31 Commins, David Dean, *The Wahhabi mission and Saudi Arabia*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2006, p. 30.

Initially, this movement was reported to Istanbul, but mostly scholars ignored this movement, because in the past similar movements was seen in the borders of the empire. The Wahhabi's views were not new in terms of religious side, but political side was not evaluated as a threat.

Ibn Saud's son, Abd al Aziz, carried on gaining lands next to amirates' borders, like his father. Undoubtedly, it was extremely good opportunity to gain land due to fact that they are remote from the government of Ottoman Empire. Not only Ottoman Empire was powerless but also it was engaging with Russia and Iran wars at this time. The weakness of Ottoman Empire gave more opportunity and courage to Wahhabis.

Abd al-Aziz Ibn Suud was able to gather both religious and political leadership in his personality. Furthermore, he managed to combine the other tribes that existed in the region of Najd with Wahhabi doctrines. In 1802, he claimed that some Wahabis were killed due to a conflict between Shiites and Wahhabis, as a result of this he had revenge of them by killing thousands of people who participated in Karbala mourning. In addition to this the tomb of Husain Ibn Ali was destroyed. After this event, Ibn Suud occupied Taif, Mecca, and Medina. Accordingly, he reached his desires conquering these holy cities between 1802 and 1806.³²

According to Figlali, when Wahhabis took the two holy cities under control, Ibn Suud said that:

Your religion became excellent and you did very well and Allah consented from you choosing Islam. From now on, do not respect to your fathers and grandfathers' false beliefs and be fair from praying for them so that Allah forgives them, and remembering them. Undoubtedly, they died in an absolute association to Allah. To stand up in front of the tomb of the prophet and to say: may peace be upon him are illegal for our sect. For this reason, passers-by must pass without saying above phrase and should say assalamu ala Muhammad.³³

We can infer a conclusion from the above quote that the structure of Najd plays a vital role in the emergence and spread of Wahhabism. Because, the majority of tribes are Bedouins live in the desert, and they are remote from city centres as well as cultural, intellectual activities. For this reason they could

32 Figlali, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p. 108; Kurşun, *al-'Uthmaniyyun...*, p.109 and see also Commins, *The Wahhabi mission...*,p.30-32.

33 Figlali, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p. 109.

be directed easily, if they are given some rewards for their effort. After the war, booties are shared amongst participants. Thus, it would be good reason to fight for Bedouins do not have regular earnings.

There was a conflict between Ottoman and Wahhabi scholars. Although Ottoman *ulama* accept four legal schools namely, Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki and Hanbali; "Wahhabism recognizes only one Sunni legal school, Hanbali."³⁴ Disagreements circulated around this topic, and finally this polemical hostility turned into a political confrontation after the Saudi conquest of Mecca and Medina in 1803-1806 as we mentioned above. In 1811, the Wahhabi-Saudi State had lands from Aleppo to Indian Ocean in the North; from Basra Gulf and the border of Iraq to Red Sea in the East.³⁵

Wahhabi state had become the central Arabian power in the region. Ottoman Empire noticed this and took measures against to them by sending Muhammad Ali Pasha, governor of Egypt. He had a well organised army and retook Mecca, Medina and Taif from Wahhabis in 1812-13. Suddenly, Ibn Suud died and his family and children were sent to Istanbul. As a result, the first period of Wahhabi State ended. On the other hand, Turki Ibn Abdullah, who was from Saudi family, managed to escape from the war, re-established Wahhabi state by choosing Riyad as a capital city.³⁶

In brief, latterly, the next leaders modernised the Wahhabi state in the late nineteenth century. In 1901, Abd ul Aziz Ibn Suud triggered this modernisation; he was also supported by British-Indian government and accepted as the governor of Najd, al-Hasa, Katif, Cubeyl and the other regions. According to the treaty with the British Indian government, these regions and cities will inherit to his children or fellowships; the governor assistant will not disagree with British-Indian government and obey the recommendations and decisions given by British-Indian government.

After the First World War, Ottoman Empire retreated from Medina in 1918. A couple of years later, 1921-25, Hail, Taif, Jeddah and Medina were occupied by Wahhabis and Ibn Suud was accepted as the king of Najd and Hijaz regions. According to Jeddah treaty, which made between British and Wahhabi State in 20 May 1927, the Wahhabi state got rid of the previous treaty's heavy conditions. Ibn Suud, declared the independency of the

34 Bennett, Clinton, *Muslims and modernity: an introduction to the issues and debates*, Continuum, London, p. 54.

35 Fiğlalı, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhepleri*, p. 109.

36 Ibid, p.109.

state. And in 1932, its name has been changed as “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.”³⁷

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the 20th Century

The kingdom was founded with a combination consisted of force and ideological mobilisation. King Saud maintained this alliance to constitute new state and legitimise its regime. The *ulama* had a crucial effect on political issues since Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. In the Saudi context, the term *ulama* is referred to those religious scholars who are “the judges (gadis) of different ranks, religious lawyers and all the other alims engaged in the judicial system; the various ranks of religious teachers (mudarris); imams and the other office-holders of consequence in the mosques.”³⁸ The *ulama* have direct political influence because of their long-standing connection with the elite itself. The leading *ulama* are from important families, like descendants from Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and their ties to the Al-Saud family are particularly close.³⁹

Ibn Saud settled certain nomads to ancestral lands in order to get control and create a unique nation. Piscatori argues that “the motivation was *clearly* Islamic: an adherent was called *akh* or brother; the movement as a whole, the *Ikhwan*, or brotherhood; and each settlement a *hijra* – a migration from the corrupted to the purifying existence, just as Muhammad’s ‘flight’ from Mecca to Medina had been.”⁴⁰

Accordingly, King Saud and his successors had used religion to legitimate their positions and policies. Bedouins and nomads live in deserts and even literacy rate is very low among them. The most important thing for them is religion and, if someone calls them for any religious event they do not hesitate to go for the sake of God. King Saud accomplished this by emphasizing the Royal Family’s special role as guardian of holy places, patron of the Pilgrimage and promoter of Islamic causes throughout the world.

However, Abd al-Aziz was criticised by the *Ikhwan* for importing ‘un-Islamic’ inventions: print media, motorcars, telephones and radios to the kingdom. Subsequently, it was seen an *Ikhwan* rebellion. Ibn Saud was able to gain under control “tribal forces, including the remnants of the *Ikhwan*, integrating into the ‘White Army’ and they became loyal supporters of the

37 Ibid, p. 109-110).

38 Abir, Mordechai, *Saudi Arabia in the oil era: regime and elites: conflict and collaboration*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colo, 1988, p.19.

39 Piscatori, James P. *Islam in the Political Process*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, p.61.

40 Ibid, p.61)

regime and important components of the Saud's powerbase."⁴¹ In the second half of 20th century, the Kingdom experienced nearly a similar situation:

By the late 1970s the foreign workforce in Saudi Arabia numbered nearly three million, of which about 100,000 were westerners. This phenomenon was anathema to the conservative population. The *ulama* in particular Najd feared that, together with Western technology, western cultural influences would subvert the Wahhabi-Saudi way of life. Consequently, it was seen "the 1979 'neo-Ikhwan' reaction, which protested the corruption of fundamentalist jihadist Wahhabi state by modernisation and gradual westernisation."⁴²

In the first half of that century, Saudi polity consisted of Arab advisers from other countries, the heads of noble images, tribal leaders and the Wahhabi establishment. The later 1950s, witnessed the proliferation of government ministers and agencies some of them quite ephemeral, designed to manage particular aspects of economic development: communications, agriculture, education, petroleum and finance.⁴³

Faysal was fighting Nasser's pan-Arabism, needed the support of *ulama*, moreover, for his pan-Islamic policies. Faysal claimed that pan-Arabism was opposed to the idea of Islamic solidarity encompassing hundreds of millions of Muslims of which the Arabs were a small, though important, component. Subsequently, he established The World Muslim League in 1962. The secretariats of this organisation and many of its institutions have been funded by the Saudis. Those organisations are located in Mecca and Jeddah and have become an important tool of Saudi foreign policy, which also promoted later The Islamic Conference Organisation.⁴⁴ All above developments were natural result of oil revenues, which contributed the modernisation process in the country. At this process, the *ulama* opposed to modernisation but their influence gradually declined. "The alliance between the *ulama* and the Saudis was finalised by Faysal when he was Prime Minister (1958-60 and 1962-64) and clinched during his monarchy (1964-75)."⁴⁵

41 Abir, *Saudi Arabia...*, p. 21.

42 Ibid, p.26-30.

43 Commins, *The Wahhabi mission...*, p.108.

44 Commins, *The Wahhabi mission...*, p.112; Abir, p.25)

45 Abir, *Saudi Arabia...*, p. 22.

Conclusion

This article provides information about pre-modern reform movement Wahhabism and its impact on the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In recent years, the term Wahhabiyya has been used synonymously with Salafism.⁴⁶ However, here we could not deal with the latter term due to the bulk of this article. Instead, we contented the early formation period of the movement as well as its formulator, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's theological views on *tawheed* (monotheism), *bid'ah* (innovations), and *shafa'ah* (intercession), and *al-amr bi'l ma'ruf wa al-nahy ani'l munkar* (enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong), which all construct the backbone of the movement. Then, the article ended with the influence of Wahhabism on the current Saudi state that owe its life to the movement.

Wahhabism emerged against innovations that very popular amongst Muslim societies in the eighteenth century. Generally, innovations are known as new thing in terms of faith and practice, which was not seen at the age of the prophet Muhammad. Thus, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his successors declared a war to innovations and disseminated their views from region to region in order to revive authentic creed and deeds practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions (*salaf u salihin*). As a starting point, the movement was right in terms of innovations and false belief. However, having agreed with Saud family for political desires, the movement lost its religious impulse for an independent Saudi-Wahhabi state. Although a few times, the Wahhabiyya movement was beaten by the Ottoman governors in the province of Egypt, the movement survived with the help of non-Muslims, mainly British.

The Wahhabi *ulama* played a crucial role in the foundation and maintenance of each Saudi-Wahhabi state. *Ikhwan* (brotherhood) enterprise amongst Bedouins and nomad tribes reached its aim to expand Wahhabi mission in the Arab Peninsula and its beyond. However, the influence of Wahhabi *ulama* gradually declined in the recent period of the state, with modernisation attempts King Faysal finalised their influence on politics.

⁴⁶ At the beginning of the 20th century, the movement sowed itself in two versions of Salafi thought: Saudi Salafism and Jihadi Salafism (Ikhwani). The former can be traced back into 1744 Dar'iyyah alliance between Ibn Abdul-Wahhab and Ibn Saud, since that time the *ulama* have always supported the royal family. The Ikhwani or Jihadi Salafism is a product of King Saud's ikhwan project in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for the expansion of Wahhabism outwards of Hijaz region. See Büyükkara Mehmet Ali, "11 Eylül'le Derinleşen Ayrılık: Suudi Selefiyye ve Cihadi Selefiyye," *Dini Araştırmalar* 7:20 (2004), pp.205-234. More recently, with the Arab uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and so on, in 2011, the term of 'Political Salafism' has also been used in academic milieu. See Yıldırım Ramazan, "Cemaatten Partiye Dönüşen Selefilik", *Analiz*, 73 (2013).

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