

1 The Canon and Its Canonizers

When contemporary Salafis seek examples of moral purity, they look above all to the Prophet Muḥammad, the other prophets, and the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad. But Salafis also treat certain other Muslims as moral authorities. These figures are not selected haphazardly. They represent traditions that contributed core ideas to the Salafi worldview: interpretations of Sunni identity, attitudes about how to derive legal rulings, and ideologies about reviving the spirit of the early Muslim community. Such ideas, and the figures who articulated and represented them, find expression in a “normative-prescriptive list,” a canon.

The canon includes many figures who would not have understood themselves as contemporary Salafis understand them. In contrast to most Western scholarly accounts of Salafism, I argue that Salafism is not simply a set of ideas that has existed across the centuries; put differently, contemporary Salafism is not simply a rearticulation of positions held by figures like Shaykh Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), who championed exclusivist Sunni Islam in the wake of the collapse of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258). Rather, canonization allows contemporary Salafis to retroactively portray earlier figures as part of a cohesive community. Canonization elides disagreements among these figures and strips away elements of their identities that might make contemporary Salafis uneasy. For example, Salafi processes of canonization overlook or explain away Ibn Taymiyya’s partial embrace of rationalist methods in theology,¹ his possible sympathies for Sufism,² his openness to the ideal that damnation was impermanent,³ and even his lifelong bachelorhood.⁴ Salafis in Nigeria pass over this latter idiosyncrasy in silence even as they make marriage a central topic of their preaching. In other words, the canon reconstructs

¹ See Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed, eds., *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

² George Makdisi, “Ibn Taymiyya: A Sufi of the Qadiriya Order,” *American Journal of Arabic Studies* 1 (1973): 118–29.

³ Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Amīr al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Raf‘ al-Astār li-Ibṭāl Adilla al-Qā’ilīn bi-Fanā’ al-Nār*, edited by Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: Maktab al-Islāmī, 1984).

⁴ Donald Little, “Did Ibn Taymiyya Have a Screw Loose?” *Studia Islamica* 41 (1975): 93–111.

the past and mediates between that past and the present. The capacity to present a coherent and idealized past gives Salafism much of its appeal: the canon provides its adherents with theological confidence and political meaning.

The Salafi “intellectual posture”⁵ cannot be understood without reference to this canon. Immersion in the canon is what distinguishes Salafis from other Muslims, including other Muslims who reject Sufism. A Muslim who condemns Sufis but preserves an attachment to a legal school or to Ash’arī theology or who has no connection to the world of contemporary Salafi scholarship is not fully Salafi. Without understanding this distinction, the formation of Salafism in the twentieth century – and its differentiation from closely related but nevertheless distinct movements, such as Wahhābīs, who maintain an affiliation to the Ḥanbalī school of law – cannot be adequately studied, including in sub-Saharan Africa.

My approach to delineating the boundaries of Salafism is deliberately narrow; Salafism cannot be a meaningful analytical category if it refers to any and all Muslims who seem puritanical. The category acquires meaning only through a strict set of recognizable, empirical criteria that appear in behavior and discourse. The canon provides a clear mechanism for tracing the appearance of such criteria, which in turn enables a study of the remarkable discursive uniformity among Salafis from Nigeria to Indonesia.

This chapter investigates how the canon formed and who formed it. I focus on three traditions that contributed to contemporary Salafism: first, the Hanbalī school as a theological (more than a legal) movement, and particularly its emphasis on a literalist creed rooted in an idealized reading of the early Muslim community’s experience; second, a set of Yemeni and Indian thinkers who favored absolute *ijtihād* (direct engagement with Qur’anic verses and *ḥadīth* reports to derive legal rulings, rather than interpretation performed through the framework of an established legal school); and third, the revivalist currents in the Middle East in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By revivalism, I mean thinkers who spoke explicitly about “reawakening” Islam and Muslims, specifically in the context of their effort to find an authentically Islamic basis from which to respond to European scientific, military, economic, and political domination of Muslim lands.

As this chapter traces the formation of the canon, it also shows the breadth of the curriculum that Nigerian students encountered at the Islamic University of Medina. African graduates of Arab universities are

⁵ Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer, 244–66 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 250.

frequently stereotyped as narrow “Wahhābīs” who lack knowledge of any scholars beyond Ibn Taymiyya and Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–92), a religious reformer whose *da’wa* (call to renewed Islamic faith) transformed the religious and political trajectory of present-day Saudi Arabia. Yet the curriculum in Medina was global. As a consequence, Nigerian Salafis have been able to draw on a globally diverse but theologically coherent set of references when they present Salafi ideas to their audiences. Nigerian Salafis use the canon to transform the way their audiences see Muslim history and geopolitics; the canon’s wide historical and geographic scope supports this effort.

Canonizers

Salafis use various methods to reframe works they include in their canon. Like other canonizers, secular and religious, they edit texts by compiling and comparing different versions of these texts that exist in manuscript form – a process visible, for example, when William Shakespeare’s contemporary editors note differences between various folio versions of his plays. When establishing authoritative versions of texts, Salafis handle *aḥādīth* with particular care. Salafis cite and grade the *aḥādīth* used by canonical authors – even if this means pointing out that canonical authors sometimes (usually inadvertently) used weak or forged reports. Canonizers also scrutinize the creeds of their subjects, sometimes noting authors’ deviations from perceived orthodoxy and sometimes remaining strategically silent about incongruities. Finally, Salafis fit canonical authors into the moral narrative of Salafi history, emphasizing – as many Muslim biographers do – authors’ perceived moral qualities in addition to their intellectual accomplishments. Salafis show how canonical figures actualized the ideals of the early Muslim community.

Salafi techniques of canonization reflect both classical inheritances and contemporary institutional arrangements. Salafi canonizers build on long-standing genres within Islamic scholarship, particularly commentary and biographical dictionaries. Yet canonizers’ techniques also reflect the role of Saudi Arabian universities in canonization. Many projects of canonization grow out of academic writings at these universities, such as M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations. The canon that emerges from the application of these methods is vast, but canonizers impose some uniformity through a shared set of techniques that appear in forewords and footnotes – textual glosses that enclose and discipline the core text. Academic conventions are central to Salafis’ canonization efforts.

Canonizers include a number of scholars, especially individuals who completed advanced degrees at Saudi Arabian universities. Canonization is a massive communal undertaking. Yet from the perspective of Nigerian

graduates of the Islamic University of Medina, canonical authority has largely run through the university and figures associated with it. One such figure is Shaykh Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, the Albanian/Syrian *ḥadīth* evaluator. As one biographer of the Nigerian Salafi Shaykh Ja'far Maḥmūd Ādam wrote, "Hardly would a new book by Shaykh Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī come out than [Ādam] would rush to look for it, purchase it, and study it."⁶ Al-Albānī merits attention as a canonizer for three reasons: he personally canonized numerous texts, he embodied the intersection of the three intellectual streams described earlier, and he influenced numerous other canonizers, who continue to refer to his authority as both a commentator on texts and a verifier of *ḥadīth* reports. Al-Albānī's canonizing projects reached back to points all along the intellectual genealogies that fed into Salafism. He taught, edited, and commented on works by classical *ḥadīth* collectors,⁷ by figures in the Yemeni-Indian genealogy discussed later in the chapter,⁸ and by representatives of the revivalist movement from the turn of the twentieth century.⁹

Canonizers did not consider the canonized to be intellectually infallible. Indeed, canonizers attributed their penchant for reexamining cherished ideas to the canonical figures themselves, asserting intellectual independence as a core value contained within the canon. In one early work, al-Albānī disagreed with several classical authorities on the soundness of a particular *ḥadīth*. He commented that even though he respected these authorities, he could disagree "because they, may Allah have mercy on them, taught us freedom of opinion and frankness in speech, so much so that they forbade us from blindly emulating them (*taqlīdihim*)."¹⁰ Canonization upholds canonized figures as moral and intellectual authorities but does not present them as perfect.

The Salafi canonizer often appears, whether in his own rendering or in biographical depictions, as the lone figure working in solitude in a library, inhabiting a world of texts. Al-Albānī in particular is often described as the ultimate autodidact. Yet this solitary work depended on the efforts of people who collected and safeguarded texts. Canonizers' legitimacy also relied on the authority present in specific intellectual lineages. In this way, canonization is a largely institutionalized process. In one passage,

⁶ Muḥammad al-Thānī 'Umar Mūsā Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī ma'a Dā'iyat al-Ḥīl wa-Mufasssīr al-Tanzīl* (Kano: Dar al-Hikma li-al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 2011), 57.

⁷ Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Da'īf al-Adab al-Mufrad li-l-Imām al-Bukhārī* (al-Jubayl, Saudi Arabia: Dār al-Ṣiddīq, 1994).

⁸ See note 3 above.

⁹ Muḥammad Rashīd Ridā, *Ḥuqūq al-Nisā' fi al-Islām*, edited by Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1984).

¹⁰ Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Khutbat al-Hāja allatī Kāna Rasūl Allāh – Salla Allāh 'alayhi wa-Sallam – Yu' allimuhā Aṣḥābahu* (Al-Riyāḍ: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif li-al-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2000 [1953]), 39.

Al-Albānī described how he found a late nineteenth-century revivalist text during a visit to Medina in 1978:

During the period of my stay there I frequented the library of the Islamic University – according to my custom whenever I travel there – to study the gems among the photocopies (*naḡā'is al-muṣawwarāt*) gathered there of rare *ḥadīth* manuscripts and other manuscripts held in different libraries in the countries of the world. This [collection] is due to the ardor and the efforts of His Excellence the Shaykh 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-'Abbād, the current vice president of the University, and before him His Excellency, the Most Erudite Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Bāz, Secretary General of the Administration for Scholarly Researches and Islamic Legal Rulings in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, may Allah reward them well for knowledge and Islam – and for the support they and others gave to proceeding in this great and important project, which has eased the difficult, and brought the far-off near, for scholars conducting research, and for industrious students, so that they may investigate and disseminate the traces of our predecessors, and the as-yet unpublished writings of our scholars. Allah is All-Hearing, Ever-Responding.¹¹

As seen in this example, the canon represents the intersection of the institutional (in the form of resources), the genealogical (in the form of personal links that connect canonizers to Salafi authorities), and the textual (in the form of texts authorized by the Salafi community). It should not surprise us, then, that al-Albānī donated his own personal library to the Islamic University of Medina,¹² thereby continuing the canonization process.

The Classical Canon and Its Ḥanbalī Roots

How do Salafis understand the genesis and evolution of their canon? For one answer, I turn to Dr. Muḥammad Amān al-Jāmī (1931–96). His ideas were highly influential at the Islamic University of Medina in the 1980s and 1990s when Nigerian Salafis were studying there.

Born in the Harar region of Ethiopia, al-Jāmī spent his adult life in Saudi Arabia. He studied with the foremost Wahhābī and Salafi teachers of the mid-twentieth century, including the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh (1893–1969) and Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Bāz, respectively the founding president and vice president of the Islamic University of Medina. Al-Jāmī became a pillar of the Salafi establishment in Saudi Arabia. His circle, strongly influenced by the teachings of al-Albānī, became dominant at Medina in

¹¹ Nu'man Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Al-Āyāt al-Bayyināt fī 'Adam Samā' al-Amwāt 'ind al-Ḥanafīyya al-Sādāt* (1888), edited by Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif li-al-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2005), 17–18.

¹² See his will, available at: <http://www.alalbany.net>; accessed March 2015.

the 1980s and 1990s, where al-Jāmī chaired the Faculty of Ḥadīth. The “Jāmīs” espoused loyalty to the Saudi state, which gave them substantial backing.¹³ If there is a voice that expresses Saudi-approved Salafism in its late-twentieth-century strand, the type that Nigerian students at the Islamic University of Medina were most likely to encounter, it is al-Jāmī’s.

Examining al-Jāmī’s narration of Salafi history clarifies the outlines of the classical Salafi canon – the core works that Salafis consider essential to defining creed. For contemporary Salafis, the classical canon exemplifies how true Muslims have actualized the creed in difficult circumstances. Al-Jāmī’s essay “Al-‘Aqīda al-Islāmiyya wa-Tārīkhuhā” (“The Islamic Creed and Its History”) presents Islamic history and Salafi history as identical.

Save only the prophets and the early Muslim community, no figures have ranked more prominently in the Salafi worldview than three later Muslims: Imam Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal (780–855), an important figure in the articulation of Sunni creed and identity during a transitional phase for Islamic creed and law; Ibn Taymiyya; and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. Al-Jāmī’s “The Islamic Creed and Its History” gives prominent places to these three men.

All three belonged to the Ḥanbalī school, named after Ibn Ḥanbal. Ḥanbalism is often described as one of four legal schools in Sunni Islam, but the school’s “leaders were often unwilling to acknowledge the same kind of taqlīd [emulation of jurisprudential authorities] as provided the institutional security of the other schools . . . each major teacher felt free to start afresh, according to the needs of his own time for reform in a puritan direction.”¹⁴ Ibn Ḥanbal himself did not seem to conceive of himself as a jurist, but rather as a pious Muslim attempting to uphold the importance of ḥadīth and defend what he considered the pure creed of Islam.¹⁵ In the context of Salafism, Ḥanbalism is better understood as a theological and interpretive tradition, rather than as a legal school.

Core theological ideas from Ḥanbalism that Salafis took up include the insistence that the Qur’an was not a created object; the rejection of both anthropomorphic and metaphorical understandings of Allah’s attributes; the notion that the path toward ultimate truth could proceed only through the early community’s understanding of Islam; and a hostility toward a

¹³ Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, translated by George Holoch (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 211–17; and Lacroix, “Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and His Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism” in *Global Salafism*, edited by Roel Meijer, 58–80.

¹⁴ Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, Volume 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 160.

¹⁵ Knut S. Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan: A History of Islamic Law* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101.

number of schools that proliferated in the first few centuries of Islam, such as the Muʿtazila (who advocated rationalist theology) and the Shīʿa (who contested the order and manner of succession to the Prophet among his Companions). As they canonized Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, twentieth-century Salafis like al-Jāmī focused on these figures' contributions not just to defining creed but to defending it: in the Salafi memory, these shaykhs are important partly for their hypervigilance against perceived heresy.

In addition to elements of creed that Ḥanbalism bequeathed to Salafis, Ḥanbalism had a political legacy that has informed Salafism. As Henri Laoust writes,

Hanbalism has always found a climate favorable to its blooming during periods of troubles. Each time that Islam has felt itself to be threatened, both in its political security and in its doctrines, a Hanbali reaction has been shaped by the attachment to the ancient Sunna.¹⁶

Ḥanbalism's political aspects reinforce the sense that it is a totalizing movement rather than a school of law narrowly conceived. Ḥanbalism's legacy for Salafism has been its emphasis on *ijtihād* (a scholar's direct engagement with Qurʾanic verses and *ḥadīth* reports to derive legal rulings), its passion for defending a certain vision of Sunni identity, and its political legacy as a force for both resistance and purification. Nigerian Salafis, operating in a context in which most Muslims belong to the Mālikī jurisprudential school of Sunni Islam, have disavowed Ḥanbalism as a legal identity even as they invoke Ibn Ḥanbal as "the imam of *ahl al-sunna*," a title by which he is known throughout the Salafi world.

Ibn Ḥanbal

Al-Jāmī's essay portrays Ibn Ḥanbal as a figure who upheld the tenets of Sunni identity at a time when the Muslim community had begun to fragment. Al-Jāmī writes that despite a proliferation of heretical sects,¹⁷ Muslims preserved a strong degree of unity from the time of the Prophet's immediate successors through the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750) and the first six ʿAbbāsīd rulers. This unity, al-Jāmī continues, collapsed only with the ʿAbbāsīd Caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 813–33). Under al-Maʾmūn and several of his successors, a *Miḥna* or inquisition attempted to enforce the doctrine that the Qurʾan was a created object. This notion was anathema to some early Sunnis, notably Ibn Ḥanbal, and it remains anathema

¹⁶ Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taḳī-d-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taymiyya, Canoniste ḥanbalite né à Ḥarrān en 661/1262, mort à Damas en 728/1328* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1939), 18.

¹⁷ Such as the Shīʿa and the Khawārij.

to contemporary Salafis; for proponents of an uncreated Qur'an, the Qur'an has always existed alongside Allah as His speech. The belief that the Qur'an is uncreated is now mainstream, but during the *Miḥna* official orthodoxy held that it was a created thing. From the Salafi viewpoint, the period from al-Ma'mūn's *Miḥna* to the present has been one in which championing true monotheism requires extraordinary acts of intellectual and physical courage.

Ibn Ḥanbal was born in 780, likely in Baghdad. Although he was descended from soldiers and politicians, from the age of fifteen, he pursued knowledge of *ḥadīth*, traveling throughout Iraq, the Ḥijāz, Yemen, and Syria. Ibn Ḥanbal's best-known work is his *Al-Musnad* (literally "supported," a technical term in *ḥadīth* studies meaning a report with an unbroken chain of transmission or *isnād*), a massive collection of *ḥadīth* reports he gathered and evaluated.¹⁸

Ibn Ḥanbal spent much of his life in Baghdad, the capital of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate. He lived during a formative period for Sunni Muslim identities. The notion of "*ahl al-sunna*" – people upholding the Prophet's normative model – emerged roughly a century before Ibn Ḥanbal's birth, during the early Muslim community's second civil war (683–93). The early *ahl al-sunna* distinguished themselves from other sects, including the early Shī'a. These sects all took different positions on the question of who was suited to rule the Muslim community and who counted as an infidel. In this debate, *ahl al-sunna* endorsed the caliphs who had succeeded the Prophet Muḥammad.¹⁹

Ahl al-sunna partly overlapped with *ahl al-ḥadīth* (the people of *ḥadīth*), who preferred to resolve all religious questions through reference to Qur'an and *aḥādīth*, minimizing the role for human interpretation.²⁰ *Ahl al-ḥadīth*'s legacy has profoundly informed the Salafi methodology, to the extent that some forerunners of the Salafi movement, as well as some Salafis themselves, use this term to refer to themselves. Ibn Ḥanbal "was a rallying figure for the Traditionists, those who wanted to build only on *ḥadīth* and who had become a religio-political party supported by the majority of the people of Baghdad and normally in opposition to the caliph."²¹

During Ibn Ḥanbal's lifetime, the Mu'tazilī school of rationalist theology was ascendant. The Mu'tazila emerged in the eighth century in Basra and became a driving force behind the *Miḥna*. In al-Jāmī's telling,

¹⁸ Christopher Melchert, *Ahmad ibn Hanbal* (London: Oneworld, 2006); and Scott Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam: The Legacy of the Generation of Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Ma'in, and Ibn Ḥanbal* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

¹⁹ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbāsids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunnī Elite* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 49–50.

²⁰ Jonathan A. C. Brown, *The Canonization of Al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

²¹ Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan*, 102.

An extremist group of the Mu'tazila gained influence . . . over the Caliph al-Ma'mūn . . . until they made him deviate from the Salafi approach the Caliphs before him had followed – the Umayyads and the 'Abbāsids – and they caused him to fall into a false belief (*bātil min al-'aqīda*). They led him to believe in the creation of the Qur'an, and in denying the attributes of Allah, and dealing with all the divine requirements by relying on reason and following empty opinions with complete insolence, turning away from the texts of the Book and the Sunna, even scorning them, and claiming that they brought no intellectual benefit, and even opposing them. This was a heretical innovation that was not known among the caliphs before him.²²

Ibn Ḥanbal rejected the notion of a created Qur'an. In his *Kitāb al-Sunna* (The Book of the Sunna), he says, "Whoever says that the Qur'ān is a created object is, for us, an unbeliever (*kāfir*)."²³

Ibn Ḥanbal hoped to avoid involvement in political disputes. He "stood for unhesitating obedience to the ruler, except in disobedience to God. Yet . . . what he asked most of all was to be left alone."²⁴ Defending creed trumped political quietism, and his response to the *Miḥna* has left a legacy that helps structure Salafis' views on the proper relationship between temporal authority and Muslims. As al-Jāmī puts it, under the *Miḥna*, some '*ulamā*' bowed to pressure from the state while others resisted it. Of those who resisted, al-Jāmī writes,

At their forefront was the Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, may Allah Most High have mercy on him, who stood by his word, and maintained his creed. Torture and maltreatment did not influence him, and the disorder (*fitna*) did not sway his heart. He paid no attention to the authority and power of the Caliph.²⁵

For Salafis, the *Miḥna* represents an episode in which divine mandates trumped temporal authority. In Ibn Ḥanbal's meld of political quietism and outspoken theological defiance, Salafis find continuities with both the uncompromising preaching of the Qur'anic prophets and the later struggles of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, and other canonical figures. Like Ibn Ḥanbal, a number of canonical figures have experienced the tension between "apoliticism and revolution."²⁶ A key component of the Salafi identity is the feeling that one is in a minority facing a world, and a state, gone awry.

In "The Islamic Creed and Its History," al-Jāmī highlights Ibn Ḥanbal's opposition to speculative theology and philosophy. Here Salafism's "canonizing discourse" makes the past – in this case the eighth

²² Muḥammad Amān al-Jāmī, *Majmū' Rasā'il al-Jāmī fī al-'Aqīda wa-l-Sunna* (Medina: Dār Ibn Rajab, 1993), 36–7.

²³ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Sunna* (Mecca: al-Maṭba' al-Salafiyya, 1930/1), 4.

²⁴ Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 113.

²⁵ Al-Jāmī, *Majmū' Rasā'il*, 37.

²⁶ Lacroix, "Between Revolution and Apoliticism."

century – relevant to the present. Al-Jāmī quotes Ibn Ḥanbal’s remark, “Do not keep company with those who engage in speculative theology (*ahl al-kalām*), even if they defend the sunna (*dhubbū ‘an al-sunna*).”²⁷ Al-Jāmī writes,

In this age, when negligence and apathy have appeared regarding keeping company with heretics (*ahl al-bid‘a*) and being friendly with them, it is incumbent on students to re-examine their tolerant stance, which indicates weak zeal and apathy in forbidding wrong, while employing the counsel (*naṣīḥa*) of the Imam of *ahl al-sunna* and the preventer of heresy (*qāmi‘ al-bid‘a*), Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, may Allah be satisfied with him; and . . . to beware the heretic among speculative theologians and the Sufis, and among the Shī‘a (*rawāfiq*, literally “rejecters,” i.e. of the order of succession to the Prophet), and others; fearing that they might be influenced by their heresy, which might corrupt their creed.²⁸

For al-Jāmī, Ibn Ḥanbal’s advice is timeless because it provides guidance for how to live in the world after the age of the Companions, an age characterized by a proliferation of sects within the Muslim community. From the Imam’s time until his own, al-Jāmī suggests, defending the pure Islamic creed required uncompromising champions and constant vigilance.

The canonization of Ibn Ḥanbal has involved not only holding him up as an exemplary figure but also teaching and defending his works. Defenders arose not just among followers of the Ḥanbalī legal school but also with figures outside the school, such as al-Albānī and the Nigerian Salafis. For example, al-Albānī wrote a short book refuting the charge that authorship of the *ḥadīth* collection *Al-Musnad* had been falsely attributed to Ibn Ḥanbal.²⁹ Nigerian Salafis have presented Ibn Ḥanbal not as a legal authority but as a champion of the true creed.

Ibn Taymiyya

For Salafis, Ibn Taymiyya is another figure who upheld the true Islamic creed in a time of turmoil. Salafis assert that he epitomizes intellectual virtuosity in the service of Islam. In “The Islamic Creed and Its History,” al-Jāmī titles his section on Ibn Taymiyya “Breaking the Stagnation” (*Kaṣr al-ḥumūd*). Al-Jāmī writes that after the time of the Caliph al-Ma‘mūn, philosophy suffused Islamic society, posing intellectual dangers to Muslims. Ibn Taymiyya undid the damage:

In that critical period a Salafi scholar appeared who studied these new forms of knowledge (*‘ulūm jadīda*) – or new conventions to be precise – just as others were

²⁷ Al-Jāmī, *Majmū‘ Rasā’il*, 39.

²⁸ Al-Jāmī, *Majmū‘ Rasā’il*, 42–3.

²⁹ Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Al-Dhabb al-Aḥmad ‘an Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad* (Al-Jubayl, Saudi Arabia: Dār al-Ṣiddīq, 1999).

studying them. But he studied them in complete silence, until he delved into all these speculative theological and philosophical conventions, with his complete mastery of Islamic sciences as creed and law, and the sciences of Qur'an and *ḥadīth* in particular, and the branches of the Arabic language too, and this was Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya, of Ḥarrān, of Damascus.³⁰

Ibn Taymiyya's proficiency in the intellectual disciplines of heretics, al-Jāmī continues, allowed the Shaykh to combat them:

The Shaykh of Islam used these conventions to defend Islam and its creed in the language of the people who were attacking the creed, in a style they recognised. He came upon the people suddenly, as a soldier armed with the weapon of his age, trained in all the weapons used in the field, and he excelled in using them to the extent necessary. The Shaykh of Islam worked to renew the approach of the *salaf*, and to inspire the movement for calling people to Islam.³¹

In al-Jāmī's account, Ibn Taymiyya merits canonization for his ability to defend Islam through mastery of the numerous and sophisticated intellectual challenges that confronted the true faith. Here as elsewhere, al-Jāmī projects the Salafi identity back through time, drawing a straight line from the prophets to the *salaf* to Ibn Ḥanbal to Ibn Taymiyya.

Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya was born in 1263 in Ḥarrān, in present-day Turkey near its border with Syria. He came from a lineage of Ḥanbalī scholars. Amid the Mongols' invasion of the Muslim heartlands, his family fled to Damascus, which was emerging as a center of Ḥanbalī scholarship.³² Ibn Taymiyya spent the majority of his life there, punctuated by extended – and sometimes involuntary – sojourns in Egypt.

Ibn Taymiyya's intellectual formation occurred in this Ḥanbalī milieu, although the shaykh would come to consider himself an absolute *mujtahid*, someone capable of deriving legal rulings directly from scriptural sources. As a young man, he studied Ibn Ḥanbal's *Al-Musnad* as well as the *ḥadīth* collections of other major compilers.³³ Ibn Taymiyya was influenced by Ibn Ḥanbal's works on creed and drew heavily on Ibn Ḥanbal's polemics against the Mu'tazila and other schools. Yet Ibn Taymiyya was not an uncritical partisan of the Ḥanbalī school. He "would ceaselessly research the thought of primitive Hanbalism, with the hope of smashing the school's immobilized codification, into which the work of later Hanbalites tended to congeal."³⁴

³⁰ Al-Jāmī, *Majmū' Rasā'il*, 48.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

³² Cook, *Commanding Right*.

³³ Laoust, *Essai*.

³⁴ Laoust, *Essai*, 77.

Ibn Taymiyya lived in an era when the last vestiges of the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate were crumbling. Mongol armies pushed into ‘Abbāsid territories, capturing Baghdad in 1258, followed by Aleppo and Damascus in 1260. Alongside, and often at war with, Mongol territories were ‘Abbāsid successor states, such as the Mamlūk Sultanate based in Cairo. Ibn Taymiyya was profoundly marked by the Mamlūk state’s confrontation with the Mongols and the Crusaders: “His youth had been exalted by the triumphs of Islam over the Franks. His adult years would often pass under anxiety about a Mongol invasion, which he had already, as a child, tragically experienced.”³⁵

Ibn Taymiyya’s entry into public life and public controversy came when he wrote *Al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyya al-Kubrā* (The Great Edict of Ḥamāh [a town in Syria]) in 1299. Ibn Taymiyya argued against positions held by the Mu‘tazila, the Ash‘ariyya, and others on the allegorical nature of Allah’s attributes. The creed elicited a popular counter-reaction and accusations of anthropomorphism.³⁶ Because of this and other polemical exchanges, Ibn Taymiyya would spend many of the ensuing years caught up in controversies with religious rivals and temporal authorities. He was imprisoned repeatedly in Cairo and Damascus, dying in the latter city’s citadel in 1328.

One example of the canonization of Ibn Taymiyya comes from a Saudi Arabian scholar who edited Ibn Taymiyya’s *Al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyya al-Kubrā* as part of his master’s degree work.³⁷ The canonizer outlined four reasons that pushed him to publish a new edition of the book. First was its “scholarly value,” especially its treatment of “the unity of the names and attributes (*tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa-l-ṣifāt*),”³⁸ one of three major forms of divine unity that Salafis routinely invoke. Second, the canonizer wrote, “This book is considered one of the strongest reactions to the Ash‘arī [theological] school” and it “treats a deviation in creed that is deeply embedded in the Islamic *umma* in the present time.” Third, it has an “easy style (*uslūb sahl*)” and “is considered one of the foundational Salafi books (*ummahāt al-kutub al-salafiyya*), which is indispensable to the seeker of knowledge.” Finally, the canonizer perceived a need for critical scholarly treatment of the text, particularly by verifying and citing *aḥādīth* and compiling the different versions of the text.³⁹ In addition to

³⁵ Laoust, *Essai*, 63–4.

³⁶ Laoust, *Essai*, 112.

³⁷ This is Dr. Ḥamad ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Tuwayjirī (b. 1964/5), who studied and worked at Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd Islamic University. For his background, see “Tarjamāt al-Duktūr Ḥamad ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Tuwayjirī,” undated. Available at: <http://www.taimiah.org/index.aspx/function=author&Id=2>; accessed September 2014.

³⁸ Ḥamad ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Tuwayjirī, “Editor’s Introduction” in Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyya al-Kubrā* (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṣamī‘ī, 2004), 10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

describing his editorial engagement with *Al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyya*, he included a biography of Ibn Taymiyya that detailed his “moral qualities.”⁴⁰ The canonizer carefully framed his subject, situating his usefulness for contemporary Salafis in particular ways.

Ibn Taymiyya’s legacy included scholars who studied directly with him, especially Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292–1350) and Ismā‘īl ibn Kathīr (1301–73). Ibn al-Qayyim influenced Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, as well as several other figures discussed in this chapter. Ibn al-Qayyim has been incorporated into the Salafi canon due to his writings, but also because his life mirrored his master’s in certain ways that make him, like Ibn Taymiyya, a touchstone for Salafi notions of principled opposition to oppression. Ibn Kathīr, meanwhile, has become a part of the Salafi canon due to his *tafsīr* (exegesis) of the Qur’ān and his historical work *Al-Bidāya wa-l-Nihāya* (The Beginning and the End).

Ibn Taymiyya’s position within the Salafi canon is central, but the meaning of his legacy is disputed within the Salafi community, particularly when it comes to assessing his position on the sensitive and consequential question of *takfīr*, or declaring other Muslims to be unbelievers. In Ibn Taymiyya’s works, especially his denunciations of Mongol converts to Islam as unbelievers, some Salafis and non-Salafis have perceived justifications for applying *takfīr* against a range of targets in the present, from ordinary Muslims to allegedly apostate Muslim rulers.⁴¹ Other Salafis, working to police the boundaries of the canon, have sought to refute such interpretations of the shaykh’s ideas. One contemporary canonizer, in his book *The Approach of Ibn Taymiyya to the Issue of Takfīr*, positions the shaykh as part of the “middle course” (*al-wāsiṭiyya*) that “*ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā‘a*” follow. This course avoids the extremes of the *murjī‘a*,⁴² or those who defer judgment on questions of *takfīr*, and “the rest of the heterodox (*ahl al-bid‘a*) . . . most of whom have anathematized anyone who disagrees with them.” The author warned that “the issue of *takfīr*, like other legal issues, is not permitted to the ignorant (*al-jāhīl*) to discuss”⁴³ and that some contemporary practitioners of *takfīr* “have begun to take from the words of Ibn Taymiyya things whose meanings they do not understand, or they understand [the meanings] but do not understand their intent.”⁴⁴ The correct way to understand

⁴⁰ Ibid., 23–7.

⁴¹ Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*, second edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Paul Heck, “‘Jihad’ Revisited,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32:1 (Spring 2004): 95–128; 116–19.

⁴² For more on this politicized label and its transposition from its early Islamic context to contemporary intra-Salafi debates, see Daniel Lav, *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴³ ‘Abd al-Majīd ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Mash‘abī, *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyya fī Mas‘alat al-Takfīr* (Al-Riyāḍ: Maktabat Aḍwā‘ al-Salaf, 1997), 3–4.

⁴⁴ Al-Mash‘abī, *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyya*, 5–6.

Ibn Taymiyya's approach, the author continued, was to conceptualize *takfir* as a specialized legal act that had to proceed according to strict engagement with criteria outlined in the Qur'an and the Sunna. The author devoted part of his book to specifying which groups Ibn Taymiyya had anathematized and on what basis. Among northern Nigerian Salafis, respect for Ibn Taymiyya runs high and suspicion of non-Salafi Muslims runs deep, but many of the leading graduates of Medina emphasize *ta'lim* (literally "instruction," but in this case the moral reformation of other Muslims through discursive persuasion) over *takfir*.

Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb

Another central figure in the Salafi canon is the Ḥanbalī shaykh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, the eighteenth-century Arabian reformer. Through his attacks on other Muslims' creeds and practices, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb caused a controversy during his lifetime that has not faded with the passing years. The label "Wahhābī" has been thrown at Muslim reformers and purists by their political and theological opponents from Mali to India, but contemporary Salafis do not consider themselves mere followers of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. He is a central, but not the sole, figure in the canon.

In the Salafi canon, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb holds a prominent place due to his uncompromising championing of his brand of *tawḥīd* (the absolute unity of Allah). Al-Jāmī writes,

In the twelfth century hijrī, the *dā'iya* (preacher), the *mujāhid* (striver), the Imam Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb noticed that a violent storm was raging over the Islamic creed and its law, in order to change its characteristics, and move things out of place, and throw them wherever they fell. Many concepts were changed because of this. The matter became obscure for people in many domains and numerous issues. Many heretical innovations occurred in Islam that had nothing to do with Islam. And so the young *dā'iya* saw that he had to make himself ready to engage in *tajdīd* (renewal of Islam) and in restoring matters to the proper place they had been in before the storm.⁴⁵

In political terms, if Ibn Ḥanbal provides Salafis with a model of uncompromising quietism, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb provides them with a model of uncompromising activism. As with Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jāmī presents Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb as a hero who appeared to save the Muslim community at a critical juncture.

Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb was born in 1703 in al-'Uyayna, in the Najd region of present-day Saudi Arabia. Like Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn

⁴⁵ Al-Jāmī, *Majmū' Rasā'il*, 63.

‘Abd al-Wahhāb was the descendant of Ḥanbalī scholars.⁴⁶ Yet during his studies in Mecca, Medina, Basra, and possibly elsewhere, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb developed an understanding of *tawḥīd* and its requirements that broke with his family tradition.

A central preoccupation in Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s intellectual formation was his engagement with scripture and *ḥadīth*. It is noteworthy that some of his teachers of *ḥadīth* came from beyond the Ḥanbalī school. During his studies in Medina, he joined a cosmopolitan intellectual circle that had, for roughly a century, been pursuing a “revival of *ḥadīth* scholarship.” The Medina circle was strongly interested in the works of Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Taymiyya. Many of these Medinan scholars belonged to the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order, but in the field of jurisprudence, “*madhhabī* (legal) affiliation was becoming an insignificant criterion in defining the nature of their intellectual association and interconnection.”⁴⁷ Although Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb broke with his Medinan teachers by attacking Sufism and anathematizing other Muslims, he built some of his ideas on the foundations that the Medinan shaykhs laid in the area of *ḥadīth* scholarship.

Although he began preaching as a young man, it was following his father’s death in 1740 that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb initiated his enduring and public call for a reinvigorated *tawḥīd*. In the town of Dir‘iyya, he found an ally in the ruler, Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd (d. 1767). In 1744, the two men swore loyalty to each other and recognized each other’s respective sway, the former in politics and the latter in religious doctrine.⁴⁸ As Ibn Sa‘ūd began a series of military conquests, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb corresponded with ‘*ulamā*’ throughout Najd. Scholars in conquered areas faced pressure to endorse his teachings or leave. Dir‘iyya became the foremost center for religious learning in Najd, as older centers of learning lost importance.⁴⁹ The two men’s families have continued to uphold the alliance, as two Saudi emirates rose and fell only to be followed by a third, the present Saudi state.

Canonizers have revered but also reevaluated the work of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. His *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (The Book of the Unity of God) is a core text, yet Salafis have not shied away from repackaging and critiquing it. Salafis’ concern with assessing the reliability of *ḥadīth* reports magnifies their tendency to critically examine such canonical texts. One canonizer’s introduction to an annotated edition of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* reads, “I wanted

⁴⁶ David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 17.

⁴⁷ Basheer Nafi, “A Teacher of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: Muḥammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī and the Revival of Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth’s Methodology,” *Islamic Law and Society* 13:2 (2006): 208–241; 214–15.

⁴⁸ Natana Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

⁴⁹ Commins, *Wahhabi Mission*.

to put the different texts of this book in order, and correct the errors that had entered into it in previous editions, and cite (*takhrīj*) its *ḥadīth* reports and non-prophetic sayings.”⁵⁰ The editor, through this process of citation, identified and indicated “nineteen mistakes” (*awḥām*) in the book.⁵¹ Even a work central to the Salafī canon remains an object of critical reframing.

This edition of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* exemplifies how the canonical, the genealogical, and the institutional can interact through canonization. The Salafī compiler of that edition was a scholar in the lineage of the Yemeni Salafī shaykh Muqbil ibn Ḥādī al-Wādī’ī (1933–2001). Al-Wādī’ī belonged to the same generation as al-Jāmī and was, like al-Jāmī, strongly influenced by al-Albānī. The edition contained forewords by two of al-Wādī’ī’s senior students and was published by the press associated with al-Wādī’ī’s school Dār al-Ḥadīth. These forewords connected the text, genealogically, to al-Wādī’ī and through him to his teachers, including al-Albānī. Canonization enfolds classical texts within a repertoire of editorial methods and genealogical authorizations.

The Yemeni-Indian Strand

In his canonizing essay “The Islamic Creed and Its History,” al-Jāmī gave pride of place to classical Ḥanbalī figures and their legacy in the twentieth century. He pointed to Saudi Arabia as the embodiment of Salafism in his own time: “In the contemporary world there has existed no Islamic *da’wa* upon whose approach (*manhaj*) an Islamic state has been built, except the *da’wa* of Imam Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.”⁵²

Yet Salafis have canonized figures beyond the Ḥanbalī-Wahhābī lineage. Salafis present their community as a global tendency, comprising movements with diverse names sharing a common creed.⁵³ Who, then, counts as a Salafī? Whose intellectual genealogies are legitimate from a Salafī point of view?

One major non-Ḥanbalī contribution to the canon has come from an intellectual genealogy that ran through Yemen and India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The central figures in this genealogy were not Ḥanbalīs in a legal sense, and they openly rejected Wahhābism. Yet twentieth-century Salafis such as al-Albānī approvingly cited their work and considered it part of the broader project of reviving the early Muslim community’s ethos and approach.

⁵⁰ ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Radmān al-Ḥabīshī, “Muqaddimat al-Muḥaqqiq” in Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (Dammāj, Yemen: Maktabat al-Imām al-Wādī’ī, 2009), 12; on *takhrīj*, see Brown, *Canonization*, 211–17.

⁵¹ Al-Ḥabīshī, “Muqadimma,” 30.

⁵² Al-Jāmī, *Majmū’ Rasā’il*, 78.

⁵³ Al-Jāmī, *Majmū’ Rasā’il*, 81.

In the context of the canon, these Yemeni and Indian figures could even be used to discipline Ibn Taymiyya: Al-Albānī painstakingly edited and published a manuscript by a Yemeni intellectual, Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Amīr al-Ṣanʿānī (1688–1769), who had argued against the idea that Hell might be temporary, a position that Ibn Taymiyya had perhaps held. Al-Albānī wrote a long introduction to the work. He treated Ibn Taymiyya with the utmost respect but admitted the possibility that Ibn Taymiyya had, from a Salafi point of view, erred. Al-Albānī ultimately sided with Ibn al-Amīr. Bracing himself for vigorous objections from Ibn Taymiyya's other contemporary disciples, al-Albānī pointed out how Ibn al-Amīr used language of which contemporary Salafis would approve. Al-Albānī referred to Ibn al-Amīr's approach as "free of legal partisanship and having no Ashʿarī or Muʿtazilī attachment (*min ghayr al-ʿaṣabiyya al-madhhabiyya wa-lā mutābiʿat ashʿariyya aw muʿtaziliyya*)."⁵⁴ Al-Albānī also noted that he had reached a similar conclusion about the issue of Hell's permanence – and Ibn Taymiyya's error or ambiguity on the issue – in his own work. It was not simply that the Yemeni scholar had produced strong textual evidence, but also that al-Albānī found his creed and methods compatible with those of contemporary Salafism.⁵⁴

The Yemeni-Indian genealogy offered a major contribution to the formation of Salafism. Two key figures in this genealogy are shaykhs Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (1760–1834) of Ṣanʿā in Yemen and Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān al-Qannūjī (1832–90), who lived in Bhopal in India. These figures were incorporated into the curriculum that Nigerians studied, formally and informally, in Medina. Nigerian Salafis directly cite both al-Shawkānī and Khān.⁵⁵

Al-Shawkānī was the most prominent Muslim scholar and judge in Yemen in his time. Born in the village of Hijrat Shawkān, he spent his adult life in Ṣanʿā, where he served as chief judge of the Qāsimī imamate from 1795 until his death. The shaykh underwent a personal transition in religious allegiances, reflecting broader changes in Yemeni society. He "rejected unequivocally the Zaydī-Hādawī school he was born into [a branch of the Shīʿa] and saw himself more properly as the intellectual heir of the Sunnī Traditionists of highland Yemen, scholars who argued that the Sunnī canonical *ḥadīth* collections were unconditionally authoritative in matters of religion."⁵⁶ Most important from the perspective of al-Shawkānī's inclusion in the Salafi canon, he embraced the principle of

⁵⁴ Al-Ṣanʿānī, *Rafʿ al-Astār*, 7.

⁵⁵ Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī*.

⁵⁶ Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkānī* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10. Knut Vikør questions the extent of al-Shawkānī's conversion, given that al-Shawkānī remained in the employ of a Zaydī imam; see *Between God and the Sultan: A History of Islamic Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 123, footnote 21.

absolute *ijtihād* and regarded himself as absolutely qualified to perform it, basing legal rulings on foundational texts alone and rejecting other legal sources such as scholarly consensus and analogy.⁵⁷ In keeping with its anti-*madhhabism* (rejection of established legal schools), the Salafi canon has enthusiastically embraced al-Shawkānī's legal manual *Nayl al-Awṭār fī Sharḥ Muntaqā al-Akhbār* (Attaining the Alms in Commenting on the Choicest Traditions). Twentieth-century Salafis canonized not only al-Shawkānī's legal works but also works by his teachers in the Yemeni Traditionist lineage – the earlier-mentioned Ibn al-Amīr, for example, had taught al-Shawkānī's primary teacher. Even in the case of al-Shawkānī, however, later Salafi canonizers seem to have strategically overlooked elements of his thought – his approach to Qur'anic exegesis, for example, gave less weight to Prophetic Companions' and Successors' interpretations than contemporary Salafis do. He was also franker than his canonizers in acknowledging the problems that differences of opinion within the early Muslim community might pose for those attempting to reconstruct an authentic, original Islam.⁵⁸

The Yemeni Sunni tradition to which al-Shawkānī belonged was not a Yemeni equivalent of the Wahhābī project. The Yemeni Traditionists held mixed attitudes toward Wahhābīs. The two circles drew on some of the same intellectual sources, such as Ibn Taymiyya, and they shared attitudes favoring scriptural literalism and disavowing popular Sufism. Yet “a doctrinal polemic raged between the Wahhābīs and the Yemeni Traditionists, in which the latter accused the Wahhābīs of extremism.”⁵⁹ Ibn al-Amīr, who strongly influenced al-Shawkānī's views on *ijtihād*, initially approved of his contemporary Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, but later changed course, dismissing the shaykh and his writings.⁶⁰ Al-Shawkānī followed a similar pattern, expressing early praise for Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb but subsequently viewing the Wahhābīs as extremists who threatened Yemen.⁶¹

Although Yemen abuts Saudi Arabia, al-Shawkānī influenced the Salafi canon in large part through the Indian *ahl-e ḥadīth* movement, and particularly through Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān, who became a major transmitter of al-Shawkānī's work. Khān was born in Bareilly, which sits in present-day Uttar Pradesh State, northern India. Khān's birthplace and family traditions connected him to one of the two major intellectual traditions

⁵⁷ Haykel, *Revival and Reform*, 92–5.

⁵⁸ Johanna Pink, “Where Does Modernity Begin? Muḥammad al-Shawkānī and the Tradition of *Tafsīr*” in *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Tradition*, edited by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink, 323–60 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁹ Haykel, *Revival and Reform*, 128.

⁶⁰ Michael Cook, “On the Origins of Wahhabism,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 2:2 (July 1992): 191–202; 200.

⁶¹ Haykel, *Revival and Reform*, 128–9.

that influenced his thought (the other being al-Shawkānī). This was the tradition represented by Shāh Walī Allāh (1703–62), a renowned scholar, *ḥadīth* master, and Sufi.⁶² Like al-Shawkānī, however, Walī Allāh rejected the use of weak *ḥadīth* reports, thereby anticipating an issue that would become a touchstone for twentieth-century revivalists and Salafis alike.⁶³ As a youth, Khān studied logic, philosophy, jurisprudence, and *ḥadīth* with *ulamā* in northern India. By 1859, Khān had established himself in the city of Bhopal semi-permanently.⁶⁴ In 1871, he married Jahan Begum (1838–1901), Bhopal's ruler. He helped rule Bhopal until 1885, when British colonial authorities deposed him.

In Bhopal, Khān encountered the Yemeni circles that connected him to al-Shawkānī and the legacy of Ibn Taymiyya. As one biographer of Khān writes, "In the 1860's *ulamā*', full of the ideas of Ibn Taimiyyah and al-Shawkānī, were found in the courts of the Indian princely states, especially Hyderabad and Bhopal."⁶⁵ Khān's pilgrimage in 1868–9 deepened his contact with the works of al-Shawkānī and Ibn Taymiyya. During the eight-month journey, he passed through Yemen, where he visited Yemeni scholars who had spent time in Bhopal.⁶⁶ He studied *ḥadīth* and transcribed scholarly works, for example those of Ibn al-Amīr. He purchased Ibn Taymiyya's *Iqtidā' al-Sirāṭ al-Mustaqīm li-Mukhālafat Aṣḥāb al-Jahīm* (The Necessity of the Straight Path for Opposing the People of Hell), as well as al-Shawkānī's *Irshād al-Fuḥūl ila Tahqīq al-Ḥaqq min 'Im al-Uṣūl* (Guiding the Masters to Verify the Truth through Knowledge of the Foundations), *Nayl al-Awṭār*, and *Faṭḥ al-Qadīr* (God's Triumph); the last of these was al-Shawkānī's exegesis of the Qur'an. After performing *ḥajj*, visiting Medina, and returning to Mecca for *umra*, he traveled back to Bhopal, where he began championing the need for a *ḥadīth*-based revival and attacking *taqlīd* and Hanafism.⁶⁷

Khān's marriage to Jahan Begum helped him secure the institutional and financial support he needed to propagate his ideas. Working with a team of copyeditors, transcribers, reviewers, and publishers, Khān abridged, translated, and synthesized texts by Ibn Taymiyya, Walī Allāh,

⁶² Saeedullah, *The Life and Works of Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Khan, Nawab of Bhopal* (Lahore: Published by Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, printed at Ashraf Press, 1973), 31.

⁶³ Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (London: Oneworld, 2014), 254.

⁶⁴ Saeedullah, *Life and Works*, 34–9.

⁶⁵ Saeedullah, *Life and Works*, 13. One such Yemeni scholar was Shaykh Ḥusayn ibn Muḥsin al-Anṣārī (1829–1909). Al-Anṣārī studied with al-Shawkānī's son Aḥmad, and his father had studied with al-Shawkānī himself. Al-Anṣārī went to visit his brother Zayn al-Ābidīn in Bhopal during the 1860s and spent much of the rest of his life there, interrupted by sojourns in Yemen. See Muḥammad Ziyād al-Takla, "Ḥusayn ibn Muḥsin al-Anṣārī al-Yamānī," al-Alukah, 2009. Available at: <http://www.alukah.net/culture/0/7590>; accessed September 2014.

⁶⁶ The two scholars mentioned in the previous note.

⁶⁷ Saeedullah, *Life and Works*, 14; 42–44.

al-Shawkānī, and others. He published these texts in multiple places – Istanbul, Egypt, and India – and in multiple languages – namely Persian, Arabic, and Urdu. Khān’s travels, activism, and publishing represented a cosmopolitan project of uniting the umma through scripturalism. Khān used the spaces of mobility opened by the Ottoman and British Empires but also reacted against imperial efforts to divide the Muslim world along national identities and borders.⁶⁸

What the Indian and Yemeni traditions shared was an emphasis on the right of the individual scholar to practice *ijtihād* by going back to the foundational texts of Islam. Shāh Walī Allāh had called for intellectual and spiritual elites to embrace a renewed *ijtihād*. Khān built on this legacy, yet in some respects he diverged from Walī Allāh. Walī Allāh belonged to the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order and defended Sufi ideas such as *waḥdat al-wujūd* (literally “monism of being,” or the notion that all things are merely manifestations of God and that nothing exists apart from Him – a notion anathema to contemporary Salafis, who abhor any perceived blurring of the line between Creator and created).⁶⁹ Khān approvingly cited some Sufi intellectuals. Yet he condemned many practices associated with Sufism, such as visiting saints’ tombs, and he opposed public discussion or teaching of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Additionally, while Walī Allāh endorsed the preeminence of the Ḥanafī school among the Indian masses, and reserved the privilege of *ijtihād* for elites, Khān publicly attacked the school’s founder Abū Ḥanīfa and promoted a broader *ijtihād*. Finally, Walī Allāh sought unity between Sunni and Shī‘ī Muslims,⁷⁰ while Khān sought to prevent Shī‘a from celebrating their rituals.⁷¹ Khān and like-minded Indian ‘ulamā’ of his day placed a premium on the notions of *tawḥīd*, *ijtihād*, and eradicating *bid‘a* (heretical innovations).⁷²

Khān’s *al-Tāj al-Mukallal min Jawāhir Ma‘āthir al-Ṭirāz al-Ākhir wal-Awwal* (The Tower Adorned with Jewels of the Achievements of the Recent and Original Model) provides insight into his views on *ijtihād* and his understanding of a canon of *mujtahids*. Khān’s canon is not the Salafi canon per se, but rather a precursor to it, a proto-Salafi corpus. *Al-Tāj al-Mukallal* is a biographical dictionary with the purpose of defending *ijtihād*, as Khān explained in the introduction:

This is a commemoration of a blessed group of people with knowledge of the exalted prophetic *ḥadīth*, who worked with the Prophet’s tradition (*al-athar*

⁶⁸ Seema Alavi, “Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832–1890) and the Creation of a Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the 19th Century,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54 (2011): 1–38.

⁶⁹ Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

⁷⁰ Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*.

⁷¹ Saeedullah, *Life and Works*.

⁷² Saeedullah, *Life and Works*, 125.

al-muṣṭafawī), and their glorious deeds, which are needed by students [trying to] understand what the *salaf* of this *umma* practiced (*mā kāna ‘alayhi salaf hādhihi al-umma*), and their successors the imams who worked with evidence (*al-dalīl*), rejected emulation (*taqlīd*) [of legal schools], and refused idle talk.⁷³

Khān went on to refute the views of those who claimed that *ijtihād* had ended after the classical period. He wrote that Allah “has guaranteed the preservation of His authentic religion. The meaning of that is not its preservation in the bellies of scrolls and notebooks (*buṭūn al-ṣuḥuf wa-l-dafātīr*), but rather the provision of those who will explain it to people in every time and at every need.”⁷⁴

Who comprised this blessed group? *Al-Tāj al-Mukallal* contains 543 names, starting with Ibn Ḥanbal and ending with Khān. The dictionary contains figures from the classical Ḥanbalī tradition such as Ibn Taymiyya, but also figures whom later Salafis would compartmentalize, such as the Andalusian philosopher and jurist Ibn Rushd (1126–98), whose works on comparative jurisprudence are acceptable to Salafis but whose embrace of philosophy is not.⁷⁵ The dictionary devotes prominent entries to representatives of the Yemeni tradition, such as Ibn al-Amīr and al-Shawkānī. Khān’s canon was mostly, but not entirely, made up of figures whom later Salafis would claim for their canon.

Like the Yemeni scholars who inspired him, Khān disavowed any allegiance to Wahhābism. In 1884, Khān published *An Interpreter of Wahabiism* to allay British authorities’ concerns about Wahhābism in India and refute his opponents’ use of this label to describe *ahl-e ḥadīth*. In the book, Khān used the criterion of allegiance to a legal school to differentiate his movement from Wahhābism. “In my opinion,” he wrote, “the Mohamedans of the world may be divided into two classes. The *Ahl-e-Sunnat* and *ḡamaat*, also called *Ahl-e-Hadis*, and the *Mukallids* [i.e., those who practice emulation of a school] of particular forms of faith.”⁷⁶ Explaining Wahhābism as a Ḥanbalī sect, he noted, “The truth is, that the Wahābis are a set of *Mukallids* of a particular religion.”⁷⁷ Notably, it was Khān’s attitude toward legal affiliation, and not the voices of those

⁷³ Siddīq Ḥasan Khān, *Al-Tāj al-Mukallal min ḡawāhir Ma’āthīr al-Ṭirāz al-Ākhir wa-l-Awwal*, second edition (Beirut: Dār Iqrā’, 1983), 19.

⁷⁴ Khān, *Al-Tāj al-Mukallal*, 21.

⁷⁵ Ibn Rushd’s *Bidāyat al-Muṭṭahid* (The Beginning of the Independent Legal Scholar), a work that compares the four Sunni schools of law, has been taught at the Islamic University. Mike Farquhar, “The Islamic University of Medina since 1961: The Politics of Religious Mission and the Making of a Modern Salafi Pedagogy” in *Shaping Global Islamic Discourses: The Role of al-Azhar, al-Medina, and al-Mustafa*, edited by Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai, 21–40 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 32.

⁷⁶ Siddīq Ḥasan Khān, *An Interpreter of Wahabiism* (Bhopal: Siddīq Hasan Khan, 1884), 89.

⁷⁷ Khān, *An Interpreter*, 33.

Wahhābīs who adhered to Ḥanbalism as a legal school, that would ultimately become the dominant tendency in the twentieth-century global Salafi approach to law.

Despite Khān's disavowal of Wahhābism, India's *ahl-e ḥadīth* ('*ḥadīth* folk') movement, of which Khān was a leading figure, was considered sufficiently pure by nineteenth-century Wahhābī '*ulamā*' that they sent some of their sons to study there.⁷⁸ These Saudi '*ulamā*' included Shaykh Sa'd ibn Ḥamad ibn 'Atīq (1850/1–1930), the son of a major Wahhābī scholar. Ibn 'Atīq traveled to India in 1883–4 and remained there nine years, studying *ḥadīth* collections with Khān, Yemeni scholars resident in India, and others. When Ibn 'Atīq returned to Saudi Arabia, he completed his studies and then became a judge, including in Riyāḍ, where he also served as imam of the Great Mosque and as a close advisor to King 'Abd al-'Azīz. Ibn 'Atīq's pupils included Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Bāz, one of the foremost canonical authorities in contemporary Salafism.⁷⁹

For contemporary Salafis, accepting the Yemeni-Indian genealogy has entailed legitimizing some thinkers, such as Khān, who were not theologically identical to later Salafis. Canonizing these figures meant, as canonization had for Ibn Taymiyya and others, ignoring or forgiving certain departures from later Salafi creed. One Salafi biographer of Khān placed him in the intellectual lineage of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Taymiyya, but noted discrepancies. Khān's writings, the biographer wrote, were "a true picture (*ṣūra ṣādiqa*) of the return to what the pious predecessors and imams of the umma practiced, except for a few issues in which he leaned toward the Ash'arīs."⁸⁰ Some thinkers are incorporated into the Salafi canon with caveats attached.

As Chapter 2 discusses, India's *ahl-e ḥadīth* would play a significant role in establishing some of Saudi Arabia's Islamic educational institutions in the early twentieth century. Before turning to the Salafi intellectual landscape of the twentieth century, however, it is important to examine one of the most complicated but influential strands in the canon – the revivalists, modernists, and proto-Salafis who flourished in Cairo, Damascus, and elsewhere around the turn of the twentieth century.

⁷⁸ Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, translated by Ethan Rundell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

⁷⁹ 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Ṣāliḥ al Bassām, '*Ulamā' Najd khilāl Thamāniyyat Qurūn, Volume 2*, second edition (Al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-'āshima li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1998), 220–7; and Muḥammad Ziyād al-Takla, "Al-'Allāma Sa'd ibn Ḥamad ibn 'Atīq," Alukah, 24 May 2007. Available at: <http://www.alukah.net/culture/0/800>; accessed September 2014.

⁸⁰ Akhtar Jamāl Luqmān, *Al-Sayyid Ṣiddīq Ḥasan al-Qannūjī: Ārā'uhu al-I'ṭiqādīyya wa-Mawqifuhu min 'Aqīdat al-Salaf* (al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-Hijra, 1996), 8.

Islamic Revival in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

The nineteenth century saw intellectual ferment among Muslim thinkers in the Middle East. The diverse tendencies these thinkers represented cannot be easily summarized, but they shared an interest in questioning received modes of Islamic thought and reinvigorating the Muslim community. Basheer Nafi has pointed to four major themes in their discourses: “*tawhid* [divine unity]; return to the Qur’an and Sunna, the ultimate source of legitimacy in Islam; assertion of the role of reason; and the call for renewed *ijtihād*.” The thinkers in this period have often been called “modernists,” meaning that they were strongly interested in Islamizing what they perceived as a Eurocentric modernity – a complex of institutional and scientific achievements that they admired but whose moral foundation they questioned. This project of Islamizing modernity also sought to “modernize” Islam, or to place the Muslim world on an equal footing to Europe in scientific and political terms. Nafi writes that Muslim revivalists viewed their project of “reviving” Islam “through the prism of modernity; for modernity, however it was perceived, was the internalised, powerful influence against which the project of Islamic reconstruction and revival was envisioned.”⁸¹ Despite their interest in modernity, however, these figures should not be viewed solely as modernists. Some revivalists were forerunners – and in some cases, literally fathers and grandfathers – of the Syrian and Egyptian circles that later Salafis like al-Jāmī counted as part of the global Salafi movement.

Scholars of Islam have written extensively on the “Islamic modernist” triumvirate of Shaykhs Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838–97), Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905), and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935). The relationship between these figures and the Salafi movement is complex, particularly in the case of Riḍā, who had sympathies for both camps. This confusion stems in part from the appellation “Salafiyya” that some Western scholars have bestowed on this movement. Appearances of the word “Salafiyya” in revivalist discourses, however, do not automatically mean that turn-of-the-twentieth-century figures belong to the Salafi canon. Indeed, Al-Afghānī’s emphasis on articulating a Muslim modernity, and ‘Abduh’s sympathy for the Mu‘tazila, place them outside the standards of orthodoxy that later Salafis would define.

The revivalists are nevertheless important to the canon. Some revivalists helped connect the streams that fed into the canon. For example, Shaykh Nu‘man Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī of Baghdad (1836–99) wrote a

⁸¹ Basheer Nafi, “The Rise of Islamic Reformist Thought and Its Challenge to Traditional Islam” in *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Suha Taji-Farouki and Basheer Nafi (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 40.

treatise defending Ibn Taymiyya against charges of heresy. He was influenced by India's *ahl-e hadīth* and arranged for one of his sons to study with Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān.⁸² Khān read al-Ālūsī's book and praised it, and the two corresponded about how to respond to popular Sufism.⁸³ The Iraqi scholar has been welcomed posthumously into the canon, in part because he embodies the intersection of Ibn Taymiyya's legacy, the Yemeni-Indian *ijtihād* enthusiasts, and the late-nineteenth-century revivalists.

Al-Ālūsī's *Ḥalā' al-'Aynayn fī Muḥākamat al-Aḥmadayn* (Clearing the Eyes in the Trial of the Two Aḥmads, completed 1880) illustrates how the genealogical and intellectual streams that would form the Salafi canon were beginning to converge by the late nineteenth century. The text strove to rehabilitate Ibn Taymiyya. Al-Ālūsī vigorously defended the thirteenth-century shaykh (one of the two Aḥmads referenced in the title) against charges by Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (1503–66), a Shāfi'ī scholar and the other titular Aḥmad. Al-Ālūsī explained that al-Haytamī had attributed to Ibn Taymiyya “some beliefs contradicting *ahl al-sunna* (*nasaba ilayhi ba 'd al-'aqā'id al-mukhālafa li-ahl al-sunna*),” such as opposing the Caliphs 'Umar and 'Alī.⁸⁴ Had Ibn Taymiyya's opponents successfully demonstrated that the shaykh had criticized or rejected key Companions of the Prophet, they would have overturned Ibn Taymiyya's claim to represent the authentic and coherent legacy of the early community. Al-Ālūsī worked to refute these charges.

His approach further illuminates the contours of the proto-Salafi canon that emerged outside present-day Saudi Arabia. Al-Ālūsī explained why he wrote the book:

So I drew up this sketch, clarifying in it – if Allah Most High wills – what each of these two shaykhs said, and transmitting the comments that are made upon [their words] in the speech of truth-seekers (*al-muḥaqqiqīn*), and past and contemporary scholarly luminaries (*wa-l-jahābidha al-mutaqaddimīn wa-l-muta'akhhirīn*), who are peers and associates of these two Imams, so that the pious onlooker may know the truth.⁸⁵

In his “Chapter Exonerating the Shaykh from What Has Been Attributed to Him, and Contemporary Truth-Seekers' Praise for Him,” al-Ālūsī listed some of these luminaries. They included students of Ibn Taymiyya, as well as Ḥanbalī scholars from Baghdad and Damascus. Yet al-Ālūsī also included Shāfi'ī and Ḥanafī scholars. Finally, he included the Yemeni-Indian intellectual lineage discussed in the previous section: Walī Allāh, al-Shawkānī, and Khān. Ibn Taymiyya, in other words, had left a legacy of

⁸² David Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 25.

⁸³ Khān, *Al-Tāj al-Mukallal*, 514.

⁸⁴ Nu'man Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Ḥalā' al-'Aynayn fī Muḥākamat al-Aḥmadayn* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Madani, 1980), 14.

⁸⁵ Al-Ālūsī, *Ḥalā' al-'Aynayn*, 15.

defenders who came from diverse lands and schools. Like Khān, al-Ālūsī was constructing a global genealogy of purist Sunni Muslims.

The figures in al-Ālūsī's proto-canon were united by more than just praise of Ibn Taymiyya: some of them also endorsed and, for al-Ālūsī, embodied the principle of *ijtihād*. Al-Ālūsī viewed *ijtihād* as an indispensable legal technique. He defined it as "the jurisprudent's (*faqīh*'s) utmost exertion to acquire an opinion in a judgment." Going further, he wrote, "The *faqīh* and the *mujtahid* are two synonymous expressions. [The *mujtahid-faqīh*] is the mature, the judicious, in other words possessing the faculty through which he obtains different forms of knowledge. . . . This faculty is reason."⁸⁶ For Ālūsī, figures like Ibn Taymiyya, al-Shawkānī, and Khān were all absolute *mujtahids* – that is, figures who had the authority to make rulings outside the framework of the four Sunni legal schools.

Intellectually, al-Ālūsī was not alone in the Arab world. A circle of Damascene '*ulamā*' played a major role within the emerging revivalist trend in both its modernist and conservative formations. The circle included Shaykhs 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Bīṭār (1837–1916), Ṭāhir al-Jazā'irī (1852–1920), and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (1866–1914). Al-Ālūsī's '*ḥalā' al-'Aynayn*' influenced this circle, helping to spark their interest in Ibn Taymiyya and in *ijtihād*.⁸⁷ Damascene '*ulamā*' also had more direct access to Ibn Taymiyya's thought due to the intellectual legacy he left among the city's Ḥanbalī scholars and the voluminous writings he left, many of them in unpublished form, in the city where he spent most of his life. Al-Jazā'irī's involvement in cataloguing rare manuscripts at al-Zāhiriyya Library led to his immersion in and dissemination of Ibn Taymiyya's thought (and also helped set the stage, in terms of intellectual infrastructure, for al-Albānī's work at al-Zāhiriyya two generations later). Ibn Taymiyya's ideas furnished the revivalists with intellectual ammunition that they used to attack official '*ulamā*' and popular Sufism, although many of these revivalists, unlike later Salafis, preserved strong sympathies for elite, intellectual Sufism.⁸⁸ The Syrian revivalists also discovered Khān and al-Shawkānī – Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wrote a Qur'anic exegesis that was influenced by Khān's *Faḥḥ al-Bayān fī Maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* (The Triumph of Explaining the Meanings of the Qur'an), which was itself based on al-Shawkānī's *Faḥḥ al-Qadīr*.⁸⁹ By the turn of the twentieth century, the constituent elements of the emerging Salafi synthesis were interacting and producing new written corpuses.

⁸⁶ Al-Ālūsī, *ḥalā' al-'Aynayn*, 190.

⁸⁷ Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 38–40.

⁸⁸ Itzhak Weismann, "Between Ṣūfī Reformism and Modernist Rationalism: A Reappraisal of the Origins of the Salafīyya from the Damascene Angle," *Die Welt des Islams* 41:2 (July 2001): 206–37.

⁸⁹ Pink, "Where Does Modernity Begin?"

Another partisan of Ibn Taymiyya and defender of *ijtihād* was Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, who was born in Tripoli in Ottoman Syria (present-day Lebanon) and lived there until 1897. Riḍā's anti-Sufi attitudes began to form before he left Tripoli for Cairo, and he was familiar with Ibn Taymiyya through al-Ālūsī. In Egypt, he engaged more thoroughly with the works of Ibn Taymiyya and his students.⁹⁰ Riḍā experimentally combined ideas in ways that prefigured contemporary Salafism: he rejected the legal schools and popular Sufism, and he insisted on the need to reexamine *ḥadīth*. Riḍā also, like some other revivalists, became a supporter of the Saudi state and a sympathetic voice raised in defense of Wahhābism. He used the platform of his journal *al-Manār* (The Lighthouse) to argue for the religious and political legitimacy of the Wahhābī project.⁹¹

The revivalists have been incorporated selectively and with reservations into the Salafi canon. Al-Albānī, for example, published an annotated version of Riḍā's *Ḥuqūq al-Nisā' fī al-Islām* (The Rights of Women in Islam) in 1984 but critiqued some of Riḍā's scriptural sources and intellectual conclusions.⁹² Other revivalists have been lauded: al-Jāmī describes Ṭāhir al-Jazā'irī as both a hero of the resistance to French colonialism and an authority on creed, praising books such as his *Al-Jawāhir al-Kalāmiyya fī Iyḍāḥ al-'Aqīda al-Islāmiyya* (The Theological Jewels in Clarifying the Islamic Creed).⁹³ Nevertheless, of the authorities in the broad canon, Nigerian Salafis have cited the revivalists the least, suggesting that study of revivalists was not emphasized in Medina.

Twentieth-century Salafis largely discarded the modernist concerns of their revivalist predecessors. Figures like al-Albānī were interested in purifying Muslim societies as a goal in and of itself, rather than as part of project to Islamize European-style modernity and in so doing compete with the West. Al-Albānī and his peers also subordinated human reason to divine revelation, and their version of *ijtihād* departs from the reason-oriented version that some revivalists embraced. Moreover, whereas the revivalists treated *ijtihād* as a way of reimagining core assumptions about Islam's place in a European-dominated world, later Salafis saw *ijtihād* more narrowly as a method for determining correct practice.

To understand and historicize the transition from revivalism to Salafism, it is important both to distinguish between the two movements' orientations but also to acknowledge the considerable overlap that has remained in terms of creed, method, and genealogy – even if Salafis today

⁹⁰ Albert Hourani, *Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 98.

⁹¹ Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Al-Wahhābiyyūn wa-l-Ḥijāz* (Cairo, 1925).

⁹² Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Ḥuqūq al-Nisā' fī al-Islām*, edited by Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1984).

⁹³ Al-Jāmī, *Majmū' Rasā'il*, 325.

are often keen to downplay the role that Muslim scholars' engagement with European modernity played in the emergence of Salafism. As the next section describes, the revivalists and modernists set the stage for the emergence of Salafism through their partnerships with the Wahhābī scholars of the young Saudi state.

An Emerging Salafi Worldview

The Salafi movement emerged in two major groups. The first, largely comprising Syrians and Egyptians, grew out of the revivalist currents described earlier. The second group included Wahhābīs in Saudi Arabia who absorbed Indian influences and/or became sympathetic to the revivalist project, particularly its rejection of legal schools. From the 1920s, as the nascent Saudi state began to cultivate international Muslim connections, these groups began to interact intensively with one another.

The Syrian and Egyptian Salafis were influenced by, and in some cases descended from, the revivalist generation of Riḍā. For example, the Syrian Salafī Shaykh Muḥammad Bahjat al-Bīṭār (1894–1976) was the grandson of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Bīṭār (1837–1916), whom Riḍā had credited with helping to launch the “Salafī” revival in Damascus. The younger al-Bīṭār’s study circle in Damascus influenced al-Albānī.⁹⁴ Al-Bīṭār edited and composed works on Ibn Taymiyya and others in the canon. In Egypt, three representatives of the emerging Salafi movement were Shaykhs Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqqī (1892–1959), ‘Abd al-Zāhir Abū al-Samaḥ (1881–1952), and Aḥmad Shākir (1892–1958), all graduates of al-Azhar and either students or associates of Riḍā.⁹⁵

Several events in 1926 marked the emergence of this Salafi trend and its interaction with the young Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In Cairo, al-Fiqqī founded *Jamā‘at Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya* (The Society of the Defenders of the Prophet’s Model), one of the world’s first institutionalized Salafī organizations. A decade later, the society began to publish a journal titled *Al-Hady al-Nabawi* (Prophetic Guidance). The journal became a venue for writings by Egyptian and Syrian thinkers such as Shākir and Abū al-Samaḥ.⁹⁶ This circle began to promote a “defined ethos and movement with the moniker ‘Salafism.’”⁹⁷ Also in 1926, following an international conference in Mecca, several non-Saudi

⁹⁴ Lacroix, “Between Revolution and Apoliticism.”

⁹⁵ Richard Gauvain, *Salafi Ritual Purity: In the Presence of God* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁹⁶ Fathī Amīn ‘Uthmān, “Tarjamat Samāhat al-Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqqī,” *Jamā‘at Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya*, 15 September 2010. Available at: www.ansaralsonna.com/web/play-1622.html; accessed September 2014.

⁹⁷ Jonathan A. C. Brown, “From Quietism to Parliamentary Giant: Salafism in Egypt and the Nour Party of Alexandria,” unpublished paper, 5.

Salafis were integrated into the Kingdom's religious and scholastic establishment. King 'Abd al-'Azīz invited al-Bīṭār to direct the Educational Institute (*al-Ma'had al-'Ilmī*) in Mecca, and he asked Abū al-Samaḥ to become the third Imam of the Grand Mosque there.⁹⁸ These men met some skepticism and resistance from Wāhhābī scholars,⁹⁹ but they contributed to forming a global Salafī identity even inside Wāhhābī-dominated Saudi Arabia. Their publishing efforts also put newly edited and printed versions of works in the emerging canon into wider circulation. Al-Fiqqī edited and republished numerous works, especially by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, and he published his own pro-Wāhhābī book in 1936.¹⁰⁰

At the same time that these institutional patterns were forming, new methodologies were emerging. These methodologies epitomized Salafism's combination of reverence for *ḥadīth* with a willingness to critically evaluate *ḥadīth* collections. Shākir spent decades reworking classical compilations of *ḥadīth*, especially Ibn Ḥanbal's *Al-Musnad*.¹⁰¹ In his introduction to the edited *Al-Musnad*, Shākir wrote that as a young man he found among his father's books the various canonical collections of *ḥadīth*, of which *Al-Musnad* was one. Shākir commented,

I found it an ocean with no shore, and a light to be illuminated by, but necks will be broken over it, for it is organised on the basis of the Companions' traditions [i.e., organised by transmitter rather than by topic]. Gathered in it are the *aḥādīth* of each Companion, consecutively without organisation. Almost no one can benefit from it except he who memorizes it, as the first ancient ones used to memorize. That was impossible, including for me. So I became infatuated and preoccupied with it. I saw that the best way it could serve the sciences of *ḥadīth* was for a man to agree to bring this great *Musnad* closer to the people, so that its benefit would spread, and so that there would be an imam for people. I wished to be that man.¹⁰²

The archetype of the solitary canonizer – the figure immersed in texts as he attempts to revitalize early Islamic thought for a twentieth-century audience – appears powerfully in this passage. Also present is the ambition of using critical scholarship to revive the authentic Sunna. Yet such

⁹⁸ Government of Saudi Arabia, "Al-Imāma wa-l-'Imma fī al-Masjid al-Harām." Available at: www.alharamain.gov.sa//index.cfm?do=cms.conarticle&contentid=5809&categoryid=993; accessed September 2014.

⁹⁹ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 109–13.

¹⁰⁰ Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqqī, *Athar al-Da'wa al-Wāhhābiyya fī al-Islāh al-Dīnī wa-l-'Umrānī fī Jazīrat al-'Arab wa-Ghayrihā*, edited by Aḥmad al-Tuwayjiri (Al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-Sunna li-l-Nashr, 2006/2007 [1936]).

¹⁰¹ Ebrahim Moosa, "Shaykh Aḥmad Shākir and the Adoption of a Scientifically-Based Lunar Calendar," *Islamic Law and Society* 5:1 (1998): 57–89; 58.

¹⁰² Aḥmad Shākir, "Introduction" in Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad*, Volume 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'arif, 1949), 4.

canonizing, or reCanonizing, efforts were only possible because of a web of personal, intellectual, and institutional arrangements.

The canon comes into view in Shākir's project. Shākir commented that as he researched commentaries on *Al-Musnad*, he discovered only three men who truly knew the text: Ibn Taymiyya and two of his students. Shākir set out to write a set of linguistic and scholarly indexes for *Al-Musnad*. These indexes disciplined the text, numbering every *ḥadīth* and then listing the number under every topic for which the *ḥadīth* is relevant. Shākir also evaluated the *aḥādīth* in *Al-Musnad*, noting the presence of weak narrators – thereby suggesting which reports were, from Shākir's standpoint, actionable and which were not. Both methodologically and genealogically, Shākir's work demonstrated the techniques and framing devices that would come to characterize the Salafī canon. The Saudi-Wahhābī establishment embraced Shākir's work, including his critiques of Westernization; Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh (1893–1969), who served as Saudi Arabia's grand mufti, wrote an introduction to Shākir's *Ḥukm al-Ĵāhiliyya* (The Rule of Pre-Islamic Ignorance).¹⁰³

Changing approaches to *ḥadīth* criticism influenced the work of al-Albānī. As his surname indicates, the famous *ḥadīth* evaluator was born in Albania. His father, a watchmaker, studied Islamic sciences in Istanbul. The family moved to Damascus after Ahmet Zogu, a secularizing dictator, became president of Albania in 1925. Al-Albānī attended a primary school there and studied the Qur'an, Ḥanafī jurisprudence and other subjects with his father. Al-Albānī also studied jurisprudence, rhetoric, and other topics with several shaykhs in Damascus.¹⁰⁴

Al-Albānī's turn to Salafism began with reading Rashīd Riḍā's writing in *Al-Manār* and particularly a critical treatment of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), a crowning text in classical intellectual Sufism. For al-Albānī, the significance of this criticism was its attack on the textual basis of long-accepted frameworks for understanding Islam. From this inspiration, al-Albānī proceeded to study *Al-Mughnī 'an Ḥaml al-Asfār fī al-Asfār*, in which Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥīm ibn Ḥusayn al-'Irāqī (1325–1403) cited and graded the *aḥādīth* present in the *Iḥyā'*. Evaluating these *aḥādīth* was not a mere scholastic exercise: for al-Albānī as for Shākir, weak *aḥādīth* – reports whose chains of transmission contained gaps or demonstrable inconsistencies and whose texts contradicted those of firmly established reports – corrupted the Muslim community in creed and worship.

¹⁰³ Aḥmad Shākir, *Ḥukm al-Ĵāhiliyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, 1992).

¹⁰⁴ "Sirat al-Shaykh al-Mujaddid al-Albānī wa-Nash'atihi al-Ilmiyya," Turāth al-Albānī website, undated. Available at: www.alalbany.net/5374; accessed September 2014.

Seeking further sources on *ḥadīth* criticism, al-Albānī spent long hours in Damascus' Zāhiriyya Library.¹⁰⁵ In the 1950s, he began to publish articles on *ḥadīth* criticism in the journal *Al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī* (Islamic Civilization), which was run by Syrian Salafis.¹⁰⁶ These writings formed the nucleus of his first multivolume work of *ḥadīth* criticism, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa'īfa wa-l-Marwū'a wa-Atharuhā al-Sayyi' fī al-Umma* (The Series of Weak and Fabricated Reports and Their Negative Effect on the Muslim Community), which began to appear in 1959. On the strength of his expertise in *ḥadīth*, al-Albānī taught at the Islamic University of Medina from 1961 to 1963. This sojourn helped extend his influence and his method to younger generations of Saudi Arabian scholars – and to Salafis worldwide. His later residence in Syria and Jordan, and his visits to Egypt and other countries, would ensure that many late-twentieth-century audiences encountered him directly.

In terms of intellectual influences, al-Albānī reached back to all three strands included in the canon. He edited and commented on works by Ibn Taymiyya and other Hanbalī authorities. He also engaged the Yemeni-Indian tradition and, as noted earlier, works by Riḍā.

Al-Albānī became both canonizer and canonized. One 2002 edition of Khān's *Al-Rawḍa al-Nadiyya* (The Dewy Meadow, itself a commentary on al-Shawkānī's *Al-Durar al-Bahiyya*, The Glittering Jewels) shows the complexity of the canonization process. The editor writes that he initially attempted to edit al-Shawkānī's own commentary on *Al-Durar al-Bahiyya* but then turned to Khān's commentary in response to its popularity among students. The editor incorporated al-Albānī's commentary on *Al-Rawḍa al-Nadiyya* as well as commentary from Aḥmad Shākīr. The editor also cited and verified all of the *aḥādīth* in the original text.¹⁰⁷ Contemporary Salafi processes of canonization, in other words, take as their objects the different streams of the canon and then filter them through the methods of al-Albānī and Shākīr.

Al-Albānī found peers in key members of the Saudi-Wahhābī establishment, in particular Shaykhs 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Bāz and Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn. The three men worked together as colleagues and participated in a coordinated defense of the canon, for example, when Ibn Bāz asked al-Albānī to defend the authenticity of Ibn Ḥanbal's *Al-Musnad*.¹⁰⁸ Their collaboration reinforced their emerging association in the Salafi mind as a triumvirate of creedal purity.

¹⁰⁵ "Sīrat al-Shaykh." See also Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Fihris Makḥṭū'āt Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhiriyya: Al-Mumtaḥab min Makḥṭū'āt al-Ḥadīth* (Damascus: Majma' al-Lughā al-'Arabiyya bi-Dimashq, 1970).

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 107.

¹⁰⁷ Ṣiddīq Hasan Khān, *Al-Rawḍa al-Nadiyya*, edited by Ḥilmī ibn Muḥammad Ismā'īl al-Rushdī (Alexandria: Dār al-'Aqīda, 2002).

¹⁰⁸ Al-Albānī, *Al-Dhabb al-Aḥmad*.

Ibn Bāz and Ibn ‘Uthaymīn were sympathetic to al-Albānī’s views even when these contradicted aspects of Wahhābism. Although often educated entirely within the Kingdom, Saudi scholars of their generation were exposed to a range of influences from the wider world, particularly the streams of scripturalist and revivalist thought that fed into the Salafi canon. As noted earlier, Ibn Bāz studied with Sa’d ibn ‘Atīq, one of the Wahhābī scholars who studied in India in the late nineteenth century. Ibn ‘Uthaymīn spoke of being broadly influenced by Rashīd Riḍā’s methods.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, both Ibn Bāz and Ibn ‘Uthaymīn participated in Saudi Arabia’s emerging system of institutionalized higher education. Universities, including the Islamic University of Medina, became settings in which these Saudi scholars interacted with people and ideas from beyond the Kingdom’s borders, which confronted them with the challenge of integrating multiple influences into a Salafi worldview that moved beyond Wahhābī parochialism.

In one major example of their embrace of a global Salafi identity over a Wahhābī-Ḥanbalī identity, Ibn Bāz and Ibn ‘Uthaymīn were sympathetic to the rejection of the four Sunni legal schools.¹¹⁰ They anchored this position in the canon, especially the writings of classical Ḥanbalī authorities such as Ibn Taymiyya’s student Ibn al-Qayyim – bypassing, as it were, the question of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s legal affiliation. Ibn Bāz wrote in one essay,

It is not necessary to emulate one of the four imams, nor another, whatever his knowledge. Because the truth is in following the Qur’an and the Sunna, not in emulating an individual person. Rather, in brief, emulation (*al-taqlīd*) is permissible out of necessity, [emulation] of he who is known for knowledge, virtue, and soundness of creed (*istiqāmat al-‘aqīda*), just as the eminent Ibn al-Qayyim explained, may Allah have mercy upon him, in his book *I’lām al-Muwaqqi’īn* (Informing the Signatories).¹¹¹

In keeping with their Salafi identity, both Ibn Bāz and Ibn ‘Uthaymīn were prominent canonizers. Ibn ‘Uthaymīn published numerous commentaries on canonical works by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, such as Ibn Taymiyya’s *Al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyya al-Kubrā*. These luminaries helped set the tone within Saudi universities, where numerous scholars and students edited, corrected, and canonized texts and thinkers from beyond the Kingdom, thereby helping to construct the Salafi canon. The

¹⁰⁹ Muḥammad ibn Sāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn, “Riḥlat al-Shaykh fi Ṭalab al-‘Ilm,” broadcast on Holy Qur’an Radio, 1982/3. Available at: <http://ar.islamway.net/lesson/55381/%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85>; accessed October 2014.

¹¹⁰ Frank Vogel, *Islamic Law and Legal System: Studies of Saudi Arabia* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

¹¹¹ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn Bāz, *Al-Shaykh Ibn Bāz wa-Mawāqifuhu al-Thābita*, edited by Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Farīḥ (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2000), 287.

canonical authority of al-Albānī, Ibn Bāz, and Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, backed by the authority of the broader canon, would strongly influence Nigerian students’ conceptions of creed, method, worship, and identity.

As Chapter 3 discusses, the most intensive canonization of al-Albānī, Ibn Bāz, and Ibn ‘Uthaymīn coincided with northern Nigerian Salafis’ time in Medina in the 1980s and 1990s. In those decades, the canonical scholars were in the final bloom of their careers, still active as teachers and authors. At the same time, some of their senior students were establishing themselves as new authorities in the same tradition – and playing prominent roles at the Islamic University.

Finally, the three scholars’ opposition to political revolution made them appealing to the Saudi regime (even as al-Albānī continued to experience problems with other Arab governments). During the 1990s, Islamists posed challenges within and outside the Kingdom. Canonization responded to this challenge, taking such forms as a collection of the three men’s legal opinions on the Algerian jihad of the 1990s, where they rejected the ideas of revolt against Muslim rulers and anathematizing and killing Muslim civilians. Ibn ‘Uthaymīn read the collection over personally, so that it bears the canonical authorities’ personal approval.¹¹² By the time of their deaths in 1999–2001, their place as Salafi religious authorities was cemented, although it would not go unchallenged by Salafi-jihadi groups, including in northern Nigeria.

Conclusion

The Salafi canon unifies a diverse set of thinkers who lived across Islamic history. To achieve this unity, Salafi canonizers reframe thinkers and texts, reducing potential inconsistencies and harmonizing conflicts. The composite picture blends scriptural literalism, opposition to emulating established legal schools, and an ethos that seeks to revive the idealized purity of the early community.

The canon furnishes a sense of history that depicts a recurring struggle between a true Muslim vanguard and a host of heretics and enemies. Salafism’s “canonizing discourse” provides tools for evaluating texts and for deciding whom to include, and whom to exclude, in the narrative of the true Islamic creed and its historical trajectory.

Salafis aspire to actualize the model they see in the careers of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. Nevertheless, they look to the lives of other Muslims for demonstrations that it is possible to uphold an exclusivist Sunni creed after the time of the early Muslim community, even in the face of profound political and religious resistance. Salafism

¹¹² ‘Abd al-Mālik Ramaḍānī al-Jazā’irī, compiler, *Fatāwā al-‘Ulamā’ al-Akābir fīmā Uhdira min Dimā’ fi al-Jazā’ir* (‘Ajmān: Maktabat al-Furqān, 2001/2).

states that it wishes to return to a seventh-century ideal, but the Salafi canon relies heavily on what it portrays as instantiations of that ideal in other centuries.

The Salafi canon, in all its layers, profoundly shaped the curriculum and the intellectual environment that Nigerian students encountered at the Islamic University of Medina. Students at Medina would read works by a range of authors, including authors outside the Ḥanbalī legal school as well as authors who had denounced Wahhābism. The international character of the environment at the Islamic University will become clearer in the next chapter, which discusses the contributions of African Salafis to life in Medina and to Saudi Arabia's outreach to Africa.