

No. 158

**Roots of Radical Sunni Traditionalism
Fear of Reason and the *Hāshwiyah***

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Singapore

7 May 2008

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ABSTRACT

Roots of Radical Sunni Traditionalism

Fear of Reason and the *Hāshwiyah* *

Any positive forward-moving progress within Muslim societies necessitates the negative task of uncovering and dissipating obstacles to progress. An overview of the historical development of radical Sunni Traditionalism summarizing its chief doctrinal preoccupations and motives, affords a deeper understanding of the contemporary dilemma facing Muslims. The *Hāshwiyah* [ignoramuses] were literalists who apprehended merely the surface meaning of words and concepts. They represented an orientation with a core doctrinal basis centred in *Hānbalite* Traditionalism whose law and creed were anchored in a narrow textualism with anthropomorphic and determinist views. Research into the *Hāshwiyah*'s doctrinal intolerance, hostility to rationalism, and mob tactics reveals the hallmark of deformist Islam. Contemporary Saudi *Hānbalite* religious ideology exhibits definite characteristics rooted in the ancient *Hāshwiyah* worldview. Despite the small numerical and geographical footprint of *Hānbalism* today, the current amplification of a *Hāshwi*-like mentality makes a deep imprint by virtue of its trans-national ubiquity.

* While this study employs Arabic terms and concepts, we provide basic context and sufficient orientation as to be intelligible to novices in the study of Islam. It is part of a broader investigation into historical and ideological roots of religious teachings that have direct bearing on the global spread of bloodshed and militarism.

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Roots of Radical Sunni Traditionalism

Fear of Reason and the *Hāshwiyah*

“The Apparent is the bridge to the Real / [al-majazu qanṭaratu l-ḥaqīqah].”

(Traditional Sufi saying, also attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad)

Introduction

Historically, Islam embodied a forward movement of the human spirit manifesting a creative cultural and intellectual endeavour that directly contributed to the rise of Europe and modernity. A remarkable feature of Islamic civilization was its successful integration of the widest range of diverse ethno-linguistic groups upon a higher rational plane than preceding civilizations had accomplished—reaching from Iberian and Balkan to Chinese and Indonesian. Over much of its first millennium, Islamic societies exhibited dynamism and a tolerant pluralism fuelled by its wellsprings of creative energy: the spiritual and intellectual resources of its revealed guidance. The eclipse of their former power and glory has yet to be adequately dealt with today by Muslims, who find themselves increasingly marginalized or disempowered in our globalized context.

Today, when Muslims think and speak of ‘ISLAM’ there is a noticeable tendency to objectify this religious-cultural-ideological legacy in terms of an invariable monolithic reality. This is especially evident when Muslims discourse about this legacy in the presence of non-Muslims. Undoubtedly, there is a level where this type of conceptualization operates in a valid manner, just as when others discourse about the essential principles or worldviews of Christianity or Buddhism, for example. Yet all of us need to be reminded of the great variation exemplified among differing Muslim societies, or even within one given society. Often, what one hears of Muslims asserting with regard to “Islam” reflects more their own specific cultural or regional Muslim reality than an unchanging Islamic ideal. Nevertheless, Muslims frequently conceive of Islam as a continuous presence remaining as normatively valid today as it was over one thousand four hundred years ago. One reason for this mode of thinking and speaking may be traced back to the early formation of the distinctive styles of Muslim “salvation history” elaborated for politico-religious legitimization and community self-definition. Just as Americans often tend to “objectify” their own national identity with reference to the U.S. Constitution and

the Declaration of Independence, Muslims have recourse to their sacred texts (Qur'an and Prophetic Ḥadīth) and their foundational narratives of providential origin and worldly empire.¹ Josef Van Ess points out: "That sort of backward-looking utopian thought is fairly common. In 19th century Europe, it took the form of nationalism; there too, a mythical past was constructed in an effort to forge an identity, and that mythical past was reconstituted through a slanted reading of the historical texts. For Muslims, a further element has been added—namely, revelation, which marks the beginning of historical reality and therefore forms an indelible part of the utopia."²

Islam is intolerant of idolatry or worship of concrete images representing Divinity. This religion elevated the **word** above the image. The word is a tangible sensory form conveying meaning; language points to meaning and discloses significance. Thus, Arabic calligraphy became its pre-eminent art form and mode of symbolic representation. But such disclosure requires the minds of humans to be prepared and capable to conceive and grasp meaning, to heed the indications or pointers words provide and thereby penetrate to their intended significances. The identity or non-identity of name and thing-named was intensively discussed among Muslim speculative theologians [*mutakallimūn*], while legalist-oriented Traditionalists avoided the topic as a reprehensible·innovation [*bid'ah*]. This issue was often cast in the polarity of '*ism* and *ma'na*·[name and concept], where proper comprehension elevates the "concept·meaning" above its "name". The gist is captured in an utterance by the reputable early thinker Ja'far al-Sādiq (d. 148 H/765 C.E.):³

"...the name is other than what-is-named, so whomever worships the name disregarding the concept [*ma'na*]·>commits unfaith [*kuf*ī] and he worships nothing, and whomever worships the name and the concept commits unfaith by worshipping Two, and whomever worships the concept disregarding the name—now that is true 'oneness' [*tawḥīd*]·...."

¹ For a good typological treatment of this topic see Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*.

² Van Ess, *Flowering of Muslim Theology*, p. 117.

³ al-Kulayni, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kaṭīb*, ed. al-Ghaffari (3rd ed., Tehran, 1388) I k. *al-Tawḥīd*, *bab al-ma'bud*, p. 87 §2. Al-Shāfi'i (d. 204 H) said: "When you hear someone say that the name is different from the thing named or the name is identical with the thing named, testify against him that he is a *Mutakallim* and has no religion"; cited in Rosenthal, *General Introduction*, p. 127 n.432.

Compare more conceptually elaborated remarks by AbuḤamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) on three types of existence for the name, the act of naming, and the named:⁴

“...existence as individuals is the fundamental and real existence, while existence in the mind is cognitive formal existence, and existence in speech is verbal and indicative. ...So the word, the knowledge, and the object known are three distinct things, though they mutually conform and correspond, and are sometimes confused by the dull-witted...”

Thus, to halt at the outer form of the literal word and fail to grasp the intended disclosure of meaning would be akin to idolatry. The persistent orientation among Muslims known historically as the Ḥāshwīyah did precisely that. The current reappearance of a *ḥāshwī*-like mindset within sectors of Muslim societies poses a genuine threat to the potential of Muslims to deal adequately in a forward-looking manner with the challenges confronting their societies.

To better comprehend the magnitude of this threat facing Muslims and the backward-looking detour that segments of their societies have strayed down, we review historically the relatively obscure trend known as the Ḥāshwīyah. This anti-intellectual tendency was marked by an uncompromising dogmatism suspicious of rationality and the symbolic imagination, as well as by hostility towards much of the higher intellectual or spiritual realms of Islamic civilization. It denied the value of legitimate interpretations and the openness of religious texts and symbols to a hierarchy of readings or seizures of meaning. It has recently received renewed impetus through the ubiquitous influence of a deformist neo-Wahhābī-mentality.⁵ Abou El Fadl observes, “the impact of puritans on the Islamic intellectual heritage, and on the humanistic and universalistic orientations within Islam, has been nothing short of devastating.”⁶ We hope this overview assists the cultivation of a critical attitude

⁴ *al-Maqṣūd al-Aṣḥaḥ fi Sharḥ al-Asmāʾ Allāh al-Ḥusnā*; trans. D. Burrell & N. Daher, pp. 5–6 (Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1995).

⁵ A good overview of this contemporary puritanical trend is provided by Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*. For the epistemic basis of neo-Wahhābism, see our “‘Kalashnikov Islam’ and the Deformist Mentality,” presented at the *International Conference On Dialogue of Civilizations and the Construction of Peace*, Centre for Civilisational Dialogue (Universiti Malaya) & Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, 26–27 March 2005.

⁶ *The Great Theft*, p. 100.

to the legacy of the past coupled with a creatively adequate response to present needs and conditions, enabling Muslims to recapture their forward-moving spirit.

Interpreting the Text

Once the leading Sufi master of the great city of Nisapur in Northeast Iran and subtle Ash'arite Qur'anic commentator Abu'l-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri>(d. 465/1072) visited the capital of the empire Baghdad where he convened a session of *dhikr* [mystic remembrance] attended by both masses and elite. When the professional reciter reached the Qur'anic verse (*Q TaHa*:20:5) “*The All Merciful Who is established [istawa] upon the Throne*”, the Traditionalist Hanbalis among the audience rose up in an unruly throng chanting “HE is Sitting! Sitting!” provoking a riot against the disciples of the great Sufi which was not defused till a number of persons were killed and caliphal police were forced to intervene to quell the disturbance.⁷ (This event, typical of Baghdadi Hanbalite fanaticism with its unruly violence, is placed into historical context below.) The image of God seated upon His Throne, and related issues of divine attributes evoking anthropomorphic qualities (Hand, Face, Speech, descent) spoken of in revelation, as well as the physical visibility of God in the Hereafter—or even in this world—spoken of in Prophetic traditions, were subject to intense polemics among Muslims from an early period. Indeed, strictly literalist Traditionalists,⁸ whose centre of gravity in early centuries were the Hanbali-jurists, upheld their epistemological doctrine of “*bi-la-kayf* [Without Asking How]” regarding the imagery and language of revelation, even debating among themselves whether the Divine Being experiences *mumassah* [physical contact] when HE sits upon the Throne, and whether the Throne creaks or emits a

⁷ See the vivid account by the Malikite magistrate from Seville, Abu-Bakr Ibn al-'Arabi> *al-'Awashim min al-Qawasim*, p. 209; his work is an extended polemic reflecting Traditionalist hostility against over-rationalizing trends of Philosophy and Shi'ism.

⁸ By Traditionalists, we denote the informal guild of professional Hādīth tradents joined by their commitment to Sunni-dogmatic orthodoxy [*shahīb sunnah*] which arose in the 2nd/8th century and achieved definite consolidation during the course of the 3rd/9th century. Also known as *Ahl al-Hādīth* [Hādīth Folk], this influential trend laid the basis for normative Sunni-creed and jurisprudence. We use “traditionists” or “tradents” to denote any person narrating *hādīth* or transmitting *akhbār* reports whether they belong to the Hādīth Folk, or to rival schools of rationalist jurists [*Ahl al-Ra'y*], historians, ascetic-mystics, early Shi'ah groupings, etc.

sound under the burden of HIS weight.⁹ They spurned the linguistic arguments of rationalist-oriented linguists and theologians who taught that such revealed imagery should be understood as straightforward metaphoric speech [*majaz*]¹⁰—just as in poetry—e.g. God’s “Hand” connotes His “Power” while Throne signifies His transcendence.

But the radical Traditionalists saw only the outward letters with a flat surface understanding. A tale is told of an encounter between the famous Basran Mu‘tazilite thinker Abu-Hudhayl (d. 227/841?) with a Traditionalist who wrote the word *Allah* on a tablet asking, “Do you deny this word is ‘GOD’—thereby rejecting what is perceived by your senses?” Abu-Hudhayl wrote a second *Allah* beside the first word asking him ironically, “*which* God?!”¹¹ This anecdote captures the familiar feature of the Hāshwiyah mode of comprehending the revealed word and divinity literally. Rationalist Mu‘tazilite thinkers who functioned as intellectual catalysts, along with the strong emphasis on independent reasoning techniques practiced among early Iraqi legal scholars, posed a distinct challenge to Traditionalists. Qur’ānic verses such as “*The All Merciful Who is established [sits upright] upon the Throne*” provoked attempts by early authorities to explain in what manner God sits upon or mounts [*istiwa*] His Throne. A response by the leading 2nd/8th century Madiṇan jurist Maḥik b. Anas (d. 179/795) was often cited: “The *istiwa* is something known (in language), but the ‘how’ is unknown (i.e. specifying the mode of sitting is unknown to us), while faith in it is obligatory, and questioning about this is a reprehensible-innovation [*bid‘ah*].”¹¹ It was commonly held that many early pious-forebears [*salaf*](e.g. Sa‘id b. al-Musayyab d.94 H, al-Sha‘bi d.103, or Sufyān al-Thawri d.161) had affirmed faith in such revealed language yet discouraged others from offering figurative-interpretations [*ta’wīl*] that may yield innovations.¹¹ From such

⁹ See e.g. al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa l-Nihāl* I, pp. 105–8 on die-hard anthropomorphists [*mushabbihatu l-hāshwiyah*]. For general orientation, see comments by ‘Abdullāh bin Ḥamīd ‘Alī in his Intro. & Appendix II of his transl. of Ibn al-Jawzī, *The Attributes of God*, pp. 5–19, 125–151.

¹⁰ Maḥkīm, *Ta’līq Sharh/Usūl al-Khamsah*, p. 544.

¹¹ Shahrastānī, *Milal* pp. 103–5: the *salaf* among *ashhāb al-hādīth* (including Maḥik b. Anas & Ibn Ḥanbal) abjured the *ta’wīl* of verses and transmitted reports with anthropomorphic imagery; they accepted them but refrained from explaining their meaning (‘halting’ [*tawqīf*]), since this was not required or necessary for proper faith in their era, and provided safety from wrong innovations. In Shahrastānī’s view, their position was not true *tashbīh* [anthropomorphist-resembling]. Haytami, *Fatawa* p. 151 & p. 201: “the difference between the (early) *salaf* and the (later) *khalaf* lies in ‘detailed explanation [*ta’wīl tafsīl*], for the *salaf* gave preference to primacy of refraining from it not being in need of it due to the uprightness of their era, while the *khalaf* [later generations]

discussions concerning the physical imagery of revealed language, reinforced by popular notions that God is located ‘above’ (*fawq*) or inhabits a certain physical “direction” (*jihah*) a definite trajectory unfolded known as the *Mushabbihah* centred in radical Traditionalism. “Resemblance” [*tashbih*] connotes conceiving of God in comparable human terms—anthropomorphism; its contrary is *tanzih* or elevating the transcendent God totally above all semblances or parallels, in keeping with the explicit statement of revelation (Q 42:11): *There is nothing like HIM; and HE is the All-Hearing the All-Seeing*.

From a very early period, linguists, grammarians and rationalist litterateurs asserted the relevance of metaphoric language [*majaz*] and literary symbolism not only for interpreting Scripture but also for expressions of meaning in a variety of disciplines. This controversy about the admissibility of metaphor and symbol when comprehending the language of revelation took shape in the famed debate over real·literal meaning *versus* metaphoric signification (the *ḥaqīqah·majaz* dichotomy). Rationalist intellectuals who, for a brief period of fifteen years under the Inquisition or *Mihnah* from 218–234 H/833–848 C.E., sought to impose their ideas as orthodox doctrine with state support under the seventh ‘Abbasid Caliph al-Ma’mun¹² (d. 218/833) and his three immediate successors, strongly upheld the validity of *majaz* or metaphoric interpretation. This issue became a standard part of theological discourse and polemics—particularly concerning the very nature of the sacred Qur’aṇ as divine Speech: whether His “Word” is increate and eternal, or temporally created-in-time and thus finite. The first officially sponsored major theological school of the Mu’tazilah, “for at least a century...the intellectual ‘orthodoxy’ of their time”¹³ held that to admit increate attributes such as Speech [*kalām*] alongside the divine essence could lead to the error of Christians who spoke of three divinities

privileged its primacy and even the necessity to immerse oneself in it on account of the corruption of their era and its numerous innovations.” For some *salaf* who employed figurative interpretation, see Ḥamid ‘Alīn *Attributes of God*, pp. 135–145.

¹² Ma’mun was committed to intellectual pursuits and patronized both Mu’tazilite thinkers as well as early scientific & philosophical activities including the circle around the philosopher al-Kindi (d. 256 H); he established the Academy of Wisdom [*Daʿ al-Ḥikmah*] in Baghdad where the Hellenic, Syrian & Indian sciences were collected and translated.

¹³ Van Ess, *Flowering of Muslim Theology*, p. 10.

in One.¹⁴ Yet the leading Traditionalist-jurist Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855), eponym of the Hanbali legal rite (one of four surviving Sunni-law schools), insisted that as divine Speech the Qur'aṇ was uncreated and pre-existent. He was one of a very few religious scholars who did not bend to coercion by 'Abbasid caliphs to affirm the created nature of Qur'aṇ as God's Speech despite torture and imprisonment.¹⁵ Ibn Hanbal thereby became the darling of the masses who increasingly began to champion the anti-rationalist dogma of Traditionalists in the consolidation of the majority group of Muslims, the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa l-Jama'ah* [People of the Tradition and Majority Assembly] (also termed *Ahl al-Hādīth wa l-Sunnah*). In a wider sense, the Inquisition was about the role of reason in interpreting divine texts.

I. Reason and Revelation

Throughout Islamic thought and experience, there has existed a tension between revealed givens mediated in Scripture and Prophetic narratives (Qur'aṇ and *Hādīth*) and rationalist patterns of thought and meaning. The Hanbali-juridical school always harboured a die-hard Traditionalist wing that actively opposed rationalizing and semi-rationalist currents, particularly those new-fangled ideas imported by circles in creative engagement with Hellenic ideas that reached early Islam under the 'Abbasid Caliphs from remaining centres of Alexandrian, pagan Harranian, and Syriac Christian schools in the East. These disciplines termed "the knowledge of the ancients [*ilm al-awā'il*]" included medicine, astronomy, cosmology, mathematics, engineering, the physical sciences..., and were often deemed suspect primarily for being non-prophetic in origin and methodology. Yet their utility was appreciated early on by Muslim intelligentsia and the rulers who sponsored their efforts at collection and recovery. The assessment of this creative tension over the priority and weight to be awarded to rationality and philosophy—or philosophically impregnated systems of thought including later speculative Theology, Legal Theory, and Sufi metaphysics—has varied widely both among Muslims and Western students of

¹⁴ God's Messenger Jesus son of Mary (upon him peace), while referred to in the Qur'aṇ as God's Word [*kalimah*] and Spirit [*ruh*], is not conceived as pre-existent nor divine. Like the early Jewish-Christians of the first Jerusalem church and Ebionites of trans-Jordan and Parapotamia, Islam teaches that Jesus was human, was immaculately conceived by the virgin Mary, and was raised alive bodily to heaven from the cross.

¹⁵ On Ibn Hanbal's conduct during the *mihnah* or inquisition under Caliph al-Mu'tasim in 218/833, see 'Abd al-Rahmān Ibn al-Jawzi, *Manāqib al-Imām Ahḥmad ibn Hanbal*, pp. 310–340.

Islamic thought. It remains true till our own day that Muslims very frequently privilege the normative juristic discourse and categories of the Law [*shari'ah*], namely positive law or jurisprudence [*fiqh*], over other historically equally significant modes of conceptual discourse that contain resources for a more adequate response to changing cultural conditions imposed by modernity within the wide variety of Muslim societies in our global reality.

The first major manifestation of this tension arose in the course of the 2nd/8th century between strict Traditionalists or *Hādīth* Folk [*Ahl al-Hādīth*] who confined legal “knowledge” to sacred texts (revealed Qur’aan and *Hādīth* narrations), and the rationalist jurists or *Ahl al-Ra’y* based mainly in Iraq who saw knowledge as comprising case law and the body of legal rulings reached primarily by individual reasoning exertion [*ijtihād al-ra’y*], sometimes without reference to sacred texts.¹⁶ During most of the 2nd century H, *ahl al-ra’y* were ascendant and dominated legal reasoning. In the last quarter of the 2nd century, the *ahl al-hādīth* experienced a strong upsurge and exerted a powerful pressure on the rationalists leading to their partial decline. By the close of the 2nd century, Traditionalists had become a counter prevailing force, and “by the middle of the 3rd/9th century, *hādīth* had won the war against *ra’y*”. In the 2nd century only a few jurists were seen as Traditionalists, while by the end of the 3rd century “most jurists...combined the two in some way”.¹⁷ During the course of the 3rd century, “the Traditionalist movement took a sharp turn towards a total opposition to rationalism, including its use of the method of *qiyās*. ...The final defeat of the rationalists was exemplified both in the withdrawal of the *Mihha* and in the emergence of its victims as heroes, with Ibn Ḥanbal standing at the forefront. With this defeat, there was implied an acknowledgement that human reason could not stand on its own as a central method of interpretation and was, in the final analysis, subservient to revelation”.¹⁸ The triumph of the Traditionalists was partly due to the weakening of pronounced rationalism, and partly to withdrawal of political support from an increasingly unpopular position.

¹⁶ On this controversy, see the balanced appraisal by Hallaq, *Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, pp. 52–54, 74–76, 113–119, 122–128, 140–146. We follow Hallaq closely here in our summary overview.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 123.

¹⁸ *ibid*, pp. 124–5.

The normative synthesis between these contrasting approaches fructified the classical elaboration of Muslim legal theory, spearheaded by the creative work of Muḥammad b. Idris al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/819) who trained in both Makkah and Madinah, worked in Iraq and Yaman, and died in Egypt. Shāfiʿī validated rational procedures for deducing legal rulings, but confined personal reasoning exertions to an inference based only upon the sacred texts of Qurʾān and Prophetic traditions, a method he accepted as the technique of *qiyas* [inferential reasoning]. “After Shāfiʿī the Traditionalist movement gained significant strength, attracting many jurists who can easily be described as staunch opponents of rationalism.”¹⁹ Ibn Ḥanbal and Dawūd al-Zāhiri (d. 270/883) “...went much further in their emphasis on the centrality of scripture and on the repugnant nature of human reasoning. For them, the latter detracted from knowledge of revelation which, in Dawūd’s eyes, could be gleaned from the revealed language itself without impregnating these texts with human meaning”.²⁰ Yet extreme forms of Traditionalism and rationalism did not appeal to the majority of Muslims. “The Traditionalism of Ibn Ḥanbal was seen as too austere and rigid, and the rationalism of the Muʿtazila and their supporters among the *ahl al-raʿy* as too libertarian. ... It was the midpoint between the two movements that constituted the normative position of the majority; and it was from this centrist position that Sunnism, the religious and legal ideology of the majority of Muslims, was to emerge.”²¹

This “Great Synthesis”, as Hallaq calls it, encouraged the re-grounding of the positive legal doctrine of rationalist jurists upon Prophetic Ḥadīth through a methodology of legal theory [*uṣūl al-fiqh*] that embraced both the corpus of Ḥadīth and individual reasoning [*raʿy*]. At the same time, Traditionalists had to meet rationalism halfway and to some degree accommodate a creative rational approach; “...for the Ḥanbalite school to survive, it had to move from conservative Traditionalism to a mainstream position, one that accepted a synthesis between Traditionalism and rationalism”.²² The consequence was that disciplines previously formally distinct or separate, now commonly became integrated and combined:

¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 124.

²⁰ *ibid*.

²¹ *ibid*, p. 125.

²² *ibid*, p. 127. The Zāhirite school, which remained steadfastly literalist and rejected the synthesis, expired.

scholars emerged who were simultaneously Traditionalist-jurists and rationalist theologians competent “to conceptualize legal theory as a synthesis between rationality and the textual tradition, that is, between reason and revelation”.²³

II. *Ignoramuses*

Halkin²⁴ collected information about those circles labelled by their opponents as “Hāshwiyah”, yet vagueness has clung to this designation and who they represent. Hāshwiyah (the meaning of *hāshw* is discussed below) was a pejorative term for the strict Sunni>Traditionalists among the *ashhāb al-hādīth* who interpreted Qur’ānic verses and narrated traditions by literal anthropomorphism²⁵ and upheld a rigid theological determinism (*Mujbirah* and *Mujabbirah* [fatalists]). In the 3rd/9th century, the Sunni>litterateur Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) stated that professional Sunni>Hādīth experts or *ashhāb al-hādīth* were nicknamed *ghutha’* [scum], *Hāshwiyah*, *Nābitah*, or *Mujabbirah* (clearly pejorative labels by opponents).²⁶ Also in the 9th century, the Mu’tazili>rationalist theologian al-Khayyāṭ refers to the opposition of his own school to “those Nābitah who swear allegiance to the tyrannical Syrian gang”.²⁷ (By Syrians is meant the Banu>Umayyah or Umayyad dynasty centred in Damascus whose fourteen kings held central power from 41–132/661–750). The contemptuous label “rogues” [*nābitah* and *nawābit*] was a slur by opponents who resented their presumption of religious authority, intolerance toward differences in doctrinal thought and self-appointed role as arbiters of “orthodoxy”. The famed Mu’tazilite author al-Jahīz (d. 255/868–9) in his barbed *Epistle on the Stupid-Rogues* [*Risālah fi-l-Nābitah*] applied “*nābitat al-hāshwiyah*” to a certain group allied with (probably Hānbalī) Sunni>Traditionalists whom he regarded as a small upstart group

²³ *ibid*, p. 127–128.

²⁴ A. S. Halkin, “The Hāshwiyya” *JAOS* 54 (1934), pp. 1–28. For earlier explanations of this name by orientalist, see Van Vloten, *Actes du onzième congrès des Orientalistes* (Leiden, 1897), Section Musulmane pp. 99–115; and Houtsma, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorasiatische Archäologie* 26 (1911), pp. 193–204. More data from Mu’tazilite, Sunni and Shi’ah sources may now be added.

²⁵ For orientation on this issue of anthropomorphism, see Josef Van Ess, *Flowering*, pp. 45–77; Van Ess, “Le *Mi’rağ* et la vision de Dieu...” & his *Theologie und Gesellschaft* IV, pp. 387–391.

²⁶ In his *Ta’wīḍ Mukhtalif al-Hādīth* (Cairo ed., p. 96); cited by Halkin in “Hāshwiyya”, p. 4 n. 5.

²⁷ Khayyāṭ *al-Intisāḥ*, p. 102.

of recent formation seeking to impose an authoritarian censorship over intellectual discourse and rational disciplines.²⁸

Jaḥẓ makes it clear that these presumptuous interfering fools had a political agenda—namely, cooperation and support of Sunni rulers, in particular upholding the legitimacy of the previous Umayyad kings—as well as opposing doctrinal “innovations” taught by rationalist thinkers and theologians of all stripes, the despised Shiʿah groups, or early ascetic mystics (later termed Sufis). He points to their cherishing the first Umayyad Caliph Muʿawiyah (rg. 661–680 C.E.): “Do not calumniate him for he is one of the Companions; to calumniate Muʿawiyah is an innovation. Whoever hates him contradicts the Sunnah!” Jaḥẓ retorts sarcastically: “They believe that the Sunnah obligates us not to declare ourselves free from one who dis-acknowledges the Sunnah;” and he goes on to condemn their state-friendly attitude—while murder is wrong.²⁹

Yet when the murderer is an unjust *sulṭān* or a disobedient prince they do not permit anyone to criticize him, repudiate him, or remove him...even when he threatens the righteous, kills the theologians, starves the beggar, wrongs the weak, leaves the borders and frontiers undefended, drinks wine and sins publicly.

Of course, Jaḥẓ belonged to the Muʿtazilite trend of thought who agreed on upholding five fundamental principles of divine Justice and Oneness, the fifth being “commanding right and forbidding wrong”.

Quietism: It is fair to state that the characteristic early Sunni Traditionalists’ rejection of rebellion against unjust rulers or of upholding justice by the sword, largely coincides with the pre-destinationist and anthropomorphic dogmas of the Hāshwiyah who maintained that God has Himself decreed the abuse or oppression Muslims experienced from authoritarian tyrants.³⁰ On the other hand there also existed a deeply rooted conviction that “disobedience to tyrants is obedience to God” (to cite both Thomas Jefferson and Ayatullah Khumayni). There was the long-

²⁸ In *Rasaʾil al-Jaḥẓ* ed. Ḥaṣṣa, II pp. 7–23. Over a century later, the Zaydi Muʿtazilite Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn Maṣḥūm (d. 425/1034) explicitly identifies them with Hānbalites—*al-Hāshwiyah al-Nawābit min al-Hānbalīyah*—see his *Taʾliq Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, p. 527.

²⁹ *Risalah fi-l-Nabīyah*; & cited by Halkin, pp. 4–5 (*apud* Van Vloten p. 118).

³⁰ Cook, *Commanding Right*, pp. 49–50, 237, 224, 334–337; & al-Ashʿarī, *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin*, p. 451–452.

standing ‘Alid Shi‘ite tradition of insurrection against unjust rule beginning from the mid 1st/7th century. Most Mu‘tazilah taught that rebellion against an unjust ruler is known by both reason and revelation, thus “the betrayal of forbidding wrong by the Traditionalists [*Hāshwiyā*] is a favourite theme of the Mu‘tazilites.”³¹ ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd (d. 144/761), a forefather of the Mu‘tazilah, complained that “those ignorant Traditionalists [*ha‘ula’i-l-hāshw*]” were the ruin of the religion for they held people back from standing up for justice and “commanding right”.³² A Mu‘tazilite rival of Jah̄z, Abu-Ja‘far al-Iskafī (d. 240/854) likewise attacked the Traditionalist *hāshw*-folk [*ahlu l-hāshwi min ash-habi l-hādith*] among the public for their ignorance and blind obedience to Umayyad propaganda almost a century after the fall of their dynasty, complaining that “although the Umayyad kings are now extinct, nevertheless their public and partisans are evident among us today clinging to what they inherited from their tyrannical kings”.³³ Iskafī asserts that in his own era (the first quarter of the 3rd/9th century) the majority of Muslims continued to adhere to some form of the older Umayyad dogma about the first Caliphs: by excluding ‘Alī from the “Rightly Guided” successors to the Prophet.

The 5th/12th century Zaydi Mu‘tazilite al-Hākim al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101) upheld the duty of rebellion against unjust rule as obligatory by word and sword, and lampooned the Hāshwīyah’s rejection of “forbidding wrong” or resisting unjust rule; rather they held that “obedience [*inqiyā‘*] is due to whoever wins [*ghalaba*], even if he is an oppressor [*ẓālim*].”³⁵ This attitude reflects the apolitical doctrine upheld by Ibn Hānbal.³⁴ In his short satiric *Epistle of the Devil to his Baleful Brethren*, Jishumī has the Devil explain that he spread quietist notions of rendering obedience to every usurper in order to subvert Islamic authority and the revolt against unjust tyrants, and that his brethren (i.e. Sunni Traditionalists) busied themselves with relating

³¹ Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 336. Later when they enjoyed the support of the state, the Baghdadi Mu‘tazilites viewed “commanding right by the sword” to be valid only in the absence of a proper ruler [*imam*], while Basran Mu‘tazilites held that it is better to have recourse to an *imam*, and only when one is lacking or absent does recourse to the sword become valid.

³² ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Fadl al-I‘tizāl* p. 242; see Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* II, p. 287.

³³ al-Iskafī, *al-Mi‘yār wa l-Muwazanah*, pp. 18–19; c.f. pp. 31–32, 58 & 192 on the neutrality [*imsāk & waqf*] of the Murji‘ah and of many Mu‘tazilah viz. the surpassing-merit [*tafdīl*] of ‘Alī Iskafī himself championed the doctrine of *imamat al-mafdūl* wherein ‘Alī surpasses Abu-Bakr yet comes last chronologically, a minority Sunni position favoured by the Baghdadi Mu‘tazilah school and certain later Shafī‘ites.

³⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib al-Imam*, pp. 166, 170, 175–176. Further, Cook, *Commanding Right*, pp. 101–113.

traditions supporting it. The leading Hānafi>Muʿtazilite scholar of Baghdad, Abu>Bakr Jaṣṣas (d. 370/981) in his work on Qurʾānic law asserted that the Iraqi jurist Abu>Hānifah (d. 150/767, eponym of the Hānafi>legal school) firmly upheld the obligation of forbidding wrong both by word and by sword,³⁵ and he directed a fierce polemic against the spineless attitude of ignorant anthropomorphist Traditionalists [*qawm min al-ḥāshwi wa juhhakī ashḥabī l-ḥādith*], abbreviated by Cook in these words:³⁶

They alone...deny the duty. They reject resort to arms in the execution of the duty, calling all such action sedition [*fitna*]. They hold that injustice and murder may be committed by a ruler with impunity [*la-yunkar ʿalayhī*], while other offenders may be proceeded against by word or deed—but not with arms. ... It is these attitudes that have led to the present sorry state of Islam—to the domination of the reprobate, of Magians, of enemies of Islam; to the collapse of the frontiers of Islam against the infidel; to the spread of injustice, the ruin of countries, and the rise of all manner of false religions. All this...is a consequence of the abandonment of the duty to command right and forbid wrong, and of standing up to unjust rulers.

Jaṣṣas further argued for the obligation to resort to arms to extirpate certain politico-legal abuses such as collection of non-canonical taxes, it being the duty of Muslims to kill such tax-collectors.

Apart from the Muʿtazilah, other authorities within normative Sunni Islam including the leading Shafīʿi>Ashʿarite scholar, Abu>Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) were prepared to countenance the use of force and organizing armed bands to forbid wrong; while the iconoclastic Andalusian thinker Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064, perhaps the last exponent of the Zāhirite law school), strongly supported recourse to arms where necessary—an unjust ruler must be deposed should he fail to reform and submit to appropriate penalties—and levelled a devastating polemic against the political

³⁵ Indeed Abu>Hānifah died in an ʿAbbasid prison, either by poison or execution, for his active ideological support of the revolt of the Ḥasanid ʿAlids in 145 H against the Caliph al-Mansūr.

³⁶ Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 336–337, citing Jaṣṣas *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* (Istanbul, 1335–1338) II, p. 34.

quietism of Traditionalists.³⁷ However, even while the *ashhāb al-hādīth* taught that prayer behind an imam whether righteous or corrupt [*fasiq, ghayr ‘adil*] was obligatory, and discouraged revolt against an oppressive ruler—they upheld as valid the duty of a continuous *jihad* against non-Muslims to spread the Islamic polity.³⁸

Abuse. As a scornful term of abuse, it is revealing that Mu‘tazilah thinkers employed this label early on and wrote works ridiculing and exposing the fallacies of this trend. It shows them on the defensive after the failure of the ‘Abbasid Inquisition in the face of the rising tide of Sunni>orthodoxy during the 3rd/9th century. For parallel reasons, Imāmi>Shi‘ah thinkers in the same era also composed works attacking the Hāshwiyah, notably the hard-hitting ridicule of *The Clarification* [*Kitāb al-Idhāh*] by the Imāmi>scholar from Nisapur al-Fadl b. Shadhan (d. 260/874) which is extant and published in an excellent edition;³⁹ as well as the heresiographers Hāsan b. Musa>al-Nawbakhti>(d. ca. 300-310 H) in his *Firaq al-Shi‘ah*⁴⁰ and Sa‘d b. ‘Abdallah al-Qummi>(d. ca. 300 H) in his *Maqalat*.⁴¹ Nawbakhti> explained the origin of the Hāshwiyah thus:⁴²

When ‘Ali> was slain the party who followed him, with the exception of a small number in his own group and of those who maintained his right to the Imāmate after the Prophet [i.e. proto-Shi‘ah], met the group that had supported Tālhā> al-Zubayr and ‘A‘ishah and joined forces with Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abu>Sufyan. These

³⁷ Ibn Hāzm, *Fīṣḥ* IV, p. 171–176; & for Ghazālī> see Cook, *Commanding Right*, pp. 369–373, 453–458.

³⁸ Ash‘ari> *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin*, p. 295. This doctrine was also part of the legacy from the Umayyads; Sunni>juristic validation of continuous state *jihad* was partly motivated for reciprocal recognition and authority of their juridical power to enforce *shari‘ah* law.

³⁹ In my view, *Idhāh* likely combines Fadl’s two polemic books: *al-Radd ‘ala>al-Hāshwiyah* and his *al-Radd ‘ala>al-Murji‘ah*; see the titles listed by al-Najashi> *Rijāl* §838, pp. 168–169, al-Tūsī> *Fihrist* (3rd pr. Beirut, 1983) §564, p. 154–155; Ibn Shahrashub, *Ma‘ālim al-‘Ulama’* (Najaf, 1961) §627, p. 91. Note that Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (ed. Tajaddud, Tehran, 1971), pp. 29, 38, 287 describes Fadl as also authoring works on Qur’ānic sciences admired by the Hāshwiyyah.

The polemic work *al-Mustarshid fi l-Imamah* by the Imāmi>scholar Muḥammad b. Jarīf b. Rustam al-Tābarī>‘al-Kabīr’ (d. early 4th/10th century) adapted much from Fadl’s *Idhāh*; the same author also wrote *al-Idhāh (fi l-Imamah)*, see Najashi> *Rijāl* II §1025 & Ibn Shahrashub, *Ma‘ālim* §715; this might account for Fadl’s work to have acquired its present title.

⁴⁰ Cited by Halkin, “Hāshwiyya”, p. 5–10 *passim*.

⁴¹ Sa‘d al-Qummi> *al-Maqalat wa l-Firaq* §14 “ahl al-hāshw wa ittiba‘ al-muluk [ignoramus and the followers of kings]”, §18 proto-Sunni>*ashhāb al-hādīth* = *al-hāshwiyah* as the vast majority; on their political neutrality see §41 & §47. Sa‘d’s *Maqalat* incorporated Nawbakhti’s *Firaq* along with supplementary materials.

⁴² al-Qummi> *al-Maqalat* §14, repeating what Nawbakhti> wrote in his *Firaq*; cited by Halkin, p. 6.

comprise the vast majority: the *ahlu l-Hāshw*, followers of the Kings and supporters of the victorious, I mean those who joined Mu‘āwiyah. They were called *Murji’ah* because they accepted the opposing parties, deeming all the *ahl al-qiblah* (who pray toward the Ka‘bah) to be believers by merely pronouncing a confession of faith, and hoped for forgiveness for all.

This is a non-Sunni>viewpoint yet quite objective, and dovetails with the Sunni>Mu‘tazilite views canvassed above. Thus Nawbakhti>equated the Hāshwīyah with the Murji’ah [Postpone.ists] and majority of the Sunni>public, used here to comprise virtually the entire community (save for the Shi‘ah and Kharijites). Fadl b. Sha‘han’s *Clarification* is especially illuminating since he pursues his detailed polemic against emerging Sunni>“orthodoxy” by citing at length only Hādīth they themselves narrated and gave credence to, in order to demonstrate how nonsensical and ignorant their doctrines were.⁴³ We shall not discuss here the well known large-scale forgery of hādīth promoted by the Umayyads in support of their ruling ideology, especially about the merits of the Companions [*fadhīl al-shahābah*].

Yet others view the Hāshwīyah as a non-Hānbali>faction, or at least wider and more inclusive of other Traditionalist Hādīth folk than only Hānbalis.⁴⁴ Michael Cook accurately yet loosely describes this label as “a rude term for anthropomorphist Traditionalists”.⁴⁵ Wael Hallaq cites remarks by the metaphysically inclined mystic Abu-Hāmid al-Ghazālī>that they “believe that they are bound to a blind and routine submission to the criterion of human authority and to the literal meaning of the revealed books”, and by the rationally inclined Hānbali>savant ‘Alī>Ibn ‘Aqīl, that “they believed that there is something in human reason that contradicts the Shari‘a”.⁴⁶ Both these scholars were normative 5th/11th century Sunni>thinkers of wide authority, and their statements clearly indicate that in their era, the Hāshwīyah were

⁴³ *Idhāh*, pp. 7–44 citing *aqawīl ashshābi l-hādīth*; & pp. 93–503 for extended polemics with the ‘Murji’ah’. It should be observed that later Imāmi>Shi‘i>scholars sometimes applied the term *hāshwīyah* to Shi‘ite traditionalists who interpreted certain hādīth about pre-creation existence of Spirits of the Prophet & imāms in a semi-anthropomorphic or gnostic sense; thus al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1020) condemned the *hāshwīyat al-shi‘ah*.

⁴⁴ Hallaq, “Was the Gate of *Ijtihad* Closed?”, p. 9–10.

⁴⁵ Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 49.

⁴⁶ Hallaq, “*Ijtihad*”, p. 10.

deemed to be outside the pale of “orthodoxy” by some mainstream Sunni>thinkers, primarily because of their hostility to reason.

The evidence of our sources suggests that one should make a distinction between the Hāshwiyah and Hādīth Traditionalists [*ashhāb al-hādīth*], yet because they both shared so many doctrines in common they were often mentioned in the same breath,⁴⁷ frequently along with “the public [*al-‘ammah*]” and the “Postpone.ists [*Murji’ah*]”. It is significant that the intellectual defender of Traditionalist dogma Abu>l-Hāsan al-Ash’ari>(d. 324/935–6) did not employ the term Hāshwiyah in his major review of Muslim doctrines *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, although his section on the doctrines of the main orthodox group “*ashhāb al-hādīth wa ahl al-sunnah*” covers all major points.⁴⁸ Both Traditionalists and the Ash’arite theologians concur that unaided human reason cannot discern right from wrong, and is guided by revelation to this knowledge. Sunni>Traditionalists certainly exhibited shades of opinion on a number of critical issues, notably over the divisive question of the increate Qur’aṇ with a significant wing maintaining an “articulatory [*lafzīyyah*]” position: Qur’aṇ is God’s uncreated and pre-existent Speech, yet our voiced articulation and writing of it are temporally originated. However the radical Traditionalists fiercely insisted on the increate nature of sounding and writing its words, charging the *lafzīs* with un-faith [*takfir*]. The great Central Asian Traditionalist al-Bukhārī>(d. 256/870) whose compilation of sound traditions *al-Jāmi’ al-Sāhīh* is deemed the most authoritative collection among Sunni>Muslims, held to this *lafzī* view—for which he was hounded out of first Samarqand, and then his home town Bukhara, by intolerant Traditionalist rivals who charged him with *kufr* over this issue; he died in a small village shunned in humble obscurity. A somewhat similar cloud hung over the celebrated Sunni>jurist-historian Abu>Ja’far Ibn Jarīf al-Tābarī>(d. 310/923, founder of the separate *Jarīfī* law school which became defunct), who was involved in an ugly dispute with the disciples of Ibn Hānbal over interpretation of a Qur’aṇic verse (*Isrā’* 17:79 – a

⁴⁷ The editor of *Idhāb* al-Hisayni>cites (p. 42 n.1): the *Tafsīr* of Abu>l-Futuh>al-Rāzī>(first-half 6th/12th century) who frequently gives the views of “*Hāshwīyān ve ashhāb al-hādīth*”; & ‘Alam al-Huda (d. 1115/1704), *Tanzīh al-Anbiyā’* viz. the view shared both by Hādīth folk and Hāshwiyah that prophets may commit major sins before their prophetic mission or even during their mission, thus denying their impeccable immunity.

⁴⁸ pp. 290–297; see also pp. 5, 172, 211, 217, 451–452, 586 & 602. Nor did al-Baghdādī>in his *Farq bayn al-Firaq*; see Halkin *op. cit.* p. 26. Shahrastānī> *al-Milal* I, p. 86, observes that al-Ash’ari>was sometimes labelled among the Hāshwiyah, or among the moderate *Jabriyyah* [determinists] (probably by Mu’tazilite opponents).

“praiseworthy position” promised to the Prophet). Invoking a weak singular *ḥādīth*, these Ḥanbalī-disciples insisted this verse meant that on resurrection day, God would seat Muḥammad beside HIM on HIS THRONE. Ṭabarī is said to have been buried secretly at night in order to forestall any possible disturbances at his funeral by the unruly rabble.⁴⁹

Stuffing. The Arabic verb *ḥaṣṣaḥ/yahṣuḥ* signifies “to stuff”—as a cushion or pillow is stuffed with cotton, or as a lamb, fowl or vegetable is stuffed with rice; thus *ḥaṣṣiyah* denotes a stuffed pillow or mattress (also a menstrual cotton pad worn internally), while *maḥṣhuww* is a well-known delicious dish of stuffed zucchini, eggplant or bell pepper (c.f. *maḥṣṣah* [contents of the colon]).⁵⁰ The verbal noun *ḥaṣṣh* literally denotes “stuffing” or “padding”. By extension, *ḥaṣṣh^{un}* connotes empty verbiage, “a redundant excess of speech of no profit or utility”;⁵¹ and more frequently, the ignorant rabble and basest sort of people (e.g. slaves and servants—thus *ḥaṣṣwah*) given to repeating empty nonsense. In this sense, the feminine-*nisbah* form *ḥaṣṣhiyah* is applied contemptuously to a class or body of people imagined as collected into a medley of base persons occupied with purveying ignorant speech or narratives of little meaning and value.⁵² The Zaydite, Aḥmad b. Yahyā observed: “the Ḥaṣṣhiyah are those who relate ignorant·nonsensical narrations [*al-aḥādīth al-maḥṣhuww*] which the reprehensible·innovators stuffed [*ḥaṣṣaḥ*] the traditions of God’s Messenger full of.”⁵³ Thus, the term *ḥaṣṣhiyah* may also be rendered “Stuffers” who padded Prophetic Ḥādīth with ignorant stupidities. This lends credence to its employment by rationally inclined circles who appreciated the

⁴⁹ See the balanced treatment by Rosenthal in his *General Introduction to History of al-Ṭabarī*, pp. 69–79. Rosenthal observes (pp. 71–72): “Ḥanbalite championship of the tradition produced vehement outpourings of hatred against those who opposed it... They were called by every conceivable epithet; they were branded as innovators, liars, ignoramuses, heretics [*zindiq*] and unbelievers. Above all, they were seen as Jahmiṣ, that is, speculative theologians [Mu‘tazilites].” The slander they slung at Ṭabarī that he held Shi‘ite views may have been due to his defence of the soundness of the *ḥādīth* of Ghadiḥ Khumm (where the Prophet singled out ‘Alī as his potential successor), in his unfinished work *Fadḥ-il ‘Alī-b. Abi Ṭālib*; see Rosenthal, *General Introduction*, pp. 59–62, 91–3, 123–4.

⁵⁰ See major classical lexicons, beginning with al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 175/792), *al-‘Ayn*; also E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1863–1877) s.v. *ḥaṣṣh*.

⁵¹ Jurjānī, *Ta‘rīfāt*, p. 171 §624.

⁵² Employed in this sense by Jaḥḥiz in his literary classic *al-Bayān wa l-Tabyīn* I, p. 137 “I mention the commoners and I don’t mean the peasants or the ignorant·rabble [*ḥaṣṣwah*]”; & p. 144 “...for the barbaric speech (of a Bedouin) is understood even by the stranger and the ignorant·rabble.”

⁵³ Cited by Halkin *op. cit.* p. 25 n.25, after Houtsma. The phrase “*al-aḥādīth al-maḥṣhuww*” conveys, of course, the simultaneous sense “stuffed with nonsense” as well as the stuffing or padding of the body of Prophetic traditions, thereby swelling them with invented reports.

double-entendre conveyed by *ḥaṣḥwiyah*—not only were they stuffed with nonsense, but they devoted themselves with stuffing the corpus of Prophetic Ḥadīth with their ignorant nonsense. Halkin is correct in characterizing the origin of this term as “more in the nature of popular etymology”.⁵⁴ *Ḥaṣḥwiyah* may thus be rendered “ignoramus spouting empty nonsense”, while simultaneously bearing the secondary connotation of “unruly rabble” and “ignorant throng”. The history of Ḥanbalite Traditionalist fanaticism and violence in the central Islamic empire, particularly in Baghdad during the 4th–6th/10th–12th centuries under Buḡid and then Saljuq rulers, confirms this association of unruly rabble and ignorant verbiage.

An early attested Islamic use of *ḥaṣḥw* in this extended meaning occurs in a statement by the fourth “rightly guided” Caliph ‘Alī>b. Abī>Ṭālib (assassinated 40/661, first-cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet), preserved in the famous collection of his utterances and letters *Path of Eloquence* [*Nahj al-Balaghah*], in which he castigates the so-called “learned” deemed by people as knowledgeable and who pose as competent to pass legal judgements, yet in reality are ignorant and perpetrate injustice.⁵⁵

...He poses as a magistrate [*qaḍī*] assuming responsibility for unravelling intricate problems baffling others. When an obscurely difficult issue is put to him, he contrives for it an ignorant·nonsensical invalidity out of his errant·opinion [*ḥaṣḥw^{an} rathth^{an} min ra’yihī*],⁵⁸ confidently asserting it as a sound solution. Yet due to dubious uncertainties he falls prey to a spider’s web of confusion. Incapable of appreciating truth and blind to enlightenment, he relies on ignorant suppositions in a senseless haphazard manner [*jaḥīl^{un} khabbat^u jahak^{at}^{un}*]...

‘Alī>s statement condemning those poseur ‘*ulama>*’ who offered invalid legal rulings out of shallow ignorance was transmitted separately in another version from that

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ *Nahj al-Balaghah* (*sharḥ*/by Muḥammad ‘Abduḥ) I, pp. 72–75 §17 “...*fa-in nazalat bi-hi ihḥa>l-mubhamati hayya’a la-ha>ḥaṣḥw^{an} rathth^{an} min ra’yihī*...” See also *al-Mu’jam al-Mufahras li-alfaz* *Nahj al-Balaghah*, p. 442 *ḥaṣḥw^{an}* in *khutbah* 17. Muḥammad ‘Abduḥ comments (p. 74 n.1): *ḥaṣḥw^{an} — al-za’id la>fa’idah fi>hi...ay annahu yulaqi>l-mubhamata bi-ra’yihī dh>if la>yusṭbu min ḥḥqiqatiha>shay^{an}*. The classical commentator Maytham al-Baḥṭānī>(d. 679 H), *Sharḥ*/*Nahj al-Balaghah* I, p. 316, glosses *al-ḥaṣḥw*—*al-kalamu l-kathiru lladhi>la>ṭṭil tahṭahu wa laysa ḥḥl^{an} li-tilka l-mubhamati*. I believe I have adequately captured the meaning, save for the final phrase.

recorded by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī in his *Nahj*. This variant form is preserved by the Muʿtazilite Abū Jaʿfar al-Iskafī (d. 240/854), by the leading Sūfī exponent Abū Ṭālib al-Makki (d. 386/996), and by the authoritative Imāmī scholar Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067).⁵⁶ ʿAlī castigated certain of his contemporary judges in the decades following the death of Muḥammad, whose expertise in the Qurʾān and Prophetic teachings was flimsy at best and who relied heavily upon their own faulty reasoning or unfounded opinion when deducing case law. His rejection of reliance upon reasoned-opinion [*raʾy*] was to become a standard feature of Imāmī-Shīʿī legal thought, which instead made reason [*ʿaql*] as one basis for legal rulings—in place of inferential reasoning [*qiyās*] as in most Sunni schools of law.

III. *Traditionalist Doctrines*

The foundations of Sunni-Traditionalism are strict adherence to the texts of the Qurʾān [*al-Kitāb*], the Sunnah (authoritative practice) of the Prophet, and Consensus [*ijmāʿ*] (mainly of the first generations of scholar-authorities). The unrivalled wellsprings of truth are the sacred texts of *al-Kitāb wa l-Sunnah*, for they also serve as the criterion for examining what humans obtain through their reason. Their understanding of Sunnah incorporated not only the canonical corpus of Prophetic Ḥadīth, but also the consensus opinions of the early generations of righteous forebears or *salaf*. This type of scriptural and *ḥadīth*-based thinking should not be underestimated, since its importance for the elaboration of doctrine in the first three Islamic centuries was considerable. Traditionalists generally avoided speculative reasoning, nor did they rationally compare Qurʾānic verses or Ḥadīth narratives in order to draw doctrinal conclusions. They invoked the precedent of early Muslim authorities who had neither interpreted anthropomorphic expressions in the Qurʾān nor dealt with figurative interpretations of “ambiguous verses” (the *mutashabihāt*), and they strongly condemned fanciful or imaginative spiritual interpretations [*taʾwīl*] favoured by Sūfīs and esotericists. Traditionalists developed a thick skin from all the abuse heaped upon them by their rationally oriented opponents, and in

⁵⁶ It represents partially the same utterance as preserved in *Nahj*, giving added support for the antiquity and meaning of this use of *ḥāshw*. This variant version reads: “...*hayyaʾa ḥāshw^a min raʾyihi* [he contrives an ignorant (solution) out of his errant-opinion]”. Cited by: al-Iskafī, *Miʾyān*, pp. 289–290 (introduced as censure of *al-ḥāshwiyyah wa l-juhḥāʾ wa l-ashḥāb al-riwayah*); al-Makki, *Qut al-Qulūb* I, p. 290 (corruption in wording?); al-Ṭūsī, *Amālī majlis 9* §8, pp. 234–235 (transmitted via Abū Ishāq al-Sabīʿī). M. Baqir al-Mahmūdī (editor of *Miʾyān*) signals this alternative version is also cited by Ibn ʿAsakir, *Taʾrikh Dimashq* (tarjamah of ʿAlī ed. al-Mahmūdī III), p. 223.

return spurned them as vile heretics [*zindiq* pl. *zanaḍiqah*]. The prominent 3rd/9th century Traditionalist Abuḥ Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277 H) observed: “the sign of reprehensible·innovators is their disdain for the People of Ḥadīth; the sign of the heretics[*zanaḍiqah*] is calling the People of Ḥadīth *ḥaṣḥwiyah*, aiming by that at a nullification of the Ḥadīth...”⁵⁷

Some even objected to Arabic grammar as tainted by overly rational analytical methods and concerns, as with the Baghdadi Mālikite jurist Ibn Khuwāz Mindād (d. 390/999) who demanded the burning of books on rationalist theology [*kalām*], poetry and grammar as unreliable disciplines inferior to Prophetic Ḥadīth.⁵⁸ (Recall that rationalist theologians including the Muʿtazilah and later Ashʿariyyah and Māturīdiyyah frequently invoked grammatical evidence drawn from the linguists [*ahl al-lughah*]—who themselves relied on data drawn from poetic citations of pre-Islamic poetry—when interpreting Qurʾānic language metaphorically.) Traditionalists further upheld the prohibition against discussing the divine Essence [*dhaṭ Allah*] by means of rational proofs, reflected in their maxim expressed in *ḥadīth* form as an utterance of the Prophet: “*la-tafakkaru fī dhaṭi llahi...* [do not think·reason concerning God’s essence].” When the Qurʾān, Sunna and *Ijmaʿ* are conjoined, they lead to certain and true perceptions which no interpretation can oppose. For example, on whether humans will see God in the Hereafter by a physical eye-witnessing, the reputable central Asian tradent al-Dāʿimī (d. 255/869) asserted: “If the Qurʾān, the Messenger’s utterance and the consensus of the community conjoin, there is no other interpretation,” while the 4th century Ibn Mandah (d. 1004 C.E.) stated: “God’s Messenger ordered not to deal with nor discuss God through rational arguments and to avoid what would bring about doubts.”

Hadith Religion. Sunni·guardians of tradition busied themselves with collecting, purifying, and compiling the vast mass of narrated-reports transmitted over generations from the Companions on the Prophet, forming the basis not only of the Prophet’s Sunnah and religious Law [*shariʿah*] but also of basic creedal doctrine. For example, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal compiled his *Musnad* consisting of ca. 30,000 traditions arranged under names of Companions who audited them from the Prophet and transmitted them to their pupils the “Successors”; these traditions were gleaned out

⁵⁷ Halkin *op. cit.* p. 25, citing al-Shāʿirī— from *Majmuʿat al-Rasaʾil al-Muniriyyah* (Cairo, 1343) I, p. 131.

⁵⁸ Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytami, *Fatawa*, p. 207; cited by Claude Gilliot in his article “Ulamaʿ”, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new edition) X, p. 802a. Book burning was also not beyond their purview.

of ca. 750,000 he had recorded directly from tradents he met personally during his years of “search for knowledge” beginning in 179 H (thus for his *Musnad* he selected about four per cent of materials at his disposal). As a Traditionalist-jurist seeking support for legal opinions, juridical rulings, and creedal doctrine primarily on the basis of Ḥadīth, and who minimized employing reasoning techniques of *ra’y* or *qiyas*, Ibn Ḥanbal held that in order to perform his function, a competent jurist should have at his command (i.e. recorded in his written notebooks, or preferably in memory) five hundred thousand Ḥadīth or more.⁵⁹ The very order in which he listed the Companions in his *Musnad*, beginning with the first four Rightly Guided Caliphs followed by those of the *Shura* council or the “Ten promised paradise”, then the Family of the Prophet..., was an explicit affirmation of emerging Sunni orthodoxy.⁶⁰ However, Ibn Ḥanbal did not entirely reject “inferential reasoning” in law, like the Traditionalist Dawūd al-Zahiri (d. 270/883) the founder of the Zahiri-school was to do one generation later; rather he “accepted *qiyas* only when absolutely necessary, placing far more restrictions on its use than Shafī’i did”.⁶¹

What were the beliefs and methodology they employed which caused rationalist circles as well as Shi’ite schools from an early period to abuse the most conservative radical Traditionalists among the *ashhab al-ḥadīth* by the label “ignoramus spouting nonsense”? From the first half of the 2nd/8th century the champions of Ḥadīth insisted upon the primacy of narrated traditions, placing them at the centre of their religious and devotional activity. After obligatory ritual requirements of faith such as prayer and fasting, the greatest religious devotional act was the study and teaching of Ḥadīth—defined as Prophetic Sunnah (*athar Rasuli-llah*) transmitted thru connected chains-of-transmitters (*isnaad*) on sound authorities (*thiqat*)—since these formed the juridical substance of the Shari’ah for regulating all aspects of individual and communal life. Indeed, the writing of Ḥadīth was preferred over supererogatory

⁵⁹ Ibn Ḥanbal’s pupil, the reputable Traditionalist Abu-Zur’ah al-Razi (d. 264 H), estimated that his teacher preserved by memory one million *ḥadīths* (both *isnad* and *matn*). He was present on the day of Ibn Ḥanbal’s death when his note books [*usul*] were catalogued; their total volume was twelve & one-half camel loads, or twenty-five bales; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Manaqib al-Imam*, pp. 59–60. Ibn Ḥanbal appears to have had a photographic memory.

⁶⁰ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1313; corrected reprint Beirut, 1991) v. I. This process is well examined by Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunni-Islam*. Consult contextual remarks by Hallaq, *Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, pp. 102–109, 122–128, 178–193.

⁶¹ Hallaq, *Origins and Evolution*, p. 124. Ibn Ḥanbal even preferred to accept unsound or “weak [*dh’if*]” ḥadīth as a basis for legal rulings, rather than have recourse to inferential reasoning.

prayers or fasts.⁶² As the influential Hānbalī-preacher Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) later stated of the Ḥaṣhwīyah: “they deem the valuation of *ḥādīth* as a whole the same, and hold that renouncing transmission of Ḥādīth is on a par with not observing required ritual obligations.”⁶³ Primacy of Ḥādīth was paramount over any linguistic, rational or symbolic attempts to explicate meaning; the narratives must be accepted word for word just as they reached us without inquiring *how* or *why*. Characterized by an austere piety and unshakeable conviction of the sacred importance of their task, they applied to themselves the famous utterance of the Prophet:⁶⁴

*A band from my community shall not cease to establish the truth,
while those who forsake and oppose them harm them not, until
God's affair is accomplished and they achieve mastery over the
people.*

Leading guardians of Tradition identified certain among themselves with the saintly “Substitutes [*Abdaʾ*]”: a mysterious caste of ‘inner humanity’ believed by some to exercise spiritual control over this world.⁶⁵ “Sunnah” required holding fast to what the Companions of the Prophet and earlier pious authorities [*salaf*] practised by following their guidance, and by rejecting all reprehensible innovations and polemical disputation over divisive doctrinal matters.⁶⁶

Majority Assembly. Above all, the early politico-religious disputes among the Companions over succession to the Prophet and bitter polemics over whom among them possessed surpassing merit or had committed errors or sins, was to be avoided for it opens the door to the reprehensible innovations of theologians and rationalists, as well as subversive doctrines espoused by the Shiʿah. Traditionalism idealized the

⁶² See J. Fück, “Die Rolle des Traditionalismus im Islam”; and Hurvitz, *The Formation of Hānbalism* ch. 1.

⁶³ *Talbis Iblis*, p. 22, where Ḥaṣhwīyah are treated among the Murjīʿah.

⁶⁴ Preserved in the collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Majāh, & Ibn Ḥānbal’s *Musnad*; this utterance was often understood to refer to the *Abdaʾ* [Substitutes], so named since whenever one expired another takes his place to fulfill his task.

⁶⁵ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib al-Imām*, pp. 147, 180–181, 196; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbis Iblis*, p. 19; Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytami, *Fatawa*, p. 426; the authorities making this claim were ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, Yazīd b. Ḥarūn & Ibn Ḥānbal. Yet Ibn Ḥānbal was opposed to proto-Sūfī devotees who taught Qadārī doctrine such as the renunciants on ‘Abbadān island in the Shatt al-‘Arab. The *Abdaʾ* were itinerant hermits who sought uninhabited areas to pursue intense devotions or self-mortification; some were sympathetic to the activities of *ashhāb al-ḥādīth*. The *Abdaʾ* were highly esteemed by early ascetic-mystics who held that there were 40 of them in Syria as well as a certain number in Iraq.

⁶⁶ *Manāqib al-Imām*, pp. 165–166, 171, 172–173; Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, pp. 294 & 297.

foundational basis of Islamic polity centred upon Muḥammad and his close associates and Companions. The overriding reason-for-being motivating Traditionalist identity was their insistence upon conformity to the *Jama'ah* [Majority Assembly], as opposed to division into sects. Adherence to the majority community served as a guarantee for the preservation of the Muslims, while division results in perdition. Uniformity through conformity protects the collectivity or majority group from being led astray into error; therefore disputation [*jadal*] and divisive intellectual speculations must be rejected—such as the confused and much disputed doctrines purveyed by rationalist theologians [*mutakallimūn*].

In his letter to the Basran tradent Musaddad b. Musarhad al-Asadi⁶⁷ (d. 228/843) spelling out true doctrine, Ibn Ḥanbal warns him: "...beware disputation with those holding errant doctrines, and refrain from discussing the shortcomings of the Prophet's Companions. Rather narrate their surpassing merits [*fadḥ'il*] and abstain from discussing what broke out between them [*al-imsak 'an ma'shajara baynahum*]." ⁶⁸ This stress on abstention from disputes emanating from the Sunni-Shi'ah schism reflects the well-known politico-theological position of the Murji'ah characteristic of proto-Sunni orthodoxy. The doctrine of *irja'* [postponement] came to have a double import: the political sense of postponement of judgement until Resurrection Day concerning one committing a major sin (especially in the case of the Companions 'Uthman, Talḥah and al-Zubayr), as well as delaying 'Ali's position among the Rightly Guided Caliphs from first to the fourth in order of merit; and a further theological sense of postponement of works from faith wherein disobedience or sin does not impair faith. ⁶⁹

⁶⁷ In Ibn al-Jawzi, *Manaqib*, p. 166–171; see Halkin, *op. cit.* p.16 n.28 for further sources. On Musaddad, said to have been one of the first to compile a *Musnad*, see Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalāni, *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib* X §202; & *Jamī'* III §4288.

⁶⁸ This theme of *imsak* or *kaff* [abstention] from engaging in bitter disputes over the early schism in the community is stressed by Ibn Ḥanbal (e.g. *Manaqib* pp. 166 & 176); it points to the doctrine of *irja'* [postponement] and neutrality (c.f. pp. 156, 165). The Sha'fi'ite Traditionalist Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d.748/1348) in his work on major sins *al-Kaba'ir*, p. 238, when treating the sin of cursing any of the Companions cites a *ḥadīth* (from Ṭabarāni in *Majma' al-Zawa'id*) via the Companion Ibn Mas'ūd wherein the Prophet himself counsels *imsak*: "If my Companions are mentioned, then abstain (from abusing them) ...*fa-imsaku*." Dhahabī adds: "thus 'abstaining' is the sign of real belief and of consent to God's bidding, whereas one who does not refrain from censuring the Companions shows himself to be a hypocrite and errant-innovator [*munaḥiq* and *mubtadil*]." ⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ash'ari, *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin*, p. 293; Shahrastāni, *al-Milal wa l-Nihāl* I, p. 139–146. Shahrastāni also points out that the Mu'tazilah labelled as Murji'ite all who disagreed with them over *qadar*. The pro-Imāni-historian al-Mas'ūdī writing in 332 H appears to count the Ḥashwiyah as one major sect among Muslims that includes *ashḥab al-ḥadīth*, but not the Murji'ah; see *Muru' al-Dhahab* IV

Statements by Ibn Hānbal affirm the identity of Sunnah with narrated Ḥadīth from the Prophet along with Qur'ānic explanations transmitted from Companions or Successors, which are not to be subjected to rational comparisons [*qiyas, amtha*] nor to rational methods of ascertaining truth [*la-tudriku bi-l-'uqu*]. Rather the Sunnah is grasped by adherence to transmitted reports from the Prophet and avoidance of sectarian innovations.⁷⁰ Regarding the doctrines of determinism [*qadar*] (divine pre-ordainment of human deeds and salvational status), of God being seen by an eyewitness, and of Qur'ān as uncreated divine Speech, he affirmed that one must:⁷¹

...give assent to narrated-traditions regarding (these doctrines) and believe them — *Why?* is not to be said, nor *How?*—rather it is a matter of assenting and believing in (these traditions). Whomever did not know the explanation of the specific *ḥadīth*, and his intelligence [*aqluhu*] informs him (of the meaning), then that suffices and is proper for him; so belief in it and consent is incumbent upon him...he is not to reject a single letter of (these traditions) nor other traditions transmitted through reliable authorities. Nor should you dispute or debate with anyone (over their meaning), nor teach others disputation...so that he abandons disputation and gives consent and believes in the transmitted reports. ...For we deem Ḥadīth must be accepted in its literal·external form (*'ala-zḥhirihi*) just as it has come down to us from the Prophet *Ṣ* and theological debate over it is a reprehensible innovation; indeed we believe in it literally and do not dispute rationally over its import with anyone.

Thus Ibn Hānbal is reported to have discouraged the *ashḥab al-ḥadīth* from copying the writings of prominent juridical authorities including the important Kufan

§2256. p. 60. The moderate Hānbali-Ibn al-Jawzi, *Talbis Iblis*, pp. 20 & 22, lists six major sects of Muslims, one being the Murji'ah who include the Ḥashwiyah and *ashḥab al-ḥadīth*. Compare al-Khwarazmi, *Mafatih al-'Ulum*, p. 19; al-'Askari, *al-Awa'il*, p. 255. For the later theological notion of *irja'* associated particularly with Hānifites and then the Maṭuridi-theological school, consult Izutsu, *Concept of Belief*.

⁷⁰ *Manaqib*, p. 171–172; further see p. 165–166.

⁷¹ *ibid*, p. 172. Compare Ash'ari, *Maqalat*, pp. 211, 217, 290 for "*bi-la-kayf*" & p. 294: *ahl al-ḥadīth wa l-sunnah* "disapprove of disputation and ostentatious display (in contention) regarding doctrine or arguing over *qadar*... and in defending their doctrines they contend by assenting to sound transmissions [*al-riwaya al-shahihah*] ...nor do they say '*how?*' or '*why?*' for that is a reprehensible innovation."

Traditionalist-jurist Sufyān al-Thawri (d. 161 H), the great Madinan jurist Maḥlik b. Anas (d. 179), the *usūlī*-jurist Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi‘i (d. 204), the Iraqi>philologist-Traditionalist Abu>‘Ubayd al-Qasim b. Sallām (d. 224), or the Iraqi>jurist Abu>Thawr Ibrāhīm b. Khālid (d. 240)—whose writings (*kutub al-ra’y*) he deemed improperly rationalist. Yet others affirm that he did permit copying the *Jāmi’* of al-Thawri and the *Muwatṭḥ* of Maḥlik. When reminded that the staunch Sunni>Traditionalist ‘Abdullāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) had himself copied such *ra’y* writings, Ibn Ḥanbal scoffed: “Ibn al-Mubārak didn’t descend from heaven! We are bidden to take knowledge from above [*min fawq*]” (thru the Prophet → from GOD).⁷²

However, the assiduous collector of Ibn Ḥanbal’s responsa Abu>Bakr al-Khallāḥ (d. 311/923) stated that in his early days, Ibn Ḥanbal had studied the writings of rationalist jurists (*kutub al-ra’y*) and made his own copies, then later disregarded them in favour of Hadith.⁷³ This detail plausibly contains truth, for Ibn Ḥanbal is said to have begun his studies under Qādī>Abu>Yusuf, the pupil of Abu>Ḥanīfah. The reality was that during the 3rd/9th century “migration (or conversion) from the rationalist to the Traditionalist camp was frequent, whereas movement in the opposite direction was rare to nonexistent”.⁷⁴ For example, his peer Abu>Thawr was known “to have been trained in the *ra’y* school of the Iraqians, and who became a Traditionalist and a ‘school founder’ in the latter part of his career”.⁷⁵ On the other hand, Khallāḥ’s statement could have been intended as a defense of the master from the charge of having been a mere *muhaddith* [Traditionalist] not a true *faqīh* [jurist], which scholars like Ibn Jarīf al-Ṭabarī>asserted. Khallāḥ also reported:⁷⁶

“Ḥūbaysh b. al-Mubashshir and a number of the *fuqaha’* said: ‘We would dispute (juridical issues) and oppose all the people in our disputations, but when Aḥmad came then we were reduced to silence’

⁷² *Manaqib*, p. 192–3. Also see p. 499–500 for Shāfi‘i’s alleged indebtedness to Ibn Ḥanbal’s superior expertise in Ḥadīth. Suyutī> *Tanwīr al-Hāwālik* (Cairo, 1370/1951; pr. with *al-Muwatṭḥ*) I p. 9 records that Ibn Ḥanbal transmitted Maḥlik’s *Muwatṭḥ* from Shāfi‘i>as well as other authorities. Consult further Ch. Melchert, “Adversaries of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal”.

⁷³ *Manaqib*, pp. 63–4; Khallāḥ further states, “...when he discoursed on *fiqh* he spoke the discourse of a man who had critiqued these sciences, thus he spoke from a thorough familiarity [...*takallama kalāma rajul*ⁿ qad intaqada l-‘ulūma fa-takallama ‘an ma‘rifatⁿ].” The term *fiqh* here appears to overlap with the conception of Iraqi legal rationalists with their emphasis on *ra’y* & *qiyās*. Ibn ‘Aqīl also insists on Ibn Ḥanbal’s profound expertise in subtle juridical matters (*ibid*, pp. 64–66).

⁷⁴ Hallaq, *Origins and Evolution*, p. 123.

⁷⁵ *ibid*.

⁷⁶ Cited in *Manaqib*, p. 64.

[on account of his superior juristic expertise—or due to his condemnation of contentious disputation?].”

This Hūbaysh b. al-Mubashshir al-Thaqafī⁷⁷ (d. 258/872) was the younger brother of a leading Baghdadi Mu‘tazilite theologian Ja‘far b. al-Mubashshir (d. 234/848), and himself was no stranger to polemical wrangling. The historian al-Mas‘ūdī described Hūbaysh as being “among the learned Traditionalists and chiefs of the Ḥaṣhwiyyah”, referring to the bitter doctrinal disputes between the two brothers and how each swore not to talk to the other until his death.⁷⁸

Ibn Ḥanbal explicitly forbade the *ashḥāb al-ḥadīth* from attending the circles of rationalist theologians [*ahl al-kalam*], even if they deployed their arguments to defend the Sunnah.⁷⁹ He also strongly discouraged them from attendance at the circle of a prominent Baghdadi Sufi teacher al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) and prevented him from teaching—although he himself had once requested one of Muḥāsibī’s pupils to secrete him in the vicinity of their private night session where he listened to this shaykh guiding the inner work of his disciples, becoming so deeply affected that he wept.⁸⁰ Muḥāsibī lived the final years of his life closeted in his home from fear of mistreatment at the hands of radical Traditionalists in Baghdad; at his death only four persons dared to attend his funeral. The tenor and ethos of a Traditionalist of the caliber of Ibn Ḥanbal may be appreciated when we recall that in his zeal to practise Muḥammadan Sunnah, he asked permission of his wife to purchase a slave girl, keeping her as his *umm walad* [love slave] and naming her Rayḥānah⁸¹ in imitation of the Prophet; and he possessed a drinking bowl [*qasṣah*] used by the Prophet which he would wash in water to drink for cures, as well as a

⁷⁷ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* II §363, p. 195; Hūbaysh, a reliable Sunni *faqīh* from Ṭūs in Khurasān who worked in Baghdad, was deemed to be of sterling character [*faḍīl*] and one of the intelligentsia [*‘uqala*].

⁷⁸ *Murūf* IV §2192 (with corruption of his name as *h̄n-sh*): ...*min ‘ulama’i ashḥābi l-ḥadīth wa ru’asa’i l-ḥaṣhwiyyah*.

⁷⁹ *Manaqib*, p. 156; details given in Melchert, “Adversaries of Aḥmad”, with a more nuanced context in Hallaq, *Origins and Evolution*, p. 122–128.

⁸⁰ *Manaqib*, p. 186–187. Nevertheless, Ibn Ḥanbal had a soft spot for pious renunciants and self-mortifiers [*zuhhād*] and compiled a valuable collection of their utterances in his *Kitāb al-Zuhd*. Muḥāsibī was a Sunni theologian as well as a Sufi theoretician and spiritual master; his work *The Essential Nature of Reason* influenced later thinkers of the stature of al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī.

⁸¹ Rayḥānah bint Sham‘ūn (d. 10/631) was a captured Jewess of Banu-Nadīr who converted to Islam and was kept by the Prophet as his possession until her death. He gave her a choice, so she chose to remain his slave rather than become his wife and submit to covering her hair & confinement to her chamber; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Ishbah* IV §446.

lock of the Prophet's hair to be immersed in water and drunk for the same purpose. On the day during the Inquisition in 218 H when, in the presence of the 'Abbasid Caliph Mu'tasim, Ibn Hānbal was severely whipped 29 lashes till he lost consciousness, he had this precious lock of hair wrapped in a napkin in the pocket of his shirt.⁸²

IV. *Fear of Reason*

Our intent is not to ridicule notions the Hāshwiyah taught, but to uncover and understand an important strand of Muslim experience fuelling rational minimalism, an activist anti-intellectual censorship, and narrow doctrinal conformity. A clearer comprehension of this mentality may help in grasping the dilemma facing Muslims today, and the need to advance critical approaches and fresh creative thinking. Living with ambiguity and open-ended possibilities may be a severe burden for some humans who privilege uniform answers to complex questions and seek reassurance in simplistic conformity. We have alluded to their self-appointed doctrinal role, their self-definition and reductionist epistemology. For ease of presentation, we now provide a brief overview of two major doctrinal issues: God's increate Speech, and the anthropomorphic vision of God; then we will review the socio-political role exercised by Hānbalism in central Islamic lands which facilitated the prolongation of the Hāshwi-mind-set, and finally glance at the later historical evolution of the Hānbalite school away from its original anti-rationalist stance. This may suffice to highlight the Hāshwiyah's chief feature: fear of reason and the threat posed by the ambiguity imposed by competing ideas, coupled with a failure of creative imaginative thinking.

GOD'S SPEECH. The radical Hāshwiyah doctrine of the Qur'aṇ taught that its letters, voiced sounds and written words pre-exist creation (increate), for the revealed Qur'aṇ is identical with the divine attribute of Speech [*kalām Allāh*] encompassed within the divine essence.⁸³ They conceived that "speech may be comprehended only if expressed in (visible) letters and (audible) words [*la-yu'qalu kalām^{un} laysa bi-hjruḥⁿ wa la-kalim*]", invoking proof texts from Hādīth and utterances by reputable early authorities ("what is between the two covers is the Speech of God") supporting this

⁸² *Manaqib*, p. 177 (Rayḥānah); pp. 186, 326 (drinking bowl and hair), and the miracle of his drawers not dropping during his whipping.

⁸³ Ash'ari; *Maqalat*, pp. 172, 290, 602; and Shahrastānī; *Milāl*, pp. 106–107 for the following citations.

notion. The Mu'tazilite Ma'akdi' mentions that "*al-Hāshwiyah al-Nawābit* among the Hānābilah maintain that this Qur'aṇ recited in the mosques and written on paper-copies [*maṣḥḥif*] is not created nor originated-in-time, but pre-exists with God The Exalted."⁸⁴ Their doctrine affirmed: "the Qur'aṇ is God's increate Speech, and whoever says it is created (originated-in-time) is an unbeliever in God [*al-qur'aṇ kalāmū llahī ghayr makhluq, wa man qala huwa makhluq fa-huwa kafir bi-llahī*]." Remember: being declared *kafir* excludes one from the salvational community of Islam, and in the opinion of some makes it permissible to shed one's blood.

Thus, the Hāshwiyah took the Qur'aṇ to truly be God's eternal pre-existent WORD physically present to our human senses: in our hands and on our tongues. Recall that for the various groupings of Mu'tazilah theologians—who vehemently upheld the absoluteness of divine oneness [*tawḥīd*]⁸⁵—the Qur'aṇ is truly *kalām Allāh*, but cannot be pre-existent [*qadīm*] with the divine essence since they denied that God's Attributes (His Speech, Knowledge, Power, Will...) form part of HIS unique indivisible essence, for this violates divine Oneness. For the normative Sunni-theological school of Ash'arites, the Qur'aṇ is truly *qadīm*, but what is held in our hands and recited on our tongues cannot itself be God's Speech; rather *kalām Allāh* is understood as an attribute or quality integral to HIS essence.⁸⁵ However, among the Traditionalists, there were many holding the view that what is in our hands and recited on our tongues is created-in-time [*muhḥath*]⁸⁶—not pre-existent nor divine; this was the *Lafz*-position adopted by eminent authorities such as al-Bukhārī. Obviously the literalist doctrine of the Qur'aṇ upheld by radical Traditionalists had profound consequences for their understanding of the literary imagery of sacred texts.

Anthropomorphic Vision. The Prophet's ascension to heaven is mentioned in the Qur'aṇ (*al-Najm* 53: 5–12 and 13–18) when Muḥammad saw two visions of God, and in his night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem (*al-Isrā'* 17: 1). The Qur'ānic phrases

⁸⁴ *Ta'liq Sharḥ Uṣūl* p. 527; & see Shahrastānī, *Milāl* I, p. 107. Some recent Occidental scholars have drawn a parallel between this "orthodox" notion and the Christian doctrine of the sacramental wine and consecrated host becoming the literal blood & flesh of Jesus (WORD of God).

⁸⁵ *ṣfat* ^{qāṣimat} ^{bi-dhātī l-Bārī}; see Shahrastānī, *Milāl* I, p. 96 for al-Ash'arī's view that "divine-Attributes are pre-eternally subsisting in His Exalted Essence [*al-ṣfat azaliyat* ^{qāṣimat} ^{bi-dhātīhi Ta'ālā}]", with his doctrine on the Qur'aṇ close to a *lafz*-position; Shahrastānī observes "...with this distinction, al-Ash'arī-disagreed with a majority of the Hāshwiyah who deemed the letters and words pre-existent." Further, D. Gimaret, *La Doctrine d'al-Ash'arī* pp. 257, 309–322.

fa-istawa>(53:6) and *istawa*>‘*ala*>‘*arshihi* [*He mounted (sat upright on) His Throne*] also entered into discussions of the reality of this event, giving rise to various interpretations: a physical eye-witnessing [*bi-l-absar*] by Muḥammad while alive in his body, a dream vision, a heart-vision (*bi-qalbihi*), or a light-vision.⁸⁶ In certain *ḥadīth* narratives about his night journey and ascension where these visions are treated and expanded, there is mention of the Prophet witnessing God seated on HIS THRONE in the form of a youth wearing a crown of light.⁸⁷ Josef Van Ess, who carefully examined the interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of these verses and their complementary *ḥadīths*, documents the survival of an “ancient anthropomorphist exegesis” on the margin of official theology: Muḥammad saw God seated on His Throne,⁸⁸ and remarking that, “Those who were put off by anthropomorphism would soon come to believe that the Prophet had seen Gabriel, and in this world.”⁸⁹ Muslim discussions over the proper interpretation of the Prophet’s eye-witnessing [*ru’yah*] revolved around two points: • affirming the reality of the Prophet’s physical eye-witnessing during his mission on earth, while debating the possibility of believers to experience it in this physical world (*ru’yat Allāh fi-l-dunya*>); and • the accepted dogma that all believers shall enjoy the physical vision of God on Resurrection Day, “...as you see the moon on the night of the full moon” when they inhabit their physical bodies in a glorified state (*Q* 75:22-23).⁹⁰

The great historian of religions, al-Shahrastānī> (d. 548/1153), provides a portrait of a group of radical Traditionalist anthropomorphists who were condemned

⁸⁶ See Van Ess, “Le *Mi’rag*/et la vision de Dieu...”, p. 30f.

⁸⁷ Including the utterance ascribed to the Prophet: “*I saw my Lord in the fairest form [ra’aytu Rabbi-fi> ahṣana shraṭ’ⁿ]*”. J. Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* IV, pp. 380f., 389f.; and especially Van Ess, *The Youthful God. Anthropomorphism in Early Islam*. While for the early Ḥaṣhwiyah, the “fairest form” was conceived as a radiant young male (perhaps after the fashion of Rabbinic mysticism, c.f. the *Shi’ur Qoma* [Measurement of His BODY]), for the leading Andalusian saint Muḥyi>-l-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabi>(d. 638/1240) the “fairest form” of divine self-disclosure was a beautiful young woman.

⁸⁸ “Le *Mi’rag*/et la vision de Dieu...”, pp. 35–38, 42–45. The influential ascetic-mystic ‘Abd al-Wahīd b. Zayd (d. 150/767) who founded the earliest Shīfī>-conventicle on ‘Abbadān island (see n.68 above), invoked *Q al-Najm* 5–18 to affirm that one can see God not only in Paradise after bodily Resurrection, but also here on earth; Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* II, p. 99.

⁸⁹ Van Ess, *Flowering of Muslim Theology*, p. 55. Ibn Jarīf al-Tābarī> was skeptical of anthropomorphism, which contributed to his persecution by his contemporary Ḥanbalites; *Theologie und Gesellschaft* II, p. 642, III p. 450, IV p. 215.

⁹⁰ Gimaret, *Doctrine*, pp. 329–344. Further, the well-informed review on *ru’yat Allāh* by Haytami> *Fatawa*>pp. 199–202 §89. We limit ourselves to mentioning only a few sources on this controversy.

by Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites alike for holding *tashbih*.⁹¹ They swelled *ḥadīth* transmissions with forgeries they ascribed to the Prophet (many derived from Jewish anthropomorphist tradition), such as the Throne creaking under HIS weight. Fadl b. Shadhān (d. 260/874) in his *Clarification* had already pinpointed this type of naïve transmission cultivated by the Ḥāshwiyah (whom he aligned with the Murji'ah, i.e. proto-Sunnis), subjecting it to devastating ridicule. Shahrastānī's remarks:⁹²

...among the Ḥāshwiyah are those who are inclined to a type of incarnationism [*ḥulūʾ*] in asserting that God may appear in the physical form of a human person, just as the angel Gabriel was known to do in the presence of the Prophet, and as He appeared so to Mary. The anthropomorphist Ḥāshwiyah like Mudḥar, Qahmas and al-Hujaymi⁹³ assert HE is a body [*jism*] not like other bodies of flesh and blood... HE possesses limbs and organs, and it is possible for HIM to touch, shake hands with, and embrace the sincerely pious who visit HIM and whom HE visits in this world.

These three Sunni>Traditionalists are extremely obscure, probably because their memory was suppressed out of embarrassment over their ludicrous ideas. Mu'tazilite critics frequently complained about the plethora of such baseless traditions purveyed by exoteric literalists being “completely baseless falsehoods [*abāṭil la-asla la-ha*].”⁹⁴ In fact, these type of naïve traditions proved to be a severe embarrassment for many later Sunni> scholar-authorities, not least leading thinkers among Ḥanbalis themselves who were forced to clarify their attitude towards and evaluation of

⁹¹ Shahrastānī, *Milal*, pp. 105–107, in the course of discussing the Mushabbihah he treats *jama'ah min ashḥābi l-ḥadīthi l-ḥāshwiyah*. Further, consult detailed notes by the editor of Fadl's *Idḥḥ* on p. 15–27.

⁹² *Milal* I, pp. 105, 107–108; also cited by Halkin, *op. cit.* p. 14. There was also a widespread notion that God descends on certain nights to the lower heavens to forgive and grant requests (see *Q Baqarah* 2:210); & Halkin *op. cit.* p. 15 n. 20.

⁹³ For the scanty information preserved about them: the Baṣṣan Ahmad b. 'Aṭḥ al-Hujaymi—*Jami'* I §173, & Dhahabi, *Mizan al-I'tidaʾ* I, p. 468; Mudḥar b. Ghassan al-Azdi al-Namari—*Jami'* III §4356; the Baṣṣan Qadari>tradent Abu>'Uthman Kahmas b. al-Minhak al-Sadusi>al-Lu'lu'i—*Jami'* II §3680, & Bukhari, *al-Ta'rikh al-Kabir* VII, p. 1029, Bukhari, *al-Di'afa' al-Shghir*, p. 307, & Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib* VII §817. Also mentioned by Shahrastānī is Dawūd al-Jawaribi> a Shi'ite pupil of the 2nd century Imami>theologian Hisham b. Salim al-Jawaliqi> also named by al-Baghdadi> and al-Khayyat> (*Intishar*, p. 56); c.f. Halkin, *op. cit.* p. 14 n.14.

⁹⁴ Mankdim, *Ta'liq Sharh al-Ushul*, p. 574. The term *batil* (pl. *abāṭil*), is a technical term in Ḥadīth sciences for an improperly or falsely ascribed chain-of-transmission of a tradition narrative.

radical Traditionalists.⁹⁵ The ongoing debate and discussion over this and related issues over the centuries confirms that an intransigent core of Ḥaṣḥwīyah maintained a continuous presence among Sunni>Traditionalists down to the modern period—conservative Ḥanbalites as well as certain later Malīkites and Shafī‘ites.

An erudite Shafī‘ite authority, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytami>(d. 974/1567) treated the question “Is GOD in heaven?” in his *fatwa*>sketching out normative boundaries of Muslim doctrine regarding issues of physicality and “above.ness [*fawqīyyah*]”.⁹⁶ He unequivocally affirms that the normative mainstream of Muslims agree by consensus on the impossibility of corporeal existence for God, something also affirmed by reason, and they all agree on the impossibility of construing Qur’ānic verses and prophetic traditions in their external literal sense. Phrases such as “*GOD is above His Throne*” signify the locus of divine essence, not a physical direction; and “*HE is in every place*” signify divine omniscience and omnipotence, not any presence here among HIS creatures. While the theologians, legal theorists [*ushūlīs*] and wise scholars purify God from all temporal created realities [*tanzīh*] and thus agree on the impossibility of the notions “above.ness” and “direction” regarding the transcendent Divinity—nevertheless many Muslims conformed to the attitude of some early *salaf* by adhering to the literal external meanings of verses and traditions. In the opinion of the great 6th/12th century Malīkite authority al-Qaḍī>‘Iyāḍ(d. 544/1149), these literalists constituted the mass of jurists and Traditionalists as well as certain of the Ash‘arite theologians; while Haytami>writing in the 10th/16th century specifies the Ḥaṣḥwīyah as well as certain Malīki>jurists.⁹⁷ Now the question arises: are those who uphold reprehensible beliefs of the anthropomorphists [*mushabbihah*] or the *mujassimah* (who give God a corporeal body) to be charged with un-faith [*takfīr*]? Here, Haytami>

⁹⁵ See, for example, the reasoned defence of Sunni>traditionalism given by the conservative Malīki>traditionalist-*faqīh* Yusuf b. ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1070), *Jamī‘ Bayaṇ al-‘Ilm*, pp. 109–120, 190–200; the Ḥanbali>savant ‘Alī>Ibn ‘Aqīl (d. 513/1119) in his unique *al-Funūn*, critiques the mentality and approach of many ordinary Ḥanbalīs with their propensity to uphold *tashbīh*—see citations about *taqlīd* in *Zahr al-Ghushūn*, pp. 88–96, and on their over-preoccupation with austerities at the expense of understanding, in Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Manāqib*, p. 505; the Ḥanbali>Ibn al-Jawzī>(d. 597) reviewed the errors of *ashḥab al-ḥadīth* in his *Talbīs Iblīs*, p. 112–116; as well as the erudite Ḥanbali>‘Abd al-Raḥmān Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Rajab (d. 795), *Jamī‘ al-‘Ulūm wa l-Ḥikam* p. 38.

⁹⁶ Haytami>*Fatawā*p. 151–156 §66. Of course, this and the following topic could be far more abundantly documented by reference to the rich literature of *kalam* and *ushūl al-fiqh*; Haytami>relies in particular on the Ash‘arite theologian and Shafī‘ite jurist Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī>(d. 478/1085).

⁹⁷ *ibid*, p. 152. This difference may reflect shifts over four intervening centuries, or more likely the varying perspectives of the Western Malīkite school in contrast to Egyptian and Makkān Shafī‘ites.

points out differing positions among mainstream Sunni>authorities, with one wing holding they should be included within the wider body of the Muslim community and treated like other errant innovators or sectaries (*ahl al-ahwa'*) since there is a lack of consensus upon the validity of *takfir* in their case (e.g. in the opinion of the Andalusian Maḥiki>magistrate Ibn Rushd d. 520/1126). Others insisted a definite consensus has been established that upholding God's "above.ness" or "direction" constitutes un-faith, and therefore *takfir* is valid but only for those who actively espouse this leading others into error, whereas those merely entertaining such wrong beliefs are guilty only of reprehensible·innovation.

In another *fatwa*>treating the validity of belief in physical eyewitnessing of God in this world [*ru'yat Allah fi-l-dunya*], Ibn Hajar al-Haytami>states that normative Sunnis do maintain this is possible in accordance with reason and on the basis of revealed data.⁹⁸ However, because the relevant rational [*'aqli*>] proofs are unreliable, only transmitted [*naqli*>] evidence is relevant. True: Muḥammad may have experienced a physical eyewitnessing during his ascension—but no one here in this world may legitimately make this same claim, which amounts to definite un-faith [*kufri*] for it implies a corporeal body for God.⁹⁹ Haytami>reviews differing views and shades of meaning with respect to Muslims who apprehend Qur'anic verses and Prophetic Ḥadīths in an explicitly literal sense—since in his view, the pious·forebears did not commit this error. Again, the question of charging them with *kufri* arises: thus the Shafi'ite Traditionalist-jurist of Damascus, al-Nawawi>(d. 676/1277), validated their *takfir* only if they explicitly affirm God possesses "a body like (corporeal) bodies [*jism*^{un} *ka-l-ajsam*]"—otherwise there can be no valid *takfir*. The most widely accepted position was the one advocated by leading Shafi'ites: no charge of absolute *kufri* is valid. Haytami's remarks clearly indicate that charging the

⁹⁸ *Fatawa*> pp. 199–202 §89. C.f. also pp. 286 & 288 for Sunni>discussions whether women enjoy eyewitnessing of God in the Hereafter; and p. 311 for certain Ḥanbali>jurists who upheld the validity of ritual prayer led by a *Jinn*—or even the legality of marriage with a female *jinniyah*.

⁹⁹ Haytami>(ibid, p. 202) cites the Shafi'i>Ash'arite mystic Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri>who maintained there exists unanimous consensus [*ijma*>] upon the position that no eyewitnessing is possible in this world (not even for saints), save only for the Prophet. The fact that Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'ari>was reported by some to have accepted the possibility of such an eyewitnessing, leads Haytami>into a technical digression over the validity of such presumed *ijma*>. He concludes: "even if this consensus is not adequately established to the satisfaction of all, nevertheless such a doctrine is of the utmost 'anomalous·deviancy [*shudhuḍh*]' and must be rejected since no one may interpret the Qur'aṇ so literally—nor does this claimed lack-of-consensus prevent legitimate *takfir* of those asserting such crass physical eyewitnessing."

Hāshwiyah with un-belief for their extreme literalism leading them into doctrinal errors, was favoured by a number of reputable Sunni>authorities at different times and places. Bear in mind that the Hāshwiyah had long been in the habit of charging with *takfir* the mainstream Sunni>schools of theologians and legal theorists from the mid 3rd/9th century onward.¹⁰⁰ The mind-set of exoteric literalists insisted solely upon primacy of sacred texts, and they viewed legal theory [*ushūl al-fiqh*] and rationalist theology as reprehensible innovations, not to speak of those disciplines permeated with philosophical concerns, or metaphysics, or psycho-spirituality.

Hanbalite Activism. The consolidation and continued presence of the Hāshwiyah as a definite trend within Sunni>Traditionalism was bound up with the rise to prominence of the Hānbali>juristic school in Baghdad at the centre of the empire.¹⁰¹ The swelling wave of Traditionalism fuelling the consolidation of Sunni>“orthodoxy”, matched by the evolution of rationalist schools moderating unfettered reason by embracing the Prophetic Sunnah mediated in Hādīth, facilitated the emergence of Hānbalism forging close ties to the ‘Abbasid state until the demise of the Caliphate in 656/1258. Under the Buḡid and Saljuq kings who rose to effective power during the 4th–6th/10th–12th centuries, while propping up the emasculated ‘Abbasid Caliph, Hānbali>religious scholars became populist activists and directly involved in the internal politics of Baghdad. With the Caliph increasingly relying on the popular support of this staunch Sunni>party in order to counterbalance competing forces in league with ruling power-holders and provincial *amīrs*, Hānbalism achieved its apogee of political influence and social presence. They upheld the weakened Caliphate becoming the chief pillar of its popular support acting as a political party or faction. The Hānbalite party took “forbidding the wrong” against sin, crime and innovative heresy to an extreme—but not against the state which now gave official support to their creed. These later patterns of Hānbalite activism marked by aggressive street populism and power-seeking symbiosis with the state

¹⁰⁰ See al-Haytami’s spirited defense in *Fatawa* pp. 152–3, 156–9, 271–3 of Ash‘arites and *ushūls* from the charge of *kufir* levelled at them by radical Hānbalites, and his castigating Tāqī>l-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) and his pupil Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350) for *tashbīh*, e.g. God has the same measure as the Throne, and for perverse ignorance regarding the metaphoric and symbolic significances of revealed texts. Haytami>laments (p. 373): “There is nobody more ignorant than a Hādīth expert [*shāhīb hādīth*] who fails to understand his *hādīth*!”

¹⁰¹ See in general Hurvitz, *Formation of Hānbalism*; Melchert, *Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law*; as well as Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 114–144 on “Hānbalites of Baghdad”.

represent a definite rupture from the heritage of Ibn Ḥanbal. The public alignment of the Caliphate with Traditionalist doctrine was most prominent under the reigns of the caliphs al-Qaḍir (rg. 381–422/991–1031) and then al-Qaʿim (rg. 422–467/1031–1075).

During the later 4th/10th century, a major confrontation took place between the ʿAbbasid Caliphate and the Buyid warlords who had assumed effective power in the central Islamic lands. The Buyid dynasty of rulers (334–447/945–1055) were of Daylami>origin (south of the Caspian Sea) but claimed ʿAlid descent; politically and doctrinally they were Twelver Shiʿah. Their pro-Shiʿah attitude encouraged Zaydi>Shiʿite as well as Muʿtazili>intellectual trends.¹⁰² The conflict unfolded around the extremely divisive issue of the Shiʿah’s habit of abusing the Companions [*sabb al-ṣaḥābah*] now encouraged as a semi-official policy by the Buyid *amirs*, which in turn provoked a strong Sunni>revival led by Ḥanbali>circles and was then championed by the ʿAbbasid caliph Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Qaḍir bi-llah (rg. 381–422/991–1031).

Al-Qaḍir actively intervened against the public influence of the Imami>Shiʿah and blocked the universal application of Jaʿfari>Shiʿite law by banning the appointment of a prominent ʿAlid to the office of chief *qāḍī* in the capital Baghdad. In 402/1011 he issued an anti-Ismaʿili>manifesto aimed against the rival Fatimid Ismaʿili>Shiʿite dynasty with its capital in Cairo, in which he also forbade the teaching of Muʿtazili>and Shiʿi>doctrines. Then in 409/1018, al-Qaḍir proclaimed a renewed Sunni>creedal doctrine inspired by Ḥanbali>ideas in his official rescript *al-risālah al-qāḍiriyyah* which condemned all forms of Shiʿism and Muʿtazilism as well as the newly emergent Sunni>Ashʿarite theology. This proclamation urged the veneration of the Companions as obligatory, expressly forbade vilifying of the Companions, and promoted the merits [*faḍḥ*] of the first Four Rashidun Caliphs in the now accepted chronological order of precedence upheld by Sunni>Islam.¹⁰³ al-Qaḍir’s appeal to the Traditionalist loyalties of the populace verged on attempting to

¹⁰² Cl. Cahen, “Buyyids” *E.I.*² I, pp. 1350a–1357a; & D. Sourdel, “al-Qaḍir Bi’llah” *E.I.*² IV, pp. 378a–379a. Zaydi>thinkers were frequently Muʿtazilite in theological orientation and politically militant, upholding the principle of forcefully “Commanding Right” by a just ruler from the Prophet’s Family. They established local Zaydi>states, at first in the area south of the Caspian Sea, and then in Yaman. The last Zaydi>imam of Yaman was overthrown by a socialist revolt in 1962.

¹⁰³ Text of *al-risālah al-qāḍiriyyah* in Ibn al-Jawzi> *al-Muntazḥm* VIII, pp. 109–111; transl. by G. Makdisi, *Ibn ʿAqīl et la resurgence de l’islam traditionniste*, pp. 303–308. On the troubled events marking the Ḥanbali>inspired popular movement against the Shiʿah in the capital during al-Qaḍir’s reign, see further Makdisi, pp. 209–303, 310–327.

establish the power of the Caliphate on a popular base. The Inquisition initiated by Caliph Ma'mun almost two centuries previously had now been totally reversed. Again in 420/1029, he issued a formal declaration affirming the superiority of the four Rashidun Caliphs. His authoritative enunciation of Sunni creed had a definitive impact in the central Islamic lands for centuries, cementing into place the traditional Sunni abhorrence of doctrinal innovation. The two main Sunni theological schools with rationalist orientation, Ash'ariyah and Maturidiyah, had to struggle to gain acceptance.

During al-Qadir's era, there appeared a virulent manifestation of Hanbalite presence in the form of unruly public crowds enforcing doctrinal correctness prompted by a fierce animosity towards opposing or rival religious and intellectual movements—whether the Imami Shi'ah with its Ja'fari legal school, or the Shafi'ite legal school (and later against the Ash'arite theological school), as well as libertines and heretics.¹⁰⁴ Traditionalists had become more numerous with lower-class adherents, thereby more populist and inclined to violence. W. Madelung portrays early manifestations of this new vocation of Hanbalism as “a militant movement attempting to rule the streets”.¹⁰⁵ By the early 4th/10th century, Hanbalite violence was rampant in the streets of Baghdad, with a penchant for fanatic fury unleashed against hated ‘innovators’, above all the despised Shi'ah whose doctrines always challenged the very identity and self-image of Sunnism. In the first-quarter of the 4th century H, Hanbalite crowds led by the popular preacher demagogue Barbahari (d. 329/941), repeatedly disturbed public order to the extent that the Caliph threatened them with severe measures unless they desisted: “...they plundered shops, raided the homes of military leaders and others to search for liquor, singing-girls or musical instruments, challenged men and women seen walking together in public, and fomented ugly assaults on Shafi'ites.”¹⁰⁶ In this period, Baghdad witnessed a series of bloody clashes between its Sunni and Shi'ite inhabitants, with assaults by vigilante groups resulting

¹⁰⁴ H. Laoust, “Le hanbalisme sous le califat de Bagdad”; S. Sabari, *Mouvements populaires à Bagdad à l'époque 'abbaside*, pp. 101–120. The Ash'arite doctrinal school grew to prominence in Khurasan and Baghdad after the mid 5th/11th century under the patronage of the Saljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk (d. 485/1092).

¹⁰⁵ Madelung, “The vigilante movement of Sahl b. Salama al-Khurasani”, & sources cited in preceding note. The Damascene Hanbali al-Khiraqi (d. 334 H) who produced one of the earliest manuals of Hanbalite *fiqh*, was beaten to death in the pursuit of “forbidding wrong”.

¹⁰⁶ Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 117.

in extensive fighting between city quarters (e.g. the Shi'ite district of Karkh) and intervention by caliphal military forces to restore order. Libraries and neighborhoods were burned to the ground in a rabble rousing zeal for true doctrine and guarding the *Sunnah* of Muḥammad.¹⁰⁷

These hostilities against innovations and heresy were prolonged well into the 7th/13th century, and had repercussions in other major provinces of the empire. The animosity between Ḥanbalites spearheaded by their hard-line Ḥaṣhwiyah faction, and the Shafi'ite and later Ash'arite schools "upstaged, but did not end, the older Ḥanbalite conflict with Mu'tazilism".¹⁰⁸ Ḥanbalite dominance underwent a partial eclipse under the Saljuq Sultāns who favoured the Ḥanafite rite, and whose viziers promoted the Shafi'ite school through their system of privately endowed Nizāmiyah *madrasahs* beginning in 459/1067. This Shafi'ite trend was strengthened during the caliphates of al-Muqtadi, al-Mustazhir and al-Mustarshid from 467–512/1075–1118, when official state patronage shifted in favour of the Shafi'ite legal-*usuli*-school and Ash'arite theology became accepted as normative Sunni-creed. But this suffered a reverse under Caliph al-Muqtafi (rg. 530–555/1136–1160) who resumed state support of the Ḥanbali-school through his chief minister 'Awn al-Dīn Ibn Hubayrah (served 544–560/1149–1164), who was also a major Ḥanbalite scholar. Favoured by state patronage, Ḥanbalism had gained increasing control over the *madrasah* educational system by the early 6th/12th century. Caliphal support continued from 555–575/1160–1180 under al-Mustanjid and al-Mustadlī; while the more independent Caliph al-Nasir (rg. 575–622/1180–1226) maintained the promotion of Ḥanbalite anthropomorphist doctrine and upheld the prohibition of rationalist theological and philosophical disciplines. With the increased power enjoyed by the Ḥanbalite community in Baghdad, and the fear and favour such power elicited from non-Ḥanbalite rulers, the pressure to adapt to their surrounding mainstream Sunni-milieu increased and mainstream Ḥanbalism found it expedient to make concessions bringing itself into line with other Sunni-schools. After the Mongol conquests during

¹⁰⁷ Sabari, *Mouvements populaires*, p. 106–112. Among them was the renowned library [*dar al-ilm*] in the Karkh quarter endowed by Sabur b. Ardashir (vizier of the Buyid *Amir* Baha' al-Dawlah) reputed to house many precious early writings, burned by the mob in 451/1059. The leading Imami scholar Abu-Ja'far al-Tusi (d. 460/1067) fled Baghdad south to the security of the town of Hilla, establishing there an important Twelver Shi'ite legal-theological centre influential for centuries.

¹⁰⁸ Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 120.

the era of the *Ikhkhān* rulers (654–736/1256–1335) the centre-of-gravity for *Hānbalite* scholarly activity now shifted west to Syria.

Reconciliation with Reason. The evolution of *Hānbalism* during the 5th/11th century and beyond evidences a countervailing trend distancing itself from its hardcore *Hāshwiyah* wing. This new orientation saw the appearance of literary genres and topics not previously entertained among earlier *Hānbalites* due to their entrenched Traditionalist bias. The notable *Hānbalī*-authority Qaḍī>Abu>Ya‘la>ibn al-Farra’ (d. 458/1066) and the austere mystically oriented ‘Abd al-Qaḍir al-Jilī>(d. 561/1166, eponym of the Qaḍiriyah Sufi Order) evolved a more-or-less systematic form of theology for the “fundamentals of faith [*uṣūl al-dīn*]” which drew upon *Hānafite* and Mu‘tazilite components. This represented “a *Hānbalite* reception of a Mu‘tazilite framework into which specific *Hānbalite* doctrines are inserted when their Mu‘tazilite equivalents are deemed unacceptable”.¹⁰⁹ The notorious case of the distinguished 5th/11th century *Hānbalite* savant ‘Ali>Ibn ‘Aqīl (d. 513/1119) is instructive, being charged with un-faith [*takfīr*] by his fellow *Hānbalites* of Baghdad who forced him to publically recant the rationalist Mu‘tazilī-inspired notions he entertained; out of solidarity with his school he endured this humiliation after remaining in hiding for five years (from 460–465/1068–1072), and even repeated his retraction before the Caliph al-Qa‘im. Yet it was the same *Hānbalite* Ibn ‘Aqīl who disputed with a *Hānafite* scholar over whether the gate of *ijtihād* was closed by insisting that *mujtahids* must exist at all times, which became the standard *Hānbalite* position.¹¹⁰ “Inferential reasoning [*qiyās*]” and “individual reasoning exertion [*ijtihād*]” had now become part of the legitimate repertoire of juristic method among *Hānbalites*, and in later centuries, *Hānbalī*-jurists contributed to its further theoretical elaboration.

The most conspicuous exponent of this new orientation was the leading *Hānbalite* of Baghdad ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn al-Jawzī>(d. 597/1201), who was open to ideas from a variety of sources (including the Shāfi‘ī>Ash‘arite al-Ghazālī), and produced a systematic theology in his *Minhaj al-Wuṣūl ila’ ʿIlm al-Uṣūl*. Ibn al-Jawzī>was a

¹⁰⁹ See the treatment by Cook, *Commanding Right*, pp. 129–138, pointing to Abu>Ya‘la’s *al-Mu’tamid fi-Uṣūl al-Dīn* & Jilī’s *al-Ghunya>li-Tālibī>Tāriq al-Haqq*; these thinkers and others such as ‘Ali>b. ‘UbaydAllāh Ibn al-Zaghūnī>(d. 527/1132) exhibit “a style of intellectual activity quite unlike that of Ibn Hānbal” (p. 138).

¹¹⁰ Hallaq, “Was the Gate of *Ijtihad* Closed?”, pp. 22–26—the dispute was over the ‘gate of judgeship’.

central figure in the development of Ḥanbalism away from its conservative Traditionalist base, working hard to bring his fellow Ḥanbalites into alignment with the broad mainstream of normative Sunnism by rectifying their Traditionalist theology from obscurantist dogmas no longer adequate for the dominant Sunni world-view and epistemology. He indulged in bitter debates and vigorous literary polemics with old-fashioned unreconstructed Traditionalists within his own school, vociferously castigating them for their unmitigated ignorance [*jama'ah min al-juhha*] and “group-think” mentality [*ashbiyyah*], and for their “absolutely disgusting and repugnant” attitude through obstinate adherence to the literal apparent meaning of Verses of Attributes and Ḥadīth.¹¹¹ Ibn al-Jawzi insisted on appropriate use of reason in conjunction with transmitted knowledge to arrive at proper comprehension of Ḥadīth.¹¹²

Does not reason, in this matter, act right in removing it from the literal sense... Should one ask: “What do you with the ḥadīth?” Reason replies: “The ḥadīth strikes a similitude by setting up an image so that the concept may be learnt by means of that sensory image.”

Ibn al-Jawzi weighed in on two of the most acute points of friction which Sunni opponents of the Ḥanbalites frequently derided them for: that Ḥanbalites are anthropomorphists [*mushabbihah*], and their traditional partiality for the Umayyads. Regarding this charge of anthropomorphism, Ibn ‘Aqīl had already rejected this outright, and Ibn al-Jawzi wrote *Repelling the Specious-Charge of Anthropomorphism* [*Daf’ Shubah al-Tashbih*] treating at length 60 controversial Ḥadīth where he severely criticized major Ḥanbalites of the past (including Abu-Ya‘la ibn al-Farra’ and Ibn al-Zaghūnī) for having laid themselves open to this calumny. He cited the Baghdadi Ḥanbalite Ḥasan ibn Ḥamid (d. 403/1012), who had opined that GOD indeed has a face although one may not affirm that HE has a head.¹¹³ This work is not so much against anthropomorphism as it is a convoluted defense of Ḥanbalism that it ever

¹¹¹ See Cook, *Commanding Right*, pp. 139–143; & Ḥamid ‘Ali’s trans. *Attributes of God*, p. 44.

¹¹² From Ibn al-Jawzi, *Shaydal-Khatir*, trans. G.F. Haddad in Ḥamid ‘Ali’s *Attributes of God*, p. 31.

¹¹³ Ibn al-Jawzi, *Daf’ Shubah al-Tashbih*, p. 31, trans. Ḥamid ‘Ali, *Attributes*, p. 42; see Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 142 n. 198. Ash‘arites had already written polemics against the ignorance of literalist anthropomorphists, such as the work by ‘Ali-b. Abu-l-Qasim Muḥammad al-Tamīmī, *Tanzih al-Ilah wa Kashf Fadā’ih al-Mushabbihah al-Hāshwiyah*; see Halkin, *op. cit.* p. 25 n. 34.

really upheld such an errant belief, forcing Ibn al-Jawzi to castigate Hānbalite masters for having clumsily given the wrong impression that *tashbīḥ* could ever be deemed sound doctrine. In a related work, *Kitāb Akhbār al-Sīfāt* treating Ḥadīth about divine attributes he amplified his frontal attack;¹¹⁴ such a forceful offence aroused strong opposition among Hānbalī-opponents who orchestrated Ibn al-Jawzi's arrest and exile to Wasit (lower Iraq) from 590–595/1194–1199 in his elder years.¹¹⁵

As for the problem of bias toward Umayyad rulers, it centred on the awkward fact that prominent Traditionalist Hānbalites were well-known as staunch defenders of the Caliph Yazīd b. Mu'awiyah (rg. 60–64/680–683), and rejected the claim that Ibn Hānbal had permitted cursing him.¹¹⁶ Yazīd was notorious in Muslim history for his responsibility in the slaying at Karbalā' of Muḥammad's grandson al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī; for his sacking of Madīnah in the battle of the Ḥarraḥ in 63/683 and subsequent burning of the Ka'bah in Makkah; not to mention his fondness for wine, slave-girls, and his pet monkey dressed in satin kept on a chain beside his throne. The portrayal of Umayyad rulers as “rightful successors [*khulafā'*]” to Prophetic authority was a legacy from archaic proto-Sunni ideology cemented into place by the Umayyads by whip and sword,¹¹⁷ along with their public cursing from the pulpits of 'Alī and members of the Prophet's Household. Hānbalite Traditionalist persistence in validating this legacy clashed with “the philo-'Alid sentiments widespread in mainstream Sunnism”.¹¹⁸ Ibn al-Jawzi rejected and repudiated Yazīd for his behavior.

V. Later Hānbalism

¹¹⁴ See Merlin Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzi's Kitāb Akhbār al-Sīfāt*.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 21–26, 38–45.

¹¹⁶ For Sunni views on cursing Yazīd, see G. F. Haddad p. 25–27, in Ḥamid 'Alī's trans. *Attributes of God*.

¹¹⁷ Ibn al-Jawzi aligned the suffering endured by Ibn Hānbal under the Inquisition with whippings and imprisonments of leading '*ulama'* ruthlessly meted out by Umayyad Caliphs and governors when enforcing their official ideology, viewing this theology-of-suffering as their mark of grace and naming over 15 famous individuals along with their punishments; see *Manāqib*, p. 341–343. However, the virtue of speaking out in the presence of an unjust ruler or tyrant, thereby risking death (an action supported by a well-known Prophetic tradition), was strongly discouraged by Ibn Hānbal himself; Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 101–102.

¹¹⁸ Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 142; Halkin, *op. cit.* p. 6–7. Veneration of the Prophet's Household was commonplace among Sunnis already, by the early 3rd/9th century, while love for Muḥammad's descendants (approved shī'ism [*al-tashayyu' al-ḥasan*]) was particularly cultivated among Shafī'ites.

Till the end of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate, Baghdad remained the centre of Ḥanbalite activity until the Mongols sacked the city in 656/1258. Beginning under the Ayyubids (570–658/1174–1260), the Ḥanbalites established themselves in Damascus, where their legal and theological thought imbibed an entirely different atmosphere; as in that era, it was a predominantly Shafī‘ite city.¹¹⁹ During the 1st century of rule by the Mamluks (658–922/1260–1516), their fortunes improved by virtue of the neutral policy adopted towards the four surviving Sunni-law schools by the Mamluk *amirs*, with Ḥanbalites enjoying salaried appointments in educational institutions from the mid 7th/13th century onward. However, the Ḥanbalites in greater Syria were not closely associated with the state, yet enjoyed a certain solidarity with political authorities, and were more noted for their poverty and lack of office rather than zealous rabble-rousing street-power. The famous Ḥanbalite scholar and avid polemicist Taqī-Ḍ-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) exhibited an abrasive personality averse to compromise, yet was popular among the Damascene public while his career included a long series of confrontations with the authorities involving official investigations and imprisonments. Nevertheless, it is fair to state that his public life displayed “a structural disposition to cooperate with the state...that is the keynote of his political thought”.¹²⁰

Ibn Taymiyyah is much discussed today by observers of Jihadists on account of his restrictive understanding of “combative struggle [*jihād*]”, since he taught that Islam was spread by the sword against non-Muslims, that *jihād* was never viewed as merely defensive warfare but refers solely to obligatory fighting [*qitā’*], and that the “Fighting Verses” of the Qur’aṇ (Q 9:5 and 2:216) indeed abrogated all other verses concerning peaceful relations with non-Muslims. (All these points were controversial and violate the normative consensus of Sunnism.)¹²¹ An Egyptian engineer Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Salām Faraj, founder and “*amir*” in 1979 of a small political commune in Cairo named “Islamic Jihād” that united three militant groups into one by the early 1980s called “The Jihād Organization [*Tanzīm al-Jihād*]” produced a manifesto for militant Islamists entitled *The Absent Duty* [*al-Farīḍah al-Gha’ibah*]. In his booklet ‘Abd al-Salām Faraj recycled Sayyid Qutb’s claim that certain Muslims could be declared *kāfirun*—

¹¹⁹ Laoust, “Le hanbalisme sous le califat de Bagdad”, p. 121–125; Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 145–164.

¹²⁰ *ibid.* p. 150.

¹²¹ See the overview in our monograph *Jihad: Peaceful Striving & Combative Struggle*.

including those rulers who abuse Islam for political legitimacy (the doctrine of *takfir*). Faraj inflated this to assert the status of unjust rulers as equivalent to apostates deserving death, and urged immediate internal *jihad* against the Egyptian government as an “individual obligation” upon all Muslims capable of fighting. The goal was to establish an Islamic regime by violent means. Faraj argued (invoking Ibn Taymiyyah) that Islam was indeed spread by the sword against non-Muslims, that *jihad* was never viewed as merely defensive warfare, but refers to fighting [*qita*] which is obligatory, and that the Fighting Verses abrogated all other verses inculcating peaceable conduct. It was his Jihad Organization which assassinated Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat on 6 October 1981. More importantly, Ibn Taymiyyah’s writings have enjoyed a revival in popularity and influence in recent decades because of their growing centrality for the Wahhabi branch of Hanbalite Traditionalism in Najd with its ubiquitous imprint now found in many Muslim societies; although Wahhabite Hanbalism began really amplifying and promoting ideas adapted from Ibn Taymiyyah during the 19th century.

However, our mentioning Ibn Taymiyyah is due to his pugnacious and vituperative attacks on a variety of rationalist disciplines cultivated by Muslims, in particular his zeal to combat what he saw to be an insidious conspiracy against the true Islam of the *salaf* (first Jewish and Magian, now Greek and Shi’ite esotericist [*batini*]) which he equated with Shi’i deviations, Sufi theosophic teachings, and Hellenizing philosophy: different faces of the same despised enemy. The old animosity of Traditionalist Hanbalism against the Mu’tazilah and then the Ash’ariyah was also thrown into his spiteful mix, fanning the flames of controversy and flinging accusations of un-faith. His aggressively strident polemics displayed the zeal of narrow Traditionalism with its abhorrence for all unattested innovatory interpretations not ascribed to the *salaf*. The reality was that his iconoclastic ideas made minimal impact upon his own school outside of a few disciples, notably Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350) and the jurist Shams al-Din b. Muflih (d. 763/1361).

In sharp contrast, Ibn Taymiyyah’s contemporary Damascene Hanbalite jurist Najm al-Din al-Tufi (d. 716/1316) favoured Ash’arite theology and love of the Prophet’s Family [*tashayyu’ h*], and was publicly reprimanded and imprisoned for these views. Tufi made a novel contribution by elaborating the notion of “public

interest [*maṣlaḥḥ*]” in legal theory, arguing for the supremacy of public good and public interest among the sources of law on the basis of the solitary Prophetic tradition “*Do not inflict injury or repay one injury with another*”. Tūfi’s understanding was that “public interest” overrides Consensus as well as the two other primary sources of law, Qur’aṇ and Sunnah, in keeping with the Shari’ah’s primary goal of aversion of harm when promoting the general wellbeing of the community. His idea was ignored until the 20th century when *maṣlaḥḥ* was retrieved as a pivot around which legal reform may revolve.¹²²

While parts of Ibn Taymiyyah’s thinking was radically innovative, it had little real relevance for the later Ḥanbalite community in Damascus and Palestine. Although Syrian Ḥanbalism continued to harbour a die-hard Ḥaṣhiwī wing, its centre-of-gravity had shifted irrevocably in the direction of the Sunni-mainstream. It remained a minority school in Damascus, Jerusalem and Cairo and little changed under the rule of Ottoman sultans (922–1337/1516–1918). At the turn of the 19th/20th century late Ottoman Syria experienced conflicting currents arising out of reactions to the Ottoman Reform movement. This period saw the rise of Arabism, as well as a significant group of *salafī*-reformist ‘*ulama*’ led by thinkers such as Jama’ al-Dīn al-Qaṣīmī (who did draw upon ideas of Ibn Taymiyyah), and several Ḥanbalite scholars were associated with his movement.

Wahhabism. Ḥanbalism was already established in Najd (eastern-central Arabia) by the 9th/15th century amidst a tribal society whose individuals owed much more to Bedouin folk customs than to the Islam practised in urban centres. Arab tribal desert life had changed little since the days of the Prophet, and in certain respects resembled the ancient pre-Islamic past.¹²³ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (b. 1703 C.E.– d. 1206/1792), the local Ḥanbalite scholar of the small Najdī oasis of Ḥuraymila’, viewed the religious and social practices of the nominal Muslims in his environment as akin to polytheism and thus an appropriate target to combat by *jihād*. His intellectual formation was fairly inclusive in terms of the normative middle-

¹²² Hallaq, *History of Islamic Legal Theories*, p. 150–153.

¹²³ Consult the detailed study of 20th century tribal life by Jibrail S. Jabbur, *The Bedouins and the Desert: Aspects of Nomadic Life in the Arab East*, trans. Lawrence Conrad (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995); and the unique early 20th century travel-geographic writings of the truly great Czech explorer Alois Musil who was made blood-brother to the Chief of the Shammār.

ground of Ḥanbalism, and many of his views reflect his role as a zealous religious reformer “the essence of which was to pit against polytheism a political dominance created by military force”.¹²⁴ In 1158/1745, he concluded a religio-political alliance with Muḥammad b. Sa‘ūd (d. 1179/1765), chief of the larger Najd-oasis al-Dir‘iyah. From this pact arose the militant Wahhabīyah movement in symbiosis with a succession of nascent Sa‘ūdī-states unfolding over the course of the following two centuries. (The label *Wahhabī* is a designation by outsiders, for they denominate themselves as “true-monotheists [*muwahhīdun*]” and conceive of their Islam as total conformity with the Qur’aṇ, Sunnah and doctrines of the *Salaf*.) “Ḥanbalism was now cast in the unfamiliar role of a doctrine of state-formation in a near-stateless tribal society, and in this role it functioned as the political ideology of three successive Sa‘ūdī-states.”¹²⁵ David Commins observes: “It is common for writers on Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab to assert that he sought a social renewal of Arabia, but that characterization is never given specific substance, unless one considers ritual correctness and moral purity to constitute such renewal.”¹²⁶ The main vices which early Wahhabī-zealots sought to stamp out were absence from prayer, tobacco smoking and music.

The essence of the early Wahhabī-movement lay in fighting polytheism and laxity in religious observance through achieving political dominance by military force, conceived as a *jihad*. In the most critical phase of its history, the modern Sa‘ūdī-state was realized by the skill and energy of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Sa‘ūd (rg. 1319–1373/1902–1952) who conquered the Ḥijāz (central west Arabia, where the cities of Makkah and al-Madīnah are situated) in 1343–4/1924–5 and secured the foundations of the present Sa‘udi Kingdom. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (the descendant of

¹²⁴ Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 174. See the summary of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s theological and legal work by N. J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, pp. 41–121. She asserts that he was not particularly indebted to the precedents or to extreme views espoused by Ibn Taymiyyah nor his pupil Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah; pp. 108–109, 247–256. Delong-Bas’ book is subtly apologetic in approach, aiming to remove any stigma of the excesses of 20th century Wahhabism from its founder; her research was funded by the King Abdul al-Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives. For an explicitly apologetic view, see J.-D. Zarabozo, *The Life, Teachings and Influence of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhab*, with sections on his “opponents and criticisms” & “recent English literature” on Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, pp. 192–264, 268–308.

¹²⁵ Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 166, and see p. 165–192 for what follows; & Cook, “On the origins of Wahhabism”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, series 3/2 (1992).

¹²⁶ Cited from his remarks “Difference between Wahhabis and Muslim Brothers”, posted online at Joshua Landis’ website *SyriaComment* for 8 May 2007. Commins has published an acclaimed study, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (I. B. Tauris, 2006) which I have not yet seen.

Muḥammad b. Sa‘ūd) preserved the religio-political alliance with the descendants of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. Today *Aḥ Sa‘ūd* [the Family of Sa‘ūd]¹²⁷ rule as monarchs while *Aḥ al-Shaykh* [the Family of the Sheikh] control and lead the informal guild of religious authorities and officials who enforce the teachings of the Sa‘ūdi-Hanbalite school as interpreted and applied by Wahhabism; the present chief *mufti* heading the religious hierarchy is a fifth-generation descendant: Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz bin ‘Abdullah bin Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Latīf bin ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Wahhāb. The intrepid Englishman H.S. Philby in his travels around the end of the First World War described the descendants of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb as constituting “a recognized state hierarchy with its headquarters at Riyadh”, responsible for training and directing missionaries (*mutḥawwa‘ah*/lit. ‘enforcers’) sent out to instruct the Bedouin.¹²⁸ A contemporary observer, the reputable Arabist professor V. Oliveti remarks of the present-day role of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s descendents:¹²⁹

They are very much married into the Saudi Royal family and are second in prestige only to them in Saudi Arabia. This is a deliberate Saudi tactic, for they use them and their prestige amongst rank and file Wahhabis as a front through which to run the religious establishment. Indeed, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the National *Mufti* and the Head of the *Da‘wa* Organization (and a number of other posts such as Head of Royal Protocol) are all but hereditary in the Aal al-Sheikh Family. They are thus extremely loyal to the Saudis.

These two families provide the leading religious and political leadership of the Saudi Kingdom, while shifting dynamics in their uterine relationship shall probably determine the social and political shape of the Kingdom’s future. Yet this is not a parasitic relationship, since both families in this alliance derive mutual benefits,

¹²⁷ Due to an ignorance of Arabic, many journalists, policy experts or would-be experts frequently confuse the title ‘Family’ [*Aḥ*] with the article ‘the’ [*al-*] prefixed to nouns treated as definite; most ruling Gulf monarchs or emirs are denominated thus after their eponymous ancestor or founder, e.g. *Aḥ Ṣābah* of Kuwait, *Aḥ Maktūm* of Dubai.

¹²⁸ *ibid.* p. 181, citing Philby, *The Heart of Arabia: a record of travel & exploration* (London, 1922) I, p. 97.

¹²⁹ Vincenzo Oliveti, *Terror’s Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and its Consequences*, p. 57 n.1. He further comments (p. 58): “...the Saudi Royal Family has the same nervous relationship with the Wahhabi movement that a civilian government has with a restive military which is nominally under it, but which it fears, and which it cannot control except through placation and funding.”

although anxiety and tensions have certainly increased in the post–September 11th 2001 era with the more visible profile of social and political reformists.

We will not prolong this overview by examining the influence and ideology of the contemporary Sa‘uḍi>religious establishment, but wish to draw attention to the state-friendly character of Wahhābi> Hānbalism and its consequences, a characteristic feature of medieval Baghdadi Hānbalism here transformed in the Arabian environment. Furthermore, there is the current Sa‘uḍi> system of “Committees for Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong [*hay‘at al-amr bi-l-ma‘rūf wa l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*]” which institutionalizes the official duty of moral puritanism through enforcers appointed by the religious establishment to supervise public morality and enforce collective prayers. These committees were first set up in Makkah in 1345/1926—after the Wahhābi>conquest of the Hājjaz from the Ottoman puppet Hashimite *sharīf*, and destruction of the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad in Madinah—although informal efforts by aggressive members of the *Ikhwan* or troops of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn Sa‘uḍ towards the local Makkan population and foreign pilgrims were evidenced before that time.¹³⁰ Then they were rapidly extended to the rest of the Sa‘uḍi>state with greater centralization, and in recent decades display the trend of general bureaucratization of the role of Wahhābi> religious authorities. This institution is partially reminiscent of the intrusive Hānbalite activism of the classical period—with its violation of the well-established traditional Islamic value of privacy rights (to be safeguarded without spying or prying) that placed clear limits on unwarranted interference—yet its formal institutionalization under the Sa‘uḍi> hereditary monarchy has no real precedent in Islam, with the possible exception of the office of *hāṣbah* in various times and places charged with market supervision and safeguarding urban public morals.¹³¹ A string of severe abuses against ordinary citizens perpetrated by members of these committees in recent years, leading in some instances to death or injury, has drawn international attention to this official institution for “Forbidding Wrong” and its encouraging an intrusive mode of overbearing vigilantism. These abuses have also focused the attention of the Sa‘uḍi>

¹³⁰ King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had an uneasy relationship with his own military bands of the *Ikhwan*: “In 1928 they tried to oust even him, but he defeated them at the famous battle of Sabila, and thereupon put to death a number of their more radical leaders who were responsible for wanton murder and sedition”; Oliveti, *Terror’s Source*, p. 58 n. 3.

¹³¹ Consult e.g. Cook, *Commanding Right*, index s.v.

people upon the near-inviolable status of *Aḥ al-Shaykh* (the descendants of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb who lead the religious establishment and head various ministries) in their unique symbiosis with the ruling monarchy.

The attention of security experts and intelligence agencies concerned to uncover sources of funding and recruitment for Jihadists both within and outside of Arabia is now focused on the claimed sinister role and ideology of the Wahhabi religious establishment. The religious hierarchy is well known to oppose any move toward constitutional parliamentary government as un-Islamic, and harbours revulsion toward insidious secular forces seeping into Muslim societies, whether economic, political, cultural and moral.¹³² This is a closed world turned in upon itself and does not welcome scrutiny. Neither do they easily welcome attempts at control or reform from the ruling *Aḥ Sa‘ūd*, who are concerned above all with continuing their hold on power and wealth while navigating the tempests raging about them in their region, as well as averting the threat of Western secularist mores from their conservative Islamic society, in order to preserve the character and stability of the extended family as its bedrock social institution.

In the Kingdom today, government expenditures outstrip revenues augmenting a trend to indebtedness that started in the 1990s, combined with social dislocations brought by rapid modernization and rampant population growth (the majority of the population is under the age of 15); a shrinking middle-class, falling household incomes, decaying infrastructure, and a decline in social services. At the same time since 2003, the Saudi Family has been combating a persistent indigenous jihadist terror current within their Kingdom. The more reactionary intransigent *‘ulama’* maintain a measure of popular support—in the opinion of some they may even outnumber the more progressive establishment religious authorities, but this is uncertain—particularly among under-employed and un-employed youth with few skills marketable in the modern

¹³² Zarabozo comments forcefully: “...the greatest reason for the West’s hatred of ‘Wahhabism’ is that ‘Wahhabism’ is the greatest force keeping the Muslims from reinterpreting their faith—actually losing their faith—to make it completely compatible with the Western way of life, capitalization and globalization. True Muslims who believe in the ultimate and timeless authority of the Quran and Sunnah will forever stand up for their rights. ...they have something to offer the rest of the world: the true teachings of God, as opposed to the nothingness and spiritual emptiness that the materialists have spread.” *Life, Teachings and Influence*, p. 206. Further, examine the topics, mode of discourse, strident polemics and thoroughgoing literal textualism exemplified in websites such as *salafimanhaj.com* maintained by a group of UK Muslims; here one finds all major themes and epistemology associated with Ḥaṣhwi-Ḥanbalism alive and flourishing.

economy. There are recent signs of concern within significant circles of the Saudi Family to meet the increasing voices for reform and liberalization at least halfway, amidst calls from intellectuals and opinion makers to end the privileged relationship it maintains with the conservative clergy and to negotiate a fresh basis for nationalist identity. Several milestones toward this possible path, said to emanate from King ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz himself, were the 2005 elections for municipal councils; the two Conventions for National Dialogue held in June and December 2003 in Makkah and Riyāḍ,} involving prominent intellectuals and clerics from various segments of Saudi society (including women). These Conventions were in response to publicized petitions asking for the public election of the Consultative Council [*Majlis al-Shura*], social justice, civil and religious rights, an end to corruption, an independent and reformed judiciary, the creation of human rights institutions and economic diversity, as well as freedom of speech, assembly and association. They urged an end to discrimination and fanatic sectarianism promoting hatred: especially towards Imāmi>Shi‘ites in Qatīf, al-Hāsa and Madīnah; Ismā‘īlīs in Najrān; as well as Sunni>Malikites and Shaf‘ī‘ites in the western provinces. These appeals were couched in terms of negotiating a more adequate social contract and appeals to mutual interests, implicitly evoking anxiety over the direction entrenched reactionary Wahhabism is taking society. Yet things move slowly and rival sections of the Family of Sa‘ūd hold differing views about the pace or the need for change. Toby Jones remarks: “While some of the Al Saud do appear to be encouraging progressive change in public, there are also clear warning signs that meaningful reform will be sacrificed on the altar of the family’s internal power struggle.”¹³³

Before leaving the Kingdom of the “Guardian of the Two Sacred Sanctuaries” [*khaḍīm al-haramayn*] (the recently self-designated title of the Sa‘ūdī>King), it should be emphasized that the future status of the intimate symbiosis of religious and political authority between Wahhabī>religious authorities and the authoritarian Sa‘ūdī>monarchy is subject to much speculation and rumor, but little firm knowledge. Unfolding tensions between internal pressures for change emanating from within, and the external geostrategic requirements in the region of Saudi Arabia’s ally the U.S., in tangent with the demonstrated sympathies of certain Wahhabī>religious leaders toward jihadist notions and activities—has led to the

¹³³ “Seeking a ‘Social Contract’ for Saudi Arabia”, *Middle East Report* (Winter 2003).

definite loss of a measure of the Wahhābi's domestic credibility. This places a large question mark over the continuation of the Wahhābi monopoly on the religious culture of the Kingdom, or even their diminishing ability to adequately prop up the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy. From the perspective of inducing socio-political and economic stability in Southwest Asia and North Africa, and for the sake of first neutralizing, then rolling back trans-national Jihadism within a large number of Muslim societies around the globe, the security and stability of the Saudi Kingdom must be maintained, and the Family of Sa'ūd be intelligently assisted and encouraged in weaning themselves from their suffocating embrace of the Family of the Sheikh. As V. Olivetti states:¹³⁴

The only people capable of quietly and seamlessly checking and moderating Salafism [i.e. radical trans-national neo-Traditionalism] are the Saudis themselves, not only because they sit atop of the hierarchy of many of the institutes that propagate Salafism, but because they have the best knowledge of them and the longest experience with them. ...Thus there is no alternative to the Saudis.

In other words, a re-alignment of forces between these two powerful Families needs to occur before one may realistically expect to uproot the tree whose roots we have been digging out, over nearly a millennium and a half of persistent growth.

Nor should one ignore the tremendous shock the monarchy experienced in 1400/1979, when the self-styled *mahdi*-Juhayman al-'Utaybi led a rabble of mainly Najdi extremists and seized the Makkan sanctuary as a Wahhābi protest against corruption and injustices by the royal family; almost every one of them died fighting after the King enlisted the assistance of (non-Muslim) French Foreign Legion troops to flush them out.¹³⁵ Finally, recall the regicide of King Faysāl ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz in 1395/1975, shot point blank by his half-brother's son; while the perpetrator was

¹³⁴ *Terror's Source*, pp. 101 & 103. Almost every sober well-informed observer of the Kingdom has come to a similar conclusion; the more active and responsible role Saudi Arabia is playing in its region, including distancing itself from too close a stance to the American colossus, is encouraging.

¹³⁵ I know this from my elder brother Kenneth G. Crow who was drafted to work as a MASH nurse outside Makkah patching up their wounds, during his employment with the Whittaker Corporation at a military base hospital in Tabuk.

declared insane and executed, and popular Arab gossip ascribed the deed to the C.I.A. in revenge for the Sa‘ūdī oil boycott after the 1967 Israeli-Arab war, certain rumors lay responsibility upon *Aḥ al-Shaykh* for obscure motives related to Fayṣal’s determination to introduce television into the Kingdom.¹³⁶

However, from the historical perspective of the evolution of Ḥanbalism, it is evident that the Wahhābī>experience of political alliance with the Saudi hereditary monarchy, *jihad* against polytheism through military conquest, and unyielding pervasive doctrinal monopoly and social-political control, represents a genuine innovation and departure from the past—unless one reverts to the early Umayyad era. With its formal bureaucratic structure subsidized by generous state support (including salaried appointments) and control over a number of ministries, combined with a monopoly over religious education in universities, *madrasas* and schools, and tight control over mosque administration exercised by the present religious establishment,¹³⁷ the Wahhābī>mode of Ḥanbalism outstrips anything witnessed before in Ḥanbalite history. The reasons for this exceptional achievement may be peculiar to its Arabian tribal context and historical circumstances. One might delve into the perceived necessity of *jihad* against semi-pagan Bedouin practices¹³⁸ and perceived reprehensible innovations prolonged from the past in surrounding Muslim societies which Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and his successors so vigorously pursued, and also scrutinize his own self-image as akin to a second prophet Muḥammad. At the same time one would have to screen out the evident tendency toward glorification of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and the magnification of his significance clearly manifest in the thought and work of his contemporary apologists. His tomb in al-Dir‘iyah is currently being restored to cater for visitors—in stark contrast with the demolishing of the tomb of Muḥammad in 1925.

¹³⁶ Interview in June 1999, with Ambassador James Aikens, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

¹³⁷ The loosely-defined leadership of today’s neo-Wahhābist global network is based in Riyāḍ in the *Idārat Hay‘at al-Buḥārā wa l-Da‘wah wa l-Irshād*, generally called simply *Hay‘at al-Da‘wah* [*The Missionary Organization*], along with its self-funded proxy the *Jam‘iyat Ihya’ al-Turāth* of Kuwait, and its international faces *Rabitat al-‘Ālam al-Islāmī* [*The Muslim World League*] (established in 1962) and the *World Organization of Muslim Youth*. Its specific interface with the Saudi government is in the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, *Da‘wah* and Guidance.

¹³⁸ For Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s own understanding of *jihad*, see Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, pp. 193–227; she asserts that later Wahhābī>adoption of ideas of Ibn Taymiyyah re-shaped the original doctrine taught by the founder. Further, see Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 178 n. 92.

Mainstream Sunni>critics of Wahhabism are wont to compare it to the earliest sectarian innovation which first appeared among Muslims during the caliphate of ‘Ali>before the middle of the 1st century H: the unruly fractious tribesmen of Kharijite “secessionists” who opposed all power possessors, rejected the larger community and preached *jihad* upon the totality of Muslims for their alleged un-faith [*kufi*], killing them as apostates with self-righteous impunity. They were neither Sunni>or Shi’ite but a third grouping, rejecting the caliphate by Quraysh. One such early Kharijite puritanical group arose out of Najd led by Najdah b. ‘Amir (d. 73/692), thus known as the Najdiyyah or al-Najadaṭ, and for a short time in the early Umayyad era, controlled a large area in Yamamah (the eastern section of the plateau of Najd) and the historical coastal province of Bahrain. However, the Najdiyyah became less rigid and violent than their ideological brethren, condemning the rest of the community of Muslims as mere hypocrites and even practising cautionary·dissimulation [*taqiyyah*] for self-protection. Despite their propensity for *takfir*, historically the Khawarij groups were certainly not state-friendly and their religious dogma never entertained co-existence with, nor active support of, any unjust ruler.¹³⁹ Rather, in terms of religious doctrine and legal rite, the Arabian Wahhabi>form of Islam within Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait is Hanbalite (whose juridical system is formally acknowledged to be the ‘constitution’ of the Saudi Kingdom), while their ideological affinity is clearly recognizable as harmonious with the purist strain of unyielding Traditionalism embodied in the Hashwi>mentality.

Conclusion

While we have been tracing out the physiognomy of radical Sunni>Traditionalism in its most impervious form, it has become clear that “Hashwiyah” refers not to a specific well-defined school but to a definite orientation having a core doctrinal basis rooted in Sunni>Traditionalist Hādīth circles whose “theology” and “legal theory” (if these notions may be employed very loosely) was centred on a narrow reductionist literalism embracing anthropomorphic and determinist views. Their “theology” consisted of basic creed (‘*aqidah*’, later transformed into the more systematic

¹³⁹ The only surviving Kharijites are the Ibadīyah, who in the early Islamic period, controlled the commerce in Berber slave girls from North Africa to the East, then established the early medieval Rustamid dynasty in Algeria, and presently are dominant in the Sultanate of Oman with pockets in Libya, Algeria and Zanzibar. Doctrinally, the Ibadīs reject a physical eyewitnessing of God in the Hereafter, and hold the Qur’ān to be created.

ushūl al-dīn) conveyed through Ḥadīth, namely a narrative-theology;¹⁴⁰ and their jurisprudence focused upon deploying revealed Scripture and the vast ocean of narrative traditions guided by their own legalist text-based tradition and creedal preoccupations. Not for them the elaborately technical argumentation of the *mutakallimūn* [rationalist theologians], nor the sophisticated methodological analyses of *ushūlīs* [legal theorists]—but the blinding clarity and overwhelming evidence of “*God says!*” and “*God’s Messenger said...*”. We saw that the early Ḥanbali law school differed in a fundamental aspect from almost all other schools by its deep suspicion of reason and insistence upon legal textualism, and by its creedal purity and active hostility to sectarian “innovations”—the one exception being the Zāhirite school which became defunct. Nevertheless, it bears repeating that respectful debate and sincere exchange of views, not imposed uniformity by scorning or suppression of the Other, always was the religious and historical norm in the history of Islamic thought.

Yet the later “Ḥaṣḥwīyah” were not confined to Ḥanbali>Traditionalism alone, and it is probably accurate to state that over the centuries, they came to include the most rigid conservative elements among Maḥiki>and Shafī’i>Traditionalists. (The Ḥanafī>law school was, from its inception, strongly oriented toward rationalism, and many Mu’tazilites were Ḥanafite in their legal rite.)¹⁴⁶ Nor should one assume that a *ḥaṣḥwī*-like mentality was peculiar to extremist Sunni>Traditionalism, and that other branches of Islam never experienced comparable patterns of intellectual impoverishment wedded to doctrinal fanaticism. While the dominant trend in contemporary Imāmī>Shi’ism remains the rationally oriented *Uṣūlī*-school which still cultivates profound philosophic and metaphysical concerns,¹⁴¹ a parallel form of textual literalism once flourished several centuries ago and persists today known as the *Akhbarī*-school which privileges sacred texts over rationalist legal methods (currently present in the Ahwaz region of S.W. Iran, and Bahrain). Perhaps it is not an accident of history that the largest legal rite today among Sunni>Muslims both in

¹⁴⁰ By “narrative theology” we mean propounding doctrine by means of narrating *ḥadīth* reports constructed to convey the theological position being taught or defended, and/or to condemn those particular doctrines being rejected or condemned. Many early traditions were put into circulation for precisely this purpose.

¹⁴¹ Ayatullah RuhʾAllāh Khumayni>(d. 1409/1989) was versed in the gnostic-metaphysical discipline of *ʿirfān*; under former president Khatemi, the Islamic Republic of Iran promoted international symposia honoring the Sāfavid-era gnostic-sage Mullā>Sādra>Shirāzī>(d. 1050/1640) whose official portrait on posters at these symposia bore an uncanny resemblance to Khumayni>himself.

numbers and geographic presence is the Ḥanafite, while the smallest is the Ḥanbalite (confined primarily to Syria and the Arabian peninsula).

However, the small footprint of contemporary Ḥanbalism makes a deep imprint by virtue of the weight of Arabian petro-wealth, financing far-flung global activities yielding a ubiquitous presence in many Muslim societies. The contemporary spread of what is often termed “Salafism”—that is to say, neo-Wahhābī>religio-cultural ideology—exhibits definite characteristics rooted in the ancient Ḥaṣhwi>mindset and world view.¹⁴² There is the same suspicion or even abhorrence of innovatory heresy (especially toward Shiʿism, Sūfism, and all rational theological and philosophic pursuits); the one-dimensional literalist textuality with its denial of symbolic meaning yielding anthropomorphism; the over-zealous religious enforcing leading to abusive intrusion of privacy; and (in Saudi Arabia, and the former Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under the Taliban) a reciprocal symbiosis with the power of the state over which it imposes doctrinal purity and social control.¹⁴³ The tree is nourished through its roots from nutrients locked into the soil well over a millennium ago, and the sands of Najd proved fertile for its growth. Nevertheless, extremist Sunni>Traditionalism by itself does not sufficiently account for the contemporary phenomenon of trans-national terror perpetrated by deviant Muslims.

A characteristic hallmark of the contemporary Jihadist mindset is their mono-dimensional literalist readings of scripture, aided by their intellectual training and scientific educational backgrounds and qualifications (many are engineers, while Zawāhiri>is a medical doctor). Such a this-worldly actualization of the mythic or

¹⁴² The virus of this ongoing deformation spreads by attaching to local hosts exhibiting inherent qualities congenial to its growth, infecting existing Muslim groups already embedded in societies. Most are not violent in the least, but can and at times do serve as half-way homes toward full-fledged *takfirī*>Jihadism. These include: the puritanical reformist Deoband movement of India and its extension in the UK; the Arab world’s Muslim Brotherhood with its offshoots in the Hamas parties of Palestine and Algeria; in Jordan’s largest political party the Islamic Action Front; in the *Islah*/parties of Kuwait and Yemen; expatriot Muslims working in Arabia and the Gulf; various groups in Indonesia, China, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Bangladesh, Turkey, the Caucasus, Europe, and east & west Africa; and the flourishing *Jamaʿatu l-Tabligh* of simple-minded itinerant preachers (founded by two Khandalawī>scholars in 1926 in India & 1947 in Pakistan).

¹⁴³ See e.g. Oliveti, *Terror’s Source*, pp. 21–43, ‘Salafi Ideology, Doctrines and Tenets’. More detailed documentation for this requires a separate study. There is now an increasing counter-ideology by prominent Saudi Wahhābites consciously distancing their school from the excesses of violent Jihadist movements, through condemning the deviant practice and wrong thinking of the ideological children of the Muslim Brotherhood coloured by semi-revolutionary & anarchic ideas of Sayyid Qutb—groups whom they label *Ikhwānī*>and *Qutbī*> see e.g. ‘Abd al-Salām b. Saḥīm al-Sihaymī> *Fikr al-Irḥab wa l-ʿUnf fi l-Mamlakati l-ʿArabīyah al-Saʿūdīyah* [*Ideology of Terrorism and Violence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*].

symbolic discourse found in the sacred texts, represents in reality a form of intellectual secularization. The literal textuality of their handling of revealed texts contrasts starkly with the nuanced inter-textualism and hierarchical modes of meaning exemplified in normative Muslim classical readings. This “flat” attitude springs from their spurning the traditional modes of rationality tied to a hierarchy of cognitive faith and insight.¹⁴⁴ The Jihadist naïve utopian view that Islam is an essentialist inflexible system that instructs its adherents in mass civilian killing and suicidal terrorism, is built upon myths of past glory and anger over present humiliations, while simultaneously rooted in European notions ultimately imbibed from the Counter-Enlightenment and from revolutionary anarchism—being in actuality, as John Gray succinctly stated, “a typical modern hybrid”.¹⁵¹

The Ḥāshwiyah or ignoramuses were exoteric literalists, apprehending merely the surface meaning of words and concepts due to their inability or refusal to penetrate beyond the literal meaning for apprehending deeper significance. Their motto *bi-la>kayf* [*Without Asking How*] discloses a mode of religious perception wherein the exterior form is deemed sacred in and by itself, requiring suspension of any active comprehension of meaning the form may disclose or mediate to our conceptual and imaginative faculties. This type of reductionist externalizing operates a slavish obedience to the factual, spurning all apprehension of higher symbolic meaning: the pointing finger *is* merely a finger, what is *pointed to* remains unrecognized and non-apprehended. The early Kufan scholar Sa‘īd b. Jubayr (executed 95/714) hit the mark when he said: “He who reads the Qur’aṅ and then does not interpret it is like a blind man or a Bedouin!”¹⁴⁵ This mentality embodies a shallow mode of surface understanding that may justly be characterized as cognitive idolatry. It is akin to one who views his face in a mirror and imagines his face to be embedded within the mirrored surface; or one who views a representative symbol of divinity and perceives this object itself to be the very divinity being worshiped. The 20th century thinker Idris Shah observed:¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ For the epistemic basis of this mindset, see our “‘Kalashnikov Islam’ and the Deformist Mentality”.

¹⁴⁵ Cited by Rosenthal, from Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī’s *Tafsīr* (Bulaq, 1323–1329) I, p. 28. Ibn Jubayr was a pupil of the influential Qur’ānic exegete and cousin of the Prophet, ‘Abdallāh b. al-‘Abbās; and was executed by the Umayyad governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, for participating in the failed revolt of Qur’aṅ readers led by Ibn al-Ash‘ath.

¹⁴⁶ *Neglected Aspects of Sufi Study* (London, Octagon Press, 1977), p. 15. Shah was an initiate of the Naqshbandī-Order, heir to the teachings of the Central Asian Khwājagan / ‘Masters of Wisdom’.

The very human desire for consistency, reassurance, certainty—causes people to seek, almost to crave, single, definite, very often over-simplified formulae: not as instruments or vehicles of learning, but as ‘truths’. ... What has happened is that the individual, whose need for mental stabilization may be stronger than his desire for truth, attaches himself to so-called principles not originally intended to be such.

While this mentality occurs in all religious traditions in accordance with an inherent human limitation varying among individuals in dissimilarity—a truth well known and discussed by Muslim sages in the past—its most virulent Muslim expression consists of intense emotional adherence to outward appearance, blended with active hostility towards all deeper intellectual and/or symbolic cognitions. Others not sharing such flat one-dimensional perception must be constrained to adopt it, while their symbolic and hierarchic representations of inner meaning must be suppressed.

The underlying epistemological defect lies in the failure of perceptive imagination to mediate or to disclose higher apprehensions, thus the pejorative label “ignoramus” along with associations of “unruly rabble” conveying the regression associated with large-group identity.¹⁴⁷ This failure is clearly seen in key points of their dogma: the physical vision of God [*ru’yah*], and God’s pre-existing increate “Word” [*kalimah*]. God is conceived to be perceptible in the physical world in an anthropomorphic manner: held to descend to our world on the clouds accompanied by the angels (*Q Baqarah* 2:210 ...*fi>ẓḥal’ⁿ*; and c.f. *Nahl* 16:2, *Qadr* 97:4), or to descend at night to the lower heavens to forgive and grant requests. His “Word” communicated to Muḥammad as the revealed QUR’AN is the very utterance of Divinity whose sensible audible and visible letters are divine speech, frozen in Arabic ligatures. It is here—buried in their failure to think critically and grasp significance by moving from the apparent to the real, inducted by the submergence of the individual mind with its innate critical prehension into the encompassing group mind with its uncritical certitude and passionate indulgence in crude self-affirming emotion—when religion becomes inverted and swallowed up by an ignorance, finding easy expression in dogmatic hatred and unthinking violence. The

¹⁴⁷ Consult Vamik Volkan, *Blind Trust: Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of Crisis and Terror* (Charlottesville VA: Pitchstone Publishing, 2004).

philosopher Ibn Sina, known to the Latins as Avicenna (d. 428/1037), might well have remarked: 'Wrong use of imaginative faculty, with sublimation of higher thinking faculty displaced by lower emotions.'

The challenge facing Muslims today is to present the perennial values and principles of Islam in authentic terms for the 21st century. Thinking Muslims must search for fresh ways to realize and make these values real and effective in our world. The energy and direction for this task must be generated from within, it cannot be imported from without. How may we grasp what is most adequate for this task ? How may we enliven creative energy and vision that resonates with the primal values of Islam ?



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