

**Interactions between Turkish and Egyptian Islamic thinkers from 1908 to 1952:
Modernity and the disruption of Islamic knowledge**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an intellectual history of Late Ottoman Muslim thinkers and how they managed the epistemic disruption of nationalism, Islamic modernism, and the emerging discourse of Salafism. It studies the poet Mehmed Akif (1873-1936), sheikh ül-Islam Mustafa Sabri (1869-1954), and his deputy Zahid Kevseri (1879-1952), all of whom chose exile in Egypt as radical secular forces seized power in republican Turkey. The thesis argues they were the most influential figures in Late Ottoman religious thought, with a lasting impact on Turkish and Arab Islamism that has been obscured by disciplinary conventions that define writers and historical fields along ethnic, linguistic, and national lines. Through a deep reading of Arabic and Ottoman texts it traces their engagement with the ideas of Muhammad 'Abduh, Muhammad Iqbal, Nasir al-Din al-Albani, Sayyid Qutb, and Said Nursi, outlining a broad history of Islamic thought in the modern period.

In Egypt Sabri engaged in extensive debate with the modernist *tajdīd* trend, which he saw as a calque on Enlightenment notions of religion. One of Mustafa Kemal's most formidable critics, Sabri was alarmed to find Egypt's intelligentsia advancing the secular, positivist agenda he had challenged in Istanbul, despite the absence of a Kemalist revolution. Kevseri (aka al-Kawthari) discerned a greater threat from the nascent Salafi movement, with its aggressive restatement of the theology advanced by Ibn Taymiyya and rejection of the juridical methodology of the Sunni legal schools. Kevseri resisted attempts to monopolise the term *salafī* because of the legitimisation it conferred on those claiming to represent the belief and practice of early Muslims; following his death Kevseri's fate was nevertheless to become al-Albani's Other in the construction of *salafiyya*. However, Akif, a modernist who brought 'Abduh's thought into the Turkish sphere, made compromises with nationalist ideology that made of him an alternative intellectual mascot of the republic once political Islam gained currency.

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Note on style

Since the religious scholars in question wrote mainly in Arabic, I have used Arabic as default language for technical terminology but when discussing Turkish texts or the Turkish public sphere I use Turkish. In footnotes, the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* is abbreviated to *IJMES* and the journals *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, *Sebilürreşad* and *Beyanülhak* to *SM*, *SR*, and *BH*. Translations of the various languages cited are by the author, except where otherwise indicated. Translations of book and poem titles in Arabic and Turkish are given in the main text, but only in rare cases when titles occur in the notes; names of newspapers and journals are not translated. I have followed the *IJMES* system regarding footnotes, transliteration of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian, and other questions of style. This means that only technical terms and phrases are fully transliterated with diacritical marks and certain commonly cited names and terms are not italicised. Names such as Egyptian president Nasser are written with their common English spelling. Dates are usually rendered in the common era (CE) format, but CE dates are given in brackets when the Ottoman Rumi and Hijri calendar is cited. Dates after the 1 January 1918 alignment of the Rumi with the Gregorian calendar are usually stated directly in CE format. As per *IJMES* style, diacritics are given for Arabic and Persian-origin Turkish words and technical terms that are no longer in use. However, I have followed the Turkish Language Institute (Türk Dil Kurumu)'s recommendation in use of the hatted diacritical mark (*şapka*) in cases where there could otherwise be ambiguity regarding grammatical function. Book titles and author names published in Latin script with the *şapka* and other transliteration marks are left intact. Words and names such as Abdülhamid have generally been left as such in Ottoman-era material rather than rendered with the modern spelling as Abdülhamit.

CHAPTER 1

The Late Ottoman intellectual tradition: A historiographical review

This thesis concerns religious thought in an age of radical thinking. It looks specifically at three Late Ottoman thinkers – two of them ulema (Ar. ‘ulama’),¹ or scholars of the established forms of Muslim knowledge, and one a poet among the class of devout Muslim intellectuals² of the era – whose active period of work was marked by two political events in the countries they moved between, namely the rise to power of the Young Turk movement in Istanbul in 1908 and of the Free Officers in Egypt in 1952.³ These three figures are: Mustafa Sabri Efendi (1869-1954), the last major sheikh ül-Islam (Ar. shaykh al-Islam; chief mufti) of the Ottoman state; Mehmed Zahid Kevseri (1879-1852), Sabri’s deputy for education (*ders vekili*) in the Ottoman religious bureaucracy known as the İlmiye; and Mehmed Akif Ersoy (1873-1936), public intellectual and poet who wrote the words to Turkey’s national anthem. Disaffected with the republic and its adoption of radical European positivist and materialist philosophies,⁴ they each found themselves drawn to Egypt as a place of refuge from the nationalist movement of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938).

Although in exile they were able to engage with their Egyptian counterparts regarding the iconoclastic ideas of the era impacting Islamic political, legal, and theological culture,

¹ I use ulema when discussing the Ottoman Turkish discourse but ‘ulama’ when the language is Arabic.

² Although the term Islamic intellectual history would band them together, I have considered ulema and intellectuals as separate categories in that ulema were interpreters of a specific body of sacred knowledge. Muslim is an imperfect description of the intellectuals in question in that most of their interlocutors would also consider themselves Muslim: the thesis title refers to Islamic thinkers in an attempt to encompass both. Brett Wilson’s term devout intellectual is a good compromise; *Translating the Qur’an in an Age of Nationalism: Print Culture and Modern Islam in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), passim.

³ I use the name Istanbul although Turkey only changed its official name from Constantinople in 1930.

⁴ The Young Turk movement was influenced by the French positivism of Auguste Comte and its notion of religion as an impediment to societal progress and the German materialism of Ludwig Büchner and its belief in natural forces as the organising principle of the universe. This Ottoman worldview Hanioglu calls scientism; M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 48-67. See also Banu Turnaoğlu, “The Positivist Universalism and Republicanism of the Young Turks,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 14/3 (2017): 777-805.

nationalist historiography, through ordering knowledge as variously Egyptian, Arab, or Turkish, has served to conceal transnational collaboration in the post-Ottoman intellectual world in which thinkers could still operate across national-linguistic lines. For example, a pervasive theme in scholarship regarding republican Turkey has been that Said Nursi (1877-1960), the celebrated *‘ālim* who remained in Turkey during the early republic, single-handedly carried the torch of Ottoman Islam through his writing while enduring persecution at the hands of the Kemalist state. Yet this misses the role of the Cairo exiles in formulating the first systematic response to secular Turkey and establishing a blueprint for an Islamic Turkish nationalism that in the fullness of time was to win out against its rivals.

The thesis examines a corpus of printed materials, including books, articles, and letters, written in Arabic, Ottoman, and Turkish by the three Muslim thinkers in question, from the Late Ottoman period through to their years in Cairo during the time of the Turkish republic. Key works include Sabri’s *Mawqif al-‘Aql wa-l-‘Ilm wa-l-‘Alam min Rabb al-‘Alamin wa-Rusulihi* (The Position of Reason, Knowledge, and the World on God and His Messengers, 1949), the collection of Kevseri’s writings published as *Maqalat al-Kawthari* (Kevseri’s Articles, 1953), Akif’s poetry collection *Safahat*, and the journals *Sirat-ı Müstakim/Sebilürreşad* and *Beyanülhak*. The research takes in many other Ottoman and Arabic works by intellectuals who contributed to the modernist and Salafi discourse (two categories I consider as distinct approaches to the Islamic tradition) of the period and who engaged, often directly, with Akif, Sabri, and Kevseri, including Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905), Musa Jarullah Bigiev (1874-1949), Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), Abul A‘la Maudoodi (1903-1979), and Nasir al-Din al-Albani (1914-1999), as well as an array of Turkish, Arabic, and English-language secondary literature.

The introductory chapter (chapter one) looks at historiographical problems in both Islamic history and the intellectual history of the Late Ottoman period.⁵ The second chapter gives in-depth profiles of Akif, Sabri, and Kevseri and considers how they have been treated in different fields of scholarship. Chapter three examines Sabri's response to the liberal Islamic trend he found dominating public space in Egypt of the 1930s and 1940s (liberal as in a calque on the Enlightenment's secular humanistic understanding of religion, often termed liberal Christianity), and contrasts this with Akif's work in centring Late Ottoman Islamism around the ideas of 'Abduh, the leading figure of this school of self-described reform Islam. The fourth chapter looks at Zahid Kevseri's problematisation of the concept of the terms *salafī* and *salafīyya*, his attempt to withhold the legitimating potential inherent in the Salafi label from the trend – distinct from that of 'Abduh's followers – which framed its iconoclastic approach to the Islamic legal and theological tradition in those terms. Chapter five looks at the three thinkers' views on the modern state as a universal model received from Europe, specifically, Akif's compromise with Turkish nationalism and Sabri's theorising on faith in a post-shari'a society. The concluding chapter (chapter six) considers their impact on the ideological trend created by the conditions of modernity known as "political Islam" (*al-islām al-siyāsī*), making use of interviews with Islamist figures active in the early period of transnational collaboration.

⁵ Late Ottoman intellectual history was of course not only Muslim in terms of its producers, and Turkish nationalist historiography for long excluded the voices of ethno-religious minorities. On the Ottoman Jewish intellectual Avram Galanti (1873-1961), for example, and his engagement with the republic, see Kerem Tınaz, *An Imperial Ideology and its Legacy: Ottomanism in a Comparative Perspective, 1894-1928* (D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2018). On Late Ottoman literature see Laurent Mignon, "Lost in Transliteration: A Few Remarks on the Armeno-Turkish Novel and Turkish Literary Historiography," in *Between Religion and Language: Turkish-speaking Christians, Jews and Greek-speaking Muslims and Catholics in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Evangelia Balta and Mehmet Sönmez (Istanbul: Eren 2011), 111-23.

The construction of Islam as a world religion

Enlightenment ideas and their universalisation through European colonial expansion engendered new ways of thinking about religion, rooted in Europe's experience of religious institutions as an oppressive force in political and social life. Islam was objectified as a category of world religion, as sociologist Wilfred Cantwell Smith theorised in his book *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962). In the Islamic case this process of what Smith called reification entailed the production of the term Islam itself by Europeans, and then through apologetic osmosis by Muslims themselves, in unfamiliar contexts and senses. This approach to the Islamic tradition located in the conceptual framework of European thought I term modernist. One line of modernist discourse – defined by its highly political and activist nature – would subsequently develop a theory of Islam as a complete system of life with implications for not only the individual but the state, expressed through innovative use of words such as *nizām*,⁶ while another strand within Muslim modernism – mimicking Western secular humanism – would be comfortable with the Enlightenment's individualist notion of religion as, in anthropologist Talal Asad's description, "anchored in personal experience, expressible as belief-statements, dependent on private institutions, and practised in one's spare-time".⁷ In *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said would reframe this Islam-made-in-Europe through the prism of his discursive framework of "Orientalism", which for him was a term that not only described scholars who studied "the East", but the paradigm of thought made possible by European power and by which Europeans described outside cultural groupings in a manner that stressed difference and need for reform.

⁶ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 115-17.

⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 207. Asad argues in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) that secular modernity, rather than establish a neutral system of universally valid knowledge within which religion is allotted its space, is itself a circumstantial system created in time, staking claims to concepts such as rationality and agency, and subject to critique.

Scholars across numerous fields of the humanities have examined how Muslim intellectual, cultural, historical, and moral understandings of the world were systematically described, deconstructed, and denigrated as unfit for what European intellectuals considered to be a new stage of social organisation.⁸ German philosopher Hegel (1770-1831) was one of the first prominent voices to present a systematic theory of Islam (“Mohametanism”) as a civilisation that had run out of steam. In his series of lectures on the philosophy of history, first delivered in 1822, Islam was an Arab obsession with the abstract that made for poetry good enough to fire the imagination of Goethe and science and philosophy useful to medieval Europe, but with the north Europeans marching to glory through the “all-enlightening sun” (*die Alles verklärende Sonne*) of the Reformation, “Islam has vanished from the stage of history at large and has retreated into Oriental ease and repose”, Hegel said.⁹ French historian and politician Francois Guizot’s *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe* (1828) also posited the Reformation as the great event that unleashed Europe’s creative powers and facilitated its civilisational advance (“une insurrection de l’esprit humain contre le pouvoir absolu dans l’ordre spirituel”),¹⁰ while Arab-Islamic civilisation was in a state of stagnation (*état stationnaire*) because of its “confusion of moral and material authority”¹¹ – a theme of the reform discourse that was to echo throughout the century as European entanglement with Muslim societies increased.

In *Islam in Liberalism* Joseph Massad identifies a second impulse for negative depictions of Islam. He examines the manner in which 19th-century European liberalism

⁸ Recent studies of note include Joseph Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 355-60.

¹⁰ François Guizot, *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe* (Paris: Victor Masson Libraire, 1851), 295.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

projected anxiety over the injustices of Europe's incomplete project of progress – the mass violence of colonialism, the dark Satanic mills of industrialisation, political and economic marginalisation of subaltern groups – onto an Oriental exterior. This discourse allowed for a proliferation of phenomena understood as Islamic, including history, peoples, philosophy, sexual practices, cuisine, sartorial standards, culture,¹² while Christian traditions were the template for thinking of *kalām* and *‘aqīda* as theology, *shari‘a* as law, or *salat* as prayer. The breadth of terms deployed in Ottoman Turkish texts for Islam – *İslam*, *İslamiyet*, *İslamlık*, *Müslümanlık*, *İslam dini* – gives some indication of how jarring this reductive, homogenising construction of Islam must have been. Turkish republican historiography tended to parallel British and French scholarship in presenting Islamic institutions and belief systems as an impediment to progress.¹³

A third motivation behind the production of this Europeanised Islam was, as Said established, the tying of its fortunes to the colonial project.¹⁴ Progress in other societies would come through the civilising mission of their ideas, whether delivered through colonialism or otherwise, but Islam was viewed as a dangerous creedal force commanding fanatical impulses of potential resistance to European power in the many colonies where Britain and France ruled over Muslim-majority populations. It was in this context that the term pan-Islamism was produced in British and French policy debate.¹⁵ In the late 19th century Britain was troubled by Ottoman projection of power through Islamic motifs because

¹² Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*, 4-6.

¹³ Bernard Lewis in *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) refers to “reactionaries” and reaction is a theme in Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish Experiment in Democracy 1950-1975* (London: Hurst, 1977). French histories such as Robert Mantran's *Histoire de la Turquie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952) followed in the footsteps of Pierre Loti (1850-1923) et al. who presented Islam as an exotic oppressive force in Late Ottoman society.

¹⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 1-3, 58-9, 113-122, 343. See also Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

¹⁵ The term appears as early as 1883 in French journalist Gabriel Charmes' *L'avenir de la Turquie: Le panislamisme* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1883). See Cemil Aydın, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2017).

of a perceived potential to stoke resistance to Britain in Egypt and India.¹⁶ Former British diplomat Wilfred Scawen Blunt, who became a forthright campaigner for an independent Egypt, outlined a blueprint for an Arab caliphate in the Hijaz with symbolic spiritual powers that would engender a reformation of Islam outside “the incubus of Turkish scholasticism” and disabused of the “dream of empire”.¹⁷ Even those Muslim intellectuals who grasped instinctively that European knowledge could not be disassociated from the physical control that Europe exerted over their societies – that the knowledge was tinged with self-serving ideas that served Europe’s imperial interests – were susceptible to the notion that Islam as the Europeans had constructed it was fundamental to their failure to maintain a pace of civilisational advance that would have kept European interventions at bay. European criticisms of Islam, however much they were repudiated and rejected, succeeded in problematising aspects of belief and practice in the minds of thinkers across Muslim societies united in a discourse of reform and renewal derived terminologically from the Arabic *tajdīd*.¹⁸

European modernity’s view of religion as irrational and a bar to civilisational progress brought with it a specific compartmentalisation of premodern time. With the evolution of the

¹⁶ On how this played out in the Arabian peninsula see William Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz under Ottoman Control, 1840-1908* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), and Frederick Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *The Future of Islam* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001); 130-1, 174-5. Sylvia Haim suspected that ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi derived his idea of an Arab caliphate in *Umm al-Qura* (1900) from Blunt; “Blunt and Kawakibi,” *Oriente Moderno*, 35/3 (1955): 132-43. This thesis is not widely accepted.

¹⁸ Many scholars in the early Islamic centuries were bestowed with the title *mujaddid* by their followers on the basis of the hadith in which the Prophet says that every one hundred years God will send someone who renovates/innovates (*yujaddid*) the *dīn* of the *umma*; see Abu Dawud, “Kitab al-Malahim,” in *Sunan Abi Dawud*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ut, 8 vols. (Damascus: al-Risala al-‘Alamiyya, 2009), 5/349, no. 4291. Ella Landau-Tasseron argues the hadith appeared in Shafi‘i circles to justify their innovative work in establishing the overriding authority of the sunna; “The ‘Cyclical Reform’: A Study of the *mujaddid* Tradition,” *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989): 79-117. The concept of the millennial *mujaddid* likely began with Indian Naqshbandi Sufi shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624), whose *mujaddid* fulfils some functions of prophecy in the post-Prophet world; see Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (New Delhi/Oxford: Oxford University Press), 13-21. In the late 19th century *tajdīd* emerges in public discourse as a broad concept for meeting the European challenge, overtaking previous notions of the *mujaddid* on which it was based.

Age of Enlightenment (*die Aufklärung; le siècle des Lumières*) from the 18th century, new thinking conceptualised history as a discipline demarcating time via a tripartite division of ancient, medieval, and modern.¹⁹ From the 1980s postcolonial studies began to push back against this taxonomy as an inappropriate colonial imposition and to experiment with the notion of the premodern, which would fit somewhere between the late medieval period and the industrial capitalism of the 19th century. The premodern served the purpose of restoring agency to non-European cultural groups in the Western-centric story of modernity. It has allowed scholars to develop the notion of multiple modernities,²⁰ or 19th-century global history in which non-European peoples are integrated into a comprehensive narrative of a world system in formation.²¹ It opened space for efforts to uncover modern temporality in India in response to British colonial scholars who developed the trope of the “Hindu mind” lacking a concept of historical time,²² and to discover early modern practices in 18th-century Japan, 13th-century China, and 11th-century Java.

The field has not been without its critics,²³ but it is striking how long disinterest in writing Muslims into the discourse of premodernity persisted²⁴ – a consequence, it would appear, of the pervasive theory of decline among both Orientalist and Muslim scholars in the

¹⁹ Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 35. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 235.

²⁰ S.N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus*, 129/1 (Winter 2000): 1-29. Sudipto Kaviraj emphasises the divergent paths within Europe, contrasting British and French models of industrialisation and democracy with Germany, Italy and Russia; Kaviraj, “An Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity,” *European Journal of Sociology*, 46/3 (2005): 497-526.

²¹ Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). See also Margrit Pernau, ed., *Global Conceptual History: A Reader* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 1-27.

²² Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India, 1600-1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001); and Rosalind O’Hanlon, “Contested Conjunctions: Brahman Communities and ‘Early Modernity’ in India,” *American Historical Review*, 118/3 (2013): 765-87.

²³ See Sheldon Pollock, “Pretextures of Time,” *History and Theory*, 46 (October 2007): 366-83; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Muddle of Modernity,” *American Historical Review*, 116/3 (June 2011): 663-75; and Jack Goldstone, “The Problem of the ‘Early Modern’ World,” *Journal of Sociology* 46/3 (2005): 249-84. The Marxist analysis of the Subaltern Studies group of Ranajit Guha was also less partial to the notion of premodernity; see Christopher Chekuri, “Writing Politics Back into History,” *History and Theory* 46 (October 2007): 384-95.

²⁴ The alternative term “early modern” has seen a profusion of scholarly output since the 2000s in relation to the Ottoman empire in particular.

19th century.²⁵ Indeed, the ancient/medieval/modern arrangement of historical time meshes remarkably well with their classificatory framework – of the classical period of the early Islamic era with its imperial expansion and construction of a vast legal-theological edifice (posited as ending with the Mongol destruction of Baghdad in 1258 and/or the rise of the Ottomans), followed by post-classical decline (*inhiṭāt*) in political power and vitality of the knowledge system, before recovering through the paradigm shifts of renaissance (*nahḍa*) and revival (*tajdīd*) from the 19th century (for modernists) or from the Wahhabi movement in the 18th century (for Salafis).

The modernist view of decline

Decline has been a powerful and persistent paradigm for understanding the trajectory of Islamic societies before the colonial encounter.²⁶ Halil İnalcık's *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, which has gone through numerous imprints since its publication in 1973, claims to find the beginnings of failure to meet the 19th-century challenge of Europe in the 16th-century “triumph of fanaticism” in Islamic discourse,²⁷ by which he means the juridical culture of the shari‘a schools and the rise of the Kadizadelis, the 16th-century puritan movement that took up the anti-Sufi ideas of theologian Birgivi Mehmed (d. 1573). Writing firmly within the discursive framework of European Orientalism and the Muslim modernists, İnalcık depicts the shari‘a tradition of compilation, annotation, and commentary

²⁵ In 2010 the American University of Beirut held a symposium entitled “Inhiṭat: Its influence and persistence in the writing of Arab cultural history”; <http://www.beirut.com/l/5486> (accessed 19 June 2016).

²⁶ See Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Ali Bulaç, *İslam Dünyasında Düşünce Sorunları* (Istanbul: Burhan Yayınları, 1983); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Nabil Matar, “Confronting Decline in Early Modern Arabic Thought,” *Journal of Early Modern History*, 9/1 (2005): 51-78

²⁷ Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), 3-4. Another definitive text is Bernard Lewis, “Some reflections on the decline of the Ottoman Empire,” *Studia Islamica* 9 (1958): 111-27.

of foundational legal texts as hindering the jurists' ability to innovate²⁸ and the Janissaries' storming of the Galata observatory in 1580 after astronomy and astrology were condemned by state 'ulama'²⁹ as an example of zealotry that came to dominate. A professor at Chicago University who published mainly in English, İnalçık was typical of a tradition of republican historiography influenced by Orientalist problematisation of Islam.³⁰ There are few fields in Late Ottoman history that the discourse of decline has not touched. E.J.W. Gibb could describe the Turks in racist terms in his *A History of Ottoman Poetry* (1900-1909) as a people who, adopting Persian culture wholesale, had been unable to produce an original literature of their own since their true genius "lies in action, not in speculation".³¹ Laurent Mignon argues that the rejection of the Ottoman past was internalised in two stages: via the writings of poet, playwright, and Ottoman bureaucrat Namık Kemal (1840-88), who derided the literature as "old wives tales" (*kocakarı masalı*), and the work of theorist of Turkish nationalism Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924), who described the Ottoman ruling class and their literary output as foreign, even colonial, in that its overlay of Arabic and Persian language and multi-ethnic authorship did not reflect a Turkish aesthetic or interest.³² In the republican era the Late Ottoman novel was for long regarded as a failure because it did not conform to European conventions.³³

²⁸ Ibid., 173.

²⁹ Ibid., 179.

³⁰ Republican historians who took this approach include Fuat Köprülü (1890-1966), Şemsettin Günaltay (1883-1961), Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935), İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı (1888-1977), Ömer Lütfi Barkan (1905-79). Like Balkan historians, they treated the Ottoman Empire as a foreign occupation. See Buşra Ersanlı, "The Ottoman Empire in the Historiography of the Kemalist Era: A Theory of Fatal Decline," in *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography*, ed. Fikret Adanir and Suraiya Faroqhi (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 115-54.

³¹ E.J.W. Gibb (ed. Edward G. Browne), *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 6 vols. (Warminster: The E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2013), 1:6-7. On Gibb, see Walter G. Andrews, "Ottoman Lyrics: Introductory Essay," in *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology*, ed. Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, Mehmet Kalpaklı (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 3-24; and Victoria Holbrook, *The Unreadable Shores of Love: Turkish Modernity and Mystic Romance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 16-31.

³² Laurent Mignon, "Sömürge Sonrası Edebiyat ve Tanzimat Sonrası Edebiyat Üzerine Notlar," in *Elifbâlar Sevdası*, Laurent Mignon (Ankara: Hece Yayınları, 2003), 77-89.

³³ This view was effectively challenged by Berna Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel bir Bakış: Ahmet Mithat'tan, A. H. Tanpınar'a* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1983).

‘Abduh was also susceptible to the trope of decline located in religion through the influence of European intellectuals he read such as Guizot, liberal Protestant theologian David Strauss and positivists such as Herbert Spencer whom he met during a trip to Britain.³⁴ Guizot was cited in *al-Radd ‘ala al-Dahriyyin* (Refutation of the Materialists, 1886), ‘Abduh’s translation of his mentor Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897)’s attack on Indian positivism, *Hakikat-i Madhhab-i Naychari*: al-Afghani suggested that the Protestant revolution as Guizot outlined it was what Islam required.³⁵ ‘Abduh gave lectures on Guizot’s book to Azharis at Dar al-‘Ulum in Cairo,³⁶ and his biographer Mark Sedgwick surmises that his lost work *Falsafat al-Ijtima‘ wa-l-Tarikh* applied Guizot’s model to Arab history. But its influence can be felt in ‘Abduh’s theological statement *Risalat al-Tawhid* (Treatise on Unity, 1897),³⁷ which unlike a typical work of the genre placed Islam within a wider framework of societal evolution in human history. In his lecture on “Islam and Science” delivered at the Sorbonne in 1883, two years after France added Tunisia to its North African possessions, Ernest Renan expounded further on the theme of Islamic decline but with an important shift from the earlier era of Orientalism: Now it was because of the Arabs themselves that Islam was hostile to science,³⁸ after Napoleon’s 1798 expedition to Egypt had opened up new vistas for Islam’s lost rationalism.³⁹ The response of Ottoman statesman and man of letters Namik Kemal in his *Renan Müdafaanamesi* (Refutation of Renan, 1910) was one of the strongest of the time, assailing Renan’s linguistic mistakes and projection of Europe’s history of religious

³⁴ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 135.

³⁵ Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (trans. Muhammad ‘Abduh), *al-Radd ‘ala al-Dahriyyin* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Jamaliyya, 1915), 65-6.

³⁶ Ibid., 132.

³⁷ Mark Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 16.

³⁸ Bernard Lewis argued the same: see “The Mongols, the Turks and the Muslim Polity,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 18 (1968): 49-68.

³⁹ In his response in French, al-Afghani conceded the notion of religion as hostile to science; Ernest Renan and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, *L’Islam et la science* (Montpellier: Archange Minotaure, 2003).

intolerance onto an exogenous tradition.⁴⁰ As Mignon points out, Kemal used Renan's lecture as the occasion for one of the earliest attacks on Orientalist scholarship's claims to expertise,⁴¹ and with Kemal we can see an early articulation of Said's theory that Europe's Islam was a discursive prop to its exercise of unprecedented political and economic power over Muslim peoples.⁴²

This new European focus on racial themes accompanied Darwin's theories on evolution and served imperial interests in the late 19th-century scramble for colonies. Britain and France feared the rallying power of Islam as a religion whose wings had not been clipped by Enlightenment to challenge their possessions in India and Africa; thus its discursive fragmentation into ethnic constituent parts. Problematisation of "the Arabs" produced a heightened sense of historic duty to meet the challenge of civilisational responsibility set by Europe through Arab and Turk detaching themselves from the other. Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931) was another influential European writer, attracting the attention of Turkish, Egyptian and Levantine intellectuals with a series of works translated into Arabic including *La psychologie des foules* (1885), *Les lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples* (1894), the third part of *Les premières civilisations* (1889), and *La civilisation des Arabes* (1884), which concluded with the statement that "peu de races se sont élevées plus haut, mais peu de races sont descendues plus bas".⁴³ Timothy Mitchell argues that Le Bon had the most impact of all among the European political writers on turn-of-the-century Egypt, effecting the "steady penetration of Orientalist themes into the writings of the Middle East".⁴⁴ Le Bon was also an important source for Jurji Zaydan, a Lebanese Christian living in post-1882 Egypt who

⁴⁰ Namık Kemal, *Renan Müdafaaanamesi* (Istanbul: Mahmut Bey Matbaası, 1910); issued in modern Turkish as Abdurrahman Küçük (trans.), *Renan Müdâfaanâmesi* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1988).

⁴¹ Laurent Mignon, "Of Moors, Jews and Gentiles," *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 35/1 (June 2011): 65-83; includes a review of other early responses to Renan.

⁴² Renan was influential among future generations of Arab political and intellectual elites; Stefan Wild, "Islamic Enlightenment and the Paradox of Averroes," *Die Welt des Islams*, 36/3 (Nov. 1996): 379-90.

⁴³ Gustave Le Bon, *La civilisation des Arabes* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1884), 677.

⁴⁴ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 169.

authored decline-themed histories and novels. The government commissioned him to produce two school textbooks, *Ta'rikh Misr al-Hadith* (Modern History of Egypt, 1889) and *al-Ta'rikh al-'Amm* (Universal History, 1890), and his five-volume *Ta'rikh al-Tamaddun al-Islami* (History of Islamic Civilisation, 1901-6) cites a number of European works including *La civilisation des Arabes* while applying the model of rise and fall.⁴⁵ Guizot's *état stationnaire* and Renan and Le Bon's *décadence* are reproduced in the discourse of 'Abduh's generation as *jumūd* (stagnation)⁴⁶ and *inhiṭāṭ* (decline).⁴⁷

During this period 'Abduh shifted position to viewing colonial Britain as too strong a power to resist, becoming a confidante of first Blunt and later Britain's post-invasion colonial administrator Lord Cromer.⁴⁸ Indian thinker Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), founder of the modernist Aligarh school, had already reached similar conclusions regarding how to manage European power following the crushing of the anti-British revolt of 1857.⁴⁹ In British India colonial interventions had already gone much further than discourse and polemics, engaging directly in remodelling Islamic juridical and education systems.⁵⁰ Reforms began in 1790 with the abolition of blood money for murder and introduction of hard labour to replace extreme punishments such as cutting off of limbs; specification of crimes for which a judge could impose discretionary punishments in 1803; codification of lashes and jail as the punishment for adultery in 1817; the end of the universal applicability of Muslim criminal law to non-Muslims in 1832; and introduction of English trial by jury and revival of Hindu institutions such as the village assembly (*panchayat*). Khan sought justification within the

⁴⁵ Many intellectuals objected to Zaydan's approach; their writings were collected by Rashid Rida in *Intiqad Kitab Ta'rikh al-Tamaddun al-Islami* (Cairo: al-Manar, 1912).

⁴⁶ 'Abduh, *Al-Islam bayn al-'Ilm wa-l-Madaniyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1960), 122, 142, 160.

⁴⁷ Al-Afghani and 'Abduh, *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa* (Cairo: Hindawi, 2014), 38, 53, 61, 72, 87, 112, 119, 161, 162.

⁴⁸ Cromer thought 'Abduh was a secret agnostic, see Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1908), 2:179-80. The friendship was used to discredit 'Abduh; see Sedgwick, 108-14.

⁴⁹ On the post-1857 Muslim schools in India see Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857-1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) and Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought*, 143-75.

⁵⁰ Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism*, 17-26.

Islamic tradition for positions that conformed with European norms. He defended eating non-halal meat in a treatise on eating with People of the Book,⁵¹ presaging ‘Abduh’s famous Transvaal fatwa in 1903 regarding consumption of meat slaughtered by Christians and the wearing of European hats.⁵² Similar dynamics were at play in Muslim Central Asia: Kazan Tatars established themselves in the 1850s and 1860s as the pioneers of new modes of education that would integrate Muslims into liberalising Russian imperial culture and society.⁵³

The Salafi view of decline

Decline was central to the thinking of those engaged in an internal critique of the Islamic tradition, one that challenged systematic adherence to the methodologies of the four Sunni legal traditions (*taqlīd*) for reasons related to their communal contexts. Shah Waliullah (d. 1762) was a Hanafi hadith scholar from India who upheld the monistic theosophy of Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240) as well as the theological positions – associated with the Abbasid-era hadith movement – of the Hanbali qadi and theologian of Damascus Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). He was driven by a concern over syncretic approaches prevalent in Mughal India, where Muslim elites were politically dominant but Muslim practice coexisted with diverse non-Muslim traditions.⁵⁴ Yemeni Zaydi scholar Muhammad al-Shawkani (d. 1834), on the other hand, sought to stabilise the political underpinnings of the Zaydi imamate through denuding the

⁵¹ Ibid., 36.

⁵² Sedgwick, *Abduh*, 97-99, 110-11.

⁵³ Danielle Ross, “Caught in the Middle: Reform and Youth Rebellion in Russia’s Madrasas, 1900-10,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 16/1 (2015): 60-1. See also Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ Gail Minault, “Sayyid Ahmad Dehlavi and the ‘Delhi Renaissance’,” in *Delhi Through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture, and Society*, ed. Robert E. Frykenberg (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 287-98.

Zaydi imam of his role as a *mujtahid* and forbidding rebellion against the imam.⁵⁵ Both Waliullah and al-Shawkani attacked *taqlīd* and emphasised the study of hadith independently of the methodologies of the legal schools. Waliullah inspired the Ahl-i Hadis movement in India, while al-Shawkani was influential for 19th-century scholars in Ottoman Baghdad and Damascus who articulated similar ideas around the organising motif of a return to the ways of the *salaf* (the early Muslims) with as little mediation of the elite scholastic culture of the *madhāhib* as possible.⁵⁶

Modernist ‘ulama’ and intellectuals, on the other hand, deployed these ideas in the service of their rationalist project, which though couched in Islamic terminologies and historical references was impacted by the European categories of reformation and enlightenment. Rather than traditionist disdain for post-classical legal and theological output, reformers upholding the scriptural authority of the Qur’an could have the Lutheran model in mind to engender European-style progress.⁵⁷ Indeed, historian Reinhard Schulze sees a calque on the West European classicism of the era in the discourse around the *salaf* among the late 19th-century modernist reformers.⁵⁸ ‘Abduh reworked al-Shawkani’s ideas on *ijmā’* (consensus) among jurists and used legal *ijtihād* (legal reasoning that engages directly with basic sources of Qur’an and hadith) freed of *taqlīd* (following the legal reasoning of authoritative jurists) to arrive at desired conclusions in which the methodology of *uṣūl*

⁵⁵ See Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 149-51, and Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muḥammad al-Shawkānī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Al-Shawkani said a Muslim should only rise against an imam who displays blatant *kufr* (unbelief); the imam need only be a member of the Prophet’s tribe Quraysh rather than of the specific lineage of Ali/Fatima and he should be free to designate his successor.

⁵⁶ See David Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) and Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

⁵⁷ Juan Cole, “Printing in Urban Islam,” in *Modernity & Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean*, ed. Leila Fawaz, Christopher Bayly, Robert Ilbert (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 352.

⁵⁸ Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 18. See also Schulze, “Was ist die Islamische Aufklärung?” *Die Welt des Islams*, 36/3 (1996): 276-325.

al-fiqh was a secondary concern.⁵⁹ In this manner shari‘a was adapted to fit an understanding of modernity which, through codification in British India, the Ottoman Mecelle, the Turkish republic’s civil code of 1926 and the changes introduced in Egypt and Arab states from the time of ‘Abduh to the work of ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri in drafting Egypt’s 1948 civil code, “closed the open text of shari‘a jurisprudence”.⁶⁰

In a study of al-Shawkani, Bernard Haykel argues that while the jurist was aware of Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt in 1798, which played a foundational role in subsequent Arab nationalist, Muslim reformist, and Western scholarship of the region, he conveyed no sense that his writings on *ijtihād* and *taqlīd* could be considered a form of response to Europe. “In formulating these ideas, Shawkānī was unaware of the European enlightenment and perceived no intellectual threat to the world of Islam from Europe... For him, the sources of Muslim weakness were intrinsic insofar as they were to be found in the erroneous beliefs and practices of Muslims themselves,” Haykel writes.⁶¹ Similarly, Aziz Ahmad notes of Waliullah’s opposition to *taqlīd* that it was a breakthrough “absolutely unconnected with any western influences”, inspired by spiritual and historical forces specific to Islamic society in the early 18th century and centred on the idea of decline in Mughal and Ottoman intellectual traditions.⁶² There have been few attempts to argue that the 18th-century religious movement founded by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1892) in central Arabia, commonly known as Wahhabism, was in any meaningful way inspired by Europe.⁶³ So there is reason to

⁵⁹ Sedgwick, *Abduh*, 122-8.

⁶⁰ Messick, *The Calligraphic State*, 56. See also Wael Hallaq, *Shari‘a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁶¹ Haykel, *Revival and Reform*, 234.

⁶² Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism*, 41.

⁶³ Hasan Hanafi argues Wahhabism was a reaction to European encroachment; “Al-Salafiyya wa-l-‘Almaniyya,” in *Tarihte ve Günümüzde Selefilik*, ed. Ahmet Kavas (Istanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2014), 137.

resist the tempting assertion that it was European expansion alone that stimulated the notion of Muslim decline and the search for inspiration in earliest Islam.⁶⁴

In Arabic writing in the early 20th century the term *salafiyya* (Salafism) was coined to describe these revivalist movements, despite the diametrically opposed motivations of these two broad groups subsumed under its umbrella. In time the divergence in intellectual genealogies would find semantic expression in the use of the term *salafiyya* for only the second group, while derivatives of *tajdīd* came more to denote the first in recognition of its Europe-facing nature. This definitional vagueness over *tajdīd* and *salafiyya* is a salient feature in the writing of Islamic intellectual history in the modern period. A third group who could be termed the conservatives, or traditionalists,⁶⁵ opposed the reform agenda of both parties. Mustafa Sabri and Zahid Kevseri belong to this group of defenders of the tradition, while Akif we can consider a modernist reformer in the mould of ‘Abduh. In Late Ottoman Istanbul the modernist reformers were by far the loudest voice amongst the ulema and devout intellectuals because they engaged more forcefully with the dominant ideological trend of the period, that of the nationalists who, deeply influenced by European positivist and materialist philosophy, harboured inimical views of religion’s place in public life.

Challenging decline has been easier within historical geographies stripped of their Islamic framing, such as the Ottoman empire or Ottoman or early modern Egypt. Baki Tezcan has been able to argue that Ottoman absolutism was gradually diluted by the socio-political power of the military institution (the Janissaries) and the juridical powers of the ‘ulama’, creating what he calls a process of proto-democratisation among the Muslim

⁶⁴ For example, Roxanne Euben, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 5. Schulze sees a calque on European classicism in the appeal to *salaf*: *A Modern History*, 18.

⁶⁵ I use traditionalist as a specific term with no relation to the Ahl al-Hadith, whom I will call traditionists. In the early Islamic field traditionalist is often used to refer to the Ahl al-Hadith; see for example Ahmed El Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 50, footnotes 27 and 28.

element of the populace (*reaya*) – a system disrupted by the autocratic reformations of the Tanzimat era.⁶⁶ However, a growing body of work is pushing back against tropes of Islamic decline which for long influenced analysis across a variety of socio-historical fields within what Marshall Hodgson called Islamicate society.⁶⁷ In a study of 17th-century intellectual currents in the Ottoman Empire and non-Ottoman North Africa Khaled El-Rouayheb has questioned decline theory as the product of a legalistic outlook shared by both Orientalist scholars and different wings of Muslim reformism in its broadest sense. A default position took hold in 20th Islamic and Western scholarship that placed law rather than the practice of theological reasoning at the heart of Islam,⁶⁸ imagining *kalām* as an apologetic practice in thrall to Greek intellectual paradigms since its Abbasid beginnings.⁶⁹ El-Rouayheb points to two basic problems: this discourse ignores other fields of knowledge such as philosophy, logic, astronomy, grammar, and theosophical Sufi thought, and it fails to explain what is inherently irrational or inflexible in a legal system that obliges jurists to consider its precedents, which is what the term *taqlīd*, often misleadingly translated as “imitation”, expresses.⁷⁰ *Kalām* was a practice that developed skills in logic and disputation, and it was this process of *tahqīq* (verification of truth) that early modern Ottoman and North African

⁶⁶ Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformations in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 227-43. Also Cemal Kafadar, “The Question of Ottoman Decline,” *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4, no. 1-2 (1997-1998): 30-75; Suraiya Faroqhi, *Artisans of Empire: Crafts and Craftspeople under the Ottomans* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009); Nelly Hanna, *Artisan Entrepreneurs in Cairo and Early-Modern Capitalism (1600-1800)* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Rhoads Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500-1700* (London: UCL Press, 1999); M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁶⁷ Hodgson’s three-volume *The Venture of Islam* (1974) created a framework for understanding Islam as a world civilisation transcending different societies through the term Islamicate. It also challenged notions of European exceptionalism in the writing of what he termed world history before the genre solidified. An early pushback also came in Roger Owen, “The Middle East in the eighteenth century – an ‘Islamic’ society in decline: A critique of Gibb and Bowen’s *Islamic Society and the West*,” *Review of Middle East Studies* 1 (1975): 101-12.

⁶⁸ El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 234.

⁶⁹ Josef van Ess, “The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology,” in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, ed. Gustave Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1970), 21-50.

⁷⁰ Precedents in terms of the legal corpus of a school as interpreted by its muftis, not case law established by court judges. On this difference between Muslim and common law see Wael Hallaq, *Shari‘a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 178. El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 358.

scholars contrasted with *taqlīd*, not *ijtihād*.⁷¹ Although *kalām* and its associated disciplines never went away, the post-classical premodern period has become a “forgotten chapter in Islamic religious history”,⁷² El-Rouayheb says, partly because Ottomanists tend to look past ‘ulama’ material since it was mainly written in Arabic, while Arabic-centred historical fields tend to consider Ottoman history in turn as a discipline unto itself.⁷³ Both El-Rouayheb and Madeline Zilfi reject the idea of the Kadizadelis as emblematic of an Ottoman decay rooted in religion.⁷⁴

Late Ottoman debate over Islam

Ottoman ‘ulama’ became the subject of heightened contestation in the decades following the Tanzimat reforms of 1839. Although they were actors in Arabic-language discourse, the main theatre of their public engagement became the emerging Ottoman Turkish press.⁷⁵ The rule of Abdülhamid (1876-1909, but effectively ending in 1908) served ultimately to diminish their status through their implication in the retrenchment of sultanic absolutism. The Hamidian regime began with the promulgation of the first Ottoman constitution in 1876 but two years later it suspended parliament as territorial losses mounted and proceeded to deploy the İlmīye and Sufi orders in the extension of the writ of the state and fending off the missionary challenge, particularly in the realm of education in the empire’s Arab and Kurdish

⁷¹ Ibid., 358.

⁷² Ibid., 200.

⁷³ Ibid., 128. Cole also notes that Ottoman legal texts were in Arabic; “Printing in Urban Islam,” 357.

⁷⁴ Madeline Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Post-Classical Age (1600-1800)* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988). Yahya Michot links them to Ibn Taymiyya: *Against Smoking: An Ottoman Manifesto* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2010). Mustapha Sheikh rejects this: *Qadizadeli Revivalism Reconsidered in Light of Ahmad al-Rumi al-Aghisari’s ‘Majalis al-Abrar’* (D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2011).

⁷⁵ Benjamin Fortna, *Learning to Read in the Late Ottoman Empire and the Early Turkish Republic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Johann Strauss, “Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire,” *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 6/1 (2003): 39-76; Elisabeth Kendall, “Between Politics and Literature: Journals in Alexandria and Istanbul at the end of the Nineteenth Century,” in Fawaz, Bayly, Ilbert, *Modernity & Culture*, 330-43.

peripheries.⁷⁶ This increased the Young Turk opposition movement in its conviction that the ‘ulama’ and religion in general were an obstacle to political, economic, juridical and educational transformations required by scientific modernity. Public discourse objectified the scholars of the premodern order and their knowledge as a problem to a greater degree than in Egypt, but this only became consequential following the revolution of 1908 that brought back the constitutional order and freed public space for discussion of previously suppressed questions of religion and state.⁷⁷

With the rise to power of the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP), the İlmîye institution came under pressure to promote a reform Islam, which for the CUP meant loosening the Meşihat (sheikh ül-Islam’s office) control over education and the judiciary.⁷⁸ This, one of the biggest questions in Ottoman public life of the time, was debated through the lively publications scene that arose from 1908: the modernist reform Islam journal *Sırat-ı Müstakim* (1908-25, published as *Sebilürreşad* from March 1912), co-edited by Akif; the conservative religious paper *Beyanülhak* (1908-12), edited by Sabri; and journals that reframed Islam in fashionable Turkist terms such as the CUP-funded *İslam Mecmuası* (1914-1918) and *Türk Yurdu* which were major outlets for nationalist ideologue Ziya Gökalp. In one of the earliest scholarly examinations of this debate, Ahmed Muhiddin used German social science theory to define the modernists as advocates of Islamic Reformation, a “Reformation trend” (*Reformasyon akımı*) whose positions reflected a European view of the path to

⁷⁶ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), passim.

⁷⁷ On the complex situation the ulema found themselves in under Abdülhamid and in the post-1908 order see Ismail Kara, “Turban and fez: ulema as opposition,” in *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, ed. E. Özdalga (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 162-200; David Kushner, “The Place of the Ulema in the Ottoman Empire During the Age of Reform (1839-1918),” *Turcica* 19 (1987): 51-74; Butrus Abu-Manneh, “Two Concepts of State in the Tanzimat Period: the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane and the Hatt-ı Hümayun,” *Turkish Historical Review* 6 (2015): 117-37; Amit Bein, *Ottoman Ulema, Turkish Republic: Agents of Change and Guardians of Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁷⁸ Akif’s biographer Midhat Cemal Kuntay reports that reformist sheikh ül-Islam Musa Kazım was interested in Spiritism, as many modernists were; *Mehmet Akif: Hayatı-Seciyesi-Sanatı* (Istanbul: Oğlak, 2015), 42-3. See Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

modernity: access to scripture without priestly mediation, secular approaches to law that dilute the writ of shari‘a courts, creed that stresses human agency and rejects fatalism.⁷⁹ In this *Kulturbewegung* they stood in opposition to what Muhiddin called the “historical Islam” (*tarihi İslam*) of the conservatives who upheld the juridical and theological framework of the Muslim polity in which they were the key functionaries.⁸⁰ The Arab reform trend taking Ibn Taymiyya as its cultic hero and intersecting with the Turkish modernists in critique of Sufism and some aspects of creed had only limited currency in Istanbul because of its association with the anti-Ottoman Wahhabi movement, its objection to the Hanafi-Maturidi legal-theological system of the Turkish seminaries, and its Arabist undertones.⁸¹ Devout intellectual İsmail Hakkı (1869-1946) was one of the first to integrate the new Arabic usages of *salaf* in his *Yeni İlm-i Kelam* (New Theology, 1920). In describing the Ahl al-Hadith scholars who asserted the primacy of hadith in legal and doctrinal questions, Hakkı used the established term *eseriyye* (*athariyya*, in reference to *athar*, a report), but he was innovative in calling this a school by the name of *Selefiyye* (the spelling in recent Latin script versions).⁸²

The term “Islamist” first emerges in this intellectual milieu. In 1904 Tatar intellectual Yusuf Akçura published an article in the Cairo-based journal *Türk* that outlined the three ideological schools competing to define the direction of a reformed Ottoman state: multi-ethnic, multi-confessional Ottomanism (*Osmanlılık, Osmanlı milliyeti*); ethnic Turkish unity (*Türklük, Türk milliyeti, Türk birliği*); pan-Islamic unity (*Müsülmanlık, İslam birliği, İslamiyet politikası*). He concluded with the question: which will be the most beneficial and viable for the Ottoman state, *Müsülmanlık* or *Türklük*?⁸³ As public debate expanded from

⁷⁹ Ahmed Muhiddin, *Modern Türklükte Kültür Hareketi* (Istanbul: Küre, 2004), 128-41. Muhiddin completed his doctoral thesis in Leipzig in 1921.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 114.

⁸¹ Abdulaziz Al-Fahad, “From Exclusivism to Accommodation: Doctrinal and Legal Evolution of Wahhabism,” *New York University Law Review* 79 (2004): 500-1.

⁸² İsmail Hakkı İzmirli, *Yeni İlm-i Kelam* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu, 2013), 91-8; İzmirli İsmail Hakkı, *Yeni İlm-i Kelam* (Istanbul: Evkaf-i İslamiye Matbaası, 1920), 98-106.

⁸³ Yusuf Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1976), 36.

1908 these positions began to harden into opposed ideological camps.⁸⁴ In a series of eight articles published in *Türk Yurdu* in 1913, titled collectively “Üç Cereyan” and the basis of his book *Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak* (To Become Turkish, To Become Pan-Islamic, To Become Modern, 1918), Ziya Gökalp used the neologism *İslamcılık* alongside *İslamlık*, intending them as parallels to *Türkçülük* and *Türklük* in his discussion of the question of pan-Islamic action and identity.⁸⁵ Gökalp never used the term *İslamcı*, which would equate to the English Islamist in modern Turkish, but he did invent the terms *İslam ümmetçisi* and *İslam milliyetçisi*: only the former is acceptable, he said, because it understands an Islamic identity shorn of the state project overtones of Islamic union in the latter.⁸⁶ In other words, a Turkist could feel at home talking in abstract terms of the *ümmet* but *milliyet* should be reserved for ethnic nationalism alone.

The response of Akif’s colleague Ahmed Naim (1872-1934) was a series of articles published in 1914 and as a book under the same name, *İslam’da Dava-ı Kavmiyet* (The Question of Nationalism in Islam), in which he argued that the Turkists were reviving the chauvinistic tribalism that the Islamic revolution explicitly rejected in its earliest period. Naim took up the terms *Türkçü* and *İslamcı*, without apparently realising that Gökalp had talked only of Islamism (*İslamcılık*), not Islamists.⁸⁷ “How inappropriate this affixing of ‘ci’ to the words Turk and Islam is! I smell a contrived meaning here. In my view those describing themselves in this manner have chosen the wrong name because it doesn’t make sense to call any Turk or Arab *Türkçü* and *Arabcı*. They are, in a word, Turk or Arab. Those

⁸⁴ Abdullah Gündoğdu, *Ümmetten Millete: Ahmet Ağaoğlu’nun Sırat-ı Müstakim ve Sebilürreşad Dergilerindeki Yazıları Üzerine bir İnceleme* (Istanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2007), 56.

⁸⁵ Ziya Gökalp, *Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak* (Istanbul: Yeni Mecmua, 1918). *İslamlık* first appears on p.9, *İslamcılık* on p.33. *İslamlık* was already attested in public debate, paralleling *Hristiyanlık* (Christianity).

⁸⁶ Ibid., 34. It would be wrong to think of Gökalp at this stage in later Kemalist terms of pushing back against public religion and religiosity at all costs: see Markus Dressler, “Rereading Ziya Gökalp: Secularism and Reform of the Islamic State in the Late Young Turk Period,” *IJMES*, 47/3 (2015): 511-31.

⁸⁷ Ahmed Naim, “İslam’da Dava-ı Kavmiyet,” *Sebilürreşad* (henceforth SR), 10 Nisan 1330 (23 April 1914), 12/293: 114-28, and *İslam’da Dava-ı Kavmiyet* (Darülhilaafe: Sebilürreşad Kütüphanesi, 1914), 17.

with a minimum of expertise in the Turkish language know that ‘*İslamcı*’ too cannot mean Muslim,” he wrote.⁸⁸ Naim sensed that this terminology was intended as a polemical device to preserve the Turkists as believing Muslims in the face of ulema and devout intellectuals who openly charged them with atheism through the term *dinsiz*, meaning “without *din*”.⁸⁹

By *İslamlaşmak* Gökalp had meant an identitarian understanding of the state as a transnational representative of Muslims, with obligations beyond borders that transcended race and language. In another work published first as a series of articles in *Sebilürreşad* and then as a book in 1918 under the title of *İslamlaşmak*⁹⁰ former prime minister Said Halim Paşa (1865-1921) took the debate in a new direction, appropriating Gökalp’s term for a theory of Islam as a total system governing the life of the individual and determining the shape of the modern state. “Islam [*İslamiyet*] is the most perfect human religion [*din*] in that it possesses its own beliefs, ethics based on those beliefs, social values arising from those ethics, and politics springing from its social values,” he wrote. “The totality of these basic factors is such that they manage the lives of men and though separate they act together to create a homogenous, perfect and indivisible whole [*bir küll*] which encompasses the idealist and positivist schools, like the moral individual who has religion [*dini bulunduğu şahs-ı manevide olduğu gibi*].”⁹¹ This was one of the earliest articulations of the notion of Islam as a comprehensive personal, social, legal, and political system encompassed by the term “Islamism”, taking the reified religion identified by Smith beyond the realm of law and theology and into that of ideology, or the political: in other words, a process of

⁸⁸ Ibid., 16, footnote 1.

⁸⁹ Devout intellectuals wrote in the press from 1908 about the concepts of *dindarlık* and *dinsizlik*, which they advanced as analogues of the theological concepts of *iman* (faith) and *küfür* (absence of faith); see Mustafa Asım, “Dindarlık ve Dinsizlik,” *Beyanülhak* (henceforth *BH*), 15 Şubat 1325 (28 February 1909), 2/49: 1038-40.

⁹⁰ İsmail Kara suggests the title may have been Akif’s suggestion; *Türkiye’de İslâmcılık Düşüncesi*, 3 vols. (Istanbul: Risale, 1986), 1:xxxvi. It was composed in French but never published in that language.

⁹¹ Said Halim Paşa, *İslamlaşmak* (Istanbul: Dar ül-Hilafe, 1918), 4.

ideologisation.⁹² Writing just after his exit from the Ottoman war cabinet, Said Halim said the current era was characterised by “distancing from Islam” (*İslam’dan uzaklaşma*) due to educational and legal innovations of French origin which had led to moral chaos. The implication was that society cannot *become* truly Muslim (*islamlaşmak*) if its citizens do not lead the life of believers, thus a process of re-Islamisation is in order. Said Halim’s thesis received less attention in republican Turkey than Gökalp’s writing, since the devout intellectuals lost out in the early reckoning with nationalism,⁹³ but ideologised religion would become a major feature of 20th-century Islamic thought in the hands of figures such as Hasan al-Banna, Abul A‘la Maudoodi, and Sayyid Qutb.⁹⁴

The intense ideological conflict unleashed by the 1908 revolution came to a head in the period 1918-1922 as two separate political authorities developed in the context of post-war occupation – the sultanate based in Istanbul which cooperated with the British authorities and the Turkish national parliament established in Ankara in 1920. The ulema and devout intellectuals were faced with tough choices. Akif, Nursi, and a number of other religious figures moved to Ankara in 1920 in the belief that Ankara’s victory over invading Greek forces and the political plans of the European Allied powers would lead to a harmonisation of nationalist and religious doctrine in whatever political arrangement emerged. When Britain acquiesced to Ankara’s forces taking control of government in Istanbul following the defeat of the Greek armies, Sabri and Kevseri fled abroad, not only because their support of the

⁹² I use Michael Freeden’s definition of ideology as “distinct, reified, systems of ideas that exist as quasi-autonomous features of our world and can be studied independently”; Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 101-2. Freeden’s suggestion that political Islam does not fit the definition of ideology in my view contains the erroneous implication that ideology itself is a European category that cannot apply elsewhere.

⁹³ There is one study of Said Halim in English, Ahmet Şeyhun, *Said Halim Pasha: Ottoman Statesman and Islamist Thinker (1865-1921)* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2003). On Said Halim’s discursive shift re the concept of *islamlaşmak*, see Kara, *Türkiye’de İslâmcılık Düşüncesi*, 1:xxxiv-xxxvi.

⁹⁴ Muhammad Iqbal mentioned Said Halim twice in his work, in *Javid Nama* (1932) and *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1934). On Islam as ideology, see the way Islam is discussed in Abul A‘la Maudoodi (trans. Muhammad Kazim Sabbaq), *al-Mustalahat al-Arba ‘a fi al-Qur’an: al-Ilah, al-Rabb, al-‘Ibada, al-Din* (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1971 [1955]), 126, 129-30.

sultan's government meant likely prosecution and even death, but because they understood it as the final victory of secular nationalism after years of bitter contestation. For Akif and Nursi the choice became co-option in the new educational and religious structures of the Turkish republic, declared in November 1923, or retreat from public life in the face of revolutionary tribunals and harassment of journalists. The death of Ali Kemal Bey, a writer and minister in one of the sultan's cabinets, at the hands of a mob in November 1922 was an indication of what was to come. Sabri, Kevseri, and Akif chose Egypt; Said Nursi remained.

Akif is a figure of enormous controversy. The leading advocate of 'Abduh's ideas in Turkish-language discourse and a gifted poet, Akif agreed to produce a Turkish translation of the Qur'an for the religious affairs administration known as Diyanet, established in 1924.⁹⁵ Though he returned to Istanbul to die in 1936, Akif never delivered the text out of concern that it would be misused by Kemalist radicals at the height of their influence in the 1930s to institutionalise a Turkish Islam severed from its Arabic base after their success in imposing the call to prayer in Turkish.⁹⁶ It has emerged in recent studies that Akif had completed his Turkish Qur'an in several copies, at least two of which he entrusted to Mehmed İhsan Efendi (1902-1961), a religious scholar who also left for Egypt and father to historian and former head of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu. İhsan Efendi revealed the existence of these copies to Ekmeleddin, Sabri's son Ibrahim, and three others when they were gathered around his deathbed in Cairo in June 1961. Published accounts of the incident say it was at Ibrahim Sabri's insistence that Akif's wish for the text to be destroyed was honoured – burned in a laundry basin on a balcony in the district of Abbasiyya

⁹⁵ On Diyanet, İstar B. Gözaydın, "Diyanet and Politics," *The Muslim World*, 98/2-3 (April/July 2008): 216-27.

⁹⁶ Proposals were considered for introducing pews, organs and wearing shoes in mosques; see Wilson, *Translating the Qur'an*, 281-3.

– for fear that the previous year’s military coup signalled a return to the radical project of Turkicising Islam.⁹⁷

Sabri and Kevseri never returned to Turkey, preferring the extant internationalism of Arabic Islamic culture in Cairo, where they became celebrated figures as rejectionists of the Salafi and liberal modernist trends. Operating across rapidly and radically reconstituted ethnic and linguistic lines, Sabri and Kevseri were bearers of a tradition that ideological and technological transformations had conspired to render obsolete. This realisation led them to engage in the polemical interventions of the new class of public intellectuals, of which Akif was an exemplar.⁹⁸ In Egypt they became agents in the process of rethinking Islam as a belief system, juridical tradition, and political ideology, a process in which Turkey was to remain somewhat isolated for several decades.

* * *

⁹⁷ The story was first recounted in İsmail Hakkı Şengüler, *Mehmed Akif Kulliyatı*, 10 vols. (Istanbul: Hikmet Neşriyat, 1992), 10:230-5. Those present were Sabri, Ekmeleddin, Şengüler, Osman Saraç, Ali İhsan Okur. On the coup’s impact: M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ, *Üstad Ali Ulvi Kurucu Hatıralar*, 5 vols. (Istanbul: Kaynak, 2007), 2:153.

⁹⁸ On the emergence of public intellectuals in Europe see Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989 [1962]); on premodern Islamicate public space see Ralph Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1985).

CHAPTER 2

Ottoman exiles: From Constantinople to Cairo

This chapter presents short biographies of Akif, Sabri, and Kevseri, describing the general lines of their thought, followed by sections looking at scholarship's changing approach to their work, the role of Egypt as a site for intellectual discourse, and the particular engagement these three thinkers had with Ottoman, Turkish, and Arabic as modes of expression. As Benjamin Fortna has argued, a low regard for biography among professional historians has done a disservice to Late Ottoman history, which has tended to privilege the state over the individual.¹ On the other hand, biographical studies of religious figures have lacked an overarching analysis of their place in modern Islamic thought beyond Turkey. Regarding the three figures under study in place of autobiography there exists a body of biographical sources in the form of their followers' memoirs as well as letters, sermons, and photographs.² Caveats apply when surveying this material: some of it is hagiographical,³ mistakes regarding events and dates are common, and much is left unsaid, possibly as a form of self-censorship.⁴ Still, there is a breadth of material to work with, and while there are likely more documents to be found among government records in Istanbul, Ankara, and Cairo, as well as letter caches, these are not historical figures to be recovered from the archive.

¹ Benjamin Fortna, *The Circassian: A Life of Eşref Bey, Late Ottoman Insurgent and Special Agent* (London: Hurst, 2016), 10.

² We know Akif visited the Pyramids with his patron 'Abbas Halim Paşa because of the photographs.

³ Kevseri's students write against a backdrop of criticism from his Salafi detractors.

⁴ Akif had to be wary of the Turkish government reading correspondence during his Egypt exile. Government documents on Akif's time in Egypt from the Turkish Republican Archive have been published; Muharrem Coşkun, *Kod Adı: İrtica - 906, Mehmed Akif Ersoy* (Istanbul: Gaziosmanpaşa Belediyesi, 2014).

Mehmed Akif: A biography

Mehmed Akif was born and grew up in the Sarıg zel quarter of the Fatih district in central Istanbul to a Kosovo Albanian father and a mother from Tokat in northern Anatolia whose parents were Uzbeks from Bukhara. According to biographical notes Akif dictated in his final weeks of life in 1936, the family name of his father was Ragıyf, name possibly derived from the Arabic *ragh f* (bread), but his parents registered him as Akif because it was what bureaucrats heard when they pronounced the Albanian; the Arabic also denotes someone devoted to God.⁵ On at least one occasion Akif visited his Kosovan relatives but he did not speak Albanian. Born three years before the aborted constitutional experiment of 1876, Akif had the education of a typical reform-minded if not Westernised Ottoman functionary. Following two years of religious education at the Emir Buhari school he moved to the state system of *iptidai* and *r   diye* schools. After three years at the civil service school known as the M lkiye the tragedy of his father’s death in 1889 and loss of the family home in a fire compelled Akif to enter the new veterinary boarding school (M lkiye Baytar Mektebi) in the hope that it would be easier to get a job. Upon graduation in 1883 he entered the ministry of agriculture’s animal husbandry bureaucracy where he worked as an inspector for twenty years until 1913, affording him the opportunity to experience the empire from Rumelia to Damascus.

The religious knowledge he attained was largely informal. His father, a religious scholar from        near  pek who taught at the Fatih *medrese* (Islamic school), taught him Arabic, Qur’an memorisation and theology (*akide*).⁶ “Whatever I know I learned from him,” Akif wrote in March 1913.⁷ He studied Persian texts at the Fatih mosque seminary with the

⁵ Nevzad Ayas, “Mehmed Akif, Zihniyeti ve D    nce Hayatı,” in *Mehmed  kif: Hayatı Eserleri ve Yetmi  Muharririn Yazıları*, E ref Edib (Istanbul: Beyan, 2011), 494; Kuntay, *Mehmet Akif*, 162.

⁶ D cane Cundio lu, *Bir Kur’an   iri: Mehmed Akif ve Kur’an Me li* (Istanbul: Birun, 2000), 17.

⁷ Mehmed Akif, “   beyinsiz kafanın derdine,    milyon halk,” from his *Hakkın Sesleri* collection; *Safahat* (Istanbul:  a rı, 2015), 262, footnote 1.

Sufi teacher Esad Dede (1843-1911) and Turkish at high school with Kadri Nasih (1855-1918), a Herzegovinian who later fled to Egypt where he established the *Kanun-i Esasi* newspaper in 1897. In his own words the early texts that impressed him and through which he improved his language skills were the pre-Islamic Arabic poems known as the *Mu‘allaqat*, the Abbasid grammarian al-Mubarrad’s *Kitab al-Kamil*, *Gulistan* of Persian poet Sa‘di (d. 1291), the *Divan* of Persian poet Hafiz (d.1390), the *Masnavi-i Ma‘navi* (Tr. *Mesnevi*) of Persian Sufi poet Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (d. 1273), the Azeri Turkish work *Dastan-ı Leyli vü Mecnun* by the Karbala-born poet Fuzuli (d. 1556), and 19th-century French novelists and poets such as Hugo, Lamartine, Zola, and Daudet. He also read Ibn ‘Arabi with writer Ahmed Naim (1872-1934)⁸ and the Sufi work *al-Waridat* of Ottoman jurist Shaykh Badr al-Din (1358-1416)⁹ with religious scholar Musa Kazım (1858-1920).

From 1893 Akif began publishing poetry in journals including the influential *Servet-i Funun* and *Resimli Gazete*. His emergence as a leading poet and intellectual of the Muslim reform movement came suddenly with the publication of *Sirat-ı Müstakim* in August 1908 under the ownership of Akif’s friend Eşref Edib and Ebü’l-Ula Mardin. With Akif as editor and lead writer, it became the leading outlet for the devout intellectuals, advancing the vision of the Young Ottoman intellectuals Namık Kemal (1840-1888) and Ziya Paşa (1825-1880) of an Ottoman state in which Islam was the defining element.¹⁰ Modelling itself on *al-Manar*, the journal was a vehicle for Akif to also promote the ideas of ‘Abduh and al-Afghani. Describing ‘Abduh as al-Afghani’s “greatest work”,¹¹ Akif took up ‘Abduh’s theme of rejecting juridical *taqlīd* and mobilising the Muslim community to meet the challenge of

⁸ Kuntay, *Mehmet Akif*, 105. He does not state which text.

⁹ Ibid., 42-3.

¹⁰ Kasuya Gen, “The Influence of *Al-Manār* on Islamism in Turkey: The Case of Mehmed Akif,” in *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World: Transmission, Transformation, Communication*, ed. Stéphane Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao, Kosugi Yasushi (London: Routledge, 2016), 80-1. See Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

¹¹ Akif, “Cemaleddin Efgani,” *Sirat-ı Müstakim* (henceforth SM), 13 Mayıs 1326 (26 May 1910), 4/90: 208.

Europe through overcoming a putative cultural propensity for inaction (*al-sa'y wa-l-'amal*).¹² By 1912 Akif had published forty-five articles and three books of 'Abduh in translation,¹³ including the debate in 1900 between 'Abduh and French diplomat Gabriel Hanotaux (1853-1944), his own thirty-five short works of *tafsir* in 1912-1913, which were inspired by 'Abduh's work published later as *Tafsir al-Manar* (one is signed 'Abduh and Akif, as if they had written it together),¹⁴ and he also translated in article and book form the early works of 'Abduh acolyte Muhammad Farid Wajdi (1875-1954).

Another Akif appears from 1912, influenced by the territorial losses to European powers in successive wars; an Akif whose concerns are markedly more political than before.¹⁵ This is the period of Akif's great poetic collection *Safahat*. The first general observation one can make about Akif's intellectual output in this period concerns his view of Sufism, which was highly influential in Ottoman political and religious culture. Although he celebrated the hybrid nature of Ottoman Muslim identity and although his father had belonged to a Khalidi-Naqshbandi *tarikat* headed by Feyzullah Efendi (1805-1876),¹⁶ Akif had an ambiguous approach to Sufism typical of reform intellectuals. He saw in its complex network of saint figures a multivocality that weakened Muslims in their effort to meet the civilisational challenge of the Europeans and establish the rationalisation in religion required by modernity. The artistic output of Ottoman Sufi culture he saw as indulgent and lazy. In Akif's first published poem in 1895, *Kur'ana Hitab*, he revealed the scripturalist approach of reformers towards Islam as a European category of world religion that configured the

¹² Akif, "Mukallidliği de yapmıyoruz," *SM*, 17 Eylül 1325 (30 September 1909), 3/56: 54-5.

¹³ This included material from *Risalat al-Tawhid*, the journal *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa*, and his *tafsir* material as it appeared in *al-Manar*. Akif's articles, translations and poetry are collected in Latin script transliteration in Şengüler, *Mehmed Âkif Külliyyatı*.

¹⁴ Akif, "Tefsir-i Şerif" (Qur'an 103:3), *SR*, 12 Temmuz 1328 (25 July 1912), 8/1: 393-4.

¹⁵ Emin Erişirgil says he becomes a "political poet" (*politika şairliği*); *İslamcı bir Şairin Romanı Mehmet Âkif* (İstanbul: Atlas, 2017), 128.

¹⁶ Ayas, "Mehmed Akif," 496. There is no entry on Feyzullah Efendi (1805-1876) in the TDV İslâm Ansiklopedi but followers have set up this page: <https://feyzullahefendi.wordpress.com/> (accessed 27 December 2017).

Qur'anic text as the prime locus of Muslim faith; it was “my companion of shared language in the world/My help and place of support in the next” (*Dünyada refik ü hemzebānım/‘Uḳbāda muin ü müste‘ānım*).¹⁷ For Akif and other Ottoman reformers this signalling their rejection of the prevailing religious-cultural model. Yet Akif also embraced Sufism as a theosophical system whose pantheistic elements commanded respect with the Europeans. Ottoman religious culture was heavily influenced by Indian Naqshbandi shaykh Sirhindi, whose system sought to establish a clear distinction between God and the created world, but the devout intellectuals retained sympathy for the earlier system of Ibn ‘Arabi, known popularly as *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Tr. *vahdet-i vücud*),¹⁸ and Akif’s poetry is suffused with such references and imagery.¹⁹

Akif’s poetics reflect a similar reforming, rationalising approach. Eschewing the elaborate language and *topoi* of the Ottoman tradition, Akif rejected prevailing notions of poetry as “art for art’s sake”. Emulating the French realist writers Hugo and Zola, he argued art had both to reflect society and offer new directions for its improvement. Thus when he first came to publish in book form (as *Safahat-ı Hayattan*) his series of poems issued in *Sırat-ı Müstakim* up to 1911, Akif wrote an introductory poem in which he positioned himself as the conscience of the nation revealing social truths rather than as a writer revelling in clever artifice: “Ask me, dear reader, so that I may tell you/Of what nature my verses here are/A mass of words whose sole craft is sincerity/Since being not an artist, I know no artifice” (*Bana sor sevgili kari sana ben söyleyeyim/Ne hüviyette şu karşında duran eş ‘ārım:/Bir yığın*

¹⁷ Edib, *Mehmed Akif*, 621. Akif asserts the centrality of the Qur’an in his encounter with a Wahhabi qadi, likely in January 1916, cited in Cemal Kutay, *Necid Çöllerinde Mehmet Akif* (Istanbul: Posta Kutusu, 1978), 213.

¹⁸ While Ibn ‘Arabi did not use this term in his work, it was initially deployed by adversaries against him. His central theme was rather the Neoplatonic problem of the one and the many. See Su‘ad al-Hakim, *al-Mu‘jam al-Sufi: al-Hikma fi Hudud al-Kalima* (Beirut: Dandara li-l-Tiba‘a wa-l-Nashr, 1981), 1145-57. See also Alexander Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press).

¹⁹ Akif seems unsure about Sufism in “Hasbihâl,” *SM*, 16 Haziran 1327 (30 June 1911), 6/147: 257-59.

*söz ki, samimiyeti ancak hüneri;/Ne tasannu bilirim, çünkü, ne sanatkârım).*²⁰ The language deployed throughout this first collection displays a mastery of the *aruz* metre (Ar. *‘arūd*) along with a sprinkling of vernacular in a simplified yet formal Ottoman Turkish to describe the lives of the subaltern classes of Istanbul, and in doing so it broke conventions and marked new directions. Ömer Rıza (1893-1952), a Cairo-based Turkish writer who was to marry one of Akif’s daughters, described Akif’s *Fatih Kürsüsünde*, published in 1914 as the fourth volume of what Akif now marketed as the *Safahat* cycle, as flowing “like scenes from a cinema reel” (*levhalar bir sinema şeridi gibi*) when he heard Akif read it aloud.²¹ This populist approach was reminiscent of the journalist Ahmed Midhat (1844-1912), who adopted a pioneering, direct style in his writings, as well as the poetics of Muallim Naci (1849-1893). Although this style was a repudiation of the *hece* poetic metre being developed in Turkish nationalist circles, it was in conformity with the nationalist framework within which Akif’s Islamic ideology was to express itself in subsequent years.

Akif joined the CUP in 1908 after its success in leading the Young Turk revolution, and as a concession to his religious principles he was allowed to avoid the declaration of “unconditional obedience” to the party (*bilâ kayd ü şart cem’iyyetin emirlerine itaat*).²² After taking a position as teacher of Ottoman literature at Istanbul’s Darülfünun university²³ in October 1908 he gave evening classes in Arabic translation at the CUP’s Şehzadebaşı branch, teaching the *Mu‘allaqat*.²⁴ Akif published a section in the CUP book *Mevaiz-i Diniye* (Religious Sermons, 1912) under the title “İttihad Yaşatır, Yükseltir Tefrika Yakar Öldürür” (Unity gives life and elevates, division destroys and kills) but he was forced out of his post at

²⁰ Akif, *Safahat*, 3. The introduction bears similarities to the Qur’an’s opening verse. Its last two lines each begin with the imperative “Oku”, which retains the read/recite ambiguity in the Fatiha’s “İqra’!”.

²¹ Ömer Rıza Doğrul, “Mehmed Akif: Şahsi ve Aile Hayatı,” in Edib, *Mehmed Akif*, 437.

²² Related by astronomer Mehmet Fatin Gökmen, who initiated Akif; in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 248-9.

²³ Established in 1846, it was renamed Darülfünûn-u Şahâne (Imperial House of Multiple Sciences) in 1900 and Istanbul Darülfünûnu in 1912, before taking its current name Istanbul University in 1933.

²⁴ Recollections of Aksekili Ahmet Hamdi; “Âkif’e ait Bazı Hâtirat,” in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 547-8.

Darülfünun in late 1913 due to CUP irritation at his *Sebilürreşad* criticisms of how the Balkan wars were handled.²⁵ In February 1913 he gave three sermons, at the Bayezid, Fatih and Süleymaniye mosques: his theme was that Muslims of different ethnic-linguistic backgrounds have a duty to overcome division to save the Ottoman state as “Islam’s last hope” (*Müslümanlığın son ümidi*).²⁶ The same themes inflect the rush of poetry he published in the period 1912-14: the second *Safahat*, which consists of one epic, titled *Süleymaniye Kürsüsünde* (At the Süleymaniye Mosque Pulpit), was serialised in *Sebilürreşad* in 1912 and issued in book form later that year, then a series of Qur’anic *tafsîr* intended as poetic commentary on the Ottoman condition²⁷ and titled *Hakkın Sesleri* (Voices of God) was published in the same manner in 1913. In 1913-14 his second epic, *Fatih Kürsüsünde* (At the Fatih Mosque Pulpit), was serialised then published as the fourth volume of *Safahat*.

This commitment to the Ottoman idea deepened in a remarkable manner in 1914 when Akif began working as a government propagandist with the secret operations apparatus known as Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa. He was involved in two projects, a trip to Berlin in 1914-1915 to help turn Muslim prisoners from French and British-held territories into Ottoman collaborators, and a second to Najd to secure the support of the Rashidi and Saudi polities against the anticipated British effort to turn the Hijazis under Sharif Husayn against the Ottomans. Though the latter mission was top secret at the time, Akif gathered material to publish the poems *Berlin Hatıraları* (Berlin Memories, 1915-1918) and *Necid Çölllerinden Medine’ye* (1918) in the subsequent *Safahat* collection *Hatıralar* (Memories), which also included material from a 1914 vacation he took in Egypt (*El-Uksur’da*, 1915). The origins of this organisation and its activities have been a topic of great controversy because of its role in

²⁵ M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ, “Introduction,” in Mehmet Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1989), xx-xxi. The article was first published in *SM*, 11 Teşrinisani 1326 (24 November 1910), 5/116: 205-7.

²⁶ Delivered on 2 February 1913, Bayezid mosque; in *SR*, 24 Kanunusani 1328 (6 February 1913), 9/2: 373-476.

²⁷ An introductory article declares his intent to develop a *tafsîr* relevant to modern life, challenging trends that saw the Qur’an as irrelevant; “Tefsir-i Şerif,” *SR*, 24 Şubat 1327 (9 March 1912), 8/1: 5-6.

the deportation and massacre of Armenians during the war. It appears to have been established by İsmail Enver Paşa (1881-1922), the minister of war from 1914 to October 1918, as a covert body under the ministry's supervision to conduct paramilitary, intelligence, propaganda, and other special operations. One of its most important leaders was Eşref Kuşçubaşı Sencer (1873-1964), son of a Circassian refugee who became the chief falconer at the sultan's court. Sencer lived the life of a brigand for some time in Izmir and then the Hijaz, before drawing the attention of Enver who gave him an assignment to lead a group smuggling junior officers from Egypt into Libya during the 1911-1912 war with Italy.²⁸ The group included a Tunisian shaykh called Salih al-Sharif, and it was al-Sharif and Sencer who approached Akif to travel to Germany in 1914. How Akif first came into contact with them is not clear, but it is possible that Akif's Egypt trip was an official mission.²⁹ The Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa was tasked with spreading Ottoman propaganda to Muslim communities around the world to accompany the November 1914 jihad fatwa issued by the sheikh ül-Islam and declaration of holy war issued by the sultan. Pamphlets were prepared by al-Sharif in Arabic and rendered in Turkish by Akif, including responses to speeches by British Prime Minister Lloyd George (in office 1916-1922) and French Resident-General in Morocco Hubert Lyautey.³⁰ Between 1914 and 1923 Akif also translated a series of articles and books written by Egyptian 'ālim and pro-Ottoman anti-British agitator 'Abd al-'Aziz Jawish (1876-1929).³¹

²⁸ Fortna, *The Circassian*, 51-81. The first major study in English was Philip Stoddard, *The Ottoman Government and the Arabs, 1911 to 1918: A Preliminary Study of the Teskilat-ı Mahsusa* (Ph.D thesis, Princeton University, 1963), for which Sencer spoke to the author. He also spoke to Kutay for his book *Necid Çöllerinde Mehmet Akif*. On the secret organisation, see Polat Safi, "History in the Trench: The Ottoman Special Organization – Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Literature," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 48/1 (2012): 89-106.

²⁹ Kutay, *Necid Çöllerinde Mehmet Akif*, 13-14. Sencer says Enver was a fan of Akif's poetry.

³⁰ Cundioğlu, *Bir Kur'an Şâiri*, 64-5. For example, al-Sharif, "Fisebillah Cihadın Hakikati, Gayesi, Hükmü, Mücahidinin Vezaifi," *SR*, 13 Teşrinisani 1330 (26 November 1914), 13/315: 20-24. It may have been Akif who authored the French version, *La vérité au sujet de la guerre sainte* (Bern: Wyss, 1916).

³¹ *Kavmiyet ve Din* (1913), *İslam ve Medeniyet* (1913/1916), *Hilafet-i İslamiye* (1914), *Hastalıklar ve Çareleri* (1332-1334), *Esrar-ı Kur'an* (1914-16), *İslam Din-i Fitra* (1916-17), *Müslümanlık Fikir ve Hayata Neler Bahsetti?* (1920-1), *Müslümanlıkta Kadının Hukuku* (1923), most of which were first published in Istanbul in Arabic.

Akif only spoke directly of his Berlin and Najd experiences through his poetry and further sermons he gave in 1920, but his words were also filtered through scattered recollections in the memoirs of his friends Eşref Edib and Midhat Cemal and, in considerably more detail, Sencer's recollections and private papers made available to journalist-historian Cemal Kutay. Akif's second mission covered some five months from late 1915: a posse of Akif, al-Sharif, Sencer, and Enver's aide-de-camp Mümtaz Bey took the Hijaz railway to Medina, then travelled through the desert with a twenty-five-man armed camel corps to Ha'il. Gifts were delivered to Sa'ud ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, the Rashidi emir of Hail, and left with the emir of Burayda for the Saudi emir 'Abd al-'Aziz who had apparently skipped town for al-Ahsa to avoid the risk of Britain discovering secret talks with an Ottoman delegation.³² As they were returning via the Hijaz railway station at al-Mu'azzam news came from Enver by telegraph of the Ottoman victory at Gallipoli (around 9 January), inducing a rapturous reaction in Akif.³³ Akif's friendship with Sencer was apparently warm and enduring, as Akif's exchange of letters from Egypt in 1930-1931 demonstrates.³⁴

How much store the Ottoman government set in these pan-Islamic policies is a question of debate, but the Sharif of Mecca's revolt in 1916 confirmed to both the Ottoman and German governments their failure.³⁵ By 1917 the Turkist wing of the CUP led by Ziya Gökalp had prevailed; Said Halim Paşa, a friend of Akif who translated his French-language works on Islamic reform into Turkish, was replaced as prime minister by the interior minister Talat Paşa (1874-1921); and the government decided to remove religious schools from the

³² Kutay, *Necid Çöllerinde*, 35. The gifts included gold, swords, daggers, watches and leather horse saddle from Thessalonika; British intelligence reports valued the gold at 10,000 pounds; Fortna, *The Circassian*, 140, 169.

³³ Kutay, *Necid Çöllerinde*, 111-21.

³⁴ Sencer lists Akif and Jawish among forty-nine Special Organisation agents cited in Stoddard, "The Ottoman Government," 173-179; al-Sharif is among fifty-six names listed separately as the core *fedai zābiṭān* (self-sacrificing officers) working with Sencer. Al-Sharif and Jawish were also agents of the German Intelligence Office for the East, set up to organise German war propaganda. See Tilman Lüdke, "(Not) Using Political Islam: The German Empire and its Failed Propaganda Campaign in the Near and Middle East, 1914-1918 and Beyond," in *Jihad and Islam in World War I*, ed. Eric Zürcher (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016), 84-5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, passim.

purview of the sheikh ül-Islam and religious endowments (*evkaf*) ministry, placing them under the ministry of education. Stirred by the Ankara government's resistance to the Allied powers' plans to carve up the empire, Akif slipped out of British-occupied Istanbul in April 1920 for Ankara in an operation that Sencer appears to have organised, taking up a seat he was offered in the new parliament for districts as yet outside its control.³⁶ *Sebilürreşad* continued its operations from there, with brief sojourns in Kayseri and Kastamonu when Greek armies were close, until the journal was closed down following the Shaykh Said rebellion in 1925.

Akif was at the peak of his fame and his powers during this period. He gave a series of mosque sermons and addresses between February 1920 and February 1921 in Balıkesir, Konya, and Kastamonu which aimed to inform the population of the truth about the Treaty of Sèvres, the Western powers' original plan to carve up the empire, and rally support for the forces of Mustafa Kemal, who made a point of meeting Akif after his arrival in Ankara.³⁷ The speeches were widely distributed by the government to provinces and war-fronts. His poem *Asım*, sixth in the *Safahat* cycle and published in *Sebilürreşad* between 1919 and 1924 (in book form in August 1928), met critical acclaim for its mix of metre, language, and message of hope for the coming generation. His poem *İstiklal Marşı* (Independence March) was chosen in 1921 as the national anthem and in 1919 the education ministry charged Akif and others with composing an Arabic dictionary that for unclear reasons did not go beyond the letter *alif*.³⁸ His entanglement with Ankara deepened when he was appointed in 1922 to the publications committee of the shari'a and religious endowments ministry (*şer'îye ve evkaf*

³⁶ Ibid., 140-1. Sencer says Akif refused money from the organisation. Akif's son Emin confirms Sencer's role in the Ankara trip; Emin Âkif Ersoy, *Babam Mehmet Âkif: İstiklal Harbi Hatıraları* (Istanbul: Kurtuba, 2017), 44.

³⁷ The sermons are collected in Abdülkerim Abdülkadiroğlu and Nuran Abdülkadiroğlu, *Mehmed Akif'in Kur'an-ı Kerim'i Tefsiri Mev'iza ve Hutbeleri* (Ankara: Diyanet, 1992). For Konya see Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 113.

³⁸ Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 335. The dictionary is also cited in a letter Akif wrote on 25 February to Fuad Şemsi İnan; Yusuf Turan Günaydın, *Mehmet Akif Ersoy: Mektuplar* (Istanbul: Atlas, 2016), 109.

vekaleti), established by Mustafa Kemal to shore up support among Islamic opinion in the ongoing conflict with Istanbul, Greece, and the Western powers. Headed by Jawish, the committee published at least eight books before it was dissolved in March 1923, including two translations into Ottoman Turkish from Arabic texts by Jawish: one responding to what was believed to be a request from the Anglican Church to explain Islam, published as *Anglikan Kilisesine Cevap* (Response to the Church of England, 1923),³⁹ and a second in praise of the trend towards prohibition in Western countries, *İçkinin Hayat-ı Beşerde Açtığı Rahneler* (The Damage Alcohol Causes, 1923).⁴⁰

Akif was vacationing in Edirne in September 1923 as the British were preparing to withdraw following the Treaty of Lausanne when a telegram arrived from Said Halim Paşa's brother Abbas Halim (1866-1934), minister of public works in Said Halim's 1913 cabinet and at whose Heybeli estate Akif often spent time. Abbas Halim invited him to spend the winter at his residence in Helwan just south of Cairo.⁴¹ Akif returned to Istanbul in spring and left again to spend the winter in Egypt in late 1924. When he left a third time in October 1925, it was for what was to become a permanent stay that only ended in 1936 when his health deteriorated. A number of theories have been put forward for why he accepted Abbas Halim's offer, including government agents trailing him,⁴² the closing of *Sebilürreşad* and trial of intellectuals including Eşref Edib in 1925,⁴³ and denunciations of Akif by Kemalist

³⁹ Jawish's Arabic original is *Ajwibati fi al-Islam 'an As'ilat al-Kanisa al-Anglikaniyya*, but the only extant copy I have found, held at the Suleymaniye Library in Istanbul, is incomplete.

⁴⁰ Jawish, *Athar al-Khamr fi Nazar Arqa al-Umam al-Masihiyya bi-Amirqa wa-Ghayriha* (1923).

⁴¹ Ersoy, *Babam*, 183. Midhat Cemal found Akif's willingness to hobnob with aristocracy distasteful, considering it an anomaly of his character; Kuntay, *Mehmet Akif*, 40, 78. Erişirgil makes a similar observation, seeing naivety in Akif's views of his Egyptian patron; *İslamcı Bir Şairin Romanı*, 211.

⁴² Recollection of Şefik Kolaylı who spoke with Akif the day before he left in 1925; Fahri Kutluay, "Aydınlatılan iki mühim sır," *SR*, 4/99 (April 1951): 375.

⁴³ Erişirgil, *İslamcı Bir Şairin Romanı*, 345.

artisans,⁴⁴ all of which appear to have played a part in his thinking. Kemalist propagandists claimed he left out of objection to a 1925 law forcing men to wear hats.⁴⁵

Hagiographical writing about his Egypt years has revolved around certain themes – that he was desperately unhappy, broken by rejection in Turkey, incapable of matching his prodigious output since 1908, lacking money.⁴⁶ From his letters to family and friends, his poetry composed at the time, and comments to visitors that appear in various memoirs, it appears that elements of this picture are inaccurate. Akif was happy to withdraw to Egypt, which he fetishised in his writing as “the Great East” (*Koca Şark*).⁴⁷ The poetry of his Egypt years – his final *Safahat* collection was published in Cairo in 1933 under the title *Gölgeler*, spanning material from 1919 to 1933 – includes his most lyrical and rapturous work. The life of seclusion he adopted in Helwan was one he often celebrated in his letters. His wife and sons Emin and Tahir were with him throughout most of those years. What did cast a huge shadow over his life in Egypt was the commission he had reluctantly accepted before leaving: to produce a definitive Turkish version of the Qur’an to be published alongside a *tafsîr* written simultaneously by the ‘âlim Elmalılı Hamdi Efendi (1878-1942). It was not until 1931 that Akif had concluded he was being exploited to provide the Kemalists with what would be the jewel in the crown of the revolutionary project.⁴⁸ Yet even then he continued to engage in

⁴⁴ Akif was insulted at the March 1925 Gallipoli Victory Day as an “irredeemable non-Turkish” poet (*çaresiz Türk olmayan bir adam*) whose paean to the dead – a section of *Asım* titled “Çanakkale Şehitlerine”, published 10 July 1924 in *Sebilürreşad* – was recited reluctantly since the speaker said no comparable work by a Turk could be found. The Republican People’s Party official organ *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* also ran an article telling Akif to “go play in the sand” (*hadi git artık, sen kumda oyna*), a line Akif used in his *Gölgeler* poem *Bir Arıza* (1929). The Gallipoli incident was related verbally from Hasan Basri Çantay to Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti, who published it in “M. Akif,” *Yeni İstanbul*, 31 December 1967. See Cündioğlu, *Bir Ku’ran Şairi*, 133.

⁴⁵ Şukufe Nihal, “Bana Göre Mehmed Akif,” *Tan*, 31 December 1938; reproduced in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 744-5. A November 1925 law made European hats compulsory for civil servants at work and all men in public places.

⁴⁶ Admirers and detractors are prone to exaggerate his suffering; among the former see Düzdağ’s *Mehmed Akif* (2011) and among the latter see Fahir İz; “Mehmet Akif: A Biography,” *Erdem*, 4/11 (May 1988): 316.

⁴⁷ Emin Âkif Ersoy, *Babam*, 103. See *El-Uksur’da* (1915), in Akif, *Safahat*, 420.

⁴⁸ Cündioğlu suggests Akif first became uneasy in 1928, the year of the alphabet reform and removal of Islam as state religion from the constitution; *Bir Kur’an Şairi*, 146-153. Akif made final arrangements for Edib to break the contract in 1931; Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 30. In a letter dated 18 May 1931, Akif describes the Ankara government as engaging in “all forms of fearless excess” (*her türlü ifratı biperva kabul eden*) in the name of renewal; Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 90. During a visit to Egypt in 1932 Edib says Akif denounced the regime as a “Freemason cabal” (*farmason dolabı*) that wanted to exploit him; Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 172.

animated debate with friends over his translation work and retained hope of publishing his Qur'an independently of the Turkish government.⁴⁹

After he became seriously ill from malaria in 1935 Akif returned to Turkey in the early summer of 1936. From his sickbed he held court for several months with a stream of visiting intellectuals and dignitaries, resisting financial temptations from Atatürk's emissaries to hand over his translation, until he finally succumbed to liver failure, passing away on 27 December 1936. Egyptian exile seemed strangely appropriate for a figure so in many ways unconventional and out of place. His early persona as the poet of the people was incongruous with the patronage of a pasha. Seniüddin Başak, a lawyer from among his pre-1908 circle, once said that as a man who stuck to his ideals (*mefkûresinin adamı*) Akif had been lucky to find sanctuary with someone like Abbas Halim.⁵⁰ His patron saw it differently, once remarking: "Akif can find an Abbas Halim any time, but I wouldn't find another Akif."⁵¹ His exile, his work in exile, his act of withholding work in exile – all seemed to further his standing in time rather than diminish it.⁵² Akif's shift from themes of Islamic unity towards a form of Turkish nationalism pleased neither devout intellectuals nor nationalists,⁵³ but established him as a Muslim-Turkish 'ālim-intellectual who could several decades later become emblematic of ascendant Turkish Islamism.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Edib says Akif hoped to publish his work in London on silk paper with Arabic on one side, Turkish on the other, and notes of *tafsīr* underneath; Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 170.

⁵⁰ Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 282.

⁵¹ Kuntay, *Mehmet Akif*, 130.

⁵² He had no agriculture ministry pension, refused a reward for his national anthem, and returned money given him in the Qur'an contract. "With my famous Arabic, Persian and French I can't find work in Cairo, Tehran, or Paris," he wrote in 1924; Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 132. Yet he lived for free in homes provided by 'Abbas Halim.

⁵³ He saw himself as above politics and ideology – thus his dismissive comment that Ziya Gökalp was a *nazariyatçı*, merely a "theoretician"; Ayas, "Mehmed Akif," 540.

⁵⁴ Diyanet head Ömer Nasuhi Bilmen approved of Akif surrendering his translation assignment to Elmalılı Hamdi since he was among the "real and capable ulema" (*hakiki ve kudretli ulema*); "Mehmed Akif: Hayatı ve eserleri," in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 817. Akif said in *Asım* he was not 'ālim, *faqīh* or politician but poet; Akif, *Safahat*, 483. But in one letter of April 1912 he called himself *müfessir* and *dai*; Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 162.

Mustafa Sabri: A biography

Operating unambiguously within the category of *‘ālim*, Sabri rejected modernist discourse as an apologetic concession to secular nationalism that helped destroy the epistemic framework of the shari‘a state. Modernists like Akif would reject the notion that they were any less fierce than conservatives in their response to the challenge of European thought. Indeed, one of their major themes was the danger of “blind imitation” of the West,⁵⁵ a charge they directed at Turkist intellectuals such as Ziya Gökalp and Tevfik Fikret (1867-1915), the latter of whom Akif attacked in poetry for his critique of Islam.⁵⁶ However, Sabri viewed their reworking of traditional theology as wholly unnecessary and noted a superficial semantic segue between their critique of imitation of Western knowledge and imitation as a principle of *fiqh*, through misuse of the term *taqlīd*. In Sabri’s derisive rendering, most of their *tajdīd* (renewal) was in fact *taqlīd* (of the West) in itself.⁵⁷

Sabri was born in the north central Anatolian town of Tokat in 1869 to parents of Turkic Anatolian origin. His father, Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Qazabadi, or Ahmed Efendi, was devout though not a religious scholar. He actively encouraged the young Sabri, a child prodigy like Akif, to enter the ranks of the ulema, though he was concerned that the speed of his son’s rise through the state bureaucracy could impact his independence of thought and action.⁵⁸ Sabri appears to have become a *ḥāfiẓ* of the Qur’an by age ten⁵⁹ and pressed his parents to allow him to study in Kayseri, a centre of religious learning, although he had

⁵⁵ ‘Abduh, “Taassup,” *SM*, 10 Eylül 1325 (23 September 1909), 3/55: 33-7. See Akif’s discussion of *mukallidlik* (imitation), “Hasbihâl,” *SM*, 30 Mayıs 1329 (12 June 1913), 10/248: 221.

⁵⁶ Edib says Fikret is one of the few people Akif despised; *Mehmed Âkif*, 223. Fikret’s poem *Tarih-i Kadim* (1905), in particular its description of the Qur’an as an “outdated book” (*kitab-ı köhne*) and the “death of thought” (*maktel-i fikr*), provoked Akif to refer to Fikret with the line *hiç utanmaz Protestanlara zangoçluk eder* (“without shame he rings the bells for Protestants”) in *Süleymaniye Kürsüsünde*; Akif, *Safahat*, 239. Fikret retorted by referring to Akif as Molla Sırat in an addendum to his poem, *Tarih-i Kadim’e Zeyl* (1914). See Kuntay, *Mehmet Akif*, 100-1; Erişirgil, *İslami bir Şairin Romanı*, 149.

⁵⁷ Sabri, *Mawqif al-Bashar Taht Sultan al-Qadar* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1933), 8.

⁵⁸ Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql wa-l-‘Ilm wa-l-‘Alam min Rabb al-‘Alamin wa-Rusulihi*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Kutub al-Arabiyya, 1981), 1:1-2, 71. Sabri gives the Arabic form of his father’s name.

⁵⁹ Sabri, *Mas’alat Tarjamat al-Qur’an* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1932), 18.

studied *fiqh*, Arabic, and logic with Zülbiyezade Ahmed Efendi in Tokat.⁶⁰ In Kayseri he studied disputation (*al-jadal wa-l-munāẓara*) with Mehmed Emin Efendi (1821-1908),⁶¹ before moving to Istanbul where he did further studies in *‘aqīda* and *fiqh* with a teacher called Shaykh Atif Bey, but more importantly was taken under the wing of the commissioner of medrese education (the *ders vekili*) at the office of the sheikh ül-Islam, Ahmed Asım Efendi (1836-1911).⁶² After obtaining his *rü’us-ı tedris* teaching qualification in 1890 he took a position as lecturer (*dersiam*) at the Fatih mosque seminary and married Ahmed Asım’s daughter Ulviye.⁶³ His teaching covered *tafsīr*, hadith, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and Arabic rhetoric, particularly *al-Mutawwal* of the Hanafi-Maturidi theologian Sa’d al-Din al-Taftazani (1322-1389), one of Sabri’s favourite scholars.

Sabri’s acquaintance with Ahmed Asım was to open doors in that the latter had been responsible since 1875 for the *Huzur Dersleri* (Imperial Presence Lectures),⁶⁴ a practice established in 1758 whereby selected religious scholars were invited to attend carefully scripted disquisitions on religious matters with the sultan during the fasting month of Ramadan.⁶⁵ Ahmed Asım invited Sabri to attend these lectures in 1897, a year after Sabri had become imam of the Beşiktaş Asariye Mosque, and Sabri drew the attention of Abdülhamid through a treatise he wrote correcting a point of *fiqh* raised in one discussion that he had been too timid to question at the time.⁶⁶ Impressed with the work, the sultan invited Sabri to serve as librarian (*hafız-ı kütüb*) at the Yıldız Palace for four years, and in this same year, 1900,

⁶⁰ Ibid., footnote 2. He studied Qutb al-Razi’s (d. 1364) *Sharh al-Shamsiyya*, a commentary on al-Katibi (d. 1294)’s book on logic *al-Risala al-Shamsiyya*.

⁶¹ Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 1:1, footnote 2.

⁶² The *ders vekili* was one of three deputies to the sheikh ül-Islam, responsible for education.

⁶³ Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 1:1. They had three children, Sabiha, Nezahet, and Ibrahim.

⁶⁴ Ebü’l-Ula Mardin, *Huzur Dersleri*, 3 vols. (Istanbul: Ismail Akgün, 1966).

⁶⁵ See Zilfi, *Politics and Piety*, 227-35.

⁶⁶ The work was *Risalat al-Yamin al-Ghamus*, regarding the sin of false oath to attain property. The incident is related by Sabri’s student in Egypt Emin Saraç; interview in Mufarrih ibn Sulayman al-Qawsi, *Mustafa Sabri: al-Mufakkir al-Islami wa-l-‘Alim al-‘Alami wa-Shaykh al-Islam fi al-Dawla al-‘Uthmaniyya Sabiqan* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 2006), 425-6.

Sabri became secretary of the sultan's office. He had also taken on work during this period as a lecturer in *tafsir* at both Darülfünun and the state's school for preachers (Medresetü'l-Vaizin).⁶⁷ In 1905 he was elected to the academic committee of scholarly publications and research for Islamic studies (Tetkikat ve Telifat-ı İslamiye Heyet-i İlmiyesi), which gave him the status to review and evaluate contemporary scholars' work.

Sabri followed an exemplary career path as a loyal and distinguished scholar within the İlmiye bureaucracy. But when political life was transformed with the revolution of 1908, he became one of the most political of the many ulema who entered the new arena of public discourse. Initially sympathetic to the CUP, Sabri wanted to preserve the Islamic features of the state, whether the state took the form of Hamidian autocracy or a constitutional system.⁶⁸ He plunged into the parliamentary arena with gusto, elected to the October 1908 assembly following the uprising and developing a particular view of what he would later call in Arabic "Islamic democracy" (*al-dīmūqrāṭiyya al-islāmiyya*)⁶⁹ that would preserve the system of ulema-administered shari'a law and the sultan as ultimate arbiter of the legislative process through his right to dissolve parliaments. Sabri's fear, ultimately realised, was of elected majorities altering the constitutional stipulations and basic laws that sustained the shari'a state in accordance with the fashion of the times.⁷⁰ When over one hundred religious scholars formed the Society for Islamic Studies (Cemiyet-i İlmiye-i İslamiye) in August 1908, Sabri was elected a board member and editor of its journal *Beyanülhak* (1908-1912). Sabri's

⁶⁷ Abdülkadir Altunsu, *Osmanlı Şeyhülislamı* (Ankara: Ayyıldız, 1972), 254.

⁶⁸ His early writings included articles in the journals *Tarık* and *Malumat* in 1898, such as "Cüretli Bir Dekadan," *Malumat*, 1 Şaban 1316 (1 December 1898), 163: 863-65.

⁶⁹ Sabri, *Mawqif al-'Aql*, 1:20. See also a speech Sabri gave extolling the restored constitutional order for guaranteeing equality and freedom of gathering, beliefs and rites for Muslims and Christians but excoriating the rich (*eşref*) for undefined unjust treatment of ordinary people; "Taşrada İrad Olunmuş bir Nutuktan," *BH*, 5 Nisan 1326 (18 April 1910), 2/56: 1150-3. "We elected delegates; they made laws according to our wishes and passed them to government who implements them. So, government derives its power from delegates who as our representatives got their power from us"; 12 Nisan 1326 (25 April 1910), 2/57: 1164.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4:333-4. On the sultan-caliph's role, see Sabri, *al-Nakir 'ala Munkiri al-Ni'ma min al-Din wa-l-Khilafa wa-l-Umma* (Beirut: Dar al-Qadiri, 1924), *passim*.

opening editorial comment used the language of reform to address readers, stating that Islam was not against “progress and civilisation”, extolling “freedom practised in a legitimate manner”, “love of [Islamic] sciences and modern knowledge”, and eschewing absolutism and injustice.⁷¹ In 1910 he was a founding member of a new party called Ahali which merged into an umbrella group formed in 1911, the Freedom and Accord Party (Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası), or Liberal Entente. One of the key policy disputes of the time was the CUP’s drive towards administrative centralisation, which Sabri saw as a tool for tightening the CUP’s grip on the levers of power that was contrary to Ottoman political traditions. Sabri travelled the country in 1912 railing against the CUP in sermons as atheist traitors,⁷² while in February 1913 Akif was still preaching for national unity during the Second Balkan War as a party member.

After its restoration to power via a coup d’état in January 1913, the CUP went after its political opponents, among them Sabri. He escaped from his home in the Çarşamba area of Fatih, climbing from a window onto the roof of the neighbour’s carpentry workshop, then made his way to the home of a Greek Orthodox acquaintance in the Fanar district⁷³ before hopping on a boat to the Romanian Black Sea town of Köstence (Constanța).⁷⁴ It seems he headed for Paris via Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to attend the Arab National Congress held in June 1913 where the question of the status of Arab provinces of the Ottoman sultanate was discussed.⁷⁵ He settled in Bucharest where he had many acquaintances among the Muslim community⁷⁶ and made a living throughout the war by teaching Turkish; one report says he bought a house.⁷⁷ Arrested in 1918 when Bucharest came under German and Turkish

⁷¹ “Beyanülhak’ın Mesleği,” *BH*, 5 October 1908.

⁷² Sadık Albayrak, *Şeriat Yolunda Yürüyenler ve Sürünenler* (Istanbul: Medrese, 1979), 24-5. Sabri refers to his sermons in *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 4:340.

⁷³ Altunsu, *Osmanlı Şeyhülislamı*, 255.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁷⁵ This is according to a biography of Sabri written by his son Ibrahim and published in al-Qawsi, *Mustafa Sabri*, 136, 396-7.

⁷⁶ Sabri mentions his time in Bucharest in *al-Nakir*, 104.

⁷⁷ Recollection of his student Ali Yakub Cenkçiler, a Kosovan who left Turkey to study at al-Azhar in 1936; interview, in al-Qawsi, *Mustafa Sabri*, 413.

occupation, Sabri was sent back to Istanbul and exile in the northwest Anatolian town of Bilecik for some two months.⁷⁸ Following the collapse of the CUP government he returned to Istanbul in January 1919 to help reestablish the Liberal Entente.

What followed was the most controversial chapter of his life: his turn as the sheikh ül-Islam who tried to put down Mustafa Kemal's National Forces (*Kuva-ı Milliye*). Sabri quickly came to dominate the religious hierarchy in the empire's twilight years, elected as the Tokat delegate to parliament in January 1919, appointed to the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye, an Islamic academy set up in 1918 as a sop to the religious establishment after the CUP had removed Islamic schools from İlmîye control,⁷⁹ and head of an elite body of ulema called the Teachers' Association (Cemiyet-i Müderrisin, later known as Teali-i İslam Cemiyeti). It was then that he was appointed sheikh ül-Islam, serving four times in Liberal Entente cabinets under prime minister (*sadrâzam*) Damad Ferid Paşa from 4 March 1919 until 25 September 1920, and deputising for him during the Versailles peace conference in June 1919.⁸⁰

Sabri's actions should be understood according to his priority of reversing CUP efforts to de-Islamise public life and stopping the Turkists from reforming as a political force. He introduced Qur'an recitations for the opening and closing of sessions in both houses of parliament, a request he had been making since 1908.⁸¹ He failed to dissuade Sultan Vahideddin from sending Mustafa Kemal to eastern Anatolia in May 1919 as general

⁷⁸ Refik Halit Karay, who was banished to Bilecik with Sabri, mentions their imprisonment in *Minelbab İlmîhrab: 1918 Mütarekesi Devrinde Olan Biten İşlere ve Gelip Geçen İnsanlara Dair Bildiklerim* (Istanbul: İnkilâp, 1992), 42. Emin Saraç says the CUP wanted to execute Sabri but Talat Paşa, then prime minister, preferred banishment; interview, 428.

⁷⁹ Zekeriya Akman, *Osmanlı Devleti'nin Son Döneminde Bir Üst Kurul, Dârü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslâmiye* (Ankara: DİB Yayınları, 2009).

⁸⁰ From 4 March 1919 to 18 May 1919, 19 May 1919 to 20 July 1919, 21 July 1919 to 1 October 1919, 31 July 1920 to 25 September 1920.

⁸¹ Sadık Albayrak, *Son Devir Osmanlı Uleması: İlmîye Ricalinin Teracim-i Ahvali*, 5 vols. (Istanbul: Medrese, 1981), 4:251.

inspector of the army,⁸² but spent hours convincing him to sign the cabinet decree ordering Mustafa Kemal to stand down on 9 July 1919.⁸³ British occupying authorities had relayed this request in June to Sabri, who suggested in his meetings with British officials that former CUP figures were bad faith actors who should be “got rid of”.⁸⁴ By the time he was appointed sheikh ül-Islam for the last time in July 1920 Mustafa Kemal’s nationalists had set up their own parliament in Ankara, and the Istanbul government had scrambled to form an army against it. As a member of the sultan’s inner group of counsellors (Şura-ı Saltanat) Sabri supported accepting the Sèvres conditions at a meeting on 22 July 1920 (it was signed on 10 August 1920).⁸⁵ He removed muftis in Deniz, Isparta, Usak, Burhaniye, Antalya, and Sinop over suspected support for Ankara,⁸⁶ yet it was not Sabri but Dürriyade Abdullah Efendi who issued the fatwa as sheikh ül-Islam sanctioning the murder of Mustafa Kemal and others in his camp after a tribunal sentenced him to death in May 1920.⁸⁷ Sabri was party to at least the early statements of the Cemiyet-i Müderrisin denouncing the National Forces,⁸⁸ though he was not a member from November 1919 when it changed its name.⁸⁹ His final resignation on

⁸² Ali Ulvi Kurucu, an Azhar student who left Turkey in 1939 and studied with Sabri for six years in Egypt, says Sabri had spies reporting on Kemal’s movements in Istanbul before he left for the east and became convinced Kemal had an understanding with the British to end the caliphate; interview in al-Qawsi, *Mustafa Sabri*, 440-1.

⁸³ Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 1:473.

⁸⁴ The words of military attache General Deedes describing Sabri’s position to Vice-Admiral Sir A. Calthorpe in letter dated 8 June 1919; British Foreign Office archives, no. FO 371/4158/94640. Document is also in Bilal Şimşir, *İngiliz Belgelerinde Atatürk, 1919-1938*, 8 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1973), 1:11-12.

⁸⁵ Altunsu, *Osmanlı Şeyhülislamları*, 256-7. One report given by Altunsu has Sabri’s wife asking him in tears how he could have consented to giving Izmir to the Greeks. Altunsu bases the report on interviews he did with Hatice Hanım, a cousin of his wife through her father Ahmed Asım, and her daughter Semiha Omay. Altunsu gives the location of the interview but not its date. He relates Ulviye Hanım’s words as follows: “Sen Allah’tan korkmadın mı, Peygamber’den utanmadın mı? İzmir’in Yunanlılara verilmesine nasıl razı oldun? İstifa edeydin, imza etmedeydin!” – to which he says Sabri said nothing.

⁸⁶ Sabahattin Selek, *Milli Mücadele*, 2 vols. (İstanbul: Burçak Yayınevi, 1966), 2:768-9.

⁸⁷ Sabri, “Takrir al-Tadhkir,” *al-Muqattam*, 4 November 1923, 2. Cited in al-Qawsi, *Mustafa Şabri*, 142. Sabri was among Istanbul ministers condemned to death for treason by the Ankara High Court in July 1920.

⁸⁸ Its first statement was published in *İkdam*, 16 September 1919; in Ali Sarıkoyuncu, “Şeyhülislam Mustafa Sabri’nin Milli Mücadele ve Atatürk İnkılapları Karşıtı Tutum ve Davranışları,” *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, no. 39 (1997): 795.

⁸⁹ Britain helped distribute its statements in northwestern Anatolia by air: see Kinross, *Atatürk*, 250; Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, “Teâlî-İ İslâm Cemiyeti,” *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2001), 207-8; Tarık Zafer Tunaya’s *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 2 vols. (İstanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1986), 2:387-396.

1 October 1920 stemmed from frustration that Damad Ferid was not more effective in challenging Ankara and possibly a failed intrigue to form his own cabinet.⁹⁰

With Ankara's forces moving into Istanbul following the Convention of Mudanya in October 1922, Sabri fled once more.⁹¹ Arriving in Alexandria, he was immediately met with hostile reaction because he had stood against those seen as fighting imperialism in the name of Islam, from vegetables thrown at him in the street,⁹² to random telegrams warning him to leave Egypt,⁹³ to derisive articles in the press.⁹⁴ He accepted an invitation by Sharif Husayn to stay in Mecca, where he was joined by the deposed sultan, but returned to Egypt five months later.⁹⁵ After Turkey was formally declared a republic in October 1923, Sabri went to Lebanon in January 1924 to complete his book on republicanism and the caliphate, *al-Nakir 'ala Munkiri al-Ni'ma min al-Din wa-l-Khilafa wa-l-Umma* (Disavowal of Those who Reject the Blessings of Religion, Caliphate and Nation), which he completed on 24 March 1924, three weeks after the Ankara parliament abolished the caliphate as he had feared.⁹⁶ Sabri's next stop was Romania, from where he made a trip to the Vatican in 1925 to place a bold request for the papal authorities to work with "patriotic Turks and eminent figures from the Muslim world" to restore the caliphate as "moderating force" (*puissance modératrice*) on the basis of their joint interest in combatting atheist nationalist destruction of the social-religious

⁹⁰ Memoirs of senior civil servant Ali Fuat Türkgeldi, *Görüp İştiklerim* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1951), 243; and recollections of Ahmed Tevfik Paşa, who headed the last Ottoman government; Mahmud Kemal İnal, *Osmanlı Devrinde Son Sadrazamlar*, 4 vols. (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1982), 4:2071.

⁹¹ A cargo boat carrying his personal effects including his book *Dinî Müceddedler* was seized; al-Qawsi, *Mustafa Sabri*, 134.

⁹² Sabri, *al-Nakir*, 232.

⁹³ Two examples are published in al-Qawsi, *Mustafa Sabri*, 479-80.

⁹⁴ Sabri defended himself in *al-Ahram*; "Shaykh al-Islam al-Sabiq Yabsut Ara'ahu wa-Yudafi' 'an Nafsihi wa-Yahmil 'ala Khusumihi," *al-Ahram*, 2 December 1922; cited in al-Qawsi, 517.

⁹⁵ Sabri wrote that he left the Hijaz in order to preserve "the independence of my ideas" (*Yarın*, 20 July 1928, p.4, column 3) but Kurucu quotes him as saying he feared an "English game" of having Sabri bless a Hijazi caliph; Düzdağ, *Hatıralar*, 2:56. Altunsu confuses the chronological order of Sabri's Greece, Hijaz and Cairo sojourns and states incorrectly that he taught at al-Azhar; *Osmanlı Şeyhülislamı*, 258.

⁹⁶ The title is an allusion to the angels Munkar and Nakir who test the faith of the dead in Islamic eschatology.

order (see Appendix 1).⁹⁷ In 1927 he took his family to Gümülcine (Komotini) in Greek Thrace, the hometown of his wife's father that retained a Turkish Muslim community. There he issued the newspaper *Yarın* (1927-1930) with his son Ibrahim. The paper was officially banned in Turkey,⁹⁸ but it was not until Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos visited Ankara in 1931 that Greece closed it down and Sabri was asked to move to Patra on the western side of Greece. Depressed after a few months in these new surrounds, Sabri was surprised to be offered a visa by the Egyptian ambassador in Athens, and on 20 January 1932 he and his family arrived back in Egypt where he would spend the last twenty-two years of his life.

Egypt was a second wind for Sabri. Shunned a decade before, he was now warmly welcomed by an elite of religious scholars and intellectuals, a circle that included the Shaykh of al-Azhar at the time Mustafa al-Maraghi (1881-1945); Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut (1893-1963), rector of al-Azhar, 1958-1963; Shaykh Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn (1876-1958), shaykh of Al-Azhar from 1952-1954;⁹⁹ the poet Mahmud Hasan Isma'il (1910-1977); Muhammad Sa'id al-'Iryan (1915-1964), who wrote school textbooks on Islamic issues after the 1952 revolution; the novelist Yahya Haqqi (1905-1992); and Mahmud Shakir (1909-1997), a poet who held a weekly salon.¹⁰⁰ The ministry of religious endowments appointed him to its committee for improving the state of mosques for which he was given a salary of twelve Egyptian pounds a month, and out of respect for Sabri its members would often meet in his flat in the suburb of Heliopolis, which became a meeting point for intellectuals in its

⁹⁷ "Espulsione del Califfo," *Turchia*, No. 43 P.O., Archivio Storico, Segreteria di Stato, Vatican City; 6-7. The letter, dated Rome, 14 May 1925, was delivered in French to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, the Cardinal Secretary of State. There is no Vatican record of a response to Sabri's initiative.

⁹⁸ Al-Qawsi, *Mustafa Sabri*, 145. One of his first articles was a poem in response to news that the Turkish republic did not recognise him as a citizen, "İstifa Ediyorum," *Yarın*, 29 July 1927, pp.1-2.

⁹⁹ Shaykh Khidr, a Tunisian, was also drawn into the Ottoman-German propaganda scheme, sent by Enver in 1915 to engage with Muslim prisoners of war. See "Sheikh Muhammad Al-Khidr Husayn un Grand Imâm d'Al-Azhar," islamophile.org, 16 May 2000, <http://www.islamophile.org/spip/Sheikh-Muhammad-Al-Khidr-Husayn,376.html> (accessed 4 March 2018).

¹⁰⁰ Ali Ulvi Kurucu, *Gecelerin Gündüzü: Nurlu Belde Medine'den Yazılar* (Istanbul: Marifet, 1990), 225-31.

own right.¹⁰¹ When his book *al-Qawl al-Fasl bayn Alladhina Yu'minun bi-l-Ghayb wa-Alladhina La Yu'minun* (The Definitive Word on Those Who Believe in the Unseen and Those Who Don't) was published in 1942, a copy found its way to the chief regent, Muhammad 'Ali Tawfiq (1875-1955), who was so enamoured of it that he invited Sabri to his Manyal palace and instituted a second monthly salary of the same amount.¹⁰² When Sabri died on 12 March 1954 President Muhammad Najib sent a representative to attend the funeral procession from Tahrir Square in central Cairo to the Abbasiyya cemetery in Darrasa. Sabri's son Ibrahim became a professor of Near Eastern Languages at the University of Alexandria.

The lustre of republican Turkey's victories against the major European powers had clearly faded, creating space in Egypt for a renegade thinker like Sabri. The series of language reforms that began in 1928 and the experimentation in using Turkish instead of Arabic in prayer signalled an intent to engage not simply in a notional "modernisation of Islam" but sever Turkey from its Arab and Islamic environment. Sabri came to realise that modernist discourse had grown deep roots in Egyptian political and intellectual life. Gradually Sabri's intellectual concerns shifted from their intense focus on the drama of Turkish politics to a second stage of more detached reflection on the epistemic violence of European ideas on Islamic state and society, but with an increasingly Egyptian flavour; in his words, his political jihad had given way to "scholarly, religious jihad" (*jihād 'ilmī dīnī*).¹⁰³ His first Egypt-era book, *Mas'alat Tarjamat al-Qu'ran* (The Qur'an Translation Question, 1932), surveyed a debate that traversed Egypt, Turkey, and India, and in which Akif had decisively intervened through refusing to play the role planned for him – Sabri addresses himself to the views of Shaykh al-Maraghi and Muhammed Farid Wajdi and makes no

¹⁰¹ Al-Qawsi, *Mustafa Sabri*, 150. Sabri discusses his work on the committee in *Mawqif al-'Aql*, 1:128-9. Sabri's salary is mentioned by Kurucu in his interview in al-Qawsi, *Mustafa Sabri*, 441.

¹⁰² Ibid., 150, 442. The regent spoke Turkish with Sabri.

¹⁰³ Sabri, *Mawqif al-'Aql*, 1:2.

mention of Akif. His second, *Mawqif al-Bashar Taht Sultan al-Qadar* (Man's Subordination to Divine Decree, 1933), was his first to examine trends in Egypt regarding the theological questions of free will and predestination. His third, *Qawli fi al-Mar'a* (My View Regarding the Women Issue, 1936) crystallised his views on a debate that had raged in both Egypt and Turkey since Qasim Amin published *Tahrir al-Mar'a* in 1899. In his next book, *al-Qawl al-Fasl*, he discussed the genre of writing which became popular in Egypt in the 1930s and 1940s concerning the Prophet's "genius" (*'abqariyya*), which he understood as an attempt to humanise the prophets to the extent of severing their link with the divine.¹⁰⁴

This led Sabri to his final book, *Mawqif al-'Aql wa-l-'Ilm wa-l-'Alam min Rabb al-'Alamin wa-'Ibadihi al-Mursalin* (The Position of Reason, Knowledge, and the World Regards God and His Prophets), a four-volume work that he part finished in May 1944 but did not fully publish until 1949. Bringing together all his ideas, including *al-Qawl al-Fasl* which is incorporated in the fourth volume, Sabri surveyed what he called the "new knowledge" (*al-'ilm al-ḥadīth*) of contemporary Islamic and European theological and philosophical trends that he feared had brought the "old knowledge" (*al-'ilm al-qadīm*) of the Islamic system to the point of collapse.¹⁰⁵ Sabri defended the underpinnings in reason and abstract logic of Islamic theology, which he approached from an Ash'ari perspective, and rejected the empirical and sceptical drift of European thought. In Sabri's view, the reformer intellectuals had accepted a notion of progress dependent upon adjustments to the ontological and epistemological bases of Muslim society. Accepting the Orientalists' claim of fatalism in Islamic theology (viz. Ash'ari occasionalism), they indulge pantheistic understandings of Sufism as a means of salvaging religion from science. There is no reason to jettison the classical system of *kalām* since it has not been proven inadequate in any way, he said; thus,

¹⁰⁴ On Enlightenment rethinking of the status of prophets see Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 43-5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1:97.

the discourse of decline must be rejected. Separation of religion from state will lead to tyranny. These are some of his major themes.

Mawqif al-‘Aql’s genesis lies in part in an ethic of political activism inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁰⁶ At least three of Sabri’s close acquaintances talk of his friendship with the group’s founder Hasan al-Banna, who would visit Sabri’s home regularly.¹⁰⁷ Al-Banna made use of Sabri as an informal advisor among non-Egyptian ‘ulama’ he knew in Cairo.¹⁰⁸ Al-Banna was a supporter of Sabri’s project to write *al-Qawl al-Fasl*, which evolved from an initiative among Azhari scholars to identify an influential voice to counter the liberal discourse of the era.¹⁰⁹ The title is a reference to Qur’an 2:3’s “*alladhīna yu’minūn bi-l-ghayb*”, but al-Banna initially proposed *al-Qawl al-Fasl bayn Imanayn: Iman Alladhina Yu’minun bi-l-Ghayb wa-Iman Alladhina La Yu’minun* (The Definitive Word on the Faith of Those Who Believe in the Unseen and the Faith of Those Who Don’t) and agreed to pay for a large batch of copies in advance to cover printing costs. Sabri was anguished over the implication in al-Banna’s title that it was still possible to talk of the modernists as possessing faith (*īmān*), so he altered it accordingly¹¹⁰ – an indication of the radical turn Sabri took in Egypt that will be examined in chapter five. Sabri became an admirer of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) even before the transformation in Qutb’s thinking in the late 1940s, and his discussion in *Mawqif al-‘Aql* of the fate of the Muslim’s *īmān* in the post-shari‘a world is strikingly reminiscent of ideas Qutb was to develop.

¹⁰⁶ The group is commonly known by this name although Society of Muslim Brethren is a better translation.

¹⁰⁷ Kurucu, interview, 442-3; Saraç, interview, 430; and Ali Yakub Cenkçiler, who moved in Brotherhood circles. See Cenkçiler, *Hatıra Kitabı* (Istanbul: Darulhadis, 2005), 25, 40-1, 91, 116, 118, 127.

¹⁰⁸ Ibrahim Munir, deputy general guide of the Muslim Brotherhood; interview, London, 30 January 2019. Other advisors included Afghan ambassador Shaykh Sadiq Mujaddidi and Algerian shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi.

¹⁰⁹ Kurucu, interview, 442.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 442-3. Kurucu wrote the entire text in his own hand because the printing press staff couldn’t read Sabri’s handwriting. He was around eighty years of age at the time.

Zahid Kevseri: A biography

While Sabri's colleague Zahid Kevseri shared his concern about the infiltration of European positivist and materialist trends through the Islamic modernism movement, he was more specifically focussed on what he discerned as disruptive trends rippling within the Islamic tradition. Sabri committed himself to the political sphere from an early stage, but in Istanbul and in exile Kevseri devoted his energies to forming a counter-discourse to the movement staking a claim to the Salafi nomenclature and its assault on the predominant juridical and theological culture. Kevseri was perhaps better placed than Sabri to engage in this wider critique because of his thorough grounding in the Sufi tradition and Hanafi law, theology, and hadith method, since the main targets of the Salafis in their assault on what has been called late Sunni traditionalism were Sufism and Hanafism.¹¹¹

Kevseri was born on 28 Shawwal 1296 (16 September 1879) near the town of Düzce in northwest Anatolia in the village of Hacı Hasan.¹¹² The village was named after his father Hasan Hilmi (1831-1926) who established a school there after arriving as a refugee from the Ottoman sancak of Şapsığ in the Adyghe region of the northern Caucasus during the mass killings and expulsion of Russia's invasion in 1864.¹¹³ Kevseri's family appear to have been speakers of West Circassian Adyghe, though the autobiographical and biographical information about him has little to say of his mother. His Circassian origin seems to have

¹¹¹ Jonathan Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 262-4. See also Ahmad Khan, "Islamic Tradition in an Age of Print: Editing, Printing and Publishing the Classical Heritage," in *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage*, ed. Elisabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 52-99.

¹¹² The republic renamed the village Çalıcuma.

¹¹³ Kevseri told a student visiting Cairo around 1949 that the name Kevseri comes from a mispronunciation of the family name Guser when written in the Ottoman Arabic script; see Muzaffer Özcanoglu, "M. Zâhid el-Kevserî ile Yaşadığım Kırık Anılarım," in *Uluslararası Düzceli M. Zâhid Kevserî Sempozyumu Bildirileri* (Düzce/Sakarya: Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi/Düzce Belediye Başkanlığı, 2007), 756. Al-Kawthari, by which he is known in Arabic, was an Arabisation he encouraged for its link to al-Kawthar, the Qur'anic verse referring to a river in paradise. The name appears with the letter س instead of ث in his 1910 book *Irgham al-Murid* (Cairo: al-Azhariyya, 2000), 79, 87. For this reason I have preferred Kevseri over the Arabised al-Kawthari except when referencing his Arabic works in footnotes.

formed an important if understated part of his self-identity in that he spoke the language and helped Circassians when he could.¹¹⁴ Like Akif's father, Kevseri's was an *'ālim* immersed in Sufism but he actively encouraged Kevseri in Sufi interests. Kevseri kept to traditional languages and knowledge systems (Arabic, Persian, Islamic sciences), contrary to Akif's embrace of French literature, leaving a detailed map of his educational profile through his books *Irgham al-Murid fi Sharh al-Nazm al-'Atid li-Tawassul al-Murid* (Training the Disciple via Commentary on 'the Verse Regarding Intercession Sought by the Disciple', 1910)¹¹⁵ and *al-Tahrir al-Wajiz fima Yabtaghihi al-Mustajiz* (Brief Description for Those Seeking Certificates, 1941). The latter was written as a prepared index of his education that would save him from writing out detailed teaching certificates (*ijāza*) by hand for the many students coming to study with him;¹¹⁶ it would also prevent any false claims regarding those he taught or who taught him.¹¹⁷ An invaluable source for understanding the alignment of Late Ottoman Sufism, *al-Tahrir al-Wajiz* lists twenty-four shaykhs with whom Kevseri studied before fleeing Istanbul and their biographies (*tarājim*), including eleven who gave him the *ijāza* certification and sixteen whom he knew in his émigré years (unusual for someone of Kevseri's stature), all but one of whom provided him with an *ijāza*. Among his main teachers in Düzcce were his father Hasan Hilmi Efendi,¹¹⁸ from whom he received hadith and *fiqh*, Düzcce Mufti Hüseyin Vehij,¹¹⁹ Şaban Fevzi Rizevi, with whom he studied Ottoman

¹¹⁴ His main biographer Ahmad Khayri says Kevseri spoke fluent Circassian; Ahmad Khayri, *al-Imam al-Kawthari*, in al-Kawthari, *Maqalat al-Kawthari* (Cairo: Al-Tawfikia Bookshop, 2000), 504. His knowledge was enough for him to suggest that the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt was named Burji not in reference to Cairo's citadel towers but to their Circassian clan of origin; al-Kawthari, *Muqaddamat al-Imam al-Kawthari* (Damascus: Dar al-Thurayya, 1997), 534. His student Ali Ulvi Kurucu wrote of Kevseri's partiality for Circassians during his Cairo years; Düzdağ, *Hatıralar*, 2:181-8.

¹¹⁵ One of Kevseri's few works translated into Turkish; Vehbi Şahinalp and M. Zahit Kalfagil, *Altun Silsile* (1983).

¹¹⁶ 'Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda, preface to al-Kawthari, *al-Tahrir al-Wajiz* (Aleppo: al-Matbu'at al-Islamiyya, 1992), 1; cited in Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah Al Rashid, "al-Imam al-Kawthari wa-Ishamatuhu fi 'Ilm al-Riwaya wa-l-Isnad," in *Uluslararası Düzcce M. Zâhid Kevserî*, 121-2.

¹¹⁷ Al-Kawthari, *al-Tahrir al-Wajiz* (Cairo: al-Anwar, 1941), 4.

¹¹⁸ Al-Kawthari, *Irgham al-Murid*, 79-82; al-Kawthari, *al-Tahrir al-Wajiz*, 42-4.

¹¹⁹ His name is sometimes prefaced Üsküplü for his family origins in Skopje; al-Kawthari, *al-Tahrir al-Wajiz*, 28.

mutakallim and mathematician Gelenbevi İsmail Efendi (1730-1791),¹²⁰ and Mehmed Nazım Efendi, a secondary school (*rüşdiye*) teacher with whom he studied Persian, geography, mathematics, and other subjects.¹²¹ His father was first a disciple of the Khalidi Naqshbandi shaykh Şeyh Devlet (d. 1867/8) and Musa al-Istirkhani al-Makki (d. 1884/5), a Naqshbandi shaykh in the Hijaz whom he met during pilgrimage,¹²² before his later well-known attachment to the Khalidi shaykh Ahmed Ziyaeddin Gümüşhanevi (1813-1893) which began in Istanbul in 1887.

Sufi teachers feature heavily among Kevseri's intellectual inspirations in Istanbul. He arrived in 1893 to study at the Kadiasker Hasan hadith school, then moved to the Fatih mosque seminary where his most influential shaykhs were Alasonyalı Ali Zeynelabidin (1852-1917) and Eğinli İbrahim Hakkı (d. 1900).¹²³ His certificate was awarded by a committee headed by the *ders vekili* Ahmed Asım Efendi, after which he began teaching at Fatih himself and was to remain there until 1914. By that time, when the CUP had taken uncontested control of government, Kevseri had stirred their animosity through a successful move, as member of the committee examining the curriculum in the post-1908 reformed school system, to obstruct CUP plans to squeeze religious education through reducing Arabic classes. In Kevseri's view these were essential for Turkish-speakers in particular to access traditional fields of knowledge.¹²⁴ He also opposed CUP efforts to loosen the İlmiye's bonds to Hanafism through a series of fatwas issued by the Meşihat allowing the use of other schools of law in the civil code (*Mecelle-i Ahkam-ı Adliye*), based on a decree issued in

¹²⁰ Al-Kawthari, *Irgham al-Murid*, 84; al-Kawthari, *al-Tahrir al-Wajiz*, 43.

¹²¹ Al-Kawthari, *al-Tahrir al-Wajiz*, 34.

¹²² Ibid., 43; Khayri, *al-Imam al-Kawthari*, 534; see Irfan Gündüz, *Osmanlılarda Devlet-Tekke Münasebetleri* (Ankara: Seha Neşriyat, 1984), 76.

¹²³ Al-Kawthari, *al-Tahrir al-Wajiz*, 33. Their biographies can be found in pp. 31-33 and 37-41.

¹²⁴ Khayri, *al-Imam al-Kawthari*, 493-4. See Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 127.

1877.¹²⁵ When in 1914 professors at Darülfünun wanted to appoint him as lecturer in the history of *fiqh*, CUP administrators left the post vacant rather than give it to Kevseri.¹²⁶ Instead he took a job teaching Arabic in the new state (*nizami*) schools, but on the advice of friends in the CUP he quit the capital to avoid arrest and teach in a *nizami* school in Kastamonu, where he remained until the armistice in October 1918.

With the revival in fortune of religious conservatives following the collapse of the CUP government, Kevseri returned to Istanbul to a job teaching Arabic at a private religious school and a post in the prestigious Süleymaniye Schools, where Sabri also found work.¹²⁷ Then during Sabri's tenure as sheikh ül-Islam he was appointed *ders vekili* in August 1919.¹²⁸ With the departure of both Sabri and the protective environment of Damad Ferid's government in October 1920, Kevseri found himself again in conflict with forces determined to limit the power of the religious establishment. Damad Ferid's successor Ahmed Tevfik Paşa (1845-1936)¹²⁹ wanted to demolish the Laleli School, a waqf (*vakıf*) built in 1759-1763 during the era of Sultan Mustafa III, but Kevseri exhausted legal avenues then claimed his prerogative as *ders vekili* to prevent it. He was forced out of office with the complaisance of the last sheikh ül-Islam, Medeni Mehmed Nuri Efendi (1859-1927).¹³⁰ As power in Istanbul shifted to the Kemalist nationalists in late 1922, Kevseri's days of freedom were numbered. When an acquaintance told him his arrest was imminent, Kevseri headed straight to the port

¹²⁵ Sadık Eraslan, *Meşihat-i İslâmiyye ve Ceride-i İlmiyye: Osmanlılarda Fetva Makamı ve Yayın Organı* (Ankara: DİB Yayınları, 2009), 89-111. The original decree of 1877 is reproduced in Ebü'l-Ula Mardin, *Medeni Hukuk Cephesinden Ahmet Cevdet Paşa* (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet, 1946), 66-7.

¹²⁶ Khayri, *al-Imam al-Kawthari*, 494.

¹²⁷ Khayri relates that on the trip back he died when the boat he was on capsized in a storm, and he lost some manuscripts including a letter by the Egyptian Shafi'i *faqih* Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 1566) praising Abu Hanifa. Khayri does not give its name but says it is not the known letter *al-Khayrat al-Hisan*. Also lost was a copy of Egyptian Hanafi-Maturidi *faqih* al-Tahawi (d. 933)'s *Aqida* by the hand of Aleppan historian Ibn al-'Adim (d. 1262). Khayri does not say if any of Kevseri's 22 works composed before he left for Egypt were among those lost at sea, but most of them are unaccounted for. Khayri, *al-Imam al-Kawthari*, 500.

¹²⁸ Albayrak, *Son Devir Osmanlı Uleması*, 4:128.

¹²⁹ Like Sultan Vahideddin he was sympathetic to Mustafa Kemal's nationalists, allowing the Ankara delegation to represent the empire at the Conference of London in 1921.

¹³⁰ Khayri, *al-Imam al-Kawthari*, 501-2.

and took the next boat to Alexandria without passing by his home, arriving 3 December 1922.¹³¹ He was not to see his family for eight years until they finally came to join him.¹³²

Kevseri blossomed in Egypt as a religious scholar. In contrast to Sabri's political activism, which ensured him a hostile reaction on his arrival in 1922, Kevseri quietly devoted himself to his own project: locating and preparing manuscripts across a range of Islamic sciences for publication with his annotation and preface, a format which became a key weapon in the polemical wars he waged from the late 1920s. Living an unstable life with little money during his early years in Egypt, Kevseri built up a deep knowledge of the manuscripts available in Cairo, mainly at Dar al-Kutub, and the Zahiriyya library in Damascus, which he could match with the knowledge he had acquired of Istanbul's manuscript collections. After a year of residing in cheap hotels and flats in the Cairo quarters of Husayn, Shubra, and Heliopolis, he left for Damascus for a year, travelling via boat from Alexandria to Beirut. On his return Kevseri stayed at the Abu Dhahab Sufi lodge in Cairo where Turkish Azhar students usually resided (known as Ruwaq al-Atrak).¹³³ He appears to have stayed there for three years (1925-7) since in 1928 he returned to Damascus for another year. Back in Egypt in 1929, his life settled into a pattern as he was employed to translate Ottoman documents into Arabic at the state archives (Dar al-Mahfuzat), a modest post that afforded him enough of a salary to carry on his research unimpeded by the rigmarole and

¹³¹ Ibid., 502. See also 'Umar Rida Kahhala, *Mu'jam al-Mu'allifin: Tarajim Musannifi al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya*, 15 vols. (Damascus: al-Taraqqi, 1961), 10:4; and Albayrak, *Son Devir Osmanlı Uleması*, 4:138. Kahhala says he was appointed to Ma'had al-Takhassus fi Ma'rifat Asma' al-Kutub wa-Mawdu'atiha wa-Tarajim Mu'allifiha; 10:4.

¹³² Kevseri married in 1914 and had three daughters and a son; his son and first daughter died before he left in 1922, and in Egypt his daughter Seniha died of typhoid in 1934 and Meliha from complications related to diabetes in 1947. His wife returned to Düzce after his death in 1952. Khayri says of her only that she was an "exemplary pious woman"; Khayri, *al-Imam al-Kawthari*, 496.

¹³³ Ibid., 495-6.

rivalry of higher office. He moved from flat to flat in several districts of Cairo before settling on a place in Heliopolis in 1939.¹³⁴

Kevseri preferred Cairo because of its access to materials and Azhari scholars after Turkey became a closed space for religious discourse.¹³⁵ During his first Damascus trips he obtained certificates from Sayyid Abu al-Khayr al-Hanafi, Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Kattani, and Muhammed ibn Sa'id ibn Ahmad al-Farra, and during the second trip Muhammad Salih al-'Amidi al-Hanafi, Muhammad Tawfiq al-Ayyubi, and the well-known hadith scholar Badr al-Din al-Hasani (1850-1935).¹³⁶ Like Sabri, a close companion in Cairo, he became well-connected in Azhari circles, establishing a weekly study circle at the Abu Dhahab mosque (of the Sufi lodge where he had stayed).¹³⁷ His efforts to excavate manuscripts continued through his acquaintance with Muhammad Amin al-Khanji (d. 1939), a bookseller from Aleppo who moved his business to Cairo,¹³⁸ Ismail Saip Sencer (1873-1940), manager of Bayezid library in Istanbul,¹³⁹ and Yusuf Banuri (1908-1977), the Deobandi scholar who founded a school in post-Partition Karachi.¹⁴⁰ During his later Cairo years Hanafi jurist Muhammad Abu Zahra (1898-1974) offered him work teaching in the shari'a department of Fuad University¹⁴¹ but Kevseri declined, citing age and his wife's health problems.¹⁴² Around this time, when

¹³⁴ During the Second World War he moved into Shaykh Yusuf al-Dijwi's home in 'Izbat al-Nakhl, after al-Dijwi suggested Heliopolis could be a target for German attacks. See Iyad Ahmad al-Ghuj, "al-Imam al-Kawthari wa-Sijillatuhu al-'Ilmiyya fi al-Suhuf wa-l-Majallat ma' al-Kashf 'amma Lam Yujma' min Maqalatihi," in *Uluslararası Düzceli M. Zâhid Kevserî*, 66, footnote 7.

¹³⁵ Mehmet Emin Özafşar, "Muhammed Zahid el-Kevseri Hayatı," in *Muhammed Zâhid El-Kevserî: Hayatı-Eserleri-Tesirleri*, ed. Necdet Yılmaz (Istanbul: Seha, 1996), 48, footnote 36.

¹³⁶ Itzhak Weismann, "The Invention of a Populist Islamic Leader: Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī, the Religious Educational Movement and the Great Syrian Revolt," *Arabica*, 52/1 (2005): 109-139.

¹³⁷ Muhammad Rajab al-Bayumi, "Muhammed Zahid al-Kawthari, Rawiyat al-'Asr wa-Amin al-Turath al-Islami," in al-Kawthari, *Muqaddimat al-Imam al-Kawthari* (Damascus: Dar al-Thurayya, 1997), 20.

¹³⁸ See al-Kawthari, "Kalima 'an Hayat al-Sayyid Muhammad Amin al-Khanji, Shaykh al-Kutubiyyin," *Maqalat*, 437-9.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 430-2.

¹⁴⁰ After Banuri visited Kevseri in 1938 during a trip to obtain material for the Majlis 'Ilmi established in 1931 by Shaykh Muhammad ibn Musa Mayan Mayan (1905-1963), the two established a correspondence lasting from 1939 to 1952; Kevseri's forty-five letters in the chain are published with annotation in Saud Al-Sarhan, *Rasa'il al-Imam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari ila al-'Allama Muhammad Yusuf al-Banuri* (Amman: Dar al-Fath, 2013).

¹⁴¹ The Egyptian University was renamed Fuad I in 1940 and Cairo University in 1952.

¹⁴² Abu Zahra, "al-Imam al-Kawthari," in al-Kawthari, *Maqalat*, 18.

Turkey shifted to a multiparty system following the Second World War, he was asked by one of his former teachers, Ahmed Şakir, to teach in Istanbul, and while he made nice about returning, health issues and familiarity with Egypt appear to have held him back.¹⁴³ He was also asked to take a post as professor of Turkish at the Oriental Languages Institute (Ma‘had al-Lughat al-Sharqiyya) before it was incorporated in the Egyptian University’s Arts Faculty in 1939, but turned the offer down because he had formed a bad opinion of European Orientalist scholars associated with the school.¹⁴⁴ Kevseri had the credentials to establish himself as a Sufi murshid had he so wished, particularly within the Khalidi Naqshbandiyya, but while he sometimes visited the Tijaniyya lodge of Shaykh Muhammad Hafiz Efendi with Sabri (who was a degree colder on Sufism) he chose not to follow that path.¹⁴⁵

Kevseri’s overarching concern was to prevent the mainstreaming of the nascent Salafi movement’s hostile views of the *madhhab* culture of *fiqh* and *kalām*, a position he dubbed *lā-madhhabiyya*, “the bridge to irreligion” (*qanṭarat al-lādīniyya*) in an article published in 1937.¹⁴⁶ This he did via at least 106 articles published in the weekly journal *al-Islam* from its inception in 1932 (some were published in *al-Sharq al-‘Arabi*)¹⁴⁷ and gathered on his death by Banuri and Kevseri students into one book, *Maqalat al-Kawthari* (a partial list of their original publication dates is given in Appendix 2).¹⁴⁸ He also wrote fifty-seven prefaces to a

¹⁴³ ‘Ammar Jaydal, “Mujmal Athar wa-Ara’ Zahid al-Kawthari,” in *Uluslararası Düzceli M. Zâhid Kevserî*, 50. In a letter he wrote in 24 March 1951 to parliamentary delegate Gazioğlu Kazuk Kamil Bey, Kevseri expresses satisfaction about the Democrat Party win in the 1950 election, but adds, “I await the day when people are free to wear what they want on their heads”; Özafşar, “Muhammed Zahid el-Kevseri Hayatı,” 52. He would joke about his sense of being happily resigned to life in Egypt; see Özcanoglu, “M. Zâhid el-Kevserî ile,” 760.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Bayumi, “Muhammed Zahid al-Kawthari,” 21.

¹⁴⁵ Düzdağ, *Hatıralar*, 2:173.

¹⁴⁶ Al-Kawthari, “al-Lamadhhabiyya Qantar al-Ladīniyya,” *Maqalat*, 129-36.

¹⁴⁷ Established in 1946 by *al-Islam* publisher Amin ‘Abd al-Rahman as an alternative outlet. Many articles were republished by *Huda al-Islam*, established by publisher Hasan Qasim whose family was tied to the Shadhili Sufi order, and *al-Nadhir*, established by Muslim Brotherhood breakaway group Shabab Sayyidna Muhammad in 1940. See al-Ghuj, “al-Imam al-Kawthari,” 69.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Ghuj says nine articles were not included in the collection and notes some omissions from the articles when first published, such as praise of King Faruq; “al-Imam al-Kawthari,” 80, 83-4. A Turkish translation by theologian Ebubekir Sifil was published in 2014 with seven additional articles, likely given to Sifil by Abu Ghudda before his death in 1997; *Makalatı’l-Kevseri* (Istanbul: RihleKitaap, 2014).

range works on history, *fiqh*, hadith, *tafsīr* and *kalām*, mostly from the classical tradition,¹⁴⁹ that he republished or published from manuscript for the first time (and gathered in the collection *Muqaddimat al-Kawthari*, 1997), twenty-three of which are among thirty-eight works he issued with annotation (most of them published).¹⁵⁰ This is in addition to thirty-five works he authored in his own right, five of which remain unpublished in manuscript form, including biographies of five early specialists in Hanafi law.¹⁵¹

While most of the twenty-one works he authored before his Egyptian exile are lost, two titles among them evidence an early concern with Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Buhuth al-Wafiyya fi Mufradat Ibn Taymiyya* (Investigations into Ibn Taymiyya's Peculiar Juridical Positions) and *al-Ta'aqqub al-Hathith Lima Yanfihi Ibn Taymiyya min al-Hadith* (Investigations of Hadith Rejected by Ibn Taymiyya). One of his extant Istanbul books, *Irgham al-Murid*, defends the concept of intercession (*tawassul*; Tr. *tevessül*), and in doing so Kevseri addresses the objections of Ibn Taymiyya in the first pages before detailing the chain of masters in the Khalidi Naqshi tradition with which he identifies.¹⁵² At this early stage in his career (1910) Kevseri established Ibn Taymiyya as the nodal point at which new trends seeking to reduce the Islamic tradition to an essential Arabness intersected. Kevseri's view was that Ibn Taymiyya's views on seeking the intercession of the dead, including the Prophet, and his understanding of God's power and attributes in terms rejected by the body of Ash'ari-

¹⁴⁹ Some are contemporary, mainly students of his: 'Abd Allah al-Ghamhari's *Iqamat al-Burhan 'ala Nuzul 'Isa fi Akhir al-Zaman* (1945), Yusuf Banuri, *Bughyat al-Arib fi Masa'il al-Qibla wa-l-Maharib* (1939), Zaki Mujahid, *al-'Ilam al-Sharqiyya fi al-Mi'a al-Rabi'a 'Ashara al-Hijriyya* (1949), Ahmad Khayri's *Izalat al-Shubhat 'an Qawl al-Ustadh 'Kunna Hurufan 'Aliyat'* (1950/51), Radwan Muhammad Radwan, *Faharis al-Bukhari* (1949).

¹⁵⁰ Akif Coşkun, *İstanbul'dan Mısır'a Bir İslam Alimi: Zahidü'l-Kevseri* (Istanbul: Işık, 2013), 78-80, lists 38; *Muqaddimat al-Kawthari*, prepared by Muhammad Abu Zahra, 645-7, 702, lists 33.

¹⁵¹ The total is listed in *Muqaddimat al-Kawthari*, 698-702. The jurists are Muhammad al-Shaybani (d. 805), Abu Yusuf al-Qadi (d. 798), Imam Zufar (d. 775), Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (d. 933), al-Hasan ibn Ziyad (d. 819/820), Muhammad ibn Shuja' (d. 880). Collected in Hamza al-Bakri, ed., *Husn al-Taqqadi*, 2 vols. (Amman: Dar al-Fath, 2017). See Bakri's introduction, 5-79.

¹⁵² Al-Kawthari, *Irgham al-Murid*, 5-6.

Maturidi theologians as anthropomorphism (*tajsīm*) would be troubling to most of his modern admirers if they had detailed knowledge of his writings.

Kevseri's discourse soon attracted attention after leaving for Cairo, where the assault on tradition from both the modernists and the self-styled Salafis had begun to overlap despite their different impulses and origins. In 1929 he engaged in one round of polemics with Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (1886-1969), a colleague of 'Abduh's disciple and collaborator Rashid Rida (1865-1935), and a second with the Damascus 'ālim Muhammad Bahjat Baytar (1894-1976) in 1939. In both cases Kevseri's opponents were prodded into action by the Jeddah notable Muhammad Nasif (Naṣīf, 1885-1971), who spent several decades trying to persuade the Saudi-Wahhabi establishment to fashion their Islamic discourse as "Salafism".¹⁵³ Baytar's *al-Kawthari wa-Ta'liqatuhu* (Kevseri and His Commentaries, 1939) was first published under Nasif's name and Nasif appears to have edited and rewritten Baytar's text.¹⁵⁴ Kevseri responded with two books, *Ta'nib al-Khatib 'ala Ma Saqahu fi Tarjamat Abi Hanifa min al-Akadhib* (Rebuke of al-Khatib over Lies in His Biography of Abu Hanifa, 1941), a response to the publication in Cairo of anti-Hanafi elements in the hadith scholar al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 1071)'s well-known *Tarikh Baghdad* (History of Baghdad), and *al-Nukat al-Tarifa fi al-Tahadduth 'an Rudud Ibn al-Shayba 'ala Abi Hanifa* (Curious Points in Discussing Ibn Shayba's Responses to Abu Hanifa, 1945). This spurred a third attack in the form of *Tali'at al-Tankil Bima fi Ta'nib al-Kawthari min al-Abatil* (Precursor to Vituperation of the Nonsense in Kevseri's Ta'nib, 1949), by the Yemeni Shaykh Abd al-Rahman al-Mu'allimi (1894-1966), and a fuller version of the same that was

¹⁵³ David Commins, "From Wahhabi to Salafi," in *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, ed. Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer, Stéphane Lacroix (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 159-61.

¹⁵⁴ Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah Al Rashid, "Introduction," in Al-Sarhan, *Rasa'il al-Imam*, 16-17. Al-Baytar told Kevseri's student Abu Ghudda he was the original author; Al-Sarhan, *Rasa'il al-Imam*, 16-17. Nasif/Baytar were responding to Kevseri's *al-Ishfaq 'ala Ahkam al-Talaq* (1936), a response to hadith scholar Ahmad Muhammad Shakir's *Nizam al-Talaq*, and his annotated edition of Ibn 'Asakir, *Tabyin Kidhb al-Muftari fima Nusiba ila al-Imam Abi Hasan al-Ash'ari* (1928).

published in Damascus after al-Mu‘allimi’s death by Nasif with a preface and annotation by Nasir al-Din al-Albani (possibly without al-Mu‘allimi’s blessing).¹⁵⁵

These issues and their significance for the direction of Islamic thought in the 20th century will be discussed more fully in chapter four. However, one more polemical dispute in which Kevseri actively engaged is worth noting here, that over predestination and free will with his fellow Ottoman exile Sabri. It is clear from Kevseri’s letters to Banuri that Sabri was among his close circle in Cairo, yet Kevseri regretted that Sabri’s views had shifted from the generic Ottoman Maturidi position that saw human action as more independent of God’s will than the Ash‘ari position allowed, which Sabri now embraced.¹⁵⁶ Kevseri, who very much held to the Maturidi line, had hoped that his commentaries¹⁵⁷ would change Sabri’s mind, but *Mawqif al-‘Aql* took aim at the Maturidi understanding. Kevseri’s rejoinder was his last book, *al-Istibsar fi al-Tahadduth ‘an al-Jabr wa-l-Ikhtiyar* (Insights Regarding the Debate on Predestination and Free Will, 1951). The debate brought into sharp focus the differing responses of these representatives of the Late Ottoman religious tradition to the fate of not only Ottoman thought but Islamic thought more generally in the face of revolutionary trends shaking the Islamic episteme. Kevseri said Sabri’s views were the result of low spirits during exile in Greece as Turkey went through revolutionary change, which was no basis for re-examining a basic principle of theology and giving ground to fatalistic thought (“I told him once, ‘perhaps failure in your political endeavours made you believe in predestination, but

¹⁵⁵ Muhammad ‘Awwama, “Manhaj al-Imam M. Zahid al-Kawthari fi Naqd al-Rijal,” in *Uluslararası Düzceli M. Zâhid Kevserî*, 301-2.

¹⁵⁶ Fazlur Rahman considered Sabri’s *Mawqif al-‘Aql* a defence of Ash‘ari predestination; see Rahman, *Islam and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 70. See Sabri, see *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 3:392, 419.

¹⁵⁷ Kamal al-Din al-Bayadi (d. 1686)’s *Isharat al-Maram min ‘Ibarat al-Imam* (1949), Hanafi jurist Ibrahim al-Halabi’s (d. 1549)’s *al-Lam‘a fi Tahqiq Mabahith al-Wujud wa-l-Huduth wa-l-Qadar*, and al-Juwayni (d. 1085)’s *al-‘Aqida al-Nizamiyya*. The Sabri-Kevseri debate is discussed in Ramazan Altıntaş, “Kevseri’nin Ta’lik Yöntemine bir Bakış: Cüveyni’nin El-Akidetü’n-Nizamiyye Adlı Eseri Örneği,” in *Uluslararası Düzceli M. Zâhid Kevserî*, 541-55; and Ömer Aydın, “Mehmed Zahid Kevseri ile Mustafa Sabri Efendi’nin Kader Konusundaki Tartışması,” *Uluslararası Düzceli M. Zâhid Kevserî*, 637-47.

why is your voluntary action (*ikhtiyār*) to blame for the countering actions of others?’’).¹⁵⁸

Sabri retorted that Kevseri was apparently as afflicted as the modernist scholars by the “propaganda of the foreigners” (*di‘āyat al-ajānib*) that predestination was to blame for Muslim backwardness.¹⁵⁹ The consequences of this debate for conceptualisations of Islam and the modern state will be examined in chapter five.

The state of scholarship

A vast amount has been written in Turkish on Akif. His death in 1936 provided an occasion for early debate about the Turkish republic and the radical secularist direction it had taken. His collaborator at *Sebilürreşad* Eşref Edib launched a cottage industry in Akif hagiography, which in time added to the general sense of alarm in Kemalist quarters over the revival of religious sentiment and its reconstruction as political ideology. Edib quickly published his biography of Akif with contributions from a host of intellectuals, and a conference was held in 1938 at Istanbul University.¹⁶⁰ As early as February 1939 one writer could rue that nationalist icons Ziya Gökalp and Yusuf Akçura were “yet to find their Eşref Edib” who could eulogise them so effectively.¹⁶¹ Since Akif was not on the 1924 blacklist of 150 enemies of the republic and he remained the author of the national anthem, his supporters saw their chance to frame him as an alternative, more authentic icon of the republic.¹⁶² As Halim Sabit Şibay (1883-1946), an intellectual close to Gökalp, wrote, “Akif lived as a great Muslim Turk. He thought in Turkish. He wrote in Turkish. He sang in Turkish.”¹⁶³ In the view of Kemalist writers, Akif’s gift with language, and in particular his occasional use of

¹⁵⁸ Al-Kawthari, *al-Istibsar fi al-Tahadduth ‘an al-Jabr wa-l-Ikhtiyar* (Cairo: al-Azhariyya, 2005), 4.

¹⁵⁹ Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 3:390. This section is an addendum written after Kevseri’s *al-Istibsar*.

¹⁶⁰ Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 723.

¹⁶¹ *Cumhuriyet*, 14 Feb 1939; cited in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 793-5.

¹⁶² Kamil Erdeha, *Yüzellilikler yahut Milli Mücadelenin Muhasebesi* (Istanbul: Tekin, 1998).

¹⁶³ Halim Sabit, in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 547.

colloquial registers, was nothing more than wizardry deployed to subvert the hearts of ordinary Turks with his Islamic message. “Akif worship” (*Akif-perestlik*) should be set aside so that Gökalp the intellectual and Tevfik Fikret the poet remain Turkey’s national heroes, one writer said.¹⁶⁴

Turkish historians who discussed Akif in English tended to present him as at one with their monochrome view of the Islamic reactionary. In *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, first published in 1964, Niyazi Berkes lumped together diverse Muslim thinkers and ulema as “bigots” attached to the past.¹⁶⁵ Although he saw Akif as the most enlightened of the genre, Berkes could not forgive the decision to withhold his Qur’an translation, which Berkes attributes mistakenly to a fear of being denounced as an apostate by Rashid Rida.¹⁶⁶ It was not until the 1980s that historians came to a more nuanced, less politicised understanding of Late Ottoman religious thought, starting with İsmail Kara’s three-volume *Türkiye’de İslamcılık Düşüncesi* (Islamist Thought in Turkey, 1986) which published excerpts from key texts in simplified modern Turkish.¹⁶⁷ The industry in Akif writing found further impetus in the 1990s with the revelations of what had happened to Akif’s Qur’an translation and subsequent discovery of extant parts of the text.¹⁶⁸ The ministry of culture and tourism issued a series of publications celebrating Akif in Turkish and English from 1986 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his death, though historian Fahir İz could still describe him in one article as “unable to adjust his ideas to the new secular nationalist Turkey”.¹⁶⁹ Interest

¹⁶⁴ Ali Süha, “Laik şair, din şairi,” *Tan*, 5 January 1939. Reproduced in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 753-4.

¹⁶⁵ Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964), 338.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 338, 489. Rida began writing against Qur’an translation in 1908 and condemned such enterprises in his book *Tarjamat al-Qur’an* (1922). Rida’s *al-Manar* series “Muhawarat al-Muslih wa-l-Muqallid” was published in *Sebilürreşad* in 1913. See Wilson, *Translating the Qur’an*, 111-17.

¹⁶⁷ Kara discusses his work in a rare interview in English in 2017; <https://www.themaydan.com/2017/10/islam-islamism-turkey-conversation-ismail-kara/> (accessed 26 January 2018).

¹⁶⁸ İhsan Efendi entrusted a third of the text to Mustafa Runyun, one of the Sabri-Kevseri circle of students.

¹⁶⁹ İz, “Mehmet Akif: A Biography,” 315.

extended to the Turkish Left, drawn by Akif's sympathetic attention to the popular classes, particularly in this earlier work.¹⁷⁰

Berkes' theory that Akif scuppered the Turkish Islam project at the behest of Arab radicals reappeared in 1999 in a speech by Professor Brigadier General Yalçın Işimer before the 1999-2000 cohort of the prestigious Gülhane Military Medical Academy in Ankara, titled "Atatürk'üm ve Türkçem" (My Atatürk and My Turkish). Işimer embellished the story with more details, such as that Akif went to Egypt in order to consult with Rida at al-Azhar and plan a Turkish university in Akif's name (one opened in 2006) that would create "Azhar-minded people" (*el-Ezher kafalı adamlar*).¹⁷¹ After three years spent abroad to avoid wearing the state-mandated hat, Akif returned in 1926 to inform Atatürk formally he would not translate the Qur'an, Işimer claimed.¹⁷² Events in this retelling are clearly garbled; in fact, Akif's testimony in his dying months was that he was happy to complete the project, but on his own terms, not those of Ankara.¹⁷³ Işimer's statement, which provoked considerable media coverage at the time, came after the military had forced Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) from office in 1997. Under the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AKP), which took office in 2002, interest in Akif continued unabated.¹⁷⁴ Akif became the resistance poet who successfully challenged secular radicalism through his "resistance translation" (*direnen meal*), to quote the title of one recent volume analysing Akif's Qur'an.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ A. Cerrahoğlu (aka Kerim Said), one of the few Marxist intellectuals in Turkey to engage critically with Islam, published *Bir İslam Reformatörü, Mehmet Akif* in 1964. See Arif Yılmaz, "Mehmet Akif Ersoy'un Şiirlerinde Halk Dilinin Kullanımı," *Mustafa Kemal University Journal of Social Sciences Institute*, 6/11 (2009): 189-210.

¹⁷¹ Yalçın Işimer, "Atatürküm ve Türkçem," *Gülhane Tıp Akademisi 1999-2000 Eğitim-Öğretim Yılı Açılış Töreni* (Ankara: GATA, 27 September 1999), 65-72; reproduced in Cündioğlu, *Bir Kur'an Şâiri*, 536.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 536.

¹⁷³ "The spiritual bounty I feel is very great [*duyduğum manevi feyiz çok büyüktür*]," he said in 1936 of having completed the translation. In Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 166.

¹⁷⁴ A glossy culture and tourism ministry book lists 321 works in Turkish on Akif, most of them published since the 1980s. Mustafa İsmet Uzun, ed., *Mehmed Akif Ersoy* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2011).

¹⁷⁵ Recep Şentürk, ed., *Direnen Meal: Akif'in Kur'an Mealî'nin Tarihi ve Tahlili* (İstanbul: Mahya, 2016).

As for Akif in Arabic, Ömer Rıza Doğrul recounts that he had established a certain name in Egypt by the time he visited in early 1914. Doğrul was working in Cairo as translator with a pro-Ottoman newspaper called *al-Sha‘b*. Staff gathered to listen to Akif discussing his poetry, with Doğrul translating into Arabic (then he took him to meet Muhammad Farid Wajdi, who, to the surprise of both of them, spoke Turkish).¹⁷⁶ Akif’s friend the diplomat and poet ‘Abd al-Wahhab ‘Azzam (1894-1959) published an obituary in *al-Risala* upon his death and followed that with translations of his poetry to introduce his work to Arabic audiences.¹⁷⁷ It was Sabri’s son Ibrahim who first translated Akif’s *Gölgeler* into Arabic as *al-Zilal* in 1953.¹⁷⁸ Despite this Akif remains largely unknown in Arabic writing on modern Islamic thought.¹⁷⁹

Sabri tends to feature in Turkish histories of Late Ottoman ‘ulama’ in starkly polarised terms. For Feroz Ahmad, Sabri is typical of the Islamic movement *tout court*, with a mentality “little different from that prevailing in Afghanistan today”.¹⁸⁰ Niyazi Berkes casts Sabri as the chief fanatic of the period and challenges Sabri’s claim that Kemalist policies were irreligious (*ladinî*).¹⁸¹ On the other hand, Sadık Albayrak, a researcher who represented Erbakan’s Welfare Party in parliament from 1991 to 1995, depicts Sabri as a hero in *Son Devir Osmanlı Uleması* (Late Ottoman Ulema, 1981), *Hilafet ve Kemalizm* (Kemalism and the Caliphate, 1992), and other books.¹⁸² Ismail Kara’s seminal work in the 1980s signalled a new trend in academic writing of impartial appraisal of Sabri and others. Although a series of

¹⁷⁶ Doğrul, “Şahsi ve Aile Hayatı,” in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 430-31.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Abd al-Wahhab ‘Azzam, “Sha‘ir al-Islam Mehmed Akif,” *al-Risala*, 1 February 1937, 5/187: 181-2; a Turkish translation is provided in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 200-3. Azzam’s translation of the opening of *Safahat 1* and *Hüsran* from *Gölgeler* was published in *al-Risala*, 22 March 1937, 5/194: 469-470.

¹⁷⁸ Ibrahim Sabri’s critical writings on Akif, *Mısır Daneleleri*, are held at IRCICA library in Istanbul.

¹⁷⁹ There are two studies: ‘Abd al-Salam ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Fahmi, *Sha‘ir al-Islam Mehmed Akif* (Mecca: al-Talib al-Jami‘i, 1984) and ‘Isa Mustafa Yucar, *Mehmed Akif: ‘Asruhu wa-Juhuduhu fi al-Da‘wa al-Islamiyya* (Ph.D thesis, Umm al-Qura University, Mecca 1990).

¹⁸⁰ Feroz Ahmad, Review of *Muslims in Modern Turkey: Kemalism, Modernism and the Revolt of the Islamic Intellectuals* by Sena Karasipahi, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 22/1 (2011): 89-91.

¹⁸¹ Niyazi Berkes, *Türk Düşününde Batı Sorunu* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1975), 49-50, 81, 142.

¹⁸² Albayrak’s son Berat married a daughter of AKP founder Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. His book *Religious Struggle in Turkey* (1992) gives a succinct summation of the Islamist view of the rise of the secular republic.

articles about Sabri appeared in Turkish scholarly journals in the 1990s, a pejorative tone remained discernible.¹⁸³ The difficulty for writers was to engage dispassionate discussion of Sabri's contribution to *kalām* without being impacted by his negative views of Turkish nationalism.¹⁸⁴

The first major biography of Sabri was that of Saudi scholar Mufarrih ibn Sulayman al-Qawsi, *al-Shaykh Mustafa Sabri wa-Mawqifuhi min al-Fikr al-Wafid* (Shaykh Mustafa Sabri and His Position Re Foreign Ideology, 1997), the only comparative works being Mehmet Kadri Karabela's thesis *One of the Last Şeyhülislâms, Mustafa Sabri Effendi (1869-1954): His Life, Works and Intellectual Contributions* (2004) and Muhammed Beşir Beşir's *Farklı Yönleriyle Şeyhülislam Mustafa Sabri Efendi* (The Different Facets of Sheikh ül-Islam Mustafa Sabri, 2013).¹⁸⁵ While Beşir's book is hagiographic, Karabela's, the most detailed in English available, examines Sabri's ideas but sidesteps his critique of the Turkish nation-state, stating only that certain of his opinions may be outdated.¹⁸⁶ Sabri's career in Istanbul is discussed in Amit Bein's article "'ulama' and Political Activism in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Political Career of Şeyhülislâm Mustafa Sabri Efendi" (2009) and his book *Ottoman Ulema, Turkish Republic: Agents of Change and Guardians of Tradition* (2011).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Ahmet Akbulut, "Şeyhülislam Mustafa Sabri ve Görüşleri (1869-1954)," *İslami Araştırmalar*, 6/1 (1992): 32-43; Ali Sarıkoyuncu, "Şeyhülislam Mustafa Sabri'nin," 787-812; Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, "Mustafa Sabri Efendi," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 31 (2006): 350-53; Ramazan Boyacıoğlu, "II. Meşrûtiyet Döneminde Beyânü'l-Hak Dergisindeki Bazı Görüş ve Düşünceler Üzerine," *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, vol. 3, December 1999: 27-50.

¹⁸⁴ An AKP-backed Imam-Hatip religious school established in Sabri's name in his hometown of Tokat changed its name in 2017 after acts of vandalism.

¹⁸⁵ Sabri was also discussed in Muhammad Husayn, *al-Ittijahat al-Wataniyya fi al-Adab al-Mu'asir* (Cairo: al-Adab, 1954), 348.

¹⁸⁶ Mehmet Kadri Karabela, *One of the Last Ottoman Şeyhülislams, Mustafa Sabri Efendi (1869-1954): His Life, Works and Intellectual Contributions* (MA Thesis, McGill University, August 2003), 102.

¹⁸⁷ The article can be found in *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'ulama' in the Middle East*, ed. Meir Hatina (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009), 67-90. See also Ahmet Şeyhun, *Islamist Thinkers in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic* (Leiden: Brill 2015), 44-52; and on Sabri's criticisms of Kant, Halim Çalış, "Mustafa Sabri Efendi ve Kant Felsefesine Yaptığı Eleştiriler," *Yeni Ümit* 54 (2001): 58-62.

Writing on Kevseri has been largely compartmentalised within Islamic Studies.¹⁸⁸ As a (Circassian) Turk writing within the traditional categories of *fiqh*, *hadith*, *kalām*, etc. – his foray into the public sphere through journals notwithstanding – he has been largely invisible to Middle East Studies. Writing almost entirely in Arabic, Kevseri has only in recent years begun to attract attention among Turkish scholars, both through the lens of pre-modern Islamic sciences or contemporary Islamic thought and movements. Ismail Kara's compendium *Türkiye'de İslamcılık Düşüncesi* overlooked him, as did Amit Bein's *Ottoman Ulema, Turkish Republic* and Ahmet Şeyhun's *Islamist Thinkers in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic* (2015). Kevseri only acquired a comprehensive entry in the authoritative *İslam Ansiklopedisi* (published by Turkey's Islamic Affairs Directorate) in 2013, whereas Sabri's entry first appeared in 2006 and Akif's in 1995. Two conferences bringing together Arab and Turkish researchers working on different aspects of Kevseri's thought went some way to rectify these lacunae in knowledge across scholarly boundaries.¹⁸⁹ Kevseri's Arabic works have been in publication since the 1950s, when his admirers published the collection *Maqalat al-Kawthari* the year after his death, and it is by this work – which provides a comprehensive overview of his thinking – that Kevseri is known to most scholars of Islamic history and modern thought.

The partisan controversies of Kevseri's work have guided his posthumous publication trajectory. After fully embracing the term Salafi from the 1950s, Nasir al-Din al-Albani made of Kevseri his Other against which the ideological category of Salafism with its radical reworking of the Sunni hermeneutical tradition defined itself. Al-Albani wrote the preface to al-Mu'allimi's *al-Tankil* when it was finally published in 1966 and, acquiring a status as the

¹⁸⁸ See Stefan Wild, "Muslim und Madhab: Ein Brief von Tokio nach Mekka und seine Folgen in Damaskus," in *Die Islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Festschrift für Hans Robert Roemer zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Hans Robert Roemer, Ulrich Haarmann, Peter Bachmann (Beirut: Wiesbaden, 1979), 674-89; and Ahmad Khan, "Islamic Tradition in an Age of Print," *passim*.

¹⁸⁹ Published as *Muhammed Zahid el-Kevserî: Hayatı-Eserleri-Tesirleri* (1996) and *Uluslararası Düzceli M. Zâhid Kevserî Sempozyumu Bildirileri* (2007).

definitive anti-Kevseri text, it was reissued by the publications wing of the Saudi Council of Senior Religious Scholars (Hay'at Kibar al-'Ulama' al-Sa'udiyya) in 1983. In the late 1990s al-Azhar's publication house began reissuing Kevseri's books under the title "Min Turath al-Kawthari". A first comprehensive biography in Turkish was published by Akif Coşkun in 2013, and Ebubekir Sifil finally published a Turkish translation of *Maqalat* in 2014.

Kevseri's anti-Salafi discourse, situated in the Ottoman legal-theological binary of Hanafi-Maturidism, makes him today an attractive figure for both religious and secular nationalists seeking to prove the existence of an eternal, unique "Turkish Islam".¹⁹⁰ But the discovery, from texts in Arabic produced in Egypt, is a belated one and his relative lack of interest in Turkey (from the priority he evidently gave to wider issues of the Islamicate) in subtle ways sours contemporary Turkish writing on him.¹⁹¹

Cairo: Intellectual centre of the Islamic West

With the Turkish republic's radical turn, Cairo became a place of refuge for Ottoman exiles, although Turkish cultural life in Egypt was in its twilight years.¹⁹² Before 1908 Egypt had been a place of refuge for Young Turk dissidents, which led to a blossoming of Turkish printing in Egypt that suited British imperial interests. Abdullah Cevdet (1869-1932) alone published eighteen works in Egypt between 1896 and 1909.¹⁹³ Anti-regime publishing was

¹⁹⁰ For example Hilmi Demir and Muzaffer Tan, *Ehl-i Sünnetin Reislerinden İmam-ı Matüridi* (Istanbul: Büyük Resim, 2017). On the trope of Turkish Islam see Elisabeth Özdalga, "The Hidden Arab: A Critical Reading of the Notion of 'Turkish Islam'," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42/4 (July 2006): 551-70.

¹⁹¹ Note his student Muzaffer Özcanoğlu's effort to stress Kevseri's longing for the homeland in his presentation to the 2007 conference on Kevseri; in "Kırık Anılarım," 755-63.

¹⁹² Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu (trans. Humphrey Davies), *The Turks in Egypt and their Cultural Legacy* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 62-3. During the reign of King Faruq (1936-1952) Turkish was not spoken at the palace and actively discouraged by the king.

¹⁹³ On Turkish political publications in Egypt from 1895 to 1947, see İhsanoğlu, *The Turks in Egypt*, 219-33, 253-95. Also M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press).

also centred in Cairo during the early republic.¹⁹⁴ Viewed as someone with the skills to rally pan-Islamic opposition, Akif came under the surveillance of Turkish diplomats. The interior ministry's Internal Security Directorate (Emniyet İşleri Umum Müdürlüğü) sent a troubled note to the consulate in Alexandria in July 1936 to find out why Akif had been granted a visa, declaring that Akif had engaged in pro-caliphate propaganda in Egypt, citing a trip he made to Antakya in French mandate Syria in 1935 (*inkılap ve rejimimiz aleyinde çok kötü sözler sarfettiği ve hilafet propagandası yaptığı*); the note also said Akif had been in close contact with dissidents on the list of 150.¹⁹⁵ Akif's letters throughout his thirteen years in Egypt are sparing in their political content, giving the impression that he was wary of their falling into the hands of censors and his being banned from ever returning home as a result. His biographer Düzdağ argues that republican bureaucrats should be thanked for keeping Akif off the list of subversives, otherwise the *İstiklal Marşı* would have been replaced and "it would be an issue even to talk about him today". Sabri, by contrast, was free to engage his intellectual pursuits in Egypt and maintained contact with Akif and Kevseri, but none of the biographical sources mention a relationship between Akif and Kevseri.

Akif was the kind of modernist intellectual whom Sabri relentlessly attacked in his work, but any rancour between them was focussed on the dramatic post-war period of occupation and the new republican order. Indeed, before their split in 1920 over Mustafa Kemal's rival authority in Ankara, the conservative and modernist Islamic thinkers drew closer together: from May to July 1919 *Sebilürreşad* serialised Sabri's *Dinî Müceddidler* (Religious Reformers, 1922) and the last section of *Yeni İslam Müctehidlerinin Kıymet-i*

¹⁹⁴ The main critical newspaper was *Müsavet*, established by Liberal Entente figure Hafız İsmail in Cairo in 1927. *Muhadenet*, established in 1927 by Hüseyin Remzi Bey, published pro-Turkey material in Turkish and Arabic with articles by Egyptian writers including Wajdi and 'Azzam. *Cephe*, published from 1943-47, was pro-Turkey and pro-Allied powers. See İhsanoğlu, *The Turks in Egypt*, 288-95.

¹⁹⁵ No. 8056, dated 13/7/1936 and no. 8297, dated 20/7/1936; cited in Düzdağ, *Mehmed Âkif*, 20-1. The Cairo consulate responds that it had not heard of such activities but makes the comment that he opposed wearing the hat due to his "religious extremism" (*dinî taassup*); undated document, *ibid.*, 22.

İlmiyesi (The Scholarly Value of Islam's New Mujtahids, 1919),¹⁹⁶ Sabri's two Ottoman works against the reformers. Their differences arose over how to respond to Mustafa Kemal's nationalist movement. Sabri's complaint to Akif and intellectuals in general was "you left me alone" (*beni yalnız bıraktınız*)¹⁹⁷ in fighting the Kemalist regime. Why did Akif not come join Sabri in his *Yarın* project? "In time we wrote what we could. We struggled so that the country would not come to this," Akif replied when Sabri harangued him about the issue in Cairo.¹⁹⁸ And why did Akif join Kemal's nationalists? There was no choice when the Greek army was occupying Anatolia, Akif protested (*tercih yapacak zaman olmadığı*).¹⁹⁹ Sabri pressed him on another occasion on whether he thought Atatürk was an exceptional figure, to which Akif replied that his only exceptional quality was an intimidating gaze (*korkutan bir bakış*).²⁰⁰ Akif at some point felt a need to defend himself further for not denouncing the changes in Turkey, telling Sabri's son Ibrahim: "I swear, I had no strength left, I could not pull myself together. These events impacted me greatly. Let me explain the extent of my misery: I could not pray without making mistakes. Even in prayer I was lost. That's how distracted I was."²⁰¹ Despite this frostiness Akif still visited Sabri's home to console each other over the death of Ahmed Naim in 1934 and Sabri viewed Akif as something of a divinely inspired poet.²⁰² Akif spent more time with İhsan Efendi, whom he had met on the boat to Egypt in 1924, and Turkish students in his circle such as Ismail Ezherli Hoca (1906-1976) and Bayramiçli Hafız Eşref.²⁰³ After his death, it was widely suspected that Akif had entrusted his Qur'an to İhsan Efendi. For many years Akif acquaintances from Istanbul and embassy officials in Cairo

¹⁹⁶ This last was published as "Terakki Edelim, fakat Müslüman Kalmak Şartıyla," SR, 24 Temmuz 1335 (24 July 1919), 17/431: 113-15.

¹⁹⁷ Muhammed Beşir Beşir, *Farklı Yönleriyle Mustafa Sabri Efendi* (Istanbul: Tahlil, 2013), 69.

¹⁹⁸ Recollection from Sabri, who told his student Kurucu; Düzdağ, *Hatıralar*, 2:112.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 2:112.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 2:112.

²⁰¹ "Yeminim olsun ki mecalım kalmadı, kendimi toparlayamıyorum. Bu yapılanlar bana çok ağır geldi. Perişanlığımın derecesini size şöyle anlatayım: Secde-i sehivsiz namaz kılamaz oldum. Yahu namazda dalıp gidiyorum. Zihnim öyle perişan"; ibid., 2/114. It's not clear if Ibrahim or his father told Kurucu this.

²⁰² Ibid., 2:113-4.

²⁰³ Ibid., 1:331.

would come to İhsan Efendi pressing him to tell the truth about what happened. As late as 1949 the Turkish embassy approached Kevseri. He is reported to have told them: “If İhsan Efendi said he destroyed it then it’s true. He’s someone true to his word.”²⁰⁴

Bar his encounters in Helwan with its rector Shaykh al-Maraghi, Akif kept his distance from al-Azhar, but both Kevseri and Sabri were heavily engaged with Azharis and the intellectual scene. They brought with them experience of the same debates on Westernisation, Islam and reform from Ottoman Istanbul, thus the knowledge and vehemence they injected into polemical skirmishes in the Egyptian arena were effective enough to stir reactions and even efforts to limit their influence.²⁰⁵ Sabri was not the only one with links to the Muslim Brotherhood: lines can also be drawn between Akif and Kevseri to Hasan al-Banna. ‘Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda (1917-1997) was a student of Kevseri who made al-Banna’s acquaintance during the period 1944-1950 when he studied at al-Azhar and in Kevseri’s circle and went on to serve as Mufti of Aleppo and Supreme Guide of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (1973-1976).²⁰⁶ Akif met al-Banna at least once in Helwan at the home of ‘Abd al-Wahhab ‘Azzam, where he was also introduced to al-Azhar’s al-Maraghi.²⁰⁷ However, the recollections of Turkish students and religious scholars in Cairo during the 1930s and 1940s describe Sabri as the main point of contact between the Turks in Egypt and the Brotherhood. The religious scholar Ali Yakub Cenkçiler (1913-1988), one of the Turkish students of Sabri and Kevseri in Cairo, is an important source on this point. In his memoirs he explains that he went to Egypt with the specific intent of joining the circles of Akif and Sabri.

²⁰⁴ Özcanoglu, “Kırık Anılarım,” 761-2.

²⁰⁵ Sabri said sympathetic ‘ulama’ and writers advised him to keep quiet for an easier life. Beşir, *Mustafa Sabri Efendi*, 44.

²⁰⁶ On Abu Ghudda in Syria see Hashimi Muhammad ‘Ali, *al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda Kama ‘Araftuhu* (Beirut: al-Basha’ir al-Islamiyya, 2004); Raphaël Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama: the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (London: Hurst, 2013); Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni ‘ulama’ from Coup to Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Abu Ghudda wrote a preface to Kevseri’s *Fiqh Ahl al-‘Iraq wa-Hadithuhum* (Beirut: Maktab al-Matbu‘at al-Islamiyya, 1970) and *al-Tahrir al-Wajiz* (1993).

²⁰⁷ Al-Banna told Kurucu this in Medina in 1946. Akif, he said, was an “honourable man” (*asil bir insan*); Düzdağ, *Hatıralar*, 2:263-4.

After receiving news while en route of Akif's early death,²⁰⁸ he arrived to find that in his words Sabri was the "chief wrestler" of an Egyptian-Turkish Islamic intellectual scene (*bu münakaşa ve münazara meydanının başpehlivanı*) that included al-Banna.²⁰⁹ For Cenkçiler al-Banna was the great activist of the era and Sabri was its theoretician.²¹⁰ With the deaths of Sabri, Kevseri, and al-Banna, Egypt had no more taste for him and he returned to Istanbul.²¹¹ Ali Ulvi Kurucu, another student of the group, relates a meeting between Amin Husayni (1895-1974), Mufti of Jerusalem, and Sabri and his students in Cairo in 1945 during which Sabri led the conversation to the topic of al-Banna, asking al-Husayni if he had met him yet. Al-Husayni lavishes praise on al-Banna for an integrity he says won him huge following among youth inside and outside Egypt. "My sons," he exhorts the group, "live by me, live by Hassan al-Banna – God-willing, you'll become like shaykh al-Islam Mustafa Sabri or Zahid Kevseri."²¹²

Two other figures sought refuge in Cairo during this period, forming a coda to the period of republican exile in Egypt. At some point soon after Atatürk's death in 1938 Eşref Sencer moved to Alexandria, staying with relatives and avoiding political activity, until 1950 when he returned to Turkey after the Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti) took power.²¹³ Another visitor to Cairo was Musa Jarullah Bigiev, Sabri's poster child for modernist delusion in *Dinî Müceddidler* and *Yeni İslam Müctehidlerinin Kıymet-i İlmiyesi*. One of many Tatar activists in the Istanbul milieu, Bigiev published Ottoman works around modernist themes after five years in Egypt during which he followed 'Abduh, Shaykh Muhammad

²⁰⁸ Cenkçiler, *Hatıra Kitabı*, 22.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 116.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 25, 155.

²¹¹ Ibid., 118. Attendees at his funeral in 1988 included Necmettin Erbakan, İskenderpaşa Naqshbandi shaykh Esad Coşan and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; ibid., 93.

²¹² Düzdağ, *Hatıralar*, 2/234. The meeting took place after al-Husayni left France for Cairo in May 1945 when Britain sought his arrest. Al-Husayni talks in his memoirs of how he kept a low profile living in Cairo; 'Abd al-Karim al-'Umar, *Mudhakkarat al-Hajj Muhammad Amin al-Husayni* (Damascus: Ahali, 1999), 259.

²¹³ Fortna, *The Circassian*, 268-70

Bakhit al-Muti‘i (d. 1935), who later served as chief mufti, and others. The work that first attracted the opprobrium of conservatives was *Rahmet-i İlahiye Burhanları* (Proofs of God’s Mercy, 1911) which argued that God would save non-believers as well as Muslims. Bigiev was forced to flee the Soviet Union in 1930 and was jailed by the British authorities in India during the Second World War. In 1947 he settled in Egypt, where he died in October 1949 after Sabri and Hadice (Khadija) Abbas Halim, daughter of the former khedive Tawfiq (ruled 1879-1892), helped him find medical treatment and a place to stay.²¹⁴

Language and resistance

Use of language was a critical element in these thinkers’ engagement with the transformations of the age. All three were highly proficient in not only Arabic, but Persian. Indeed, Kevseri’s first work was a Persian-language treatise on Arabic grammar, *Nazm-i ‘Avamil-i I‘rab*.²¹⁵ Akif taught Persian texts while he lived in Ankara during the post-war occupation. Kevseri wrote almost entirely in Arabic, with only one known work in Ottoman Turkish, a biography of Sirhindi composed while he was in Kastamonu.²¹⁶ Engaged more with the public sphere than Kevseri, Sabri shifted from Turkish to Arabic in the critical period 1922-1924 when the Ottoman state was transformed from Islamic sultanate/caliphate to Turkish republic, publishing his first major Arabic work *al-Nakir ‘ala Munkiri al-Ni‘ma*. In Cairo these two religious scholars published solely in Arabic-language media and with Arabic-language publishers. Akif, on the other hand, never published in Arabic. As his *Safahat* project evolved, Akif formulated a very particular lexical, semantic, and

²¹⁴ Al-Sarhan, *Rasa’il al-Imam*, 108-114, footnote 1. On Bigiev, see Ahmet Kanlıdere, *Reform within Islam: The Taidid Movement Among the Kazan Tatars, 1809-1917* (Istanbul: Eren, 1997); Rotraud Wielandt, “Main Trends of Islamic Theological Thought from the Late Nineteenth Century to Present Times,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 707-64; Wilson, *Translating the Qur’an*, 117-47.

²¹⁵ Listed by Ahmad Khayri, but apparently lost; al-Kawthari, *Maqalat*, 517.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 517.

morphological style located in the interplay of Turkish, Arabic and Persian in which he retained the use of *aruz* metre with its associations of transnational Islamic identity but directed himself to a Turkish audience. He could only have done this within the medium of Ottoman Turkish, and it is only Akif who would have broken the law had he continued his literary project inside the Turkish republic, since he published in the Ottoman Arabic script.²¹⁷ *Gölgeler* was published at the Shabab printing press in Cairo in 1933 and when Akif sent a shipment of 2,175 copies to Istanbul to accompany his return in 1936 the ministry of interior had some destroyed and a batch sent back to Egypt for their use of Arabic script and “backward propaganda” (*irticai propagandalar*).²¹⁸

The language law of 1928 should more accurately be described the alphabet law, since it mandated the use of a modified Latin script for Turkish, with municipalities given discretion to apply penalties for Arabic script after a two-month grace period. The law was the first step in a series of linguistic changes over the following decade which as a whole are referred to as the language revolution (*dil devrimi*), encompassing elimination of words of Arabic and Persian origin, invention of Turkish equivalents, removal of Arabic and Persian from school curriculum in 1929, banning the Arabic call to prayer from 1932, and obligatory use of Turkish surnames from 1934.²¹⁹ However, the use of Ottoman continued in private, and letter writing is one sphere where the Arabic script survived into the 1960s.²²⁰ For some

²¹⁷ Among the literati Refik Halit Karay (1888-1965) also continued publishing in Ottoman script, but the output of many dried up, even if they were public supporters; Laurent Mignon, “The Literati and the Letters: A Few Words on the Turkish Alphabet Reform,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 20/1 (2010): 11-24.

²¹⁸ Murad Bardakçı, “Mehmed Âkif devlet tarafından ‘İrtica-906’ diye kodlanmış, ölüm döşğinde yatarken bile izlenmiş ve Safahat’ı da imha edilmişti,” *Habertürk*, 19 November 2018; <https://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/murat-bardakci/2225662-mehmed-akif-devlet-tarafindan-irtica-906-diye-kodlanmis-olum-doseginde-yatarken-bile-izlenmis-ve-safahati-da-imha-edilmisti> (accessed 12 August 2019).

²¹⁹ Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Uriel Heyd, *Language Reform in Modern Turkey* (Jerusalem: Israel Oriental Society, 1954); Hüseyin Sadoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ulusçuluk ve Dil Politikaları* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2003); Tuğrul Şavkay, *Dil Devrimi* (Istanbul: Gelenek, 2002).

²²⁰ Emmanuel Szurek, “The Linguist and the Politician. The Türk Dil Kurumu and the Field of Power in the Single-party Period,” in *Order and Compromise: Government Practices in Turkey from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Early 21st Century*, ed. Marc Aymes, Benjamin Gourisse and Élise Massicard (Leiden: Brill,

this was an ideological issue, but for many it was a question of habit and confidence in expression. A mixture of both motives explains Akif's use of Ottoman in correspondence with family and friends in Turkey in the period from 1928.²²¹ We know too that Kevseri wrote at least one letter in Ottoman to his brother in 1952 (see Appendices 3 and 4).²²² Akif was a master of register in Turkish, shifting from colloquial in letters to his family to elaborate formality in letters to the composer Şerif Muhiddin Targan (1892-1967), whom he revered,²²³ but he expressed regret on occasion over the reforms for having in his view simply replaced one foreign lexicon for another: "With nothing remaining of what we took from the Persians, or to be precise that literary style's complete demise, we seem to have begun to steal from the Westerners and especially the French. I don't know when we'll unite with literature born of our own soul."²²⁴ As a criticism, this observation seems rather soft if we are to take Akif as a Muslim radical opposed to the republican project. Akif's commitment to Ottoman was considerable. Indeed, his career was given to developing a modern Ottoman that retained a core of Arabic and Persian features yet was functionally Turkish. In other words, Akif's Ottoman was a form of resistance to the more radical elements of Turkish nationalism, but not to its basic premises.

Mustafa Sabri's reaction to the language reforms, on the other hand, was more viscerally rejectionist. Ali Ulvi Kurucu recounts how Sabri would listen to state radio broadcasts from Ankara, noting down the new words. Sabri realised that the aim was to

2015), 68-96; Hale Yılmaz, "Learning to Read (Again): The Social Experiences of Turkey's 1928 Alphabet Reform," *IJMES*, 43/4 (2011): 677-97.

²²¹ Akif's correspondence continued from 1928 with his daughter Suad and her husband Ahmed, Eşref Edib, Mahir İz, Eşref Sencer, Fuad Şemsi İnan, Şefik Kolaylık, Asım Şakir Gören, Princess Emine 'Abbas Halim, Ömer Rıza Doğrul, and Abdulillah Bey. The letters Akif received have not been made public or found.

²²² Dated 8 Jumada al-Akhira 1371 (5 March 1952), Kevseri informs Necati in Düzce that he and his wife are ill and may not live much longer; <https://www.facebook.com/arslan.hamdi2016/posts/10155424320453953> (accessed 5 February 2018).

²²³ See four letters to Muhiddin, a celebrated oud player who moved to New York in 1924. Reproduced in Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 76-82.

²²⁴ Letter to Princess Emine 'Abbas Halim, 9 February 1936; in Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 143.

create a new generation of Turks capable only of reading the new Turkish, unable to access that which came before. Sabri predicted that an impoverished smaller, truncated language would emerge, cut off from its rich historical roots. “Turkish was once one of the richest languages through the Turkicising of Persian and Arabic. But at this rate, not only 1,000-year-old works, but works only twenty or thirty years old will become incomprehensible. Turkish used to flow like water in sermons, speeches and poetry. When you wrote or spoke you wouldn’t repeat the same words, but with these repetitions what awaits us is an ugly, sterile and incongruous Turkish and ugly poetry of jarring words that doesn’t rhyme,” he said.²²⁵ Kevseri made no clear reference to the language revolution, nor indeed to other aspects of the early Kemalist period in Turkey, but he surely agreed with Sabri’s assessment. In Kevseri’s view, Mustafa Kemal was the “tyrant of atheism” (*tāghiyat al-ilhād*) from whom no good could come.²²⁶

Both Sabri and Kevseri’s mastery of written Arabic placed them at the end of a long tradition of Arabic-language material in Islamic sciences produced by Arabic-proficient ulema and men-of-letters. The republic would even refashion the ulema as professors of divinity (*ilahiyat*) in university faculties.²²⁷ Sabri and Kevseri were able to adapt the form of expression with which they were familiar inside the disciplinary categories of *kalām*, hadith, and *fiqh* and meld it with the popular intellectual discourse in the journals of the day. Rarely did weaknesses show through. In the view of Muhammad Abu Zahra, Kevseri’s writing betrayed no indication that Arabic was not his mother tongue.²²⁸ Kevseri’s facility with the

²²⁵ Beşir, *Mustafa Sabri Efendi*, 82-3. The comments were made at some point during the Second World War.

²²⁶ Letter 11 (undated) from Kevseri to Yusuf Banuri; Al-Sarhan, *Rasa’il al-Imam*, 117.

²²⁷ Hadith transmission networks were disrupted; see Recep Şentürk, *Narrative Social Structure: Anatomy of the Hadith Transmission Network, 610-1505* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). On Imam-Hatip schools, which returned in 1950, see Iren Özgür, *Islamic Schools in Modern Turkey: Faith, Politics, and Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²²⁸ Abu Zahra, Preface, *Maqalat*, 15.

language extended to the gentle turn of phrase,²²⁹ the obscure,²³⁰ the neologistic insult,²³¹ defence of Abu Hanifa's Arabic,²³² the florid riposte,²³³ and of course Qur'anic hermeneutics.²³⁴ Arabic was the medium of communication in Kevseri's dealings with Yusuf Banuri and other Indian-Pakistani scholars, and he appears to have been more familiar with colloquial Arabic in Egypt than Sabri and Akif, which likely accounts for the impression one gets of his wider interaction with Egyptians. "I don't understand their Arabic and they don't understand mine," Sabri once said,²³⁵ and while Sabri would exchange views in writing with modernist intellectual Taha Husayn (1889-1973),²³⁶ Kevseri would receive Husayn at his house.²³⁷ Akif also made light of his abilities in Egyptian Arabic, telling his Turkish language students at the Egyptian University where he began teaching in 1929, "if you don't laugh at my Arabic I won't laugh at your Turkish."²³⁸ In Istanbul, however, it was Akif who was regarded as the prime Arabist of the era due to his knowledge of the literary tradition. Indeed,

²²⁹ The Prophet's death as *zaman luḥūqihī bi-l-raftiq al-a' lā*; Kevseri, "Masahif al-Amsar wa-'Azim 'Inayat Hadhihi al-Umma bi-l-Qur'an al-Karim fi Jami' al-Dawa'ir," *Maqalat*, 26.

²³⁰ The use of the verb *istaq'ad*; "Hal li-Ghayr Allah Haqq fi al-Ijab wa-l-Tahrim," *Maqalat*, 110. The verb is not cited in the classical dictionaries but appears in *Nahj al-Balagha* and is used in some colloquial speech.

²³¹ He derides his Salafi and modernist opponents as, variously, *mutamajhid*, *mustajhid* and *mutasallif*; al-Kawthari, *al-Ishfaq 'ala Ahkam al-Talaq* (Cairo: al-Azhariyya li-l-Turath, 1994), 8; and al-Kawthari, *Ta'nib al-Khatib 'ala Ma Saqahu fi Tarjamat Abi Hanifa min al-Akadhib* (publisher unknown, 1990), 105.

²³² His use of *bi-aba qubays*, which al-Khatib al-Baghdadi claims is wrong; Kevseri, *Ta'nib al-Khatib*, 47. He argues Abu Hanifa was the best grammarian of the four imams, noting mistakes in Ibn Hanbal's writing; *ibid.*, 54. He accuses al-Khatib of questioning Abu Hanifa's Arabic on the basis of his non-Arab origin; *ibid.*, 246-8.

²³³ To the suggestion in *Tali'at al-Tankil* that Kevseri is a dog or a prostitute, Kevseri says al-Mu'allimi is a "failed slanderer" (*al-bāhit al-mutahāfit*) and "al-Kawthari is not one to talk like a barking dog or a prattling prostitute"; al-Kawthari, *al-Tarhib bi-Naqd al-Khatib*, in al-Kawthari, *Ta'nib al-Khatib*, 374. See also the word-play of "*ishbā' ash'abiyyataka*" in his response to Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib's accusation of anti-Arab *shu'ūbiyya* that al-Khatib is an opportunist who only wants to "sate his greed"; al-Kawthari, *Saf'at al-Burhan 'ala Safahat al-'Udwan* (Cairo: al-Azhariyya li-l-Turath, 2005), 40.

²³⁴ In the debate over literal understandings of the Qur'anic text, he argued that *istawā 'ala al-'arsh* in 57:4 could not be understood as God's occupying a position (*al-istiqrār al-makānī*) on a throne since the same verse also says God is *ma'akum aynamā kuntum*, which no one understands literally as a physical presence; Kevseri, "Khuturat al-Qawl bi-l-Jiha Fadlan 'an al-Qawl bi-l-Tajsim al-Sarih," *Maqalat*, 271.

²³⁵ Cited in Özcanoglu, "Kırık Anılarım," 759. Sabri made the comment during a tram ride. Khayri says Kevseri had only a slight accent, presumably in colloquial Arabic; Khayri, *al-Imam al-Kawthari*, 504.

²³⁶ Sabri, *Mawqif al-'Aql*, 1:446-454 and 4:459-61, which includes correspondence between them.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 759. The visit occurred after Husayn was appointed education minister in 1950.

²³⁸ Kuntay, *Mehmet Akif*, 133.

his confidante Midhat Cemal Kuntay writes that the intellectual elite were in awe of Akif's Arabic,²³⁹ and the decision to give him the Qur'an translation project is testament to that.

The political implications of language were drawn out by Sabri most of all. For Sabri, as he wrote in his last Ottoman work *Dinî Müceddidler*, acquiring Arabic was more important than being Arab or Turkish (*zaten bence Türkün Arap veyahud Arabın Türk olmasının ehemiyeti yoktur. Yalnız lisan itibariyle Arapçanın tefevvükünü kabiliyet-i te'ammümünü itiraf etmek zaruridir*).²⁴⁰ He qualified this statement with the proviso, "let it not be thought that I want to gradually Arabise the Turks" (*Türkleri tedricen Araplaştırmak istediğim zannolunmasın*).²⁴¹ In Greece in 1930 he seemed to go further, writing that he would have favoured Turks switching to Arabic, but not for the purpose of claiming membership of any ethnic Arabness (*Arap milliyeti*) which would be no better than Turkish chauvinism.²⁴² Two decades later in Cairo he avoided phrasing his views in that manner but was equally controversial: "If we are to speak about preferences among peoples, I preferred the Arabs over my people, the Turks, and I declared this before my present status as an emigré from Turkey. I declared it in the Ottoman parliament when I was a member and its Arab Syrian, Hijazi, Iraqi, and Yemeni members heard this. Today too I hold to my position of preferring the Arabs, because the Qur'an was revealed in their language, and it was memorised as it was revealed. So because of the Qur'an and the interest in it of the religious scholars of Islam from all nations, and who established Arabic grammar which has no peer among the world's languages, the language of the Arabs became the clearest (*afşah*) and the best (*afdal*) of all languages."²⁴³ European occupation of Anatolia would have been better than Kemalist rule

²³⁹ Ibid., 22.

²⁴⁰ Sabri, *Dinî Müceddidler*, Yahud 'Türkiye İçin Necat ve İğtila Yolları'nda bir Rehber (Istanbul: Âsîtâne Kitabevi, nda), 260.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 260.

²⁴² Sabri, "Din ve Milliyet - 1," *Yarın*, 14 April 1930, p.1.

²⁴³ Sabri, *Mawqif al-'Aql*, 1:92.

since the individual's faith can survive non-Muslim rule intact but not that of apostates,²⁴⁴ but it was specifically his view that Turkish ethnicity is of secondary importance to knowledge of Arabic that was omitted from the 1994 translation of *Dinî Müceddidler* into modern Turkish.²⁴⁵

Akif shared this sense of Arabic's importance as the lingua franca of the Islamicate,²⁴⁶ but was devoted to Ottoman Turkish with its heterogeneous Arabic, Persian, and Turkish lexicon. In his biography Emin Erişirgil contrasted Akif's methodology with that of Ziya Gökalp, whose view was that a core of Arabic and Persian-origin words was acceptable as long as they operated according to Turkish language rules and were rendered in a Turkish (Istanbul) accent.²⁴⁷ Akif could support this approach as a compromise with the Turkists, though his preference was to celebrate a word's Arabic or Persian source-environment to the full. This can be seen at several points in his *Safahat* where Yakup Çelik, one of his editors in modern Turkish, has opted for familiar Ottoman understandings of Arabic terms over an alternative from Arabic and the *kalām* genre.²⁴⁸ As the prime adaptor of modernist Islamic thought into Ottoman Turkish, Akif played an important role in the transfer and formulation of concepts, and Arabic was his first reference point for coining new terms.²⁴⁹ At the same time, he deployed Persian to particular effect in his more lyrical and Sufi-inspired texts,²⁵⁰ but

²⁴⁴ Sabri cites a Hanafi legal ruling regarding the disputed custodianship of a child in which the child's non-Muslim parent is favoured over a Muslim who would take him as a slave. Sabri, *Mawqif al-ʿAql*, 4:340-1.

²⁴⁵ Sabri, *Dinî Müceddidler* (Istanbul: Sabil, 1994), 249; compare to p.260 in the Ottoman version.

²⁴⁶ "For Islamic history it is imperative above all else to be familiar with Arabic-language," he wrote; Akif, "Medeniyet-i İslamiye Tarihinin Hataları," *SR*, 22 Mart 1328 (4 April 1912), 8/187: 92.

²⁴⁷ Erişirgil, *İslamcı bir Şairin Romanı*, 187.

²⁴⁸ The Latin script imprint of *Safahat* by Yakup Çelik, *Mehmet Akif Ersoy ve Safahat* (Istanbul: Akçağ, 2013), consistently defines *heyula* as *hayal* (apparition, spectre) in its footnotes, yet Akif intends its *kalām* sense of matter; see the phrase *uzaktan andırıyorken, demin, heyulayı* and accompanying footnote in *Ezanlar* from Akif/Çelik, *Safahat*, 130. Akif uses the word five times in total: 130 (in the Düzdağ Arabic script version, 128), 353 (Çelik)/447 (Düzdağ), 508/673, 523/693; only 527/698 is better understood as "apparition".

²⁴⁹ Akif translated *idéalisme* and *positivisme* in Said Halim Paşa's *İslamlaşmak* (1918) as *fikriye* and *işbâtiye* (p.4). Sabri followed Naim and Akif in using *ithbâtiyya* in Arabic rather than *al-falsafa al-waḍʿiyya* preferred in Egypt; Sabri, *Mawqif al-ʿAql*, 1:147, footnote 3. Sabri used *husbāniyya* for Scepticism, the theory of impossibility of arriving at absolute truth, from Ottoman *hisbāniye*, though *shukūkiyya* was the more common Arabic usage.

²⁵⁰ Note his use of Persian to soften his language and relay a sense of religious ecstasy in *Ezanlar* (1908), *Asım* (1919-24), and the *Gölgeler* collection, in particular *Secde* (1925) and *Gece* (1925).

was content to absorb elements of the *Türklük* vocabulary, not least since it afforded him a more varied palette with which to paint.²⁵¹ Akif possessed the lexical mastery of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish to deploy whichever word served the sentiment he sought to convey, as he explained in a theoretical essay on *ahenk* (harmony) written for his Darülfünun classes.²⁵² Words of different origins were fitted seamlessly into the array of *aruz* metre forms in which Akif had a grasp like few others.²⁵³ Yet Akif's attempt to create what we might call a workable Turkist Ottoman Turkish pleased neither nationalists who resented his appeal to religious themes nor ulema who, however subtly revealed, resented his encroachment upon their territory.²⁵⁴

Akif, Sabri, and Kevseri were writers who preserved Arabic and Persian vocabulary and constructions at a time when language had become an intense field of contestation in Turkey and beyond. They fought to uphold a transnational linguistic aesthetic while their peers were content to separate into more clearly defined Turkish and Arabic realms of expression. As adherents of Arabic and Arabic script, they were champions of a form of textual expression embedded in a sumptuous materiality bearing all the prestige of a venerated historical tradition. Script was about more than text and meaning conveyed through words and grammar. As Moustapha and Sperl write in a recent study, in its harmony and geometry the Arabic calligraphical tradition expressed not only the language of God's

²⁵¹ See use of *İlahi*, *Tanrı* and *Yezdan* for God in *Hicran* (1925), from *Gölgeler*; Akif/Düzdağ, *Safahat*, 666-7.

²⁵² In Ömer Hakan Özalp, *Osmanlı Edebiyatı Ders Notları 1908-1909 Eğitim Dönemi* (İstanbul: Bağcılar Belediye Başkanlığı, 2014) and Yusuf Turan Günaydın, *Kavâid-i Edebiyye* (İstanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2016), 31-40.

²⁵³ In a letter to Mahir İz, Akif expresses fear that *aruz* will disappear if the language reforms succeed; no. 13, dated 3 Dhulhicce 1350 (9 April 1932), in Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 67. On Akif's use of *aruz* see İsmail Habib, "Şahsiyeti, Evsaf-ı Mümeyyizesi," in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 379-385, and Mehmet Behcet Yazar, "Mehmed Âkif: Lisani, Nazmi, Şiiri, Sanatı," in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 484-488; Düzdağ, "Introduction," *Safahat*, 16-47.

²⁵⁴ Elmalılı Hamdi questioned linking some Qur'anic verses together in his translation; discussed in a letter to Mahir İz dated 1 March 1926, cited in Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 43. İz mentions the issue in his biography *Yılların İzi*, 358. Some critics said his language was not Turkicised enough; Cündioğlu, *Bir Kur'an Şairi*, 271.

revelation but the integrity and justice of the cosmic order.²⁵⁵ However, the interwar period was what İlker Aytürk calls the “heyday of an international romanization movement” when the drive to romanise scripts in the Soviet Union and European colonies was promoted even by the League of Nations.²⁵⁶ Non-Western societies were drawn into the post-Enlightenment refocusing of language on its instrumental function of conveying meaning in a transparent fashion, which meant writing was expected to efface as much as possible of its own materiality.²⁵⁷ Thus, Atatürk’s language reforms reordered the spatial and visual elements of writing as a sacred practice: shorn of its magical aspects and redirected towards positivist ends, Ottoman became Turkish.

* * *

²⁵⁵ Ahmed Moustafa and Stefan Sperl, *The Cosmic Script: Sacred Geometry and the Science of Arabic Penmanship* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 11. Also, J.R. Osborn, *Letters of Light: Arabic Script in Calligraphy, Print, and Digital Design* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017).

²⁵⁶ İlker Aytürk, “Script Charisma in Hebrew and Turkish: A Comparative Framework for Explaining Success and Failure of Romanization,” *Journal of World History*, 21/1 (2010): 97-130 (98, footnote 4).

²⁵⁷ Andréas Stauder, Lecture on Materiality and Reading (ancient/modern) of Ancient Egyptian Texts, Queen’s College, University of Oxford, 31 May 2017. John Baines, “Writing and its Multiple Disappearances,” in *The Disappearance of Writing Systems: Perspectives on Literacy and Communication*, ed. John Baines, John Bennet, and Stephen Houston (London: Equinox, 2008), 347-62.

CHAPTER 3

The Ottoman scholars and their negotiation of Muhammad ‘Abduh

This chapter looks in detail at the Turkish exiles’ engagement with the modernist trend in Egypt and the ideas of Muhammad ‘Abduh. It reviews the *Islāmiyyāt* literature of Egyptian intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s, Sabri’s response to this trend, his belief that Egypt had voluntarily adopted the radical ideas that Atatürk had forced on the Turkey he fled, and his conviction that ‘Abduh’s reform Islam was responsible for this. It then looks at Mehmed Akif’s work in Istanbul and Cairo in centring Late Ottoman Islamism around the ideas of ‘Abduh and considers comparisons between Akif and Indian thinker Muhammad Iqbal, whom Akif helped introduce to Arab audiences.

Literature regarding Egypt’s liberal era

In his extensive study of the impact of Western philosophy on Islamic thought and defence of the Islamic tradition, Mustafa Sabri expresses shock at the inroads atheistic Western materialist trends had made in Egypt. Fleeing Turkey after what he called the collapse of the “*mujāhid* Turkish Muslim state” (*dawlat al-turk al-muslima al-mujāhida*), Sabri wrote: “I found the cultural atmosphere in Egypt too poisoned by the Western trend [*masmūm min tayyār al-gharb*], and this shook me more than the position of the new Turkey regarding this trend, as did the realisation that my Arab brothers prefer this Turkey to the old Muslim Turkey.”¹ In the early pages Sabri establishes his main targets – Mustafa al-Maraghi, shaykh of al-Azhar from 1937-1929 and 1935-1945; ‘Abd Allah al-Qasimi (al-Qaṣīmī, 1907-1996), a Najdi intellectual who studied at al-Azhar and reneged on Wahhabism to write the atheistic

¹ Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 1:23.

text *Hadhihi Hiya al-Aghlal* (These are the Chains, 1946);² Muhammad Hasan Haykal (1888-1956), author of *Hayat Muhammad* (1935) and other works; Muhammad Farid Wajdi, the well-known intellectual who became editor of *Majallat al-Azhar*; Shaykh Shaltut, who later as rector of al-Azhar under Nasser issued a fatwa recognising worship according to the various Shi'i, Druze and 'Alawi rites as valid for any Muslim; the writers 'Abbas al-'Aqqad and Qasim Amin; and the father of the movement, 'Abduh. Sabri will mention others in his assault on Egypt's liberal age but these are the names he returns to again and again.

Sabri's central thesis was that the discourse of *tajdīd* had gradually acquired a position of dominance in public discourse, as represented in al-Azhar and print media. He noted that while 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq's *al-Islam wa-Usul al-Hukm* (Islam and the Foundations of Governance) led to his dismissal from al-Azhar after its publication in 1925 for advancing Islamic justifications for a Kemalist political order, it was telling that he later became the minister of religious endowments as Sabri wrote in the 1940s. Similarly, Taha Husayn became dean of Fuad University's faculty of arts years after his *Fi al-Shi'r al-Jahili* (1926) caused him to lose his teaching post. Sabri's contemporaries among Western scholars were also interested in the *tajdīd* movement. Hamilton Gibb used it in a series of four articles he published between 1928 and 1933, titled "Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature", in which he praised this new trend whose figurehead he considered to be 'Abduh.³

Charles Adams elaborated further on the nature of the movement in *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: The Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh*, defining it as "an attempt to free the religion of Islam from the shackles of a too rigid orthodoxy, and to

² Al-Qasimi was initially a Wahhabi critic of the Azhari modernist trend, publishing *al-Buruq al-Najdiyya fi Iktisah al-Zulamat al-Dijwiyya* (1931) in respond to Shaykh Yusuf al-Dijwi's criticism of Wahhabism and its opposition to practices associated with intercession.

³ Gibb informed his readers that some Egyptian writers consider Arabic inadequate for expressing modern ideas. H.A.R. Gibb, "Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature — III," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 5/3 (1929): 465, 459, 451.

accomplish reforms which will render it adaptable to the complex demands of modern life”.⁴

Adams supported ‘Abduh’s identification of Azhari education, the culture of Sufism, and *taqlīd* in the legal tradition as premodern phenomena hindering the achievement of modernity as well as his later rejection of Afghani’s pan-Islamic activism. Adams makes the telling comment that ‘Abduh considered that “the religion of Islam as conceived by the doctors of the schools has become so vast and complex a system, that it is difficult for anyone, particularly if he be an uneducated person, to know just what Islam is”.⁵ In other words, ‘Abduh had understood the European imperative that Islam should be knowable by a European standard. Adams also noted some of the theological shifts ‘Abduh was seen as having effected that diluted the notion of God as the immediate cause of all things and aligned the Qur’an with empirical thinking, such as asserting free will over predetermination,⁶ the Qur’anic phrase *sunnat Allāh* as an expression of the idea of natural law,⁷ his discussion of the notion of prophethood and miracles, promotion of the doctrine of the created Qur’an,⁸ and the attempt to match scientific knowledge with Qur’anic knowledge.⁹ Adams examined the different trends emanating from ‘Abduh, judging them by rubrics such as those who studied with him, supported his educational reforms, or furthered

⁴ Charles Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muḥammad ‘Abduh* (London: Oxford University Press/H. Milford, 1933), vi.

⁵ Ibid., 107.

⁶ Al-Afghani and ‘Abduh, “al-Qada’ wa-l-Qadar,” *al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa*, 81-8.

⁷ Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, 140.

⁸ His position shifted in early editions of *Risalat al-Tawhid*. The first edition of 1897 (taken from lecture notes from 1885 to 1888) stated briefly that the word of God was an attribute that was eternal with God but then went into a page of detail outlining the view that the pronounced word is created and cannot be said to be eternal (*qadīm*). ‘Abduh’s elaboration on the created element was removed in subsequent editions after his colleague Shaykh al-Shinqiti convinced him it was confusing people. This is odd in that the essence of his argument is consonant with the post-classical Ash‘ari-Maturidi consensus. The point of dissent may have been ‘Abduh’s criticism of Ahmad ibn Hanbal as too embroiled in resisting the Abbasid inquisition to declare the logic of the Qur’an’s pronunciation (*lafẓ*) as a human creation, which is at odds with Ibn Hanbal’s view that the question is better left undiscussed. See Mahmud Abu Rayya, ed., *Risalat al-Tawhid*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘arif, 2003), 14, footnote 1; the pages removed in subsequent editions are 53-5.

⁹ Microbes could be understood as a form of jinn and jinn could be responsible for epilepsy: ‘Abduh, “Bab Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Hakim,” *al-Manar*, 23 June 1906, 9/5: 334-5. See Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, 137-8.

this theological innovations, and he noted their considerable divergence, from the activism of Rashid Rida to the literary endeavours of Taha Husayn.

These trends – the liberal humanist and the Islamically political – evolved during the two decades following Adams’ work, but contemporary Western scholarship – associating them with the broad anti-colonialism of the period – tended to view them as failures.¹⁰ Gibb was the harshest, writing that the liberal modernists were intellectually incoherent and had ceded ground to a virulent political reactionism; that the modernist movement did not understand ‘Abduh’s revolutionary ideas and so fell back upon al-Afghani’s activism. Gibb appears to have had in mind Rida’s attempt to merge Wahhabi Hanbali themes into his discourse.¹¹ Gibb makes some effort to rescue ‘Abduh from this framing, citing his inspiration in Ibn Khaldun’s theory of historical change,¹² but describes his modernists, whether they are intellectuals like Haykal and Wajdi or activists like Rida, as “discarding almost the whole medieval apparatus of interpretation”: “The tradition as a whole... is treated by modernists with scant respect when it runs counter to their ideas, and European scholarship has itself furnished them with the means to discredit it.”¹³ Alongside their rationalised Qur’an, Gibb accused the modernists of having created a cult of the prophet as a form of compensation for their systematic vilification of Sufism. Gibb’s disappointment was reflected in other works that took issue with the writing of Wajdi, Haykal, and Husayn and movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁴

¹⁰ Israel Gershoni, “The Theory of Crisis and the Crisis in a Theory: Intellectual History in Twentieth-Century Middle Eastern Studies,” in *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century*, ed. Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer, Hakan Erdem (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 138.

¹¹ His reference to “Neo-Hanbalite Manar modernists”; H.A.R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), 46.

¹² *Ibid.*, 128.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 72-3.

¹⁴ Gustave von Grunebaum, *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955); Smith’s *Islam in Modern History*; P. J. Vatikiotis, *The Modern History of Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

Attitudes began to shift with Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*. First published in 1962, this study framed the Egyptian intellectuals as the latter stage of a period of positive engagement with Western culture that began in the early 19th century, positive in that like Gibb, his teacher and mentor, Hourani understood it to have been an era of drawing on Western intellectual ideas without promoting forms of resistance. Taking their cue from Hourani, Western scholars began to analyse the intellectual lights of pre-republic Egypt as constructing a discourse that could be understood on its own terms in an Egyptian context and not through the lens of apologetics. Thus, Israel Gershoni describes the modernist intellectuals as a natural component of the Egyptian urban bourgeoisie (*effendiyya*) in a typical developing nation. Their project was to "borrow selectively elements of European culture, especially scientific and technological products, but also the ideas of humanism and rationalism, and incorporate them into local (Islamic-Arab-Egyptian) cultural traditions".¹⁵ Against these variations on modernisation theory, in which religion is harmonised with European notions of progress,¹⁶ Samira Haj argues that 'Abduh's project should be seen as rooted firmly in the Islamic tradition, "not a mere ideological weapon, a ruse, or a reaction to European power".¹⁷ 'Abduh and the movement he inspired should not be understood in Western terms as secular or liberal humanism since the central elements of his discourse were Islamic questions regarding the monist theoretical and experiential culture of Sufism, conceptualisation of God, and the legal methodologies of *taqlīd* and *ijtihād*, she says. 'Abduh wanted to preserve religion as the defining authority on morality, rejecting colonialism's claims to reorder society according to Enlightenment notions of progress and reason;¹⁸ his new Muslim subject was rooted in the theologian al-Ghazali (d. 1111)'s personal ethics and

¹⁵ Ibid., 169.

¹⁶ See also Wielandt, "Main Trends of Islamic Theological," passim, for a similar positive approach.

¹⁷ Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 28.

¹⁸ Ibid., 98-99.

Mu‘tazili reason-based knowledge rather than the West’s individualism and tradition-free liberalism.¹⁹ However, Haj stretches her taxonomy to the limit in considering ‘Abduh and the Najdi Wahhabi movement as partners in the creation of this Muslim subject, despite the extensive differences of political, social, educational, and geographical context in which they operated.²⁰

Sabri’s early attitude towards ‘Abduh

Sabri’s attitude to ‘Abduh changes over time. In a way this is surprising for so well-known a figure. ‘Abduh became the touchstone of the Turkish modernists at the onset of the second constitutional era in 1908 through Akif and *Sırat-ı Müstakim*.²¹ Ziya Gökalp appeared to allude to ‘Abduh’s theory of microbes-as-jinn in his “Üç Cereyan” series, describing transnational pan-Islamism (*milliyetçilik*) as a microbe attacking both Islam and the Ottoman state.²² However, ‘Abduh does not feature in any of Sabri’s early writing, where the thrust of his views in a series of articles published from 1908 to 1911 was to uphold a conservative approach to *fiqh* clearly at odds with that of ‘Abduh (polygamy, divorce, inheritance, interest).²³ It is not until 1919 that Sabri takes a strong position publicly against interest – the

¹⁹ Ibid., 113.

²⁰ Ibid., 30-66.

²¹ Despite Lord Cromer’s efforts to dissuade him, ‘Abduh visited Istanbul in 1901 with Shaykh Ali Yusuf, editor of *al-Mu‘ayyad*. He met Abdülhamid and the sheikh ül-Islam Mehmet Cemaleddin Efendi. According to Yusuf, the mufti and ‘Abduh agreed that the body of ‘ulama’ were to blame for the innovation of non-shari‘a courts in Egypt since they had been distant from ordinary people, failing to serve the public good. This led to a flurry of conservative criticism of ‘Abduh in the Egyptian press. See Rida, *Tarikh al-Ustadh al-Imam al-Shaykh Muhammad ‘Abduh*, 3 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Fadila, 2006), 1:847-857.

²² Gökalp, *Türkleşmek*, 60. On the other hand, Gökalp often used medical terminology. Other Westernists such as Abdullah Cevdet also had a high opinion of ‘Abduh.

²³ See his defence of the fez, “Fes ve Kalpak,” *BH*, 3 Teşrinisani 1324 (16 November 1908), 1/7: 146-49; on polygamy, “Teaddüd-ü Zevcât,” *BH*, 1 Kanunuevvel 1324 (14 December 1908), 1/11: 226-31; on divorce, “Din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesailden: Talak,” *BH*, 16 Mart 1325 (29 March 1909), 1/26: 595-98; on Islamic inheritance, “Din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesailden: İrs, Zekve,” *BH*, 22 Şubat 1325 (7 March 1910), 2/50: 1060-1062; he objected to photography (which ‘Abduh approved of), “Din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesailden: Suret,” *BH*, 26 Kanunusani 1324 (8 February 1909), 1/19: 426-28; on action and work ethic (without referencing ‘Abduh), “Din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesailden: Say ve Servet,”

topic of one of ‘Abduh’s most well-known and controversial fatwas – when his book *Dinî Müceddidler* was serialised in *Sebilürreşad*, although interest is cited in a list of conditions of Islamic shari‘a that Sabri outlines in the 1908 introduction to his series in *Beyanülhak* on contemporary “issues of debate in Islam” (*din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesail*).²⁴ His *Sebilürreşad* articles said interest was one of the iniquities of the European capitalist system that had provoked the communist counter-reaction in Russia.²⁵

‘Abduh is first directly referred to in *Yeni İslam Müctehidleri*, Sabri’s response to the Tatar intellectual Musa Jarullah. During his Romanian exile Bigiev’s book *Rahmet-i İlahiye Burhanları* had been brought to Sabri’s attention by the Bucharest mufti, introducing Sabri to Bigiev’s other writings on the theme of reform in the context of Tatar Jadidism.²⁶ Bigiev’s writing provoked controversy in Tatar circles but also induced Sabri to engage his first major critique of the modernist movement. Bigiev had two objectives in his book: to question the belief in eternal punishment for non-Muslims (*hulūd meselesi*) and to challenge Islamic theology as a disciplinary practice. His was an intervention in an ongoing debate regarding hellfire, its duration and its subjects, in which premodern theological understandings of scripture, upheld by Sabri, were remodelled towards a moral theism that considered anyone who believes in God and does good deeds as a viable candidate for salvation.²⁷ Bigiev accused the *mutakallimūn* of misinterpreting Qur’anic material to restrict divine mercy to

BH, 8 Şubat 1909 (21 February 1909), 2/48: 1020-23; on insurance, “Din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesailden: Sigorta, Kumar,” BH, 21 Şubat 1326 (6 March 1911), 4/100: 1858-61; and the limits of permissibility in music, “Din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesailden: Musiki,” BH, 24 Mayıs 1326 (6 June 1910), 3/63: 1258-62.

²⁴ “Din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesailden: Mukaddime,” BH, 6 Teşrinievvel 1324 (19 October 1908), 1/3: 8. The term used is *faiz*. He mentions the issue again in “Suret,” BH, 1/22, 492.

²⁵ Sabri, *Dinî Müceddidler*, 62; *Sebilürreşad*, “Dinî Müceddidler,” 12 Haziran 1335 (12 June 1919), 16/421: 35.
²⁶ Bigiev’s book was first published in the Russian Muslim journal *Şura* in Orenburg in 1909. A modern Turkish edition was published along with Sabri’s book; Ömer H. Özalp, *İlâhî Adale* (Istanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 1996). See also Wielandt, “Main Trends of Islamic Theological Thought,” 732 and Wilson, *Translating the Qur’an*, 39-44.

²⁷ Mohammad Hassan Khalil argues Rashid Rida pioneered the modern debate, but Khalil does not discuss the Tatar contribution; see Khalil, *Islam and The Fate of Others: The Salvation Question* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 110-45.

believers (*mu'minūn*), adding that it was in Sufi writers that he found clear thinking on the issue.²⁸ Sabri saw in this an attempt by non-specialists to produce a European Islam in which Ibn 'Arabi's pantheistic themes were accentuated in accordance with liberal humanism's objectification of Christian mercy and *taqlīd* was problematised in the modernist effort to destabilise the Islamic tradition. Sabri accused Bigiev of misinterpreting Qur'anic verses to impute a forgiveness for *kufṛ* and *shirk* that isn't there and lessen their admonitory impact, and he said Bigiev had attributed a clarity to Ibn 'Arabi's thinking on eternal damnation in *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya* that overlooked its contradictory statements.²⁹ Sabri also accused Bigiev of deriving an interpretation of Jesus in Qur'an 5:116-118 as a figure interceding with God to forgive idolators from Ibn 'Arabi and his follower 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jili (d. 1424) and their concept of the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*).³⁰ Sabri cited Qur'an 88:21-26 to argue that the Prophet can only guide and warn, while God makes clear that the suffering of the final reckoning is His affair alone. He then added that 'Abduh, "one of the renewers of the last era" (*son asır müceddidlerinden*), had commented on the verse by saying simply there was no escape from God's warning.³¹ Sabri's use of *müceddid* here was intended polemically to dismiss modernist intellectuals as undeserving of the term, which had become common currency; indeed, it's clear from Sabri's visceral reaction to 'Abduh in later years that he was not at this point aware of the nature of 'Abduh's thinking at all.

After this praise, 'Abduh only took Sabri's attention again in an article published in his *Yarın* newspaper in 1927 which attacked arguments made by reformers to justify

²⁸ Musa Jarullah Bigiev, *Rahmet-i İlahiye Bürhanları*, in *İlâhî Adalet*, ed. Ömer Özalp (Istanbul: Pınar Yayınevi, 1996), 263-71.

²⁹ Sabri, *Yeni İslam Müctehidlerinin Kıymet-i İlmiyesi* (Istanbul: Âsitâne Kitabevi, nda), 114-29. See Ibn 'Arabi, *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, chapters 124, 297, 320, 558.

³⁰ Sabri, *Yeni İslam Müctehidleri*, 58-64. Bigiev, *Rahmet-i İlahiye*, 311-2. Sabri cites Ibn 'Arabi, *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, chapter 358. On Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of Jesus in Qur'an 5:116, see Maurice Gloton, *Jesus Son of Mary in the Qur'an and According to the Teachings of Ibn 'Arabi* (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2016).

³¹ Ibid., 68. Akif translated 'Abduh's *tafsīr* of these verses; 'Abduh, "Tefsir-i Sure-i Gaşiye, 17-26," *SR*, 24 Şubat 1327 (9 March 1911), 8/1: 183-4. The original is in Muhammad 'Abduh (ed. Muhammad 'Imara), *al-A'mal al-Kamila*, 5 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1993), 5:375-81.

neglecting the Ramadan fast. Sabri was provoked into writing by an article by Süleyman Nazif, an Ottoman governor, poet and admirer of Akif, and another by Ubeydullah Efendi, which Sabri viewed as typifying the assault on religious belief and practice of the era. The fast was an issue that reformers had focussed on for some time. Bigiev published a book in 1911 arguing for laxer rules, *Uzun Günlerde Ruze* (The Fast During Long Days), which Sabri referenced in his riposte. As sheikh ül-Islam Sabri took up the issue, ordering demobilised and other soldiers to maintain the fast in public places following the armistice.³² Sabri directly addressed ‘Abduh’s view that not only the elderly and ill but coal workers and prisoners engaged in hard labour should all be absolved of fasting and allowed to feed the poor for every day missed rather than obliged to fast the missed days after Ramadan.³³ From this comment it would appear that Sabri had read at least some of ‘Abduh’s *tafsīr* material, whether through its publication in *al-Manar* or in book form.

That Sabri’s worldview was markedly different from ‘Abduh’s is clear from his first statement of position in *Beyanülhak*. In its first issue Sabri wrote in an editorial comment that the CUP and army had found it necessary to take action against despotic rule (*devr-i istibdad*), which he equated with the shari‘a category of *munkar* (reprehensible act), in part because ulema including himself had failed in their duty (*vaktiyle vazifemizi maatteessüf eda edemediğimiz*) as consultants to rulers,³⁴ but the ulema’s role now was to preserve Islamic rites and national-religious morals (*şer‘iyye-i islamiye ve adab-ı milliye*) through active participation in public life.³⁵ At pains to stress that his group of ulema supported the new order, Sabri seemed anxious to make sure that radical trends did not shut out conservative voices. He pressed his case in more detail from the third issue, inaugurating his series on

³² Sabri, “Fetva-yı Meşihatpenahi,” 29 Mayıs 1335 (29 May 1919), in *SR*, 16/419: 21-2.

³³ Sabri, “Savm-i Ramazan: Fidyeye ile Geçştirilebilir mi?” *Yarın*, 13 April 1928, 1/19: 2-4. ‘Abduh’s *tafsīr* of Qur’an 2:286 (“rabbanā lā tuḥammilnā mā lā tāqa lanā bihi”) is in *al-A‘mal al-Kamila*, 4:739-43.

³⁴ “Beyanülhak’ın Mesleği,” *BH*, 22 Eylül 1324 (5 October 1908), 1/1: 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

contemporary issues in Islam. He started by saying there are some who object to Islamic shari‘a ordinances *in toto* or, no less incoherently, in part and it’s not clear if they are criticising the ulema or religion itself, but it is through *ilm-i kelam* that the foundations of religion in “the world of Islam” (*alem-i İslam*) must be defended from such attacks.³⁶ Rather than the decline of *taqlīd* in *fiqh*, Sabri championed the branches of knowledge associated with *kalām* such as logic, disputation, mathematics, and philosophy. However, there are trends now seeking to diminish this system of knowledge, he wrote. Empirical knowledge does not replace abstract logic, since it is only through logic that empirical knowledge can be appraised. Western thinkers involve themselves in an obsessive manner with “the most unnecessary” (*en lüzumsuz*) empirical details,³⁷ but thus far Ottoman education has not been critically corrupted by this approach and Arabic remains the vehicle for learning the Islamic sciences. Efforts to demonstrate that prophetic hadiths conform to the notion of the earth moving around a static sun are appreciated, he said, but one should not seek indications of modern science in the Qur’an since as a text guiding the individual and society its function was not to indicate such things; it was to give solutions for afflictions of the spirit rather than of the body (*emraz-ı cismaniye ziyade emraz-ı ruhaniyeye çare-sāz olur*).³⁸ Some hadith may be useful relating to medical issues, for example, but the prophet was a man of wisdom, not a specialist in medicine (*peygamber hakîmdi, tabip değildi*).³⁹ The ulema’s task is to protect Islamic ordinances from mingling with European thinking and fortunately the methodology of hadith narrators and jurists was so rigorous in the early period, more so than that of

³⁶ Sabri, “Din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesailden: Mukaddime,” *BH*, 6 Teşrinievvel 1324 (19 October 1908), 1/3: 9.

³⁷ Sabri, “Din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesailden: Mukaddime 2,” *BH*, 20 Teşrinievvel 1324 (2 November 1908), 1/5: 90.

³⁸ Sabri, “Din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesailden: Mukaddime 3,” *BH*, 27 Teşrinievvel 1324 (9 November 1908), 1/6: 107.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

modern historians whose personal character is rarely adduced in evaluations of their work,⁴⁰ that the Islamic system of knowledge remains strong.

Without using the words *tecdid* or *müceddid*, Sabri expressed here an ethos that was plainly in contrast to that of ‘Abduh, in particular his rejection of the trend seeking Qur’anic bases for European science. His mention of diseases of the body and spirit may have been another allusion to ‘Abduh’s discussion of microbes, but the issue was not in his view serious enough to warrant calling ‘Abduh out. Sabri’s focus was primarily on intellectuals with the intent to sabotage religion (*dini baltalamak*) who claimed interpretive authority in Islamic affairs, rather than ulema whose critique he viewed as manageable.⁴¹ Why he did not take aim then at Akif and others in the *Sırat-ı Müstakim* group is not clear. One explanation is Gündoğdu’s argument that the period from 1908 until the 1912 coup against the CUP was one of relative civility in the public debate when nationalist intellectuals were still welcomed in Islamic journals as well-intentioned advocates of reform Islam. Indeed, there was some overlap in the views of conservative ulema and reformist intellectuals. *Sırat-ı Müstakim* serialised Akif’s translation of Muhammad Farid Wajdi’s *al-Mar’a al-Muslima* (The Muslim Woman, 1901), which was a response to Qasim Amin’s two works, *Tahrir al-Mar’a* (Emancipation of Women, 1899) and *al-Mar’a al-Jadida* (The New Woman, 1900). Wajdi makes two points with which Sabri would hardly disagree: a defence of veiling (*ḥijāb* in the Arabic text, *mestūriyet* in Akif’s Ottoman) as in conformity with the innate God-given characteristics (*fiṭra/fitrat*) of women and theories of national development (*takmīl al-umma wa-taḥsīn ḥālīha al-ijtimā’iyya/ümmetin terakkisini tekml etmek/heyet-i ictimā’iyyenin hâlini bir kat daha yükseltmek*), and a rejection of Western materialist values which have disfigured

⁴⁰ Sabri, “Din-i İslam’da hedef-i münakaşa olan mesailden: Mukaddime 4,” *BH*, 10 Teşrinisani 1324 (23 November 1908), 1/8: 155-6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

humanity (*shawwahat wajh al-insāniyya/insaniyetin yüzünü karartan*).⁴² Wajdi's other works published in *Sırat-ı Müstakim* at this time, *Hadika-i Fikriye (al-Hadiqa al-Fikriyya, 1901)* and *Müslümanlıkta Medeniyet (al-Madaniyya wa-l-Islam, 1901)*, presented an anti-materialist, anti-colonial polemic behind which lay concessions to the Enlightenment's epistemological system that only became apparent to Sabri once in Egypt. Thirdly, much of this material took time to flood into the Ottoman market following the collapse of Hamidian censorship – Wajdi's book was published in Egypt in 1901, serialised in Ottoman in 1908, then published in book form in 1909. Fourthly, during his wartime exile Sabri's anxiety over *müceddid* intellectuals crystallised around the figures of Musa Jarullah Bigiev and Haşım Nahid (1880-1962), a finance ministry official who wrote in nationalist publications.

Sabri's first significant discussion of 'Abduh came in *Mawqif al-Bashar Taht Sultan al-Qadar*, published in 1933. His second book written in Egypt, it followed *Mas'alat Tarjamat al-Qur'an* (1932) which took aim at Mustafa al-Maraghi and Muhammad Farid Wajdi over their support for translating the Qur'an into national languages. Debate over the question of translation was intense during this period and focussed on Egypt as the nexus of intellectual authority in Islam. Al-Azhar's authoritative Arabic imprints of 1924 and 1936 enhanced Egypt's status, but leading figures began to see advantage in an English Qur'an that would be propagated by al-Azhar. Al-Maraghi also saw a chance to push back against Christian missionary activity with a missionary drive of Islam's own and to check the propaganda efforts of the Lahore Ahmadiyya who had led the way with a translation published in 1917, but Sabri's focus was the linguistic nationalism of the Kemalists. In his book Sabri pressed the point that his Egyptian interlocutors did not appear to appreciate the radical nature of the Turkish project and challenged the argument that Abu Hanifa had

⁴² Muhammad Farid Wajdi, *al-Mar'a al-Muslima* (Cairo: al-Taraqqi, 1901), 5, 202; the Ottoman is *Müslüman Kadım* (Istanbul: Sırat-ı Müstakim, 1325 [1909]), 5, 163.

approved the use of Persian in prayer regardless of one's knowledge of Arabic with the view that he later reneged on that position.⁴³ However, with al-Maraghi reappointed to head al-Azhar in 1935 and Rashid Rida's change of heart on the issue, Egypt began printing English Qur'ans in 1938.⁴⁴

Mawqif al-Bashar took as its target Shaykh al-Muti'i over an article in the journal *al-Hidaya* in which he expressed a Maturidi view of extensive free will in human action and blamed Ash'arism for what he called Muslim backwardness (*ta'akkhur*).⁴⁵ This became the occasion for Sabri to take on the trend he had observed towards reformulating theological understandings on free will as the basis for bringing Muslim societies up to par with Europe in political, economic and technological strength. Sabri saw 'Abduh's influence behind al-Muti'i, who had succeeded him as chief mufti (though some question the degree to which he should be seen as a disciple).⁴⁶ Citing 'Abduh's *Risalat al-Tawhid* and its section on men's actions (*af'āl al-ibād*), Sabri revived the accusation of Mu'tazilism directed at 'Abduh during his lifetime, a polemical charge which has been used to denounce any number of 'Abduh's views, from his teaching of logic and *kalām*, to his rejection of adherence to the single legal school, to his Ash'ari-Maturidi view of the Qur'an as God's speech.⁴⁷

The complexities of any thinker's ideas are *ipso facto* hard to define, but in 'Abduh's case the issue is complicated by his changing views, the unclear authorship of some works,

⁴³ Sabri, *Mas'alat Tarjamat al-Qur'an*, 35-67.

⁴⁴ Wilson, *Translating the Qur'an*, 186-209.

⁴⁵ Sabri, *Mawqif al-Bashar*, 20-2.

⁴⁶ In *Haqiqat al-Islam wa-Usul al-Hukm* (1926) al-Muti'i rejected Ali 'Abd al-Raziq's claim that the Prophet had not mandated a political system; Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, 208; Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 189-192.

⁴⁷ 'Abduh's early nemesis at al-Azhar was Shaykh 'Illaysh (d. 1882), who questioned his teaching of Sa'd al-Din Taftazani (d. 1390)'s commentary on Najm al-Din al-Nasafi (d. 1142)'s *Aqa'id*, a standard Maturidi work; see 'Abduh, *al-A'mal al-Kamila*, 3:210. As Maliki Mufti 'Illaysh objected to going outside the Ash'ari curriculum, but in as much as al-Nasafi was misrepresented as a Mu'tazili in this dispute, it seems the real issue was the principle of *taqlid* in teaching *kalām* and logic, which accompanied the reform group's objection to legal *taqlid*. See Indira Falk Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 93-7; and El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 175, 360.

and the attempts of later strands within Sunni Arab modernism to align his views with their thinking. The eighteen issues of *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqa* are attributed variously to ʿAbduh, al-Afghani or both.⁴⁸ Akif translated its well-known article on predestination and free will under ʿAbduh’s name, yet Sabri considered it to be primarily al-Afghani’s work because of its divergence from ʿAbduh’s argument in *Risalat al-Tawhid*.⁴⁹ The *Risalat al-Waridat* (Treatise on Mystical Inspirations), published in 1908 though apparently written in 1874, has been the topic of considerable debate: it expresses a pantheistic illuminationist theosophy absent in *Risalat al-Tawhid*, in which the theme of causality puts God at a certain remove from modern society. Adams considered it to be ʿAbduh’s work, while Muhammad ʿImara left it out of his collected works of ʿAbduh first published in 1972.⁵⁰ From personal papers he examined in Tehran, Iranian scholar Sayyid Hadi Khusraw Shahi supported this view of al-Afghani as the primary author, a view also upheld by Rotraud Wielandt.⁵¹ ʿImara and Rida implied al-Afghani was responsible for ʿAbduh’s interest in Sufi theosophy and Shiʿi *ʿirfān*,⁵² while Rida tried to configure him as the inheritor of Ibn Taymiyya’s mantle;⁵³ Sunni modernism has also asserted against considerable evidence that al-Afghani was a Sunni.⁵⁴ As for ʿAbduh’s Qurʾan commentary, it was first published from 1900 in *al-Manar*, based on lecture notes taken by Rida, and then later published by Rida as *Tafsir al-Manar* in 1927, but it only

⁴⁸ The ideas were said to be Afghani’s but the words ʿAbduh’s. See Keddie, “Al-Sayyid Jamal al-Din ʿal-Afghani,” in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnama (London: Zed, 1994), 28; Rida, *Tarikh*, 1:190.

⁴⁹ ʿAbduh, “Kaza ve Kader,” *SM*, 23 April 1335 (8 May 1909), 2/35: 133-136; and 30 Nisan 1325 (15 May 1909), 2/36: 149-50.

⁵⁰ ʿImara also considers *al-Taʿliqat ʿala Sharh al-ʿAqaʿid al-ʿAdudiyya* (published in 1904 but written in 1876) to be al-Afghani’s, but footnotes with ʿAbduh’s signature. The book is a gloss on Jalal al-Din Dawani (d. 1502)’s commentary on ʿAdud al-Din al-Ijī’s *Mawaqif*, a key Ashʿari text. See Alnoor Dhanani, “Al-Mawāqif fī ʿilm al-kalām by ʿAḍūd al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 1355), and Its Commentaries,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 375-98. Robert Wisnovsky thinks ʿAbduh was its prime author; see “Avicenna’s Islamic reception,” in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 191, footnote 4.

⁵¹ See Wielandt, “Main Trends of Islamic Theological Thought,” 716-19.

⁵² Vincent J. Cornell, “Muhammad ʿAbduh: A Sufi-Inspired Modernist?” in *Tradition and Modernity: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. David Marshall (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 108-11.

⁵³ Rida even rebukes ʿAbduh for neglecting to mention Ibn Taymiyya in his edition of *Risalat al-Tawhid*; *Risalat al-Tawhid* (Cairo: al-Manar, 1942), 26, footnote 2.

⁵⁴ Keddie, “Al-Sayyid Jamal al-Din,” 28.

ran as far as 12:107 and ‘Abduh had only even then been closely involved in the text up to 4:125.⁵⁵

The 1884 article that Sabri attributed to al-Afghani alone set out to prove that European claims regarding divine predetermination of events (*al-qadā’ wa-l-qadar*) in Islam, seen as the source of numerous forms of social, political and economic malaise, had misunderstood and distorted the Ash‘ari compromise between free will and predestination as what in *kalām* terms would be considered *jabriyya*. *Al-qadā’ wa-l-qadar*, it said, expresses the notion of human action that takes place within the context of a chain of events, the external features of which alone can be known to men but the totality of which only God (*mudabbir al-kawn al-a‘la*) can know. Therefore, no one can conclude that their life term is fixed, that their livelihood is assured, and that God will perpetually intervene in the direction of their affairs. Correct belief encourages action not inertia and inaction, but they added, “we do not deny that in the souls of some Muslims this belief has been spoiled by the belief in *al-jabr* [predestination], which could be the cause of some of the calamities they have suffered in recent times.”⁵⁶

What attracted Sabri to the article was that although it leaned towards the Maturidi view in that man was the unambiguous source of his own action, it did not openly challenge Ash‘ari doctrine in the manner of ‘Abduh’s *Risala*.⁵⁷ In the latter’s section on human actions, ‘Abduh states in the first line that man is fully aware of his existence through his reason and senses, without need for evidence or a teacher to guide him (*lā yaḥtāj fī dhālik ilā dalīl yuhdīhi wa-lā mu‘allim yurshiduhu*), a position that diverges from the Ash‘ari belief in classical *kalām* debates in the need for a prophet and establishment of divine law.⁵⁸ Through

⁵⁵ Hassan, *Islam and The Fate of Others*, 111-2.

⁵⁶ Al-Afghani and ‘Abduh, “al-Qada’ wa-l-Qadar,” *al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa*, 87.

⁵⁷ Sabri, *Mawqif al-Bashar*, 46.

⁵⁸ ‘Abduh (ed. Imara), *Risalat al-Tawhid* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1994), 61. See Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2006), 108-19.

his mental faculties man intuitively that a higher power guides his actions but in a manner he cannot comprehend (*quwwa asmā min an tuḥīṭ bihā qudratuhu/sulṭān lā taṣil ilayhi sulṭatuhu*); and he understands that all events in the universe are reliant upon (*mustanida ilā*) one necessitating entity for existence (*wājib wujūd wāḥid*) who makes possible the voluntary mental and physical actions of men.⁵⁹ ‘Abduh goes on to justify this position as the mid-way between the early Mu‘tazili belief in the total independence of human action, which implies God has no power in worlds He has created, and supporters of predestination and “those who upheld it but disavowed the name” (*man qāla bihi wa-tabarra’a min ismihi*) – a reference to the Ash‘ariyya⁶⁰ – whose position negates the responsibilities and faculties of reason inscribed in the divine law (*hadm li-l-sharī‘a wa-maḥw li-l-takālīf wa-ibṭāl li-ḥukm al-‘aql al-badīhī*).⁶¹ So man’s happiness is dependent upon his will and his ability (*al-‘abd yaksib bi-irādatihi wa-qudratihi mā huwa wasīla li-sa‘ādatihi*), his abilities bequeathed by God (*ṣarrafahu fī quwāhu*).⁶²

Sabri was suspicious. ‘Abduh was taking aim at the Ash‘arism that European scholars had identified as the source of a malaise and inaction that was meant to explain why Muslim countries had failed to achieve the progress of Europe. ‘Abduh’s attack was a “distortion of one after another of Islam’s ideas and beliefs to replace them with what Europe wants for us [*istibdāl mā tarḍāhu lanā urubbā makānahā*]”. Since he did not read ‘Abduh as simply advancing Maturidism, Sabri reached for the polemical charge of Mu‘tazilism and he was helped in this by the fact that ‘Abduh did not use the language of particular and universal will (*al-irāda al-juz’iyya/al-juz’ al-ikhtiyārī* and *al-irāda al-kulliyya*), Maturidi concepts of human agency that Philipp Bruckmayr has shown developed in Ottoman Naqshbandi

⁵⁹ Ibid., 61-2.

⁶⁰ ‘Imara clarifies this intent to readers in a footnote; Rida makes no comment.

⁶¹ Ibid., 63.

⁶² Ibid., 64.

discourse.⁶³ Sabri was well aware of this terminology since although he was not a Naqshbandi adept the language had influenced the general discourse of Ottoman *kalām*.⁶⁴ Sabri said that ‘Abduh was exaggerating in his description of Mu‘tazilism as a school in favour of free will in order to balance out his criticism of the Ash‘ariyya and deflect the charge of Mu‘tazilism.⁶⁵ Of course, ‘Abduh was positive elsewhere in the opening section of his *Risala* about Ash‘arism as an effective compromise in early theological debates around questions of God’s power and human responsibility.

Sabri was particularly sensitive to these issues at this point since it was in *Mawqif al-Bashar* that he declared his switch from Maturidism to Ash‘ari thinking on predestination. He talked of his experience in Thrace, where difficulties he said he had always had in reconciling the Qur’anic verses on divine will with the Maturidi position on human responsibility (*mas’ūliyyat al-‘ibād*) came to a head through reading the views of Egyptian ‘ulama’.⁶⁶ He described his new position as an Ash‘ari “midway determinism” (*al-jabr al-mutawassit*),⁶⁷ in that volition (*irāda/ikhtiyār*) is entirely God’s but realised upon man’s “readiness for will” (*al-isti‘dād li-l-irāda*) via a divine *tafwīd* (authorisation) that empowers action – in other words an intersection of divine causation and human desire to act (*jabr wa-tafwīd ma‘an*).⁶⁸ Sabri’s defence of Ash‘ari occasionalism stood out for its framing in the language of Maturidi

⁶³ Philipp Bruckmayr, “The Particular Will (*al-irādat al-juz‘iyya*): Excavations Regarding a Latecomer in Kalām Terminology on Human Agency and its Position in Naqshbandi Discourse,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 13/2011: 2-20. The terminology was not widespread in Egypt, India and Hijaz, though used by Hasan al-Attar (1776-1835), al-Azhar rector from 1830-1835. Peter Gran, “Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭār,” in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography: 1350-1850*, ed. Roger Allen and Terri DeYoung (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 56-68.

⁶⁴ Sabri was a member of the the İslah-ı Medaris-i İslamiye Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi (Beneficial Society for the Reform of Islamic Schools), established by the Khalidi Naqshbandis of Konya; Bruckmayr, “The Particular Will,” 9. This school system became the model for the Daru’l-Hilafeti’l-Aliye established in Istanbul in 1914. See Ismail Bilgili, “Bekir Sami Paşa Nakşbendî Halidî Zaviyesinin Konya İslah-i Medâris-i İslamiye Medresesine Dönüşümü Bağlamında Nakşbendîliğin İlmi Hayata Tesiri,” *Uluslararası Bahaeddin Nakşibend ve Nakşibendilik Sempozyumu* (Istanbul: Hüdayi Vakfı, 2016), 312-40.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 38. He was correct on this point in that Jahm ibn Safwan (d. 746), one of the early figures of the Mu‘tazila movement, favoured a strict determinism.

⁶⁶ Sabri, *Mawqif al-Bashar*, 93-4. This refers to Qur’an 81:29 and 76:30, “wa-mā tashā’ūn illā an yashā’ Allāh”.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 56, 148.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 47, 72. This is a position he praises with regard to Gelenbevi in the latter’s gloss to Dawani’s *Sharh al-‘Aqa’id al-‘Adudiyya*.

partial will and unabashed embrace of the language of *jabriyya*. Maturidism, he said, was a radical form of free will attracting attention among Egyptian liberal modernists for the wrong reasons:⁶⁹ if theology was an explanation of the state of nations then how to explain the strength of early Muslims, given the intense sectarian conflict over theological questions or the ascendance of modernists today who do not in effect believe in predestination at all?⁷⁰ Sabri's change of heart on human agency was not in itself prompted by his experience in Egypt, which at the time of writing *Mawqif al-Bashar* was not long, but by the collapse of the Ottoman state and rise of the radical republic, about which he provided an early analysis in his first major Arabic work *al-Nakir* (1924). However, the book registered his sense of shock at the extent to which liberal modernist *apologia* had taken hold in Egypt and the first hints that he blamed 'Abduh for this. Had he been aware of the "collapse and dissolution" (*al-suqūṭ wa-l-inḥilāl*) that subsequently befell Islamic thought, 'Abduh – still "the genius shaykh" in Sabri's estimation⁷¹ – would have regretted the loose manner in which he discussed these theological questions, he wrote.⁷²

In his earlier Turkish works *Yeni İslam Müctehidleri* (1919) and *Dinî Müceddidler* (1922) Sabri assailed modernist intellectuals as varying degrees of witting/unwitting accomplice to the CUP/Kemalist enterprise, through internalising Orientalist tropes of Islam as a fatalistic system of knowledge requiring a Protestant revolution to set it right. Among the "the intellectuals of our country who imitate Europe" (*memleketimizin Avrupayı taklid eden münevverleri*) it was Bigiev Sabri had in mind.⁷³ Bigiev's early Turkish translation of the Qur'an had been viewed by some in Ottoman circles as a "Lutheran moment",⁷⁴ prompting

⁶⁹ Ibid., 145, 160-3.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 219-220.

⁷¹ Ibid., 33.

⁷² Ibid., 45-6.

⁷³ Sabri, *Dinî Müceddidler*, 239.

⁷⁴ Doğan Gürpınar, *Ottoman/Turkish Visions of the Nation, 1860-1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 73. For a discussion of the Late Ottoman Luther debate see Suat Mertoğlu, "Ahmed Muhiddin: Hayatı,

Haşim Nahid to declare him “Islam’s Luther” (*İslamiyetin Luteri*), a *müceddid* and *mücahid* liberating Islamic thought and ethics. “A Russian Muslim has taken the first step towards the truth of religion; let us too follow him [*Rusiyeli bir Müslüman dinin hakikatine doğru ilk adımını attı, biz de onu takib edelim*],” Nahid wrote in his book *Türkiye İçin Necat ve İğtila Yolları* (Means of Salvation and Progress for Turkey, 1912).⁷⁵ Building on Bigiev’s ideas, Nahid elaborated on the nature of this Lutheran liberation as the end of the monopoly on scriptural interpretation enjoyed by the ulema.⁷⁶ The canon of books studied in Arabic grammar, logic, *kalām*, *fiqh*, and philosophy had emptied education of the true spirit of Islam;⁷⁷ a “social shari‘a” (*şeriat-i ictimā‘iye*) was required to spread the notion of love for people of the same country;⁷⁸ effort and initiative (*teşebbüs*) would result from freedom of thought (*hürriyet-i fikriye*) and human agency (*azim ve irade*).⁷⁹

Sabri and the Farah Antun debate: “The imam of modern Egypt was a sceptic”⁸⁰

By the time Sabri came to write *Mawqif al-‘Aql* he had expanded his understanding of the elements of Islamic tradition under attack from the modernists and refined his opinion of

Eserleri, Düşüncesi,” in Muhiddin, *Modern Türklükte Kültür Hareketi*, 36-39 and Wilson, *Translating the Qur‘an*, 23. The call for a Luther began with al-Afghani and was made in Istanbul around 1892; Roman Loimeier, “Is There Something like “Protestant Islam?”” *Die Welt des Islams*, 45/2 (2005): 245.

⁷⁵ Haşim Nahid, *Türkiye İçin: Necat ve İğtila Yolları* (Istanbul: İktbal Kitaphanesi, 1912), 214. Sabri’s *Dinî Müceddidler* had a subheading that described it as a response to Nahid’s book. Other writers attack the search for a Luther; see Mustafa Naim, “Luterlik Yapmak İstiyorlar,” *Medrese İtikadları*, 2 Ağustos 1329 (15 August 1913), issue 13: 103-104. But CUP and republican intellectuals openly called for Islam to find its Luther: see Abdullah Cevdet, the appendix to his translation of of Dutch Orientalist Reinhart Dozy (1820-1883)’s *Essai sur l’histoire de l’Islamisme* (1879), “Tekmile: Son Kırk Sene Zarfında İslamiyet,” in *Tarih-i İslamiyet*, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Matbaa-i İctihad, 1909), 2:720-1; and Celal Nuri, *Türk İnkılabı* (Istanbul: Sühulet Kütüphanesi, 1926), 368-82. Atatürk was compared to Luther by US ambassador Charles Sherrill in 1932-1933 for promoting the Turkish Qur‘an and call to prayer; see *A Year’s Embassy to Mustafa Kemal* (New York/London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934), 195.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 132-3.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 230-1.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 242-3.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 240-1, 244. Namık Kemal also indulged the trope of Muslim inaction in an essay published posthumously in 1912; “Say,” in *Kiraat-ı Edebiye*, 3 vols., ed. Celal Sahir Erozan and Mehmed Fuad Köprülü (Istanbul: Karabet Matbaası, 1912), 1:51-8.

⁸⁰ Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 1:305.

‘Abduh as the eponymous founder of the movement. Sabri’s starting point was ‘Abduh’s celebrated debate in 1901 with Farah Antun (1874-1922), a Lebanese Christian who left Tripoli for Egypt in 1897 to establish the journal *al-Jami‘a al-Uthmaniyya*.⁸¹ Antun stirred the ire of ‘Abduh and Rida, who emigrated with him on the same boat, with a series of articles on the figure of Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), the Andalusian philosopher who upheld Aristotle’s view of a more distant creator in whose dominion natural laws were created through continuous divine agency but not individual human acts i.e. God delegates his power through secondary causes.⁸² Like Renan, Antun viewed Ibn Rushd as a heroic figure who faced persecution for his effort to rationalise the Islamic version of the Semitic monotheistic system, in particular of prophecy. His experience thus became in their view emblematic of intolerance within religious systems and a need to separate the temporal and spiritual functions of the state. Antun made clear his intent to address contemporary realities in the dedication to the book he published in 1903 gathering in one volume the main elements of his exchange with ‘Abduh. The new generation “in the East”, understanding the damage inherent in religion playing a role outside its sacred space (*makān muqaddas*), wish to “keep pace with the new trend of European civilisation” (*mujārāt tayyār al-tamaddun al-urubbī al-jadīd*).⁸³ I will look at this debate in some detail, then consider what some scholars have extracted from it alongside Sabri’s analysis.

In his initial article Antun described Ibn Rushd (d. 1198)’s philosophy as challenging the *mutakallimūn*’s belief that all matter is created by God who has absolute powers of intervention in all questions of creation (*khāliq muṭlaq al-taṣarruf fī al-kawn*).⁸⁴ Ibn Rushd

⁸¹ Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 254.

⁸² He wrote commentaries on Aristototle’s works except *Politics*, which was not translated into Arabic until 1948. Majid Fakhry, *Averroës (Ibn Rushd): His Life, Works and Influence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001).

⁸³ Farah Antun, *Ibn Rushd wa-Falsafatuhu* (Alexandria: al-Jami‘a, 1903), dedication (*Ihda’ al-Kitab*). On this new Enlightenment conceptualisation of the sacred see Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 30-7, 236-7.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 34. Antun ranged his discussion of Ibn Rushd around the three issues Ghazali famously extracted as demonstrating the *kuf*r of the philosophers: upholding the eternity (*qidam*) of the world, denial of God’s

did this by positing an Aristotelian theory similar to that of modern materialists (*māddiyyūn*) in which subsequent creation is possible through the motion initiated by the God, the prime mover (*al-muḥarrik al-awwal alladhī huwa maṣdar al-quwwa wa-l-fi‘l*) whose originating action and existence, according to the language of Ibn Sina (d. 1037)’s Aristotelian system, is alone necessary (i.e. He is *wājib al-wujūd*, the necessary existent).⁸⁵ Man is independent with regards to his own actions but bound by external events affecting those actions, while it is through acquired knowledge or the ascetic practice of Sufism that man can achieve a form of direct contact (*ittiṣāl*) with God. Antun acknowledged that Ibn Rushd’s views were more complicated, or obtuse, than to say he did not believe in the afterlife (*al-ḥayāh al-thāniya*), as was long claimed in Christian European discussion, but he did not believe the individual intellect (*al-‘aql al-khāṣṣ al-munfa‘il*) would survive physical death, Antun wrote.⁸⁶

‘Abduh’s first response challenged this as an exaggeration of differences between the *mutakallimūn*, the Muslim philosophers and the Greek Peripatetic tradition which failed to see the commonalities behind specific vocabularies they used. Antun, he said, had misrepresented the theologians’ position as being that all causes come from God such that “it’s not eating that causes satisfaction, rather God creates satisfaction upon eating”.⁸⁷ At the same time Antun had constructed an erroneous image of Ibn Rushd as a materialist in Greek philosophical terms – a non-deistic view of the world as nothing but matter – which is to misunderstand the Aristotelian tradition to which Ibn Rushd belonged.⁸⁸ As such he believed

knowledge of secondary cause events (*juz’iyyāt*), denial of bodily resurrection (*ba‘th al-ajsād wa-ḥashruha*); Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (ed. Salah al-Din al-Hawwari), *Tahafut al-Falasifa* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Asriyya, 2005), 225.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 36-7. On Ibn Rushd’s concept of universal (active) and individual (habitual/material) intellect see R. Arnaldez, “Ibn Rushd,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs; http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0340 (accessed 20 July 2019). Also, Richard C. Taylor, “Averroes on the Ontology of the Human Soul,” *The Muslim World*, 102/3-4 (2012): 580-96.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 93.

only God was eternal (*azalī*) and aware of all universals and particulars in creation and he believed in the eternity of the soul and its possibilities of punishment and reward.⁸⁹ ‘Abduh said Antun was simply following in the tracks of European thinkers who liked to think of Ibn Rushd as a Sufi master in his thinking on spiritual and physical existence whose ideas influenced the medieval church⁹⁰ and whose rationalism made him a stepping stone to modern European thought.⁹¹

Antun pressed on, accusing ‘Abduh of denying secondary causes⁹² and ridiculing Muslim scholars as unaware of their own intellectual genealogy. Arabs only became aware of Ibn Rushd’s works through Latin and Hebrew translations, and Ibn Rushd was reliant upon Arabic translations from the Greek, he wrote; Ernest Renan, on the other hand, could refer to the Greek originals in his writing on Ibn Rushd and engage in comparative study.⁹³ Antun also noted ‘Abduh’s use of the term *al-‘aql al-fa‘āl* for Ibn Rushd’s theory of the one universal intellect, although Ibn Rushd called it *al-‘aql al-fā‘il*, suggesting he had confused it with Ibn Sina and al-Farabi’s taxonomy.⁹⁴ Antun’s main point was that ‘Abduh could not admit the theologians had their reasons for considering that Ibn Rushd did not belong to a “creedal deist school” (*madhhab ilahī millī*)⁹⁵ – i.e. that his position was unorthodox and unconventional, if not atheistic – and that the most important objection among them was elaborated by al-Ghazali when he declared allegorical interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of the Qur’anic text with regard to the afterlife as out of bounds.⁹⁶ The Ibn Rushd controversy indicates the fundamental divide between reason and religion since the three Abrahamic monotheisms

⁸⁹ Ibid., 96.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 96.

⁹¹ Ibid., 76-84; these sections contain Antun’s description of the “victory of Ibn Rushd’s philosophy” in Europe.

⁹² Ibid., 98, 104.

⁹³ Ibid., 114-116. He is referring to Renan’s book *Averroès et l’Averroïsme: Essai historique* (1852).

⁹⁴ Ibid., 117.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 117.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 121; see al-Ghazali, *Tahafut*, 215-6. On Ghazali’s notion of *ta’wīl* see Martin Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qur’ān: One Book, Many Meanings* (London: Routledge, 2007). Also, Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 71, 118.

have similar conceptualisations of life after death, Antun said. Thus, religion should be designated as a new ontological category, the realm of the heart (*dā'irat al-qalb*), leaving reason to grapple with the world of empirical knowledge (*al-mushāhada wa-l-tajriba wa-l-imtiḥān*).⁹⁷

In this second response to Antun 'Abduh set aside this element of the disputation to take up Antun's classic Enlightenment claim in a separate article that Christianity had helped birth modern civilisation (*al-tamaddun al-ḥadīth*) because it contained within it the capacity to separate itself from the state.⁹⁸ 'Abduh reached first for the Qur'an in response, citing its injunction that there should be no compulsion in religion. Many Muslims are satisfied to have their children study in Christian missionary schools today, while in Antun's own country there are two Muslim sects (by which he means Druze and 'Alawite) living in peace with other communities despite the view of many Muslims that they are heretics. Internecine strife in Muslim societies has been political at heart rather than theological and in the early Islamic period many individuals from non-Muslim communities assumed high positions of state or importance in intellectual culture. Christianity has been characterised by heavy dependence on miracles as signs of truth,⁹⁹ and a tendency towards extreme asceticism rather than reason as its disciplinary practice of choice to bolster faith. Its religious authorities instituted regimes of thought control that continued throughout the recent centuries of technological progress, while persecution flowed from the Protestant reformers no less than their Catholic enemies. The claim that religion has been subjugated by temporal authority is false in that authority derives ultimately from God, 'Abduh said.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid., 122.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 124-5.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 140-1.

In his response¹⁰¹ Antun characterised ‘Abduh as having shifted to an unbecoming attack on his Christian brethren “who placed a lot of hopes in him”, an attack that gives materialism, the real enemy, the tools with which to attack all religious systems including Buddhism, Confucianism, and idolatry (*al-wathaniyya*).¹⁰² He also suggested throughout that ‘Abduh should have deferred to Renan as an authority on Christian history, through translations published in Antun’s journal.¹⁰³ Despite whatever arguments can be made about religious persecution in Islamic and Christian history, knowledge and philosophy won out in Europe because religion was detached from governing power (*al-sulṭa al-madaniyya*), Antun said.¹⁰⁴ The duty of modern government is to ensure freedom of the individual regardless of sect and belief within the frame of the constitution (*ḥurriyyat kull shakhṣ ḍimn dā’irat al-dustūr*) and the wider public good (*maṣlahat al-jumhūr*).¹⁰⁵ National unity is possible but religious unity is not;¹⁰⁶ therefore what Europe has attained could be called *dīn al-insāniyya* that embraces all religions outside government functions.¹⁰⁷ “The desire to restrict interpretation of religion and right of leadership to the Arabs alone and place the faith of other believing nations below them does not conform to the needs of the age,” Antun wrote.¹⁰⁸ It is useless to argue that Islam is the religion of reason and Christianity that of miracles because all religions are ultimately irrational;¹⁰⁹ religion only attains the status of knowledge when it is rational (‘*aqlī*), since religion is faith in an unseen creator, an afterlife,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 141-206. Antun published a truncated version of ‘Abduh’s 35-page article.

¹⁰² Ibid., 142.

¹⁰³ Antun refers to his “history of Jesus and the apostles (*al-rusul*) book”. Renan published *Vie de Jésus* (1863), which was republished in 1882 as *Histoire des Origines du Christianisme* with a second chapter titled *Les Apôtres*. Antun published a translation of *Vie de Jésus* in 1904, *Tarikh al-Masih*.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 147.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 151-2.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 158-9.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 171.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 176.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 182.

revelation, prophecy, and miracles.¹¹⁰ To object to Christian miracles is to object to the Qur'an where many of the same miracles, such as the immaculate conception, take place.¹¹¹

After only brief descriptions of three more responses from 'Abduh, Antun pushed on. Christian Europe's separation of *dīn* and *dunyā* was what facilitated civilisation in the world (*mahhada subul al-madaniyya fī al- 'ālam*) which speaks to something in the essence of Christianity.¹¹² We can't say that Islamic civilisation was the model of human perfection, otherwise why did Muslim rulers and legal scholars not think to put limits on men's divorce rights and marriage rules which damage the family?¹¹³ A final response from 'Abduh was summarised in one page, in which 'Abduh gave alternative reasons for the advances of European science that did not rely on the notion of Christianity's natural propensity for separation from the state and concluded with praise for the tolerance of British colonial rule.¹¹⁴ Antun allowed himself one more reply, in which he welcomed 'Abduh's comment on British empire as "the words of a rational man" (*qawl rajul 'āqil*), while noting that the Irish might not agree.¹¹⁵ In his final comments Antun talked of the bad blood the debate had engendered, suggesting it was the work of Rida and *al-Manar*.¹¹⁶ Indeed, 'Abduh occupied the post of state mufti of Egypt throughout this period, and one is left with the impression he had been lured into a public tussle that he ought to have been above but through which Antun found his vehicle for advancing an Enlightenment vision in Arabic of nationalism transcending religion.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 182-3.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 185.

¹¹² Ibid., 208.

¹¹³ Ibid., 213.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 218. See Muhammad 'Abduh, *al-Islam wa-l-Nasraniyya fī al- 'Ilm wa-l-Madaniyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Hadatha, 1988), 196-8.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 225.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 227.

The views of scholars who have studied the debate have been influenced by the source through which they received it. In *al-Islam wa-l-Nasraniyya* (Islam and Christianity, 1905), a collection of ‘Abduh’s articles of response first published in *al-Manar* in 1902 and issued in book form after his death, Rida offers only a summation of Antun’s positions in the introduction. The text often diverges from the responses ‘Abduh sent to *al-Jami‘a*, and the early stage of the debate over the question of secondary causes is omitted in its entirety. Charles Adams relied upon Rida’s collection, and so views the Antun debate as an extension of ‘Abduh’s other great debate with French diplomat Gabriel Hanotaux. The combined effect of both was that ‘Abduh became the foremost defender of Islam in the face of the European political and intellectual onslaught, Adams wrote. In this view ‘Abduh responded effectively to the charge that Islam is less tolerant than other faiths, that Islam is hostile to learning and knowledge, and that European modernity is a consequence of Christianity’s tolerance and limited claims on the state.¹¹⁷

Hourani’s view, based on his reading of Antun’s book, was quite different. He picked up on the confidence of Antun’s claims and their basis in Antun’s penchant for Renan, as well as Antun’s ulterior motive as self-consciously a member of an Arab minority in advocating for a supra-religious national order, “a secular State in which Muslims and Christians can participate on a footing of complete equality”.¹¹⁸ ‘Abduh, he argued, agreed with much of Antun’s vision of national freedom and equality, but his fundamental dispute was over the notion of a need, or even the possibility, to relegate Islam to the realm of “the heart” since he believed that it was in a purified shari‘a that the Islamic political order would thrive. Hourani emphasises Antun’s argument that it was through a separation of religious and governmental jurisdictions that Europe had advanced in civics, science, and other fields,

¹¹⁷ Adams, *Islam and Modernity*, 86, 89-90.

¹¹⁸ Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 255.

allowing for the development of a culture of tolerance. In his telling, ‘Abduh has been reduced to “anger” through the brusque message from Antun that, in Hourani’s words, “the world has changed... modern States are no longer based on religion, but on two things—national unity and the techniques of modern science”.¹¹⁹ In other words, Hourani’s ‘Abduh is an ahistorical Romantic who thinks Islam is to be restored to its civilisation-defining role through the return of its centre of gravity to the Arabs.

Relying on ‘Abduh’s book (as reproduced in ‘Imara’s *al-A‘mal al-Kamila*) as well as Rida’s discussion of the debate in his *Tarikh al-Imam*,¹²⁰ Samira Haj understands ‘Abduh as mounting a challenge to the Eurocentric vision of historical development. The relegation of religion to the non-political sphere was the outcome of a trajectory particular to Europe in which religion was regarded as the site of unruly passions and tolerance was the outcome of conflict between papal authority and provincial monarchy. The involvement of early Abbasid caliphs in doctrinal disputes among scholars over the nature of the Qur’an never rose to the level of violence of the Inquisition, the series of state campaigns to enforce Catholic orthodoxy which began in 12th-century France and was abolished in the early 19th century, if it was comparable in any meaningful way at all. ‘Abduh was not rejecting the Enlightenment notion of secular authority per se, Haj says, but suggesting it was for Muslims to define the boundaries of civic power and the role of religious scholars, shari‘a law, and Islamic ethics.¹²¹ In other words ‘Abduh was rejecting *a priori* the validity of Antun’s comparative approach. Mark Sedgwick has a similar view of ‘Abduh in his study: he was asserting that Islam does not merge civic and religious authority in the manner of Catholicism in that the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 257.

¹²⁰ Rida, *Tarikh*, 1:805-16.

¹²¹ Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, 98.

Sunni caliph was a temporal figure, not *‘ālim din* from the class of theologians or jurists.¹²²

Sabri bases his argument on both books. In this view, the second is an attempt to compensate for ‘Abduh’s capitulation in the first, but it is to the first one should look to understand the apologetic nature of the modernist reformers.¹²³ In Sabri’s analysis Antun’s most important claim was that religion is contrary to reason and knowledge because it is not verifiable by modern empirical standards. Religion is “faith in an unseen creator and unseen afterlife, and revelation, prophecy, miracles, gathering of the dead and their resurrection, reward, and punishment are all unperceivable and irrational [*ghayr maḥsūsa wa-ghayr ma ‘qūla*]”, Antun said.¹²⁴ ‘Abduh’s great failure in the debate was to leave this claim unanswered, because, Sabri concludes, ‘Abduh was himself a sceptic (*raybī*) or even an atheist who shared this view.¹²⁵ He considers that Antun was correct in his appraisal of Ibn Rushd as a proto-materialist of the Enlightenment era for his arguments in support of the causative powers of matter (*mādda/hayūlā*) and that ‘Abduh was disingenuous in his defence.¹²⁶ ‘Abduh appeared weak in the debate because he broadly agreed with the Antun-Renan thesis of stagnation in Islam, Sabri said.¹²⁷

The Antun debate is the first of four broad arguments Sabri makes in his case against ‘Abduh. Secondly, Sabri argues that ‘Abduh’s proofs for the existence of God and oneness of God as sole creator departed from the arguments usually adduced in the field of *kalām* in that ‘Abduh both upheld the theory of infinite causes (*al-tasalsul*), which Sabri sees as

¹²² Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh*, 53-4. Also D.M. Reid, *The Odyssey of Farah Antun: A Syrian Christian’s Quest for Secularism* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1975), 80-97.

¹²³ Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 1:133.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 1:23 and 4:17. Antun, *Falsafat Ibn Rushd*, 183.

¹²⁵ Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 4:18.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 3:360; *hayūlā* was the Arabic rendering of Aristotle’s *hūlē* (ὑλῆ).

¹²⁷ Ibid., 1:14, 103 (footnote 1), 134, 143, 223 (footnote 1), 370, 4:345-6. Also, *Mawqif al-Bashar*, 23. ‘Abduh discusses stagnation at length; *al-Islam wa-l-Nasraniyya*, 133-67.

invalidating *wājib al-wujūd* as proof of the existence of God,¹²⁸ and he omitted *wājib al-wujūd* in establishing the oneness of God (*waḥdāniyyat Allāh*), relying alone on the logical argument known as *burhān al-tamānu*,¹²⁹ which Sabri claims he in any case misunderstands.¹²⁹ Sabri suggests ‘Abduh adopts these positions to avoid arguments located in abstract logic that would not pass the test of empirical knowledge (*shahādat al-ḥiss wa-l-tajriba*).¹³⁰ Thirdly, ‘Abduh fails to defend unseen paranormal phenomena (*al-khawāriq*) such as belief in the existence of angels, the devil, and the miracles, “as if the shaykh agrees with his opponent [Antun]”. ‘Abduh and the modernists create a new discourse of the Muslim prophet that considers him as merely one of the “great reformers” (*al-‘uṣamā’ al-muṣliḥūn*) among men.¹³¹

Sabri saw himself engaging the critique of Antun’s work that ‘Abduh failed to achieve. He described *Mawqif al-‘Aql* as an effort to resume the debate, as if he was articulating the arguments ‘Abduh could not and as if ‘Abduh’s disciples among Sabri’s Egyptian contemporaries were the voice of his antagonist Antun.¹³² If Antun said religions are only reasonable when they can be proven through experiential knowledge, Sabri responded that no, speculative reason has been able to offer arguments to prove the existence of God.¹³³ Sabri suggested ‘Abduh and his followers were under the influence of Hegel and others, in particular Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), which though it pushed back against the scepticism (*ḥusbāniyya*) and inductive reasoning (*manṭiq istiqrā’ī*) of David

¹²⁸ Sabri cites al-Afghani and ‘Abduh’s *Ta’liqat*, which supports the chain of causes in rejecting the *kalām* argument known as *buṭlān al-tasalsul*, or *burhān al-taṭbīq*; *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 1:230 and 3:365-89. Sabri cites their statement: “Thus far no proof has been posited of finitude to any chain whose parts are in existence, let alone one that is indisputable”; al-Afghani and ‘Abduh, *al-Ta’liqat ‘ala Sharḥ al-‘Aqa’id al-‘Adudiyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Shuruq al-Dawliyya, 2002), 217. There is no such mention of infinite regress in *Risalat al-Tawhid*.

¹²⁹ Sabri says this because ‘Abduh discusses the proof in terms of rival creative forces causing disorder in the universe, rather than to establish that no god could be God if he was obliged to negotiate creation with another entity; *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 1:136-8, 2:83-4, footnote 1. See ‘Abduh (ed. Imara), *Risalat al-Tawhid*, 46-8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:141.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 1:142-3.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 4:18, footnote 1.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 2:35-6.

Hume still imagined great limits to what reason could know of the world.¹³⁴ Thus, Western philosophers who retained a concern for Christian faith gave up on the idea of reason defending religion and began to look elsewhere.¹³⁵ He wrote: “The conflict over denying and proving certainty [*al-yaqīn*] concerns me a lot. It is the central axis of this book in that Islam turns on proving certainty. Since we Muslims do not hesitate in acknowledging the existence of certainty in human knowledge, we do not consider this belief to be contrary to reason as the Christian West did.”¹³⁶ What ‘Abduh should have told Antun was that this divide that emerged in European philosophy between religion and reason is intimately linked to the ethical breach Sabri saw in contemporary Western society.¹³⁷ He noted the implication in many of Antun’s arguments that Islam and Christianity are equivalent systems, that the Trinity parallels Muslim theologians’ understanding of God’s attributes as knowledge, will, ability (‘*ilm*, *irāda*, *qudra*),¹³⁸ or represents idealistic poetic constructs (*al-taṣawwurāt al-shi‘riyya*),¹³⁹ and that there is no substantive difference between the Christian terminology of men as “sons of God” (*abnā’ Allāh*) and the Qur’an’s “slaves of God” (‘*ibād Allāh*).¹⁴⁰ Like his hero Renan, Antun did not believe in Jesus’ divinity yet was a self-described Christian, Sabri said.¹⁴¹ Antun’s intent then was to entice Muslims towards this vague religiosity in which good, virtue, and righteousness (*khayr*, *faḍīla*, *ṣalāh*) replace reason and knowledge (‘*aql* and ‘*ilm*), the foundations of Islamic *kalām*.¹⁴²

Central to Sabri’s thesis was the argument that the Muslim *kalām* tradition adapted the best of the Greek philosophical tradition of Aristotle and Plato, ditching its sceptical

¹³⁴ Ibid. 1:305. He often cites Ahmad Amin and Zaki Nagib Mahmud’s study of European philosophy, *Qissat al-Falsafa al-Jadida* (1935).

¹³⁵ Ibid., 2:149, 151. On Descartes, 2:211-228, and Kant, 2:228-233, 3:66-75.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 2:155.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 2:24-5.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 2:43.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 2:45. He means ideal in the philosophical sense of realities that are constructs of the human mind.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 2:52.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 2:51.

¹⁴² Ibid., 2:62-3.

elements and rethinking its ideas on the distant creator and eternal nature of the world (*qidam al-‘ālam*), to develop rational proofs of God and His unique creative powers.¹⁴³ He rejects the arguments of the modernists, whether they are ‘ulama’ like ‘Abduh or public intellectuals such as Bigiev, that Greek thought poisoned the purity of Islam in the era of translation in the early Abbasid period, producing a tradition of elitist *kalām* and associated disciplines that distanced Islam from its fundamentals and its public.¹⁴⁴ Sabri makes the observation that Muslim modernists (*alafranga zümresi*, “the European group”) are different from the trend associated with Ibn Taymiyya, despite their outwardly similar approach in rejecting juridical *taqlīd* for *ijtihād*, because there could be no suspicion over the latter’s “firmness in religion” (*salabet-i diniye*), by which he means their knowledge and their faith.¹⁴⁵ ‘Abduh has introduced theological scepticism (*al-ḥusbāniyya/al-raybiyya*) and relativism to disorient the culture in its epistemological certitude.¹⁴⁶ He did this through compromising the theory of the necessary existent with the notion of an endless chain of causation, which builds bridges to the materialist understanding of a world without beginning or end. Therefore, ‘Abduh cannot prove the existence of God, and neither can Kant, despite the empirical-rationalist tradition’s self-description as positive knowledge.¹⁴⁷ They favour natural laws that have no need for a creator,¹⁴⁸ and view reason/rationality (*al-‘aql*) as the material movement of the brain like other parts of the body, not as a unique spiritual force (*quwwa makhṣūṣa rūḥāniyya*).¹⁴⁹ These materialists in Sabri’s telling are similar to thieves (*luṣūṣ*) in their failure to acknowledge that the discoveries of man are intentional disclosures from God at specific points in time, “secrets of the cosmos, held by God in created things and revealed to those who discover

¹⁴³ Ibid., 1:205, 219; 2:113.

¹⁴⁴ See Sabri’s opening remarks on Bigiev and Nahid in *Dinî Müceddidler*, 3-22.

¹⁴⁵ Sabri, *Yeni İslam Müctehidler*, 8. He calls Ibn Taymiyya’s group independent (*istiklal takib eden*), reflecting his view (and Kevseri’s) that it was not a mainstream trend.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 1:304. He notes Cromer’s comment that ‘Abduh seemed agnostic (*raybî*) about God’s existence. Sabri does not offer an Arabic term for relativism; the term is mine, deduced from his general description.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 2:307-8.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 2:308-9.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 2:313.

them” (*al-asrār al-kawniyya allatī kanazahā Allāh fī al-kā’ināt wa-abāḥahā li-muktashifihā*).¹⁵⁰

Summarising various lines of argumentation in Egyptian modernist thinking, Sabri formed a conception of the ‘Abduh trend that: promoted the notion of faith in the unseen as faith in the unrealistic (*ghayr wāqī*);¹⁵¹ downgraded prophethood as a category of human experience to the realm of human genius (‘*abqariyya*’);¹⁵² reconceptualised the Qur’an as Islam’s single miraculous event whose most important element is the call to examine natural phenomena;¹⁵³ questioned the authenticity of prophetic hadith *tout court*;¹⁵⁴ rejected belief in resurrection;¹⁵⁵ favoured discarding unclear Qur’anic material (the *mutashābihāt* verses);¹⁵⁶ reconfigured the concept of the devil as “evil in the world” and rejected the existence of angels as well as the ascent and return of Christ;¹⁵⁷ and introduced new vocabulary such as Wajdi’s *i’tiqādiyyūn* as an alternative to *mu’minūn*, a calque on the English/French

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 2:353-4. This view of knowledge forms part of the secondary proof of God in the *kalām* tradition known as the theory of final causes (*al-illa al-ghā’iyya*); see section 2:342-470.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 4:4. Muhammad Farid Wajdi, “Muhammad Salla Allah ‘alayhi wa-Sallam fī Taqdir Qudat al-Ra’y fī Urubba,” *Majallat al-Azhar*, 8/5 (1937): 358-61.

¹⁵² Ibid., 1:30, 4:5-16, 4:40-2. Sabri takes ‘Abduh’s views on prophethood again from the *Ta’liqat*, which defines a prophet (*nabī*) as someone “born with an innate sense of what’s right in knowledge and practice [*fuṭira ‘alā al-haqq ‘ilman wa-‘amalan*]”; *al-Ta’liqat*, 152-3. In *Risalat al-Tawhid* prophets are also of exceptional disposition but enjoy an unbreakable spiritual bond with God; ‘Abduh (ed. ‘Imara), *Risalat al-Tawhid*, 81-2. Among the contemporary texts Sabri discusses are: Zaki Mubarak, “Asma’uni Siḥat al-Haqq,” *al-Risala*, 27 February 1939, 7/295: 387-9; Wajdi, “al-Sira al-Muhammadiyya Taht Daw’ al-‘Ilm wa-l-Falsafa,” *Majallat al-Azhar*, 11/7 (1940): 385-90; Wajdi, “al-Sira al-Muhammadiyya Taht Daw’ al-‘Ilm wa-l-Falsafa: Muqaddima,” *Majallat al-Azhar*, 10/1 (1939): 12-17; Wajdi, “Ma Hiya al-Nubuwwa wa-Ma Hiya al-Risala wa-l-Adilla al-‘Ilmiyya fī Imkan al-Wahy,” *Majallat al-Azhar*, 10/2 (1939): 90-8; Wajdi, “Ma Rabahahu al-Din min al-‘Ilm fī al-Zaman al-Akhar,” *al-Risala*, 6 January 1947, 15/705: 12-13; ‘Abbas al-‘Aqqad, *‘Abqariyyat Muhammad* (1942); Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *Hayat Muhammad* (1935); Shibli Shumayyil, *Falsafat al-Nushu’ wa-l-Irtiqa’* (1910).

¹⁵³ Ibid., 4:16.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 4:48-62. Haykal, *Hayat Muhammad* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘arif, 2001), 46-50.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 4:209-217. Wajdi shifted position from rejecting both corporal and spiritual resurrection, which the *mutakallimūn* uphold, to accepting spiritual resurrection only, the position of Muslim philosophers.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 1:175. See Wajdi, “Madhhab al-Qur’an fī al-Ayat al-Mutashabihat,” *al-Ahram*, 30 August 1933, in Sabri 4:432-8; Wajdi, “Madhhab al-Qur’an fī al-Ayat al-Mutashabihat,” *al-Ahram*, 10 September 1933, in Sabri 4:432-8; Wajdi, “Tafsil Ba’d Ma Ajmalnahu min al-Mutashabihat,” *al-Ahram*, in Sabri 4:450-3. See also Ahmad Zaki Pasha, “Ayna Wadi al-Naml al-Madhkur fī al-Qur’an?” *al-Ahram*, 6 August 1933, in Sabri 4:391-6; Wajdi’s response, “Wadi al-Naml wa-Madhhab al-Qur’an,” in Sabri 4:397-9, and Sabri’s response to Wajdi and defence of Ahmad Zaki, “Wadi al-Zalal Ba’d Wadi al-Naml,” *al-Ahram*, 26 August 1933, in Sabri 4:400-6.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 1:34, 360-2.

believer/croyant.¹⁵⁸ The corollary of this rationalisation of the Islamic tradition was a spiritless cult of the Prophet (“through studying the life of the Prophet they tried to find the pleasure of faith and reassurance they had lost”)¹⁵⁹ and a turn towards naturalism under titles such as spiritism,¹⁶⁰ vitalism,¹⁶¹ pantheism,¹⁶² or Ibn ‘Arabi’s *wahdat al-wujūd*.¹⁶³ In Sabri’s analysis it was in no small part due to the Antun-‘Abduh debate that these heretical, atheistic beliefs (*ilhād*) had colonised the minds of the intelligentsia, for whom religion (*al-dīn*) had become “a bothersome unwanted tradition” (*turāth muz ‘ij lā yurghab fīhi*)¹⁶⁴ rather than a set of beliefs and practices rooted in affirmation of a creator whose existence is necessary (*wujūd mawjūd wājib al-wujūd*).¹⁶⁵ “There is no difference between modern Egypt and Turkey in the victory of atheism [*ilhād*] over religion except that while in Turkey the irreligious revolution [*al-inqilāb al-lādīnī*] was established by force in the era of Mustafa Kemal, in Egypt it spread through the publishing and propaganda of writers and the patronage of a government itself under the patronage of the West,” Sabri wrote.¹⁶⁶

Akif and the Gabriel Hanotaux debate: Defending ‘Abduh

Although Qasim Amin and Muhammad Farid Wajdi were early champions of ‘Abduh’s ideas in Egypt, the Istanbul ecumene was one of the first to witness the comprehensive packaging of ‘Abduh’s thought through the work of Akif. Of ‘Abduh’s two great debates, Akif ignored that of Farah Antun for Gabriel Hanotaux, a former foreign minister of France. Though Sabri

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 1:52. See Wajdi, “al-Din fi Mu‘tarak al-Shukuk,” *al-Risala*, 15 January 1945, 13/602: 57-60.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 1:123.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 1:210, 2:235 re Wajdi.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 2:304.

¹⁶² Ibid., 3:90.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 3:85-315 (most of vol.3). Sabri saw Sufi theosophy as dissolution of difference between creator and created in the Biblical tradition but also as emerging from misunderstandings in the *kalām/falsafa* discourse on God as *wujūd*; 3:187 and vol. 3 passim.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 1:441-2.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 1:433.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 1:30.

had nothing to say about it, the Hanotaux debate had a wider impact outside Egypt, not least because ‘Abduh’s interlocuter was a prominent European politician and it was conducted in French as well as Arabic.¹⁶⁷ It also gave his supporters further material with which to draw him as a warrior against imperialism and thus burnish the credentials of reform Islam. Akif was effective in framing both ‘Abduh and al-Afghani in this manner, rebutting arguments that their political activism came at the expense of soundness in matters of creed or devotion (*zühd*). “To fight against Monsieur Hanotaux and defend the rights of millions of Muslims in the Western Islamic world [*magribdeki*] I would say is more of a good deed [*sevap*] than centuries of futile piety [*nevāfil*],” he wrote.¹⁶⁸ “Today there is no Jamal al-Din or Muhammad ‘Abduh. The Islamic world is in a truly lonely and wretched state. We must remember such greats of the nation with mercy and respect, so that those who come after do not give up the struggle.”¹⁶⁹

The debate initially raged over the pages of *al-Mu‘ayyad* in Cairo and *Le Journal* in Paris, then *al-Ahram* whose editor Bashara Taqla conducted a long, adulatory interview with Hanotaux. The material was covered in numerous books: Egyptian entrepreneur Muhammad Tal‘at Harb (who later founded Bank Misr) published *L’Europe et l’Islam* (1905), a Tatar Turkish version of ‘Abduh’s interventions by Zakir Kadiri (*Islam ve Hanoto*, 1909), Wajdi in Arabic (*al-Islam*, 1910), and the publisher Muhammad Amin al-Khanji’s *al-Islam wa-l-Radd ‘ala Muntaqidihi*, issued in 1924 when veneration for ‘Abduh was gaining ground in Egypt’s early constitutional period.¹⁷⁰ Hanotaux’s original articles (published in two parts) began by applying the grand racial judgements of Guizot and Renan to an analysis of France’s Islamic

¹⁶⁷ It inspired playwright and novelist Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987) to write “al-Difa‘ ‘an al-Islam” (*al-Risala*, 15 April 1935, 3/93: 576-80) after reading Voltaire’s *Le fanatisme, ou Mahomet le prophète* (1773). See Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 192.

¹⁶⁸ Akif, “Hasbihâl,” *SM*, 20 Mayıs 1326 (2 June 1910), 3/91: 222-3. This is a modernist swipe at Sufi culture.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁷⁰ Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt’s Liberal Experiment, 1922-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

problem.¹⁷¹ Through its African colonies, Aryan, Christian, and egalitarian France has established itself “in the centre of Islam”, controlling the lives of Semitic Muslims of Asian origin whose religiosity is abnormally intense, he says. The bond of fraternity that unites those who turn to Mecca in prayer (*rābiṭat al-akhā’ al-jāmi’a li-afrād al-‘ālam al-islāmī/l’etrote confraternite religieuse de tout le monde islamique*) – the Islamic world – is now a threat to French empire.¹⁷² Then he moved on to theology: the Trinity serves to bring mankind closer to God, as did the Greek gods, and this reflects the Aryan mentality, but Islam demands total submission to a distant and forbidding God who is at the same time interventionist in that He leaves man with no room for free will.

This took Hanotaux to the two diametrically opposed views in France towards the question of how the French state should deal with its Muslim subjects. On the one hand, there are those who think of Islam as a mental pathology, a “leprosy” (*lèpre*,¹⁷³ *judhām*¹⁷⁴) in which adepts live by irrational regulations such as those forbidding wine and pork and acts of mass hysteria such as pilgrimage (*la folie mystique*,¹⁷⁵ *al-junūn al-rūḥānī*)¹⁷⁶. He attributes these views to anti-Muslim essayist Daniel Kimon in his book *La pathologie de l’Islam et les moyens de le détruire* (The Pathology of Islam and the Means to Destroy It, 1897), who, Hanotaux explains, suggested the Prophet’s tomb be moved from Mecca, where he thought it was located, to the Louvre. On the other hand, there are those “searching for their lost religion” who see in Islam the strength of faith that Europe once had and wonder if France could pivot to acting as a champion of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, Hanotaux turned to his own view. France should listen to the Arabist experts inside its colonial apparatus and

¹⁷¹ Published in *Le Journal de Paris* of 21 and 28 March 1900.

¹⁷² Muhammad ‘Abduh and Gabriel Hanotaux, *al-Islam wa-l-Radd ‘ala Muntaqidihi* (Cairo: Matba‘at al-Tawfiq al-Adabiyya, 1924), 9; Gabriel Hanotaux, *L’Europe et l’Islam* (Cairo: J. Politis, 1905), 27.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Abduh and Hanotaux, *al-Islam*, 12.

¹⁷⁵ Hanotaux, *L’Europe et l’Islam*, 31.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Abduh and Hanotaux, *al-Islam*, 13.

organise a major research project to bring to politicians' attention the fact that a great transformation is taking place in Islamic societies thanks to France. Religious and political authority has been separated in Tunisia without fuss or fanfare, keeping mosques closed to Christians and changing only some laws as necessary; European ideas have been absorbed by the population, allowing for a synthesis of French and indigenous authority; Tunisia is relinquishing Mecca and its Asian past for a new beginning in which two religions coexist in peace and harmony.

‘Abduh’s response came in three articles.¹⁷⁷ Hanotaux, he wrote, has produced an amalgam of misinformed tropes about Islam that he wants to pass off as expertise to the French public. He has confused the Muslim concept of God’s transcendent non-anthropomorphic nature (*tanzīh*) with the issue of predetermination and human agency, a question on which Christian theology itself is divided. ‘Abduh then elaborated on a theme in decline discourse that appears in several of ‘Abduh’s writings, that it was converts to Islam in the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods – here he cited Persians and Byzantines, while in his response to Antun he cited Persians and Turks – who corrupted the early faith that emerged from the world of the uncivilised Bedouin. ‘Abduh introduced the idea that it was from the milieu of Sufi practice, rather than *kalām*, that fatalism and indulgence developed as features of Muslim society, which he also blamed on Aryan Iranians and Indians.¹⁷⁸ Islam did not sever the relationship between man and God, what it did was put an end to the concept of intermediaries. As for Kimon’s views, ‘Abduh suggested Hanotaux was acting in bad faith in reproducing them in the cause of his argument. It’s not the fact that France rules over Muslims that causes resentment, but the lack of respect shown to them, since it is “justice,

¹⁷⁷ Published in *al-Mu’ayyad* on 6, 13 and 20 May 1900.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Abduh and Hanotaux, *al-Islam*, 32.

rights, and respecting beliefs after understanding them that lighten the authority of the victor over the defeated”.¹⁷⁹

In Hanotaux’s responses, one in *al-Ahram*’s French and Arabic editions in interview with its editor, followed by a shorter one in *Le Journal*, he was defensive. He only cited Kimon to indicate a broad base of opinion in France, Britain and Germany, he said. In separating religious and civil authority (*al-sulṭa al-madaniyya*) we, France, made the advances that allowed us to expand into other territories, but now we want to help you advance too.¹⁸⁰ Calls for Islamic union only serve to frighten Europe: Arab Muslims would be better to follow the example of Japan which managed to stave off colonial subjugation through adopting European science, technology, and the nation-state model. It is European powers who are helping hold the Ottoman empire together. He holds up two Turkish intellectuals as exemplars: Young Turk intellectual Ahmed Rıza (1858-1930), who founded the CUP paper *Meşveret* in French and Turkish from Paris, and the journalist Ahmed Midhat. While he suggests that Rıza has an idealised view of tolerance – a reference to his French book *Tolérance musulmane* (1897) which was heavily critical of colonialism – Midhat is for Hanotaux “the most justifiably famous of Turkish writers right now”, citing his modernist views that Islam has no need of clergy, Muhammad has no miraculous qualities as a prophet, and the Qur’an should be Islam’s sole source of authority – ideas that he seemed unaware were within ‘Abduh’s frame of reference.¹⁸¹ ‘Abduh’s final word was to stress the gains of reform Islam. Islam contains some blind religious fanaticism (*al-ta’aṣṣub al-dīnī al-a’mā*), but rational Muslims are engaged in a process of correcting misunderstandings over foundational texts.¹⁸² Both Istanbul and Cairo have established non-shari‘a courts in some

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 48.

¹⁸¹ Hanotaux, *L’Europe et l’Islam*, 68-9. He seems to mean Midhat’s anti-materialist essay *Ben Neyim?* (1891).

¹⁸² ‘Abduh and Hanotaux, *al-Islam*, 75. From *al-Mu’ayyad*, 25 July 1900.

jurisdictions, but Europeans should realise that the sultan/caliph does not exercise papal authority, he only guarantees the functioning of the shari‘a system. Had Hanotaux restricted his intervention to the political interests of Muslim states we would have welcomed his advice, but he insisted to pontificate vainly on Muslim theology.

The transfer into Arabic of French conceptualisations of Islam in this exchange gives a sense of the subtle crafting of Islam as an objective category in Arabic language discourse. Prosaic inventions such as *la religion mahometane* are rendered without comment as simply *al-islām*,¹⁸³ or *le mahometisme* as *al-diyāna al-muḥammadiyya*,¹⁸⁴ or *la foi mohametane* as *al-īmān al-muḥammadī*,¹⁸⁵ while *le monde musulman* is rendered with the calque *al-‘ālam al-islāmī*, which with its “Arab world” counterpart came to attain a translingual hegemony that holds to this day.¹⁸⁶ The lexical intersection between the French *civilisation* and the notion of temporal (*contra* religious) powers in the term *civile* is reproduced in the Arabic and Ottoman terms *tamaddun/medeniyet* for civilisation and *madanī/medeni* for both civilised and temporal/non-religious.¹⁸⁷ This conflation is seen throughout the Hanotaux material in talking of *al-sulṭa al-madaniyya/saltanat-i medeniye* and *tamaddun/medeniyet*.¹⁸⁸ This is despite the fact that Akif had no compunction in censoring Kimon’s proposal to steal the Prophet’s tomb or Hanotaux’s concluding statement that Tunisia is home to a diverse historical heritage “under the sponsorship of France and its humanity”.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ Hanotaux, *L’Europe et l’Islam*, 29; Abduh and Hanotaux, *al-Islam*, 11.

¹⁸⁴ Hanotaux, 31; ‘Abduh and Hanotaux, 12.

¹⁸⁵ Hanotaux, 37; ‘Abduh and Hanotaux, 18.

¹⁸⁶ Hanotaux, 25; ‘Abduh and Hanotaux, 7.

¹⁸⁷ Kevin Reinhart, “Civilization and its Discussants: Medeniyet and the Turkish Conversion to Modernism,” in *Converting Cultures: Religion, Ideology, and Transformations of Modernity*, ed. Dennis Washburn and A. Kevin Reinhart (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 267-79. The Arabic *madanī* later came to indicate civil society.

¹⁸⁸ For example, for ‘Abduh see ‘Abduh and Hanotaux, *al-Islam*, 79-90; for Akif see his *Hanotonun Hücumuna Karşı Şeyh Muhammed Abdunun İslamı Müdafası* (Istanbul: Tevsi-i Tıbaat Matbaası, 1913), 72-3.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Abduh and Hanotaux, *al-Islam*, 15; Akif, *Hanotonun Hücumuna Karşı*, 13.

Akif and the Anglican Church affair

The text Akif worked on with ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Jawish, published in 1923, was the pinnacle of the Ottoman modernist project. For both it was the coda to a decade of anti-colonial activism. A graduate of both Dar al-‘Ulum and al-Azhar where he studied under ‘Abduh, Jawish was sent by the Egyptian education ministry for training in Britain and wrote manuals on English-Arabic translation. Through his acquaintance with historian David Margoliouth he was appointed as Arabic teacher to British officials heading for service in Egypt and Sudan at New College, Oxford from 1902 to 1906, but he understood the experience as colonialism’s attempt to co-opt governing elites into the imperial enterprise.¹⁹⁰ During these classes Jawish came to realise that students saw Islam as “slavery, divorce, and polygamy” (*dīn al-istirqāq, wa-l-ṭalāq wa-ta‘addud al-zawjāt*) and understood Muhammad’s function in terms of Jesus in Christianity, and this prompted him to write *al-Islam Din al-Fitra wa-l-Hurriyya* (Islam is the Religion of Nature and Freedom, 1905).¹⁹¹ Back in Egypt he veered towards journalism, establishing his own paper *al-Hidaya* in 1910, but after falling foul of the authorities for anti-British agitation (causing a rift with Rashid Rida who favoured an Arab caliph)¹⁹² he was deported to Istanbul in 1912. Building on relationships established with leading CUP figures Enver and Talat Paşa during a trip in 1909,¹⁹³ Jawish joined the CUP-backed Pan-Islamic Islamic Benevolent Society (*al-Jam‘iyya al-Khayriyya al-Islamiyya*) established by Arab and Turkish dignitaries in Istanbul in 1913¹⁹⁴ and worked with Akif on wartime propaganda. During these years he travelled frequently to Germany and other European states, attending

¹⁹⁰ Anwar al-Jundi, *‘Abd al-‘Aziz Jawish min Ruwwad al-Tarbiya wa-l-Sihafa wa-l-Ijtima‘* (Cairo: al-Mu‘assasa al-Misriyya al-‘Amma, 1965), 50-2.

¹⁹¹ ‘Abd al-Aziz Jawish, *al-Islam Din al-Fitra wa-l-Hurriyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1905), 10. His son Nasir says the book was published in English as *Islam, Religion of Instinct and Freedom* but it appears never to have gone to print; Nasir Jawish, “Preface,” in Jawish, *al-Islam*, 5-8.

¹⁹² Al-Jundi, *‘Abd al-‘Aziz Jawish*, 113-5.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 121.

¹⁹⁴ Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 109-111. Shakib Arslan, *Sira Dhatiyya* (al-Mukhtara: al-Dar al-Taqaaddumiyya, 2008), 87-8.

conferences and establishing newspapers as part of the Ottoman-German effort to win over Muslim subjects of the Allied powers.¹⁹⁵ With the fall of the CUP he left Istanbul to work with the Egyptian delegation to Versailles, but returned to Turkey in 1922 at Atatürk's request to head his Islamic publications committee.¹⁹⁶

The genesis of the Jawish book is as yet not fully understood. A letter was delivered to the sheikh ül-Islam's office in Istanbul on 21 December 1918 in the name of Arthur Boutwood (1864-1924), a civil servant with the British government's Charity Commission and public intellectual who had written a number of books on questions of national identity, religion, and education.¹⁹⁷ No copy of the original letter has been found in the Müftülük archives in Istanbul, among Boutwood's private papers in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, or in Church of England archives. However, an Ottoman translation of the text was published on two separate occasions by members of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye which the Mufti Haydarizade Ibrahim had charged with providing a response, Ahmed Rasim Avni in the newspaper *Alemdar*¹⁹⁸ and Eşref Efendizade Şevketi in his book *Say ve Sermaye Mücadelesinin Dinen Suret-i Halli* (The Religious Solution to Conflicts of Labour and Capital, 1923). Şevketi recounts how he was present at the Meşihat when the document came and translates a second letter he received personally from Boutwood dated 3 April 1921 in response to Şevketi's request for more information regarding Boutwood's key questions: what is the Prophet's religion, what is its contribution to thought and life, what is its solution to the problems of our times, what does it have to say about the political and spiritual forces

¹⁹⁵ The papers included *al-Hilal al-'Uthmani* and *al-Haqq Ya 'lu* in Cairo, *Die Islamische Welt* in Germany, *al-'Alam al-Islami* in Istanbul, and *L'Egypte* in Switzerland.

¹⁹⁶ Jawish, *al-Islam*, 8.

¹⁹⁷ On his contribution to public discourse in Britain see E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 46-56.

¹⁹⁸ Ahmed Rasim Avni, "Anglikan Encümen-i İlmiyesine Cevap," *Alemdar*, 12 September 1919; cited in Nurettin Ceylan, *Gerçeğin Aynasında Bediüzzaman* (Istanbul: Nesil, 2016), 177.

transforming the world?¹⁹⁹ In the translation Boutwood says nothing of his work for the British government but that the description of Islam is for a small library being prepared by the Church of England's publications wing to which he had been assigned.

Boutwood's letter was understood as a request from the Anglican Church itself, to which it was agreed that İsmail Hakkı would respond.²⁰⁰ Boutwood appears to have received Hakkı's book in 1920, noting with amusement that its author addressed the package "care of the Archbishop of Canterbury" and referring to it flippantly as "a piece of Islamic propaganda".²⁰¹ The comment is discordant in that Boutwood had a genuine interest in languages and cultures of the non-Western world, nurturing a belief, post-war, that Islam was in a position to retain the spirituality he felt materialist Europe was losing. Indeed, his writings make clear his opposition to materialist trends in Western philosophy and attempts to provide rational explanation for miracles in the narrative of early Christianity. His letter expressed the hope to hear the East speak for itself rather than through Muslims whose minds are "filled with the most modern culture" (*en asri bir harsla zihinleri doldurulmuş kimseler*).²⁰² He was in contact with British Muslim leader Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928) to write the preface to an English edition of the Hakkı version, and said he was planning Persian, Urdu, and Arabic editions.²⁰³ He also talked of using the book to convince British Prime Minister Lloyd George, who stoked anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish sentiment during and after the war, that the caliph was not a pope and so Turkey's retention of the office should not be considered problematic,²⁰⁴ and that the British government should act to

¹⁹⁹ Eşref Efendizade Şevketi, *Say ve Sermaye Mücadelatının Dinen Suret-i Halli* (İstanbul: Matbaa-ı Osmaniye, 1923), 5. Transliterated in Ceylan, *Gerçeğin Aynasında*, 174.

²⁰⁰ İsmail Hakkı, *El-Cevabü's-Sedid fi Beyan-ı Dinü'l-Tevhid* (Ankara: Ali Şükrü Matbaası, 1920).

²⁰¹ Arthur Boutwood Papers, Corpus Christi College Library, Cambridge, UK: see box "Ignotus," vol. 2, 337-8 (biography written by his wife) and "Letters 1900-1924," Letter to Chief Charity Commissioner H.P. Morris, 1 April 1920: 246-7.

²⁰² Şevketi, *Say ve Sermaye*, 5.

²⁰³ Ibid., 338.

²⁰⁴ Arthur Boutwood Papers, "Letters," Letter to Ahmed Vehbi, 21 May 1921: 305.

preserve the Ottoman polity.²⁰⁵ Boutwood was clear that he believed in the British empire and he was an interlocuter with an array of Muslim figures in Britain, Turkey, the Ottoman Arab provinces, and India (including Lahore Ahmadi leader Muhammad Ali) regarding what was termed at the time “Eastern policy”. It remains possible that he was acting not out of purely intellectual interest in the service of a church project but as part of an intelligence operation. His effort to establish a channel to the Ottoman Islamic authorities came one month into the British occupation of Istanbul, which made the issue particularly suspect to some figures, most notably Said Nursi.²⁰⁶ At the time there was no shortage of English-language materials explaining Islam, though perhaps of too apologetic a nature in Boutwood’s view.²⁰⁷

With the move of senior ulema and devout intellectuals to Ankara in 1922 and its continuing conflict with Istanbul, Greece, and the Allied Powers, Mustafa Kemal’s government seized on the request as a prestigious state project that would stamp its authority in religious matters in Turkey and beyond. It was among the first matters passed to the publications committee of the shari‘a and religious ministry in August 1922, when parliamentarians accused Istanbul of having failed to provide appropriate answers to the Church of England.²⁰⁸ *Sebilürreşad* praised the choice of Jawish to lead the committee and produce a new response in conjunction with Akif, describing Jawish as a *müceddid* in the line of great renewers such as ‘Abduh.²⁰⁹ Declaring the project a “great duty” (*büyük vazife*) with

²⁰⁵ Ibid., “Letters,” Letter to Syed Ameer Ali, 29 January 1921: 305c.

²⁰⁶ Ceylan, *Gerçeğin Aynasında*, 171-86. Zekeriya Akman suggests the same, writing “it’s possible they wanted to know Islam from Muslims to give direction to their activities in the Islamic geography, their target population”; Akman, “Anglikan Kilisesi’nin Meşihat Kurumuna Soruları ve Bunlara Verilen Cevaplar,” *Hikmet Yurdu*, 6/11 (Jan-June 2013): 358. Boutwood’s letters are full of enigmatic references to ulterior motives. The unsigned introduction to his letters collection refers to “strangers” who destroyed many boxes of papers kept at his office after his sudden death, as well as a package marked confidential “implicating many pillars of society” that his wife burnt; Introduction, Letters, 2.

²⁰⁷ Syed Ameer Ali published *The Spirit of Islam* in 1902 and the Ahmadis of the Woking Mosque began publishing *The Islamic Review* journal in 1913 and a host of books by its writers.

²⁰⁸ Comments of Müfid Efendi, representative for Kırşehir; *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi*, 24 Ağustos 1338 (24 August 1922), devre 1 (1920-1923), year 3 (1922), vol. 22: 354-5.

²⁰⁹ “Anglikan Kilisesine Verilen Cevaplar Hakkında,” SR, 17 January 1924, 23/584: 188.

the first instalment of Jawish's work in its issue of 5 July 1923, *Sebilürreşad* said it augured well for the Turkish parliament and would raise its status around the Islamic world.²¹⁰ Atatürk praised the publications committee in a speech in March 1923, declaring its role as "comparing Islamic philosophy with Western scientific and philosophical theories, researching the Islamic peoples' beliefs and scientific, social, and economic life, and publishing the results", and for this purpose books from Istanbul, Europe, and Egypt were being collected in a special library.²¹¹ *Sebilürreşad* hailed the Jawish-Akif book as a manifesto for modern Islam, consonant with the progress of modern times (*bugünkü harikulade terakkiyatı*) and capable of providing solutions to modern problems.²¹²

The published Ottoman text is the *apologia* that Boutwood hoped to avoid. Christian missionaries have depicted Islam as blind submission to God without independent thought or agency (*fikirsiz, iradesiz*),²¹³ but Islamic faith is based on reason (*akla istinad*), it says.²¹⁴ The prophet makes clear that the Qur'an is Islam's only miracle (*Peygamberi teyid için Kur'andan başka harika olamayacağını bildiriyor*) and Islam does not oblige reason to accept impossible beliefs or rules which defy proof (*muhal olan bir akidenin yahud hilaf-ı burhan ile sabit bir hükmün kabuluna akli ilzam etmek müstahıldır*).²¹⁵ This form of rationality encompasses individual freedom of conscience (*ferdî hürriyet-i vicdan*), which means equality of responsibility for actions among sexes, classes, and states, and the obligation to perform certain duties such as prayer and fasting is an individual responsibility that indicates men are freed from inherited sin²¹⁶ and no individual can atone for the sins of others – a rejection of Christian and Muslim intercession. Jawish reviews early Church

²¹⁰ "Anglikan Kilisesine Cevap - 1," SR, 5 July 1923, 21/542-3: 170.

²¹¹ Mustafa Kemal, "Birinci Dönem, Dördüncü Toplanma Yılıni Açarken," 1 March 1923, in *Gazi M. Kemal Atatürk, Eğitim Politikası Üzerine Konuşmalar*, Kemal Ayaç (Ankara: Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü, 1984), 44.

²¹² "Anglikan Kilisesine Cevap - 1," SR, 5 July 1923, 21/542-3: 170.

²¹³ Abdülaziz Çaviş, "Anglikan Kilisesine Cevap - IV," SR, 2 August 1923, 22/547-8: 3.

²¹⁴ Çaviş, SR, 9 August 1923, 22/549-50: 17.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

²¹⁶ Çaviş, SR, 13 August 1923, 22/553-4: 51.

debates on Christ's divinity²¹⁷ and considers that God brings recompense for some good and bad deeds in this life rather than leave that for the next.²¹⁸ Echoing Said Halim's *İslamlaşmak*, he says Islam is comprehensive in its view of history and approach to modern life, from its prescriptions for eating, drinking, attire, health, work, marriage, happiness, and sadness,²¹⁹ to an integrationist understanding of the pre-Islamic prophets and the Enlightenment philosophers.²²⁰ Muslims are called to effort and action (*say, mücahede*), and not to fall into despair or entertain notions of divine predetermination of human action, which he says Sufi circles have fed.²²¹ From this Jawish discusses the question of Islamic unity: rather than condemn nationalism he outlines a workable form of transnational identity in the era of nation states – the Muhammadan nation (*ümmet-i Muhammedî*) possesses a religious nationalism (*kavmiyet-i diniye*) that encompasses language, thought, architecture, lifestyle, family, and ethics, he says.²²²

Finally, Jawish turns to European liberalism and what he sees as its self-serving representations of Islam. On the one hand, he tries to undercut European claims to superiority through democracy by pointing to parliaments controlled by financial interests²²³ and through women's rights by pointing to the mixed pattern across Western countries.²²⁴ On the other hand, Jawish explicitly links European discourse on the Orient to imperatives of empire. "In addition to desires on Africa and a policy of appropriation in its northern part that prevent showing Islam in its true form, European countries began to misrepresent and besmirch Islam

²¹⁷ Çaviş, SR, 20 September 1923, 22/561-2: 113-15.

²¹⁸ Çaviş, SR, 9 August 1923, 22/549-50: 20.

²¹⁹ Çaviş, SR, 23 August 1923, 22/553-4, 23: 52.

²²⁰ Çaviş, SR, 20 September 1923, 22/561-2: 113.

²²¹ Çaviş, SR, 27 September 1923, 22/563-4: 129-132.

²²² Çaviş, SR, 4 October 1923, 22/565-6: 147-8. This represented a reworking of the rejection of *kavmiyet* in Ahmed Naim's *İslam'da Dava-yı Kavmiyet* (1914).

²²³ Çaviş, SR, 13 December 1923, 23/579: 98.

²²⁴ Çaviş, SR, 20 December 1923, 23/580: 114-6; SR, 3 January 1924, 23/583: 146-149; SR, 10 January 1924, 23/584: 161-3; SR, 17 January 1924, 23/585: 178-180; SR, 31 January 1924, 23/586: 209-210; SR, 7 February 1924, 23/587: 226-7; SR, 14 February 1924, 23/588: 241-2.

in seeking to obtain its territories,” he writes.²²⁵ “So they began to revive anti-Islamic works from the Middle Ages and spread propaganda against Islamic rules and the Qur’an, and after publishing books to that effect, judgements were made that Islam was incompatible with civilisation [*İslam’ın medeniyeti kabule müsaid olmadığı*] and that because of Islam Muslim peoples were incapable of reaching the level of European nations. Whenever there was something they wanted in the Islamic world, they arrived at their colonial aims through this form of attack.”²²⁶ In acting in this manner the Europeans were exploiting the decline that Muslim states had experienced in terms of political organisation and knowledge production, though a few good Orientalists had been perceptive and honest enough to acknowledge the Islamic impulse to know, he said.²²⁷

Despite Jawish and Akif’s best efforts, the mood against any role for Islamic institutions in Turkish public affairs had turned. Jawish left in November 1923 for Egypt, but soon after his arrival in October 1922 he had sensed that Mustafa Kemal was set on a Western style secular republic during two long discussions in November and December in which he pressed Jawish about his views on the caliphate in particular.²²⁸ In the following months nationalist historian Fuat Köprülü (1890-1966), who had just published his *Türkiye Tarihi* (The History of Turkey), would smear the Hakkı and Jawish books on modern Islam as “rather primitive” (*pek iptidai*),²²⁹ and in 1924 the caliphate was abolished and the Directorate of Religious Affairs formed, taking on the functions of the now defunct shari‘a and religious endowments ministry which itself had subsumed the office of sheikh ül-Islam.

²²⁵ Abdülaziz Çaviş (trans. Akif), *Anglikan Kilisesine Cevap* (Istanbul: Evkaf-i İslamiye Matbaası, 1339 [1923]), 197. It is not clear why this section was not published in *Sebilürreşad*.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 197-8.

²²⁷ He cites positively French thinker Jules La Beaume’s *Le Koran analysé* (1878); Çaviş, *Anglikan Kilisesine Cevap*, 202.

²²⁸ Al-Jundi, ‘*Abd al-Aziz Jawish*, 139-143.

²²⁹ “Anglikan Kilisesine Verilen Cevaplar Hakkında,” *SR*, 17 January 1924, 23/584: 188.

Der Wille zur Macht: Akif, Muhammad Iqbal, and Muslim progress

During his early years in Cairo when he was busy on his Qur'an work and the main body of his *Gölgeler* collection there is no record of Akif maintaining contact with Jawish, who died in 1929. However, Akif's network expands from that year through the friendship he established with 'Abd al-Wahhab 'Azzam. Born in 1894 to a well-known family of religious scholars, 'Azzam had an Azhari education, studied to become a judge, then spent three years studying philosophy and literature at the Egyptian University. He worked as the imam of the Egyptian embassy in London while doing his masters on Persian Sufi poet Fariduddin 'Attar (d. 1220) at the School of Oriental Studies where he graduated in 1928. On his return he took a university post teaching Persian while he completed his doctorate on Ferdowsi's *Shahname*.²³⁰ He came to know about Akif's presence in Helwan during a trip to Istanbul when accompanying his uncle 'Abd al-Rahman 'Azzam (first secretary general of the Arab League)²³¹ to a meeting with Akif's son-in-law Ömer Rıza.

Rıza described their friendship as an intellectual match that drew Akif out of his seclusion, in that 'Azzam arranged for Akif's teaching job and drew him into his Helwan circle.²³² They shared a passion for Arabic and Persian literature, on the one hand, and French literature, on the other, but were troubled by European representation of Muslim culture. During his German sojourn Akif met the professor of Islamic Studies Martin Hartmann (1851-1918), concluding he was "of superficial knowledge" (*sathî bilgili*) on Persian literature.²³³ On his return he made three complaints of the Germans: the empty vanity (*kuru bir gösteriş*) of their Orientalists, foreign policy too mindful of the United States, and their

²³⁰ For a summary of his life see Ahmad Tamam, "'Abd al-Wahhab 'Azzam, al-Diblumasi al-Adib (fi Zikra Wafatihi)," Islam Online, <https://archive.islamonline.net/?p=9053> (accessed 5 May 2018). From 1947-1956 he was Egypt's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Yemen, then established Riyadh University.

²³¹ He also worked with the Ottomans in Libya during the First World War; see Ralph Coury, *The Making of an Egyptian Arab Nationalist: The Early Years of Azzam Pasha, 1893-1936* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1998). Stoddard lists Dr. Abdürrahman Bey among the Fedai Zabitan; *The Ottoman Government and the Arabs*, 173.

²³² Edib, *Mehmed Akif*, 451.

²³³ Ömer Rıza Doğrul, "Mehmed Akif," 439.

cuisine with its boiled cabbage.²³⁴ Akif documented attitudes that might today be described as Islamophobic. The German government warned them during their wartime mission in Berlin that due to anti-Muslim sentiment there was a deep scepticism in parliament over their collaboration. “The country’s ideas had become so poisoned against us over centuries by journalists, novelists, and those so-called Orientalists, who claimed to understand Eastern languages, Eastern sciences and arts, Eastern morals and customs, that there was no possibility of an understanding or peace between us,” Akif said.²³⁵ He relates his shock at the Austrian government lighting the streets in celebration when Jerusalem fell to the British because of its liberation from Muslim hands.²³⁶

Given these interests it was fortuitous that Akif and ‘Azzam should develop a mutual admiration for Indian poet and intellectual Muhammad Iqbal. ‘Azzam explains in his obituary his debt to Akif for introducing him to Iqbal, specifically his Persian-language poetry collection *Payam-i Mashriq* (Message of the East, 1923), after which ‘Azzam obtained *Asrar-i Khudi* (Secrets of the Self, 1915) and *Rumuz-i Bikhudi* (Mysteries of Selflessness, 1917)²³⁷ from Indian acquaintances in Cairo, and they would read all three works together.²³⁸ ‘Azzam later translated these works into Arabic, publishing *Payam-i Mashriq* in Pakistan during his time as Egypt’s ambassador and the others in Egypt.²³⁹ In the introduction to his *Payam-i Mashriq* translation ‘Azzam says he first heard of Iqbal as a “Sufi poet” from Indian students during his time at London University, which didn’t encourage him to know more.²⁴⁰

²³⁴ Ibid., 439. See also Akif, “Köy Hocası,” SR, 12 December 1918, 15/382: 331-2. Hartmann shared the Orientalist view of Islam as fatally crippled by fatalism; see Cundioğlu, *Bir Kur’an Şairi*, 67.

²³⁵ Akif, “Nasrullah Kürsüsünde,” SR, 25 November 1920, 18/464: 251.

²³⁶ Ibid., 251. In Midhat Cemal’s telling, Akif was in Germany or Austria at the time. Given Jerusalem fell to British forces between 17 November and 30 December 1917, this would place Akif in Europe later than is normally assumed.

²³⁷ These titles are usually rendered in modern Turkish as *Peyam-i Maşrik*, *Esrar-i Hodi* and *Rumuz-i Bihodi*.

²³⁸ ‘Abd al-Wahhab ‘Azzam, “İslam Şairi Mehmed Âkif,” in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 200-3.

²³⁹ *Payami Mashriq: Risalat al-Mashriq* (1951); *Diwan al-Asrar wa-l-Rumuz* (1956), combining *Asrar-i Khudi* and *Rumuz-i Bikhudi*; his Urdu collection *Zarb-i Kalim* (1936) as *Darb al-Kalim: I’lan al-Harb ‘ala al-‘Asr al-Hadir* (1952).

²⁴⁰ ‘Azzam, “Muqaddimat al-Mutarjim,” in *Payam-i Mashriq: Risalat al-Mashriq*, Muhammad Iqbal (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1981), 2. ‘Azzam says he retained the copy Akif gave him.

However, it was ‘Azzam rather than Akif who had the chance to meet Iqbal when Iqbal was hosted by the Muslim Youth Association in Cairo on his way to attend the Islamic conference held in Jerusalem in December 1931. Iqbal was feted in Egypt over five intense days during which he met with intellectuals on several occasions, and though ‘Azzam gave an address in his honour there is no record of Akif’s having attended.²⁴¹ It is possible that he drew no attention from the Egyptian journalists, though Akif never made any subsequent mention of the event. Why Akif would not have gone is something of a mystery. He may have been too shy to insert himself into the mix, since he did not know English and was not confident of his spoken Arabic; he also knew that Iqbal did not read Turkish and may not have had a chance to become familiar with his work. It seems highly unlikely that ‘Azzam would not have informed him in advance.²⁴²

Parallels between Akif and Iqbal have been noted by a number of scholars, notably in Turkish.²⁴³ Annemarie Schimmel noted the similarity during her five years teaching at Ankara University in the 1950s.²⁴⁴ Schimmel recognised Akif as the one of the first Muslim intellectuals outside India to appreciate Iqbal’s importance and she also saw the impact of Turkish thinkers (Akif, Said Halim, Gökalep) on Iqbal. Iqbal’s poem *Tarana-i Hind* (1904) became popular in Turkey as an anti-colonial anthem and Iqbal turned his attention to Ottoman losses in the Balkan wars and Libya, inspiring a number of works.²⁴⁵ The parallels go beyond age, life span, social background, and belief in art as the field where intellectuals

²⁴¹ The visit is detailed in Hafiz Mahfuz and Nabila Ishaq, *Iqbal wa-l-Azhar* (Cairo: Dar al-Bayan, 1999), 25-7.

²⁴² ‘Azzam is silent about Akif in the Turkish section of his travelogue *Rihlat* (Cairo, 1939), 72-92.

²⁴³ Yusuf Karaca, “Akif ve İkbāl,” *İslami Edebiyat*, Issue 3, Jan-March 1990: 28-30; İsa Çelik, “Çagdaş İki İslam Şairi: Muhammed İkbāl ve Mehmed Akif,” *Atatürk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Issue 22 (Erzurum, 2004): 151-92; Faik Gözübüyük, “Mehmed Akif ve Muhammed İkbāl,” *Türk Yurdu*, 50/280, January 1960: 49-51; Münevver Ayaşlı, *İşittiklerim Gördüklerim Bildiklerim* (İstanbul: Güryay Mat., 1973), 154-64; Neşet Çağatay, “Allama Muhammad İqbāl and Mehmet Akif Ersoy,” *İslam İlimleri Enstitüsü Dergisi*, no. 4 (1980): 61-6; Beşir Ayvazoğlu, “Mehmed Akif ve Muhammed İkbāl,” *Muhammed İkbāl Kitabı Uluslararası Muhammed İkbāl Sempozyumu Bildirileri* (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür İşleri, 1997), 43-56.

²⁴⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, “Önsöz,” in *Cavidname*, Muhammed İkbāl (İstanbul: Kırkambar, 2010), 12.

²⁴⁵ Nisar Ahmed Asrar, “Muhammed İkbāl’in Eserlerinde Türkiye ve Türkler,” *Muhammed İkbāl Kitabı*, 76-9.

should theorise construction of nation. The fate of their choices in language is also similar: Sahota notes that Iqbal's Persian was reduced after his death to a national language belonging to neither India nor Pakistan, but Akif also laboured over a language whose form (alphabet reform) and much of its substance (language reform) was discarded in the transformation of Turkish begun in the early republican period.²⁴⁶ They also shared a direct, if contrasting, experience of Germany: Iqbal spent three years studying for his doctorate in Persian metaphysics under the guidance of British and German Orientalists and had as a result a more positive view of European claims to expertise than Akif. Iqbal even managed the trip to Andalusia that Akif was planning in December 1925 in his early Egypt years before fatigue and illness struck him down.²⁴⁷

As Sahota points out, *Payam-i Mashriq* undercut the Western notion of civilisation's mono-directional flow from European metropolitan centre to Oriental satrapy.²⁴⁸ It was heavily influenced by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* (1819), which was partly inspired by Hafiz. Iqbal talks of the "Eastern influence" Goethe channelled from his professor Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), who was interested in the poetry of Sa'adi, and Austrian diplomat Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856), who in 1812 published the first translation of Hafiz's *Divan* in a Western language. Goethe in turn inspired a series of Persianists in German literature of the time, including August Platen (1796-1835), Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866), and Friedrich von Bodenstedt (1819-1892). Iqbal noted himself that Goethe borrowed from the poetic style and structure of Persian literature in particular without embracing its Sufi substance and monist theory, with the implication that

²⁴⁶ G.S. Sahota, "Uncanny Affinities: A Translation of Iqbal's Preface to *Payam-e Mashriq*," *Postcolonial Studies*, 15:4 (2012): 437-52. Transliterated into Latin script Akif's work remains generally comprehensible.

²⁴⁷ Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 135. Iqbal's poem was "Masjid-e-Qartaba", published in the collection *Bāl-e Jibrīl* (1935) after a visit in 1931. It was one of Iqbal's few works to focus on architecture, a major theme for Akif. Akif wanted to visit the Elhambra in Grenada for another poem taking Islamic architecture as his inspiration.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 444-5.

he could do the same with both Sufi and German traditions.²⁴⁹ The Islamic East must wake up from centuries of slumber – the “ease and indolence” of Persian thought – to reassert both the individual and society and thus play its role at a critical juncture in world history in light of the moral decline of Europe as evidenced by the First World War and the new possibilities revealed in the physics of Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859-1941).²⁵⁰

So frank was Iqbal’s engagement with post-Enlightenment Western knowledge that he was accused of mimicking many of its elements, in particular the concepts of the *Übermensch* and the will to power (*der Wille zur Macht*) in German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)’s system. The phrase “*der Wille zur Macht*” appeared in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spake Zarathustra, 1883) and *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (Beyond Good and Evil, 1886), and his notes on the concept were put together posthumously under the same title in 1901. It was inspired by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)’s concept of the will to live, as well as Darwinian evolutionary theory, and though subsequently interpreted by many admirers and detractors in political and/or racial terms, the concept emerged in the context of Nietzsche’s critique of German culture and nationalism as outlined in essays published in the 1870s. Hegel was Nietzsche’s arch-villain in what he saw as an intellectual class with a naive understanding of modern Europe as the teleological apotheosis of human history, an understanding that masked a sense of unease over Germany as a late-comer to nationhood and high culture. Rather than engage in modernity’s detached historicisation of knowledge, the creative and independent man of action should produce knowledge in the present through

²⁴⁹ See his later written introduction, translated from Urdu, in Iqbal (trans. Syed Abbas Ali Jaffery), *The Moonbeams Over the East: A Translation of Poems from Allama Iqbal’s Payam-i-Mashriq* (Karachi: Royal Book Co., 1996), 53.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 55-6.

the arts.²⁵¹ Out of this thinking emerges Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, the ideal type developed in the godless landscape of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* who rejects Platonic and Christian ethics and metaphysics for a new understanding of man in the world. Iqbal made no secret of his interest in Nietzsche. Both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer are addressed directly in *Payam-i Mashriq*,²⁵² Nietzsche is compared to the Sufi martyr Mansur Hallaj (d. 922) in his *Javidname* (1932),²⁵³ and Nietzsche is often brought up in Iqbal's speeches and articles.²⁵⁴ In his public comments Iqbal also related his concept of self-hood to Freud's ego.²⁵⁵

So Iqbal welcomed the broad similarity in Nietzsche's thinking and his own as far as this intersection could be described as identifying and exalting an innate inner driving force in humans, even if he understood that Nietzsche's use of these terms took place in a particular historical context regarding the trajectory of rational philosophy, national culture, and belief in God in 19th-century German society. Iqbal's purpose, however, was to address the condition of contemporary Muslims, who had for the most part fallen under the yoke of European powers because, he believed, after ascending to the civilisational heights of socio-political organisation and intellectual achievement they had lost the way. He was blunt in the lectures which became the basis of his book *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930). Here he outlined the Muslim modernist understanding of, on the one hand, excessive intellectualisation within the Sufi tradition that had diverted attention from more pressing and worthy tasks of communal guidance and, on the other, rigid adherence to the

²⁵¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Use and Abuse of History," in Nietzsche (trans. Anthony M. Ludovici and Adrian Collins), *The Untimely Meditations (Thoughts Out of Season Parts I and II)* (Lawrence, Kansas: Digireads.com, 2009), 96-133.

²⁵² Muhammad Iqbal, *Payam-i Mashriq: Dar Javab-i Divan-i Sha'ir-i Almanavi Go'ete* (Lahore: Dr Javid Iqbal, 1969), 117-8.

²⁵³ "There was a Hallaj who was a stranger in his own land" (*būd ḥallājī bih shahr-i khūd gharīb*); see Iqbal's translation, in *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, ed. Latif Ahmad Sherwani (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1995), 187. Hallaj is also "the free man who knows good and evil" (*mard-i āzādī kih dānad khūb ve zisht*). See Iqbal (trans. A.J. Arberry), *Javid-Nama* (Ajman, UAE: Islamic Books, 2000), 93, 112.

²⁵⁴ Iqbal, "Muslim Democracy," *The New Era*, Lucknow, 28 July 1917, cited in Sherwani, *Speeches*, 161.

²⁵⁵ Address to All-India Muslim Conference, 1932, in Sherwani, *Speeches*, 41; "McTaggart's Philosophy," *Indian Arts and Letters*, 6/1 (1932): 25-31, cited in Sherwani, *Speeches*, 183.

established legal and theological traditions that had crushed the creative spirit of individual and community. As for Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Iqbal's concept of the *mard-i mu'min* draws equally if not more on al-Jili's *al-insān al-kāmil*, on which Iqbal wrote an essay in 1900.²⁵⁶ Iqbal was advocating neither post-God materialism nor absorption of the ego in the infinity of the divine, but the human personality's full embrace of God.²⁵⁷

Akif can also be located inside this cluster of ideas. How influenced was he by Iqbal? Reading 'Azzam offers some insight into Akif's understanding of Iqbal, given their extensive discussions about *Payam-i Mashriq*. In the preface to his translation, 'Azzam writes of the lesson he learned from Akif in what he calls instinctive translation (*bi-l-fars*), retaining the obscurity of meaning that Iqbal often conveys as well as the metre, but altering phrases that would convey different meanings in Arabic.²⁵⁸ 'Azzam gives an explanation of Iqbal's philosophy based on his reading of Iqbal's first collection, *Asrar-i Khudi* (1915), and then applies these ideas to *Payam-i Mashriq*. The key to Iqbal's thinking, 'Azzam says, is *khūdī* (Ar. *al-dhātīyya*), which is equivalent to selfhood, or, in Freudian terms, the concept of the ego.²⁵⁹ Men must be true to their innate character in order to express this selfhood through independent thought and creativity; while imitation (*taqlīd*) weakens the self, the trials of life strengthen it,²⁶⁰ and Iqbal's descriptions of animals such as the self-reliant and independent hawk serve as examples in nature of the kind of free agent man should be.²⁶¹ Thus, Iqbal believed men had free will but were under the illusion of divine order (*hurr mukhtār*

²⁵⁶ Iqbal, "The Doctrine of Absolute Unity as Expounded by Abdul Karim al-Jilani," in Sherwani, *Speeches*, 77-97.

²⁵⁷ Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 118-21. For more on Iqbal see Mir Mustansir, *Iqbal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), H.C. Hillier (ed.), *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), M. Saeed Sheikh, *Studies in Iqbal's Thought and Art: Select Articles from the Quarterly "Iqbāl"* (Lahore: Bazm-i Iqbal, 1972).

²⁵⁸ 'Azzam, "Muqaddimat al-Mutarjim," 11-12.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 14-16.

²⁶⁰ 'Azzam cites the Arabic section "Schopenhauer wa-Nietzsche"; 'Azzam, *Payam-i Mashriq*, 117.

²⁶¹ Ibid., "Nasihat Saqr li-Farkhihi," 40-1.

yatawahham annahu mujbar).²⁶² ‘Azzam says Iqbal also believed in the primacy of passion over reason (‘*ishq* over ‘*aql*), the man of action who rejects the entrapments of Ash‘arism’s anti-voluntarist tendencies.²⁶³

Secondly, Akif wrote to a friend on 8 March 1925 that he had received by post two works by Iqbal, one of which was *Payam-i Mashriq*.²⁶⁴ Akif adds he had seen a short work by Iqbal while in Ankara and found him similar to himself (*sahibini kendime benzetmiştim*).²⁶⁵ He talks of Iqbal’s familiarity with all the works of the Sufi masters while “thoroughly digesting Western philosophy through going to Germany” (*Almanya’ya giderek Garp felsefesini adamakallı hazmeden İkbāl*) and notes approvingly that Iqbal writes in Persian and has strong Arabic. It’s not clear if *Asrar-i Khudi* or *Rumuz-i Bikhudi* were among his Iqbal readings in Ankara or the package he received in 1925.²⁶⁶ Following his introduction to Iqbal, Akif says he gave copies of the *Safahat* collection to Indian Muslims who visited him at *Sebilürreşad* offices in Istanbul for them to pass on to Iqbal. Mahir İz talked in his memoirs of reading *Payam-i Mashriq* with Akif in his Istanbul home,²⁶⁷ and in a letter dated 1 February 1927, Akif asked İz to send him Akif’s copy of *Payam-i Mashriq* which he had once left at İz’s home.²⁶⁸ Unsubstantiated claims have been made that Iqbal and Akif engaged in direct correspondence from 1930. Researcher Mehmet Önder says Akif’s son-in-law Ömer Rıza read out a letter from Iqbal to Akif at a conference he organised in Konya on Iqbal and Rumi at some point during Rıza’s time as a member of parliament in the

²⁶² Ibid., “al-Ta’ira,” 76.

²⁶³ Ibid., “Muhawarat al-‘Ilm wa-l-‘Ishq,” 34-5; “Naqsh al-Afranj,” 110; “Risalat Bergson,” 123. Iqbal gave a clear exposition in English of his ideas in the preface to an English translation of *Asrar-i Khudi* published in 1920; Muhammad Iqbal (trans. Reynold Nicholson), *The Secrets of the Self (Asrār-i Khudī): A Philosophical Poem* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammed Ashraf, 1920), xvi-xxix.

²⁶⁴ Letter to Asım Şakir Gören, in Edib, *Mehmed Akif*, 203-4.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 203.

²⁶⁶ Erişirgil thinks the first major work he read was *Payam-i Mashriq*; *İslamcı bir Şairin*, 363.

²⁶⁷ İz, *Yılların İzi*, 141.

²⁶⁸ Letter to Mahir İz, 1 Şubat 1343 (1 February 1927), in Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 56. Also Süleymaniye Library, Archive No. 2568, “Mektuplar: Mehmet Akif Ersoy” (Letters to Mahir İz), p.19.

1950s. However, the text published by Önder, which is not cited elsewhere, talks only of love for modern Turkey and a desire to visit Rumi's tomb in Konya, without any mention of Akif.²⁶⁹ In his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought* (1930) and *Javidname* (1932) Iqbal mentions Atatürk, Gökalt, and Said Halim Paşa – but not Akif.

So while it is possible that Akif's lyrical Sufi turn in the *Gölgeler* collection, including *Firavun ile Yüz Yüze* (Face to Face with Pharaoh, December 1924), *Gece* (Evening), *Hicran* (Separation), and *Secde* (Prostration in Prayer, all January 1925), was influenced by *Payam-i Mashriq*, as for Akif's earlier work containing his thinking on human agency, the good and bad of the Sufi tradition, art and the nation, he was writing along the same lines as Iqbal independently. *Sanatkâr* (Artist), the very last poem of *Gölgeler*, and written August 1933, makes explicit reference to Iqbal. The poem is an homage to composer Şerif Muhiddin and dedicated to Archibald Roosevelt, son of the American president Theodore Roosevelt, in recognition of what Akif says in a footnote was the kindness he showed Muhiddin during his time in New York. In that spirit, Akif pieces together various tableaux of high cultural achievement from East and West to highlight cross-flows between them. A traveller marvels at urban Americana observed from the window of the train he boards in Boston, then is surprised to see a noble artist (*sanatkâr*) prostrating in prayer. But Akif's Muhiddin is inside the carriage, where his lover praises him effusively for an oud performance he has given. Applying familiar figurative devices from Ottoman poetry, Muhiddin's playing is likened to the dove's longing cry and the burning heart of nightingales: "Yes, the voice first heard by our civilised West/This breath bursting from the desert's burning heart/This speech of ages, like the call of God" (*Evet, bizim medeni Garb'ın ilk*

²⁶⁹ Mehmet Önder, "Mehmet Akif ve Muhammed İkbal," *Milli Kültür*, 57 (May 1987), 51-53. Önder makes reference in a footnote to another article of his that contains in fact no mention of Akif at all; Mehmet Önder, "İkbal'in Yaşamı ve Mevlana Hayranlığı," *Pakistan Postası*, 24/1, January 1976: 5-6, 14. Önder cites a visit he made in 1976 to Iqbal's home where he found a copy of *Safahat* but not apparently any correspondence.

*işittiği ses,/Çölün yanık yüreğinden kopup gelen bu nefes,/Nida-i Hak gibi edvarı haşreden bu hitab).*²⁷⁰ Even New York concert pianist Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938) makes an appearance in the text to praise the oud player, whose artistry springs from the blood of the prophets as the pinnacle of Eastern sensitivity (*O kanda bir galeyan: Şark'a en temiz heyecan*).²⁷¹ Yet this East is today suffering “the despair of an afflicted nation” (*hāsir bir ümmetin ye'si*),²⁷² and to express this despair Akif's narrator quotes “the poet of India, that philosopher Iqbal”: “*Heyecana verdi gönülleri,/Heyecanlı sesleri gönlümün;/Ben o nağmeden müteheyyicim:/Ki yok ihtimali terennümün*” (Their hearts were ecstatic/The ecstatic sounds of my heart/So ecstatic am I from that music/That I cannot sing).²⁷³ The poem ends on a note of ambiguous optimism, blind hope for a bright future.

Payam-i Mashriq's interest in European thought and questioning of Sufism was not new territory for Akif.²⁷⁴ His ideas evolve in a clear progression. In *Süleymaniye Kürsüsünde*, touring the mosque, which was completed by the architect Sinan in 1558 under Suleyman the Magnificent, Akif describes it as a superlative human achievement that transcends nations and ideologies. “One day courts and temples would be destroyed/The purist of places soiled by the filthiest feet/Mankind would know a new religion, atheism/God's name erased from man's memory [*Yıkılır bir gün olur mahkemeler, ma'bedler/En temiz yerleri en kirli ayaklar çiğner/Beşeriyet yeni bir din tanıyıp ilhādı/Beşerin hafızasından silinir Hakk'ın adı*],” he writes, but “not one stone from this home of God will fall” (*Yine tek bir taşı düşmez şu Hüda lānesinin*) since it is destined to remain “the only home of truth on earth” (*doğruluğun yerdeki tek yurdu*).²⁷⁵ In *Fatih Kürsüsünde*, two friends marvelling over another high-point of

²⁷⁰ Akif, *Safahat*, 698.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 702.

²⁷² Ibid., 702.

²⁷³ Ibid., 703. The quatrain is from verse twenty-five of the section “May-i Bāqī” from *Payam-i Mashriq*; “dīl-i yārān az navāhā-yi perishānam sūkh/man az ān nağhmīh tepīdam kih surūdan natawān”. See Ali Nihat Tarlan, *İkbal'den Şiirler: Şarktan Haber ve Zebur-u Acem* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1971), 107.

²⁷⁴ On Akif's spiritual despair in Egypt see Çelik, “Çağdaş İki İslam Şairi,” 158-60.

²⁷⁵ Akif, *Safahat*, 198.

Ottoman architecture, the Fatih mosque, muse over contemporary standards, the state of disrepair of schools, mosques and coffee-houses, the innovations of intellectuals.²⁷⁶ In *Berlin Hatıraları* German urban planning is commended for its functionality: “What of the streets they talk of? Space without end/No chance of wandering on crooked bends [*Sokak dediler neymiş? Feza-i bî-payan/Ki tayyedilmesinin yoktur ihtimali yayan*].”²⁷⁷ European achievement came with wars, Akif notes; but while Germany was able to recover from its Napoleonic defeats, the Ottomans could not benefit from the positive sciences as Europe has done – an argument that Iqbal and Akif each made in their work.²⁷⁸ Akif’s subsequent *Asım* is his most forthright in outlining a theory of applying European knowledge in the construction of the modern nation, but with memorialisation of Gallipoli as the nation’s foundational event. Akif intends the figure of Asım as representative of the new generation that will emerge stronger for the failures of its forebears, Akif’s generation.²⁷⁹ Asım transforms religious and nationalist zeal in war into a quest for education in Europe so that he can return for the nation-building project, and it was because of the sacrifice and success of Gallipoli that he can engage Europeans now on an equal footing. The poem, viewed by admirers as his most significant, ends with Asım’s father counselling the youth to always bear in mind al-Afghani’s words to ‘Abduh, “I want a revolution” (*İnkılab istiyorum*).²⁸⁰

The central theme of Akif’s work was the call to action.²⁸¹ In *Fatih Kürsüsünde* his preacher gives an extended exposition on creation which appears to draw on the ideas and language of the Sufi, philosophical, and *kalām* traditions, in particular the emanationist *ḥaqd* of Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd, as well as ‘Abduh’s *al-sa’y wa-l-‘amal* and the

²⁷⁶ Akif, *Safahat*, 306-7.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 430.

²⁷⁸ Iqbal, “Islam and Ahmadism,” *Islam*, January 1936, cited in Sherwani, *Speeches*, 225.

²⁷⁹ Erişirgil argues Akif modelled the poem on Namık Kemal’s play *Vatan Yahud Silistre* (1872); *İslamcı bir Şairin*, 256.

²⁸⁰ Akif, *Safahat*, 605.

²⁸¹ Discussed in Turkish in Ertan Erol, “Safahat’ta Emek ve Gayret Kavramları Üzerine,” *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 5/21 (Spring 2012): 106-16.

German philosophers. “The sea of [divine] power’s lasting work has no beginning/The call of bounteous eternity is manifest in every drop [*Beliğ sayidir umman-i kudretin ezeli/Hurūş-i feyz-i ezel her kütəyresinde celi*],” the preacher says.²⁸² “Will, if considered, is always its eternal striving/But whose? That of the pure divine power, of the veiled secret/It neither rests nor remains idle for even a second/From stirring the affairs of creation [*İrade hep ezeli sayidir, bakılsa, onun/Kimin? O kudret-i mahzın, o sırr-ı meknūnun/Ne dinlenir, ne de atıl kalır, velev bir an/Şuun-ı hilkati kesif edip yaratmaktan*].”²⁸³ He goes on to say that the creative power in the world could be articulated in terms of material (*madde*) that takes on different forms through *say*,²⁸⁴ but he also uses the more familiar *kalām* term *zerre*, the smallest forms of matter which exhibit the same life force as the harmony of the seas and skies.²⁸⁵ Akif then elaborates on the ecological system of the natural world as an “endless chain” (*bir bī-nihāye silsile*) of dynamic energy, hinting at the *kalām* innovation that Sabri sensed in ‘Abduh and viewed as a surrender to new European epistemology.²⁸⁶ Akif’s preacher continually returns to his refrain: “Those who survive know that striving is a duty/Keep working to deserve survival through your effort” (*Bekayı hak tanıyan, sayı bir vazife bilir/Çalış çalış, ki beka say olursa hakkedilir*).

The sermon uses this discussion of divine power and causes, in which the Ash‘ari-Maturidi terminology of human acquisition of divine authority to act (*kasb/tafwīd*) have in a sense been replaced by his concept of *say*, as a device for Akif’s polemical point regarding “the West that is active” (*mücahid olan Garb*) and “the East that is stagnant” (*atıl olan Şark*).²⁸⁷ The reason for this is to be found in the nexus of beliefs which express the lethargy

²⁸² Akif, *Safahat*, 318. Feyz recalls the Neoplatonic emanation that came into Arabic as the *fayḍ* of Sufism and the philosophers.

²⁸³ Ibid., 319.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 319.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 328.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 328-9.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 332. Akif is playing to the modernist trope of the West being more truly Islamic than the Muslim East.

of the times: *kader* and *tevekkül*. Popular understandings of God's decree have deviated from the intention as outlined in *kalām*: there are possible existences that exist as archetypes (*Kader: Şeraiti mevcud olup da meydanda/Zuhura gelmesidir mümkinātın a 'yānda*), but their realisation requires the effort of responsible men (*Niçin nasıl geliyormuş... O büsbütün mechül/Biz ihtiyarımızın suretindeniz mesul*).²⁸⁸ Through placing faith in the guiding hand of God, Muslim *tevekkül* has become *tahakküm*, a form of arrogant prejudging of God, effectively making God subservient to man (*Hüdayı kendine kul yaptı, kendi oldu Hüda*).²⁸⁹ These passages recall Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam* (Gems of Wisdom) and its section on God's act of enabling the existence of all things (their as yet non-existent prototypes, or *a 'yān*) that display the desire for existence, regardless of their function or intent in the world – a text Akif is almost certain to have read.²⁹⁰

Despite their considerable points of intersection, Iqbal and Akif are only cited together by Turkish scholars. Through his English and German connections, Iqbal had a voice in the West that Akif did not, and likely as a result of that he acquired a status in Arabic that Akif did not. Akif's audience was purely his own community, something that could not be said of Iqbal. Despite his columns in *Sebilürreşad* and sermons in time of national crisis, Akif did not engage in theory or politics outside his poetry: he never endeavoured a reconstruction of religious thought and exile prevented him from playing a role in the national project during his lifetime. On the other hand, it was Iqbal's renunciation of the Ahmadiyya movement in 1935 over its failure to affirm the finality of Muhammad's prophethood that cleared the way for the institutionalisation of his memory in Pakistan.²⁹¹ Ultimately Akif's poetry operates within intellectual boundaries a degree narrower than those

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 341.

²⁸⁹ Akif, *Safahat*, 340.

²⁹⁰ Abu al-Ala' 'Afifi (ed.), *Fusus al-Hikam li-Muhi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1980), 177-80.

²⁹¹ A series of articles and comments on the topic are published in Sherwani, *Speeches*, 197-241.

of Iqbal, less flamboyantly damning of the Sufi tradition, less dialectically engaged with European thinkers.²⁹² Yet a tension permeates the work of both in that they elaborate a metaphysics of existence situated in the very tradition they seek to reformulate. What both Akif and Iqbal represent is a final effort by modernist intellectuals to preserve something of the edifice of Sufism from the purificatory wave of Islamic rationalisation of which they were an intrinsic part.

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²⁹² Viewing these events from a distance, Iqbal supported ending the caliphate and other elements of the Kemalist revolution. Ibid., 232-5.

CHAPTER 4

The Salafi Revolution: Kevseri's defence of Sunni traditionalism

This chapter looks at Kevseri's conflicts with the emerging Salafi trend. It looks first at his approach to 'Abduh and the modernists, and how it differed from Sabri's, then reviews the polemical debates between Kevseri and his Salafi opponents as they evolved from the 1920s to the early 1950s. While like Sabri he saw the *tajdīd* reformers as attempting to transform Islam into a calque on post-Enlightenment religion, Kevseri identified what would become the Salafi movement as more destabilising to the Islamic tradition, since it was speaking more authentically from within the tradition with the aim of radically altering its multivocal, heterogenous disposition. It considers that Kevseri was able to delay the final semantic stabilisation of the term Salafi around the ideas that characterise the ideological movement of that name today, but that Syrian 'ālim Nasir al-Din al-Albani used the work of Kevseri as a foil against which he could construct "Salafism" following Kevseri's death.

Kevseri's views on 'Abduh

Kevseri was no less concerned about the intellectual direction of the modernist movement than Sabri. Like Sabri he initially had a positive view of 'Abduh but came to adopt a view of him as a disruptor, though in questions of *fiqh* rather than creed. Having developed closer ties to al-Azhar than Sabri, Kevseri was more deferential to his Egyptian hosts in choosing not to reveal his views in too frank a manner. 'Abduh came up in Kevseri's first polemical scuffle with the Salafi group in the late 1920s. Kevseri's contribution to an annotated collection of three well-known commentaries on the hadith scholar al-Dhahabi (d. 1348)'s *Tadhkirat al-Huffaz* (Memorial of the Hadith Scholars) provoked Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib to accuse

Kevseri of anti-Arab bias in his assessment of *tajsīm* (anthropomorphism in the sense of corporeal understandings of God) in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya.

In a review of the book when it was first published al-Khatib had thanked Kevseri for his comments in a work that he thought did a service to al-Dhahabi, an important figure in the traditionist canon due to theological views that aligned with those of Ibn Taymiyya.¹ This prompted the Jeddah publisher Muhammad Nasif to write to al-Khatib chiding him for having overlooked what Kevseri had written in his commentary and footnotes.² Kevseri had evidently begun to draw attention with his early critical editions of theological works associated with the traditionists.³ In 1926 he had published in Cairo an edition with commentary of Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201)'s *Daf' Shubhat al-Tashbih* (Refutation of the Suspicion of Anthropomorphism), a Hanbali work rejecting the accusation of *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism in the sense of likening God to his creation).⁴ In 1928 Kevseri was the first to publish from manuscript an annotated version of al-Dhahabi's *Bayan Zaghl al-'Ilm* (Explication of the Debasement of Knowledge) in which al-Dhahabi agreed with Ibn Taymiyya on general points of theology – the nature of *īmān*, the uncreatedness of the Qur'an, the attributes of God, and the idea that these represent the position of earlier Muslims⁵ – but admonished him for having drawn accusations from his Syrian and Egyptian peers of arrogance and desire for office.⁶ Al-Dhahabi suggested Ibn Taymiyya's attacks on

¹ Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (unsigned), "Harakat al-Nashr wa-l-Ta'lif: Dhuyul Tadhkirat al-Huffaz li-l-Dhahabi," *al-Zahra*, Dhu al-Qi'da 1347 (May 1928), 5/5: 364. The book, titled *Dhayl Tadhkirat al-Huffaz li-l-Dhahabi* was published by the Damascus publisher Husam al-Din al-Qudsi in 1928.

² Al-Khatib, "Udwan 'ala 'Ulama' al-Islam Yajib An Yakun Lahu Hadd Yaqif 'Indahu," in al-Kawthari, *Saf'at al-Burhan*, 57.

³ Al Rashid, "Introduction," in Al-Sarhan, *Rasa'il al-Imam*, 12. Kevseri's initial article is published in *Saf'at al-Burhan*, 52-56, titled "Ta'liquna 'ala Ibn Fahd fi Dhuyul Tadhkirat al-Huffaz" (undated).

⁴ A previous book, his first in Egypt, was a response to Ibn Qutayba (d. 889)'s *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith* titled *Raf' al-Rayba 'an Takhabbutat Ibn Qutayba* but the manuscript has never been published. Cited in al-Bayumi, *al-Muqaddimat*, 699. Better-known is Kevseri's annotated edition of Ibn Qutayba's *al-Ikhtilaf fi al-Lafz wa-l-Radd 'ala al-Jahmiyya wa-l-Mushabbih*, published in 1930.

⁵ Al-Kawthari, *Bayan Zaghl al-'Ilm wa-l-Talab* (Cairo: al-Azhariyya li-l-Turath, 2010), 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

practitioners of logic and philosophy made him as guilty as those he accused,⁷ and even questioned one aspect of Ibn Taymiyya's theological system, the idea that God can be conceived of as occupying any spatial location (*al-jihāt*) he so wishes.⁸ Kevseri also appended a controversial letter of advice known as *al-Nasiha al-Dhahabiyya*, in which al-Dhahabi repeated those charges directly to his former master.⁹ Kevseri disagreed with most of al-Dhahabi's opinions but what attracted him to the material was the fact that Ibn Taymiyya was excoriated by one of his own, even on points of theology.

Nasif was right in his assumption that al-Khatib had not looked closely at what Kevseri had said in the book of al-Dhahabi commentaries.¹⁰ In it Kevseri faulted the al-Dhahabi commentator Taqi al-Din Muhammad ibn Fahd al-Makki (d. 1466/7)¹¹ for his description of Damascus *muḥaddith* al-Jamal 'Abd Allah ibn Ibrahim al-Shara'ihī (d. 1417/8) as a great hadith scholar despite his being *ummī*, or not having learned to read or write in his youth.¹² Kevseri used this example to argue that there exists a generalised problem of hadith narrators (*ruwāḥ*) who when at school in their early years moved straight from learning the basic skills of reading and writing to hadith narration without immersion in other Islamic sciences. This meant they had a tendency to absorb the opinions of teachers who had wayward views on theological questions. Thus, the trope of the stellar *ummī* scholar was not the issue, what mattered was whether they remained 'āmmī, i.e. without the proper training to be considered among the elite of 'ulama' who are of sound knowledge, commoners not

⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁹ Ibid., 35-6. Caterina Bori considers the *Nasiha* to be authentic; see Bori, "al-Dhahabi," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 3, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Everett Rowson (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016) [henceforth EI3]; http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_25995 (accessed 21 July 2018).

¹⁰ Al-Khatib also missed that the catalogue of al-Qudsi's publications contained several Kevseri-edited pro-Hanafi works slanted against the theology of Ibn Taymiyya. See the back-cover list in Ahmad Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *al-Tanbih wa-l-Iqaz li-Ma fi Dhuyul Tadhkirat al-Huffaz* (Damascus: al-Qudsi, 1929).

¹¹ John Lash Meloy, "Ibn Fahd", in EI3; http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30441 (accessed 21 July 2018).

¹² Kevseri, *Saf'at al-Burhan*, 52-6. Kevseri's section in the *Dhayl* that provoked al-Khatib is reprinted here.

experts. Kevseri implied that Ibn Taymiyya and his Damascus followers including al-Dhahabi¹³ were the former for their position on *al-jihāt* – that God’s omnipotence means it is logical to conceive of his possessing a limitless ability of movement that opponents would consider anthropomorphic – that were largely drawn from the writings of ‘Uthman ibn Sa‘id al-Darimi (815-893/5), a student of Ahmad ibn Hanbal.¹⁴ He suggested that they had absorbed these ideas from the non-Muslim communities in which they grew up or converted or were socialised as Muslims. Kevseri’s final point was an appeal to readers not to be duped by anti-Ash‘ari and anti-Maturidi propaganda in the name of the *salaf*, an appeal that contained the essence of the idea that came to dominate Kevseri’s thought: that marginal theology is making a comeback through the legitimating language of Salafism.¹⁵

Kevseri’s intervention was something of a *coup de théâtre*, surprising his opponents in several ways. He had attacked not only their ideas but struck at the underlying assumption that ethnic Arab origin implied privileged knowledge, particularly in the grasp of hadith. He had done so, moreover, as a non-Arab Circassian from an Ottoman intellectual environment viewed in some Arab circles as deficient in hadith scholarship.¹⁶ This sense of initial disarray comes across in al-Khatib’s response to Kevseri, which began by accusing him of “sharp-tongued impudence” (*salāṭa wa-ṭūl lisān*).¹⁷ Al-Khatib’s line of attack was to bring up a passage from ‘Abduh’s response to Farah Antun in which he argued that Islam as an “Arab

¹³ He mentions al-Dhahabi, Ibn al-Qayyim, and Ahmad ibn Abi Qasim ibn Badran al-Dashti (d. 1313). Regards al-Dashti, see al-Dhahabi, *Mu‘jam al-Shuyukh al-Kabir*, 2 vols. (Taif: Maktabat al-Siddiq, 1987), 1:101-2.

¹⁴ Binyamin Abrahamov, “al-Dārimī, Abū Sa‘īd,” in *EI3*; http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23880 (accessed on 21 July 2018).

¹⁵ He makes reference to a Cairo-era book he wrote, *Tahdhir al-Khalaf min Makhazi Ad‘iya’ al-Salaf*, apparently lost. Al-Bayumi refers to it as a manuscript in *Muqaddimat* (p.700) but does not say anything more.

¹⁶ I owe this point to Dr Hamza al-Bakri of Fatih Sultan Mehmet University. Ahmad Khayri mentions hadith lessons Kevseri took in Damascus in 1928 with renowned hadith scholar Badr al-Din al-Hasani (1850-1935); *al-Imam al-Kawthari*, 9. However, Kevseri studied hadith intensively during his early years (see Özafşar, “Muhammed Zahid el-Kevseri ‘Hadis Yönu’,” *Muhammed Zahid el-Kevserî*, 92-3), and this was typical of the Khalidi Naqshbandi line of Gümüşhanevi to which Kevseri’s father belonged; see Butrus Abu-Manneh, “Shaykh Ahmed Ziya’uddin el-Gümüşhanevi and the Ziya’-Khālidi suborder,” in *Shi‘a Islam, Sects and Sufism*, ed. Frederick De Jong (Utrecht: M.Th. Houtsma Stichting, 1992): 105-17. Kevseri discusses Gümüşhanevi’s role in Ottoman hadith dissemination in *Irgham al-Murid*, 69-76; and *al-Tahrir al-Wajiz*, 26-7.

¹⁷ Al-Khatib, “‘Udwan ‘ala ‘Ulama’ al-Islam,” 57.

religion” (*al-Islām kāna dīnan ‘arabiyyan*) had been corrupted (*ustu‘jima*) in the Abbasid era by the caliph al-Mu‘tasim (ruled 833-842) bringing into his army non-Muslim Turks and Persians who proceeded to take control of key arms of the state while secretly holding to other religions and their practice.¹⁸ Though this argument was apologetic in the context of Antun and Ernest Renan’s accusation of Islamic stagnation (*jumūd*), Rashid Rida’s editing magnified it further with annotations that framed ‘Abduh’s words in an exclusively anti-Turk context (“what evil he [al-Mu‘tasim] did in enabling the Turks to seize control of the nation”).¹⁹ Al-Khatib presented the text in the same manner to argue that Kevseri as a Circassian Turk was motivated by anti-Arab animus to assail revered hadith scholars from Arab lands (*fī al-aqtār al-‘arabiyya*).²⁰ While on the one hand al-Khatib made a false assumption that ‘Abduh identified with the theological views in question, on the other he rejected the charge of *tajsīm* by claiming there was no such manuscript attributed to Ibn Taymiyya in Damascus’s Zahirīyya library where his father was custodian.²¹ Reinforcing the Arabist othering of Kevseri as a Turk, he concluded with the dig that the Kemalists were wasting their time in trying to sow dissent in “countries that still know the value of the *salaf*” (*bilād lā tazāl ta‘rif li-l-salaf aqdārahum wa-faḍlahum*).²²

Kevseri’s fifty-page response, *Saf‘at al-Burhan ‘ala Safahat al-‘Udwan* (Evidence That Strikes Down Hostile Writing), written and published in Damascus in 1929 just before his return to Cairo, established the lines of argumentation that were to mark the next two decades of his engagement with the main currents in 20th-century Islamic thought. It is also clear from this work that Kevseri had more than a passing knowledge of ‘Abduh. Firstly, he

¹⁸ ‘Abduh, *al-Islam wa-l-Nasraniyya*, 134.

¹⁹ Ibid., 134, footnote 1; “bi‘samā ṣana‘a fī tamkīn al-turk min salb mulk al-umma”.

²⁰ Al-Khatib, “‘Udwan ‘ala ‘Ulama’ al-Islam,” 59.

²¹ Ibid., 61. Kevseri did not mention such a manuscript in his article but al-Khatib said the publisher al-Qudsi told him he was convinced to publish after Kevseri said he had found one. Traditionists habitually rejected the *tajsīm* charge; al-Albani, “Preface to *al-Tankil*,” in Muhammad Bahjat al-Baytar, *al-Kawthari wa-Ta‘addihi ‘ala al-Turath wa-Bayan Halihi fī Mu‘allafatihi wa-Mu‘allaqatihi* (Cairo: Dar al-Haramayn, 1999), 141.

²² Ibid., 62.

praised ‘Abduh as an honest scholar whose ideas had been exploited outside their context. ‘Abduh was “the uncontested imam of the Egyptian renaissance, who has been of enormous service to Egypt, the East and all of us” and left a “beautiful memory”, but, Kevseri added, “not all his opinions and words are far from the realm of criticism, not least after his trips to the West; indeed, some of his ideas and views evidenced extremism [*taṭarruf*].”²³ He politely rejected ‘Abduh’s comment that some Turkic-origin officials dissimulated their beliefs, noting Ibn Khaldun’s praise of the faith and fighting prowess of the Turkish contingent in his *Muqaddima*.²⁴ As for the suggestion that Kevseri wanted to avenge himself of ‘Abduh’s words against Turks, he wrote: “Knocking on the doors of odious nationalism [*al-qawmiyyāt al-mamqūta*] is a trap set by the West for the East, and the peoples who fall into this abyss are those for whom God wishes destruction. It is not at all in the interests of Islam, Arabism (*‘urūba*), or peoples to knock on these doors.”²⁵

In *Saf‘at al-Burhan* Kevseri mounted a major assault on the emerging discourse of Salafism for its opposition to the juridical and intellectual culture of the schools, on the one hand, and its resurrection of marginal theology, on the other. The Salafiyya championed by al-Khatib and the group elevating Ibn Taymiyya expresses a racially charged Arabism, he said;²⁶ they promote un-Islamic national identity and radical theology through rejection of the established *madhāhib* and claims to an *ijtihād* that bypasses that of the Sunni imams; they display a violent streak through extensive use of *takfīr* of their opponents;²⁷ and they exploit the prestige of the first generations of Muslims with links to the Prophet (*al-salaf al-ṣālih*) to

²³ al-Kawthari, *Saf‘at al-Burhan*, 19.

²⁴ Ibid., 21-2. He points out that ‘Abduh was of Turcoman origin on his father’s side; 17.

²⁵ Ibid., 18.

²⁶ “So, who cares if I didn’t follow this kind of *salafiyya*, your current *salafiyya*, and if *salafiyya* meant Arabism and noble Arab tribes, then what branch of Rabia or Mudar is this Harrani Shaykh [Ibn Taymiyya]?”; *ibid.*, 41.

²⁷ Ibid., 15. He cites, for example, the Hanbali preacher al-Hasan ibn Ali al-Barbahari (d. 941), who is said to have caused rioting in defence of Hanbali-defined orthodoxy against Ash‘ari, Mu‘tazili and Shi‘i opponents. See Christopher Melchert, “al-Barbahārī,” *EI3*; http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_22944 (accessed on 22 July 2018).

market this theology (*sitāran li-bida*)²⁸ through modern publishing culture, the battleground on which defenders of tradition against these efforts at destabilisation must fight. It is in this context that Kevseri coined the phrase *lā-madhhabiyya*, here in the heat of this polemical skirmish in 1929, and not in the better-known article of 1937 which addressed this issue specifically and employed the word in its title. The *madhhab* loyalty Kevseri wants to preserve is to the four Sunni schools of law and their interpretive traditions, based in the principle of precedent (*taqlīd*) and the specific role accorded to *ijtihād*.²⁹ “Those who are trying to remove the sanctity [of the imams] in the hearts of the nation are the *lā-madhhabiyya* group, and their continuous effort to divert people’s attention from them through claiming their own *ijtihād*, to denounce this or that imam in obsessively separating rulings from their evidence..., and the publication of books by these abnormal figures [*kutub al-shudhdhād*] has been a notable reality in many countries for quite some time,” Kevseri wrote.³⁰ “In this manner they have cleared the way to irreligion [*lā-dīniyya*] and made their plan a bridge [*qanṭara*] to that. Thus, it has become clear to the thinking public that ‘*lā-madhhabiyya* is the bridge to irreligion’ [sic]. I don’t know if the two parties have been cooperating in this aim since the beginning, or if the first leads to the second only out of ignorance, but what I do know is that the *lā-madhhabiyya* are among those most connected to this bloated voice [the irreligious].”³¹

Who did Kevseri mean by the *lā-dīniyya* party? He almost certainly did not intend ‘Abduh and modernist reformers acting in his name since he had already praised ‘Abduh as a positive if sometimes misguided leader of renaissance. It seems more plausible that he had in mind the positivist-materialist political and intellectual class that had been dominant in

²⁸ Ibid., 41.

²⁹ On *taqlīd* see Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, Rethinking the Taqlīd-Ijtihād Dichotomy: A Conceptual-Historical Approach,” *Journal of American Oriental Society*, 136/2 (2016): 285-303; El Shamsy, *Canonization*, 185-9.

³⁰ Ibid., 31.

³¹ Ibid.

Ottoman and Turkish affairs since 1908 and to whom the equivalent term *dinsizlik* had been applied in Late Ottoman Turkish public discourse. His comment in the later article that the consequence of *lā-madhhabīyya* would be “the *lā-dīniyya* dominant in other countries whose fate has been atheism [*ilhād*] and misfortune [*ta‘āsa*]” reinforces this view.³² In other words, he was drawing a connection between two iconoclasms: Salafi subversion of the schools and secular nationalism. After his skirmish with al-Khatib Kevseri rarely acknowledged the term *salafīyya*.³³ He saw claims to represent the belief and practice of the first Muslims as a “false Salafism” (*salafīyya zā‘ifa*)³⁴ seeking to “enter the pure hearts of ordinary Muslims”³⁵ of today through the legitimacy conferred by the term.

Kevseri spoke directly to the question of ‘Abduh on three occasions during his period of public commentary in Egypt. Directing harsh if polite criticism, he clearly viewed ‘Abduh as of a different genus from his Salafi interlocutors. In the first, he took up a letter ‘Abduh sent to the Ottoman sheikh ūl-Islam Uryanizade Esad Efendi (1814-1889) in 1887 and published posthumously by *al-Manar* in 1906, which highlighted what Kevseri considered to be ‘Abduh’s once exceptional character. ‘Abduh praised the Ottoman state as a pillar of Islam predating new concepts such as “name of nation and interest of country” (*ism al-waṭan wa-maṣlaḥat al-bilād*) and rued European success in weakening Muslim identity through the network of missionary schools to which even the children of senior officials were sent, rendering them Muslim in name only (*kuffār taḥt ḥijāb ism al-islām*) and agents of the foreigners once they took up government careers.³⁶

³² Al-Kawthari, “Al-Lamadhhabīyya Qantar al-Ladīniyya,” *Maqalat*, 137. In another article he expanded *lā-madhhabīyya* to include Ibn Taymiyya anthropomorphists, proponents of *ijtihād*, Sufi libertines, and revivers of Isma‘īli Shi‘ism; “Khuturat al-Tasarru‘ fi al-Ifṭā’,” *Maqalat*, 142.

³³ He calls Nasif “that Salafi notable”; “Hawl Kalima Tu‘za ila al-Suyuti Ghalatan,” *Maqalat*, 307.

³⁴ Al-Kawthari, *Saf‘at al-Burhan*, 40.

³⁵ Al-Kawthari, “Tahdhir al-Umma min Du‘at al-Wathaniyya,” *Maqalat*, 278; first published June 1939.

³⁶ Al-Kawthari, “Ra‘y Shaykh Muhammad ‘Abduh fi Ba‘d al-Masa’il,” *Maqalat*, 469-70.

In a second article, Kevseri rejected efforts to align ‘Abduh alongside Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab as reformers opposed to Sufi intercession.³⁷ He began by pointing to ‘Abduh’s early interest in Sufi metaphysics as evidenced by his *Risalat al-Waridat* and his commentary on Dawani’s *Sharh al-‘Adudiyya*, in which he saw evidence of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Kevseri says this despite his favouring Sirhindi’s less monistic *waḥdat al-shuhūd*). As outlined in chapter three, ‘Abduh’s authorship of both has been the subject of debate, but at the least they were written under the influence of al-Afghani.³⁸ Kevseri noted ‘Abduh’s debt to al-Afghani’s teachings in philosophy and rued that ‘Abduh subsequently spent time in the West where he “sipped from its muddy waters” (*kara ‘a min yanābī’ihi al-‘ākira*), but he rejected Rashid Rida’s claim that ‘Abduh later repudiated Sufi metaphysics.³⁹ Kevseri’s wider point was that there is only a superficial congruence between ‘Abduh’s ideas and those of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab: the Najdi shaykh’s intellectual inspiration was Ibn Taymiyya, his theology, jurisprudence, and opposition to *kalām* and *falsafa* as disciplines. ‘Abduh’s views he saw as more consonant with the totality of the Islamic tradition.

In a third article, published in June 1942, Kevseri was critical of the grand mufti, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Majid Salim, over an opinion (originally issued in November 1928) regarding the wearing of hats that concurred with the well-known Transvaal fatwa issued by ‘Abduh in 1903. ‘Abduh had responded to South African Muslims that wearing a *burnayta* – by which was understood at the time to mean European fedoras and top hats – did not

³⁷ He was responding to two articles by liberal intellectual Ahmad Amin (1886-1954); “Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab - 1,” *al-Thaqafa*, 30 November 1943, no. 257: 5-8; and “Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab - 2,” *al-Thaqafa*, 7 December 1943, no. 258: 5-8.

³⁸ Oliver Scharbrodt, “The Salafiyya and Sufism: Muḥammad ‘Abduh and His Risālat al-Wāridāt (Treatise on Mystical Inspirations),” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 70/1 (2007): 89-115 and Vincent Cornell, “Muhammad ‘Abduh. A Sufi-Inspired Modernist?” 109-11.

³⁹ Al-Kawthari, “Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab wa-Muhammad ‘Abduh fi Nazar Sahib al-Thaqafa,” *Maqalat*, 335. He sees evidence of ‘Abduh retaining his Sufism in his commentary on Qur’an 2:186, “wa-idhā sa’alaka ‘ibādī ‘annī fa-innī qarīb”. In his *Tafsir* ‘Abduh said it meant there was no “veil or saint or intercessor” between the believer and God; ‘Abduh, *al-A‘mal al-Kamila*, 4:452. Rida also wrote a footnote into *al-Waridat* to say ‘Abduh supported *waḥdat al-shuhūd* not *waḥdat al-wujūd*; ‘Abduh (ed. Rashid Rida), *Risalat al-Waridat* (Cairo: al-Manar, 1925), 31.

contradict the legal principle of avoiding imitation (*tashabbuh*) of non-Muslims as long as it was for a purpose such as avoiding the sun.⁴⁰ Kevseri noted that ‘Abduh’s fatwa had provoked a great reaction at the time, but the current mufti was going further in his legal reasoning that ignored the views of the four imams as if he were an absolute *mujtahid*. Kevseri concluded with a denunciation of modernist ‘ulama’ (‘*ālim* ‘*mudir*’) as “imposters in knowledge” (*ad ‘iyā’ al- ‘ilm*).⁴¹ He hoped that the authorities would keep those who “break the bonds of *fiqh* one by one” (*yanquḍūn ‘urā al-fiqh al-islāmī ‘urwatan ‘urwatan*) away from positions of leadership in religion and purify society of those who think their mission is to “disturb the order and challenge the *fiqh* tradition” (*ta ‘kīr al-nab ‘ wa-l-tajarru’ ‘alā al-fiqh al-mutāwarith*).⁴²

‘Abduh looms unnamed in two other issues Kevseri tackled in his writings, one concerning practice according to the *madhāhib* and the other concerning modernist theology. Regarding the first, in an article published in May 1947 Kevseri noted a trend in *lā-madhhabiyya* circles to lead prayer while wearing sandals. Like the wearing of hats, this was an issue in which the views of the reformers and the self-styled Salafis intersected. ‘Abduh applied the principles of custom (‘*urf*), public good (*maṣlaḥa*), and use of different schools of Sunni law (*talfīq*) during his time as mufti,⁴³ but the question of wearing sandals indicated the radical direction towards a notion of applied pre-*madhhab fiqh*. The cause of prayer in sandals was taken up by al-Albani in his 1961 book *Sifat Salat al-Nabi*, which tries to provide the bare, established hadiths without the distortion of *madhhab* framing to enable readers to act on the prophet’s injunction to “pray as you saw me pray”.⁴⁴ There are uncorroborated

⁴⁰ ‘Abduh, *al-A ‘mal al-Kamila*, 2:508-9.

⁴¹ Kevseri, “Mansha’ Ilzam Ahl al-Dhimma bi-Shu ‘ar Khass wa-Hukm Talabbus al-Muslim bihi ‘Ind al-Fuqaha’,” *Maqalat*, 227.

⁴² Ibid., 227. The use of ‘*urwa* is almost certainly a reference to ‘Abduh.

⁴³ Sedgwick, *Muhammad ‘Abduh*, 80, 119, 216-17.

⁴⁴ Nasir al-Din al-Albani, *Sifat Salat al-Nabi min al-Takbir ila al-Taslim Ka-annaka Tarahu* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma ‘arif li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi’, 1996), 80-1.

reports that ‘Abduh had also advocated prayer in sandals, though they are not recorded by Rida in his *Tarikh* or the complete works compiled by Muhammad ‘Imara.⁴⁵ If true, ‘Abduh biographer Mark Sedgwick suggests his motive was to align Muslim practice with that of Europe.⁴⁶ This was certainly the logic behind Ankara’s experiment with introducing church pews inside mosques in the 1930s and at least one public call for sandals in Turkish mosques. Ubeydullah Efendi (1858-1937), a pro-government propagandist during the CUP years and the early republic, gave a sermon advocating this in 1925, the period when the state began its push for delivery of the Friday prayer sermon in Turkish.⁴⁷

For Kevseri the issue of praying in sandals or leading prayer in sandals was a red line: if some imams insist on this they should be obliged to use specific places of worship (*ma‘bad khāṣṣ*) that separate them from those practicing normative Islam and built through funds other than those dispensed by the waqf for mosque building; in other words it is a non-Muslim practice and should be treated as such.⁴⁸ The prophet may well have led prayer in this manner since the streets of Medina were clean at that time and foot coverings could be easily cleaned, he said.⁴⁹ Hanafi jurists argued that the toes must touch the ground during prostration,⁵⁰ but today the streets of towns and cities are dirty with alcohol and other substances, making it impossible to clean them quickly, plus there would nothing in this that sets Muslims apart from Christians and Jews, Kevseri argued.⁵¹

⁴⁵ See Sedgwick, *Muhammed ‘Abduh*, 101. See the incident recounted in Jacques Jomier, *Le Commentaire Coranique du Manar: Tendances Modernes d’Exégèse Coranique en Egypte* (Paris: G. P. Maisaneuve, 1954), 100-1, footnote 2.

⁴⁶ Muhammad ‘Abduh Blog, 18 April 2012, <http://Abduhinfo.blogspot.com/2012/04/solution-to-problem-of-why-muhammad.html> (accessed 2 August 2018).

⁴⁷ Mehmed Ubeydullah, “Camilere Ayyakabıyla Girmek,” *Vatan*, 15 Mayıs 1341 (15 May 1925). The article is published in Dücane Cündioğlu, *Türkçe İbadet I* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 1999), 191-4.

⁴⁸ Al-Kawthari, “Kashf al-Ru’us wa-Libs al-Na‘al fi al-Salat,” *Maqalat*, 178-180.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 172-3. His Hanafi jurists are al-Karkhi (d. 951/2), *al-Usul* and Najm al-Din al-Zahidi (d. 1259/60), *Qunyat al-Munya li-Tatmim al-Ghunya*.

⁵¹ Discussed in M.J. Kister, “‘Do not Assimilate Yourselves...’ Lā tashabbahū...,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 12 (1989): 321-70.

Regarding the second issue, Kevseri took aim at the trope of Jesus' resurrection as a miraculous event unfit for the modern age, an issue taken up by 'Abduh acolytes including Shaykh Shaltut and part of Sabri's case against 'Abduh.⁵² For Kevseri this question highlighted not only the dangers of relying solely on experiential knowledge in the pursuit of truth, which puts humans at the level of animals (*al-iqtisār 'alā al-maḥsūs sha'n al-bahīm*), but the long established debate in the field of *uṣūl al-fiqh* over the role of hadith in establishing epistemological certainty.⁵³ In 1942 Shaltut, later rector of al-Azhar, issued a religious opinion in response to a question from an Ahmadi Indian officer deployed with the British occupying forces in Egypt asking if Jesus was alive or dead in the view of Qur'an and sunna, what the judgement is of a Muslim who denies he is alive, and what the judgement on someone who did not believe in him would be if he returned.⁵⁴ Shaltut argued that Jesus had died, was not alive, and would not come back, that holding such views did not constitute apostasy (*ridda*), and that hadith explaining the Qur'an on these points were single-transmitter, or *āḥād*, and thus inadmissible in questions of creed.⁵⁵ This reflected a position popular in modernist circles that the Qur'an alone establishes such truth: indeed, 'Abduh had written in his *Risala* that no believer was obliged to accept *āḥād* hadiths.⁵⁶ Since the classical

⁵² Sabri, *Mawqif al-'Aql*, 4:241.

⁵³ Al-Kawthari, "Kalimat Fadilat al-Ustadh al-Kabir," *Maqalat*, 258. On certitude and hadith, Aron Zysow, *The Economy of Certainty: An Introduction to the Typology of Islamic Legal Theory* (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2013); Hüseyin Hansu, "Notes on the Term Mutawātir and Its Reception in Ḥadīth Criticism," *Islamic Law and Society*, 16/3-4 (2009): 383-408; and Jonathan Brown, "Did the Prophet Say It or Not? The Literal, Historical, and Effective Truth of Ḥadīths in Early Sunnism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 129/2 (2009): 259-85.

⁵⁴ The question was put to al-Azhar rector al-Maraghi who passed it on to Shaltut to answer. Shaltut published his fatwa in "Raf' 'Isa," *al-Risala*, 11 May 1942, 10/462: 515-17 and later issues 516-19. They were republished in 1960 in *al-Fatawa: Dirasa li-Mushkilat al-Muslim al-Mu'aṣir fi Hayatihi al-Yawmiyya al-'Amma* when Shaltut was rector of al-Azhar. The first fatwa is reproduced in al-Kawthari, *Nazra 'Abira fi Maza'im man Yunkir Nuzul 'Isa 'Alayhi al-Salam Qabla al-Akhira* (Cairo: Dar al-Khalil, 1987), 23-31.

⁵⁵ Shaltut argues that the Qur'anic verses including the phrases *innī mutawaffika wa-rāfi'uka ilayya* (3:55) and *bal rafa'ahu Allāh ilayhi* (4:158) meant God had raised Jesus' station in honouring him and saving him from death at the hands of his enemies to end his days according to God's plan, not that God had physically taken him to His side. Re his return in the end days, Shaltut said al-Tabari's interpretation in his *Tafsir* of 4:159 and 43:61 has been privileged by jurists over alternative readings found in *tafsir* literature (al-Kawthari, *Nazra 'Abira*, 38-46). Shaltut said the *fiqh* consensus is illogical since it concerns a future event that cannot be known, and "there is no place for *ijtihād* regards the future" (*al-hissī al-mustaqbil lā madkhala li-l-ijtihād fīhi*); Ibid., 49.

⁵⁶ 'Abduh (ed. Imara), *Risala*, 177.

period hadith scholars have preferred terminology around the notion of sound/weak (*ṣaḥīḥ/ḍaʿīf*) to that of single/multi-sourced because of arguments that prophetic hadith cannot be considered *āḥād* at all.⁵⁷ Kevseri made two points: that the hadiths regarding Jesus' return were in fact multi-sourced (*mutawātir*) and that to reject *āḥād* hadiths on principle would be to deny the faith of most Muslims (*ikfār dahmā' al-umma*), a typical Kevseri argument.⁵⁸ Kevseri's responses in three articles⁵⁹ and a book, *Nazra 'Abira fi Maza'im man Yunkir Nuzul 'Isa 'Alayhi al-Salam Qabla al-Akhira* (Brief Review of the Claims of Those Who Deny Jesus' Return Before the Hereafter, 1943) also presented the issue in terms of a threat from the Ahmadiyya in India. For Kevseri the Ahmadiyya was another dangerous movement challenging the inherited tradition, reworking elements in the concepts of final prophecy and revelation and making use of print media to propagate a disruptive message.⁶⁰ In May 1942 Kevseri wrote that Ahmadis were attempting to find a footing in al-Azhar,⁶¹ and expressed his concerns in letters to Indian shaykh Yusuf Banuri, who became a leading campaigner against Ahmadi legal status as Muslims following Pakistan's independence.⁶²

One further point also suggests it would be wrong to think of Kevseri as roundly opposed to 'Abduh. Kevseri's Maturidism overlaps with 'Abduh's liberal thinking on questions of faith, human responsibility for created actions in the world, and the nature of the Qur'an. As scholars have noted, the caliph Ma'mun (ruled 813-833) appealed not only to Mu'tazili thinking on the created nature of the Qur'an, over which he famously instituted an inquisition (*miḥna*), but to nascent Hanafi thinking that was later developed in the Maturidi tradition. While early Mu'tazili theorised that the Qur'an could not be eternal (*qadīm*)

⁵⁷ Hansu, "Notes on the Term Mutawātir," 394-400.

⁵⁸ Al-Kawthari, "Kalima," 260.

⁵⁹ Al-Kawthari, "Kalima," *Maqalat*, 257-60; "Inkar Nuzul 'Isa wa-Iqrar 'Aqidat al-Tajsim," *Maqalat*, 261-2, "Al-Risala wa-l-Azhar," *Maqalat*, 317-21.

⁶⁰ Al-Kawthari, "'Ind Juhaynat al-Khabar al-Yaqin: Muruq al-Qadyaniyya," *Maqalat*, 321-23.

⁶¹ Al-Kawthari, "Al-Risala wa-l-Azhar," 320. He cites Ahmadi students who had been ejected from al-Azhar.

⁶² Letter 11 (undated), Al-Sarhan, *Rasa'il*, 115-6. Kevseri dismissed both Mirza Ghulam and Musa Jarullah Bigiev as "fake scholars" (*muta'ālim*) meddling with received knowledge.

because this would put it alongside God and thus violate the notion of His absolute unity, the Hanafi argument was that all things by definition are created by God.⁶³ Reports on Abu Hanifa's views listed in al-Khatib al-Baghdadi's *Tarikh Baghdad* were typical of the traditionist accusation that the Hanafis professed a created Qur'an.⁶⁴ Kevseri's responses appealed to post-*miḥna* understandings of the issue. For example, regarding a report that states Abu Hanifa was the first to assert the createdness of the Qur'an, Kevseri dismissed it for including a fabricator in its chain of transmission (*isnād*) and added that Abu Hanifa said in response to the teaching of Khurasan-based theologian Jahm ibn Safwan (d. 746) regarding God's attributes that on the contrary God's speech (*kalām Allāh*) is an eternal attribute subsisting in Him (*qiyāmihi billah*). Kevseri went on: "But as for what is on the tongue of reciters, in the minds of memorisers, and on pages in terms of vocalisation, mental images and textual writing, it is created like those bearing them, and the majority of 'ulama' settled on that view."⁶⁵ This argumentation is essentially the same as that of 'Abduh in the first version of *Risalat al-Tawhid* that he was pressed to alter for alleged Mu'tazilism, despite the fact that 'Abduh's opening statement that the Qur'an is God's speech was not part of Mu'tazili doctrine which denied the reality of God's engaging in the human act of speech.⁶⁶ Yet it is around the theme of Mu'tazilism that debate on Abduh's ideas has centred.⁶⁷ Even

⁶³ Wilferd Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran," in *Orientalia Hispanica sive studia F. M. Pareja octogenario dicata*, ed. J. M. Barral (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 504-25, esp. 509-11. Also, John Nawas, "A Reexamination of Three Current Explanations for al-Ma'mun's Introduction of the Miḥna," *IJMES*, 26/4 (1994): 615-29.

⁶⁴ Christopher Melchert, "The Adversaries of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal," *Arabica*, 44/2 (April 1997): 239.

⁶⁵ Al-Kawthari, *Ta'nib al-Khatib*, 107-8. The thrust of Kevseri's defence is that as the earliest of the four Sunni imams Abu Hanifa was a frontline defender of an assumed Islamic orthodoxy against the first wave of over-rationalist Mu'tazili thinking (p.119). See also the lengthy footnote in his edition of Ibn Qutayba's *al-Ikhtilaf fi-l-Lafz* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, 2001 [1930]), 40-3, footnote 1.

⁶⁶ Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy," 506-7.

⁶⁷ Those discussing 'Abduh as a neo-Mu'tazili include: Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (London: Cass, 1966), 13-14; Detlev Khalid, "Some Aspects of Neo-Mu'tazilism," *Islamic Studies* 8/4 (1969): 320-21; Robert Caspar, "Un aspect de la pensée musulmane moderne: le renouveau du mu'tazilisme," *Melanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire* 4 (1957): 141-202; Louis Gardet, "Signification du 'renouveau Mu'tazilite' dans la pensée musulmane contemporaine," *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition*, ed. S. M. Stern, A. Hourani, V. Brown (Oxford: Cassirer, 1972), 63-75. Gardet accepts 'Abduh's discourse could also be considered an "Ash'arisme renouvé".

Ibn Taymiyya tried to moderate the Hanbali discussion of the issue through conceding that though the text was uncreated in its essence as God's speech it was not so in its specific manifestations and equivocating on its status as eternal.⁶⁸

‘Abduh certainly did not subscribe openly to one specific theological school. Rather than be led by the texts of one tradition, he would pick and choose among the views of theologians he cited including al-Ash‘ari, Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, and the Mu‘tazili Abu al-Husayn al-Basri (d. 1044) in the service of his wider aim of creating a rationalised accessible Islam for a new religious public.⁶⁹ But ‘Abduh also outlined a Maturidi notion of faith as affirmation of a certitude of belief in God, His prophets, and the day of judgement that has been attained through reason,⁷⁰ the same reason that is aware of the voluntary nature of human actions,⁷¹ but needful of the guidance of shari‘a to know which of them bring rewards and which of them bring punishments.⁷² This thinking falls within the purview of Mu‘tazili insistence on God's justice and transcendence but with a Maturidi colouring.⁷³ Through al-Afghani, ‘Abduh had been schooled in Ibn Sina, Maturidi, and Sufi texts,⁷⁴ and in his later period under Rida's influence his ideas appear to align more with Ibn Taymiyya (viz. his comments regarding the miracles of saints). There is every likelihood that Kevseri would

⁶⁸ Discussed in Madelung, “The Origins,” 524-5. For example, Ibn Taymiyya says it was God's voice heard by Moses, even if His speech at that point was a non-eternal act in time; see Ibn Taymiyya (ed. Rashid Rida), *Majmu‘at al-Rasa‘il wa-l-Masa‘il*, (Beirut: Dar Ihya‘ al-Turath al-‘Arabi, 1972), 149-50. Kevseri rejects this traditionist attribution to Ibn Hanbal with the Maturidi view that the voice Moses heard was “a created happening, not subsisting in God” (*ḥādith makhluq la yaqūm billah*); al-Kawthari, ed., *al-Asma‘ wa-l-Sifat li-l-Imam al-Bayhaqi* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-l-Turath, 2000 [1939]), 191, footnote 1.

⁶⁹ ‘Abduh (ed. ‘Imara), *Risalat al-Tawhid*, 181-3, on the miracles of saints.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 178.

⁷¹ Ibid., 61 (63 on Ash‘ari-Maturidi *kasb al-af‘āl*).

⁷² Ibid., 78-9, 175; “the law came to clarify that which exists, it is not the creator of good” (*muḥdith al-ḥusn*). Caspar (“Un aspect,” 169) considers ‘Abduh's comments in *Tafsir al-Manar* regarding Qur‘an 4:14 on grave sins committed knowingly as exiting the Muslim from faith and ensuring hellfire to be evidence of Mu‘tazilism. ‘Abduh certainly said that he was giving his view in the context of disputes between the Sunnis and Mu‘tazilism on the question; ‘Abduh, *al-A‘mal al-Kamila*, 5:176-7. But his *Tafsir* was begun during his period under the influence of Rida, who would see this view as conforming to Ibn Taymiyya's ethics of faith and action.

⁷³ Malcolm Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 127. Duncan B. Macdonald, “Al-Maturidi,” in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. H.A.R. Gibb (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953), 363. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 142.

⁷⁴ Thomas Hildebrandt, “Waren Ḡamāl ad-Dīn al-Afḡānī und Muḥammad ‘Abduh Neo-Mu‘taziliten?” *Welt des Islams* 42 (2), 2002: 210-11, 215. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 142.

have been aware of the *Risala*, not least because it was published in Kazan Turkish in 1911 and serialised in Ottoman Turkish in 1919.⁷⁵ So it remains very possible that Kevseri was forgiving in his criticism of ‘Abduh because he saw Maturidism in his theological and ethical positions.

Kevseri’s defence of Hanafi-Maturidism

Kevseri perceived an assault on the Ottoman Hanafi-Maturidi system stemming largely from Egypt where he observed the power of print culture and the determination of Ibn Taymiyya’s followers to make use of it. In the introduction to his annotated edition of Egyptian jurist Taqi al-Din al-Subki’s *al-Sayf al-Saqil fi al-Radd ‘ala Ibn Zufayl* (The Polished Sword Refuting Ibn Zufayl), a manuscript responding to Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) that Kevseri said he found in the Khalidiyya library in Jerusalem, Kevseri said there would have been no need to respond to them were it not for the low-price imprints of their books on the streets.⁷⁶ Publishing is in a state of chaos, he said, because of the nonchalance of commercial publishing regards the fate of the Islamic tradition.⁷⁷ He pointed to Faraj Allah al-Kurdi (d. 1940), a Kurdish emigre in Cairo, who established the Kurdistan al-‘Ilmiyya printing press and began publishing works by Ibn Taymiyya and his disciples⁷⁸ (al-Kurdi later embraced Baha’ism, for which he was denounced by Rashid Rida).⁷⁹ This was followed by Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib’s Salafiyya publication network, launched in Egypt in 1909, and a third

⁷⁵ ‘Abduh (trans. Abdullah Bubi), *Tevhid* (Kazan: Örnek, 1911); ‘Abduh (trans. Hüseyin Mazhar), “Tevhide Dair,” SR, eleven issues between 23 January 1919 (15/388) and 17 April 1919 (16/406).

⁷⁶ Al-Kawthari, Introduction, *al-Sayf al-Saqil fi al-Radd ‘ala Ibn Zufayl*, Taqi al-Din al-Subki (Cairo: al-Azhariyya li-l-Turath, 2003), 18-19.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 28. “What’s it got to do with me [*mālī anā*]?” they say in their Cairene Arabic.

⁷⁸ They included Ibn Taymiyya’s well-known anti-Mongol fatwas, the Mardin fatwa and fatwas against the Levantine Nusayris (‘Alawis). These justified fighting the Mongols as rebels against Mamluk rule, justified Muslims’ remaining under Mongol rule in Mardin, as long as they could practise Islam unimpeded, and considered esoteric sects as apostate (*murtadd*).

⁷⁹ Juan Cole, “Rashid Rida on the Baha’i Faith: A Utilitarian Theory of the Spread of Religions,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 5/3 (1983): 276-291.

enterprise of concern to Kevseri in Egypt, that of the Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya organisation of Muhammad Hamid al-Fiqi (1892-1959), a prominent Hanbali admirer of Ibn Taymiyya.⁸⁰

Modern scholarship has faced taxonomic challenges in thinking about Maturidism. Rudolph Ulrich has argued that it was only with the work of Wilferd Madelung and his article “The Spread of Maturidism and the Turks” (1971) that the close association of Maturidi theology with Hanafi *fiqh* and the movement of Maturidism westwards from Central Asia via Turkic tribes began to find appreciation.⁸¹ The Maturidis of Transoxania had from an early stage identified themselves as followers of Abu Hanifa, who predated Maturidi, but from the 17th-century Ottoman scholars became interested in harmonising Maturidi theology with Ash‘arism, which accounts for the conflation between the two found in much of the modern literature.⁸² Maturidism remained little known west of Transoxiana until the 11th century and only known in Baghdad in the late Seljuq period before the Mongol conquest.⁸³ The task of defining these theological traditions must contend with problems such as seemingly contradictory views in works attributed to their eponymous founders, questions over authenticity of texts, and later views which speak in the name of the broadly defined school.

The main division between the Ash‘aris and Maturidis was on the theory of faith (*īmān*). They broadly agreed that faith did not rise or fall to the extent of exiting a Muslim from the community of believers and so was fixed, although diverging views are found in the writings of al-Ash‘ari himself,⁸⁴ but the Hanafi Maturidis said knowledge of God is attained

⁸⁰ See Khan, “Islamic Tradition in an Age of Print,” 63 and 93, note 49.

⁸¹ Wilferd Madelung, “The Spread of Maturidism and the Turks,” in *Actas IV: Congresso de Estudos Arabes e Islamicos, Coimbra-Lisboa 1968* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 109-68. See Izutsu, *Concept of Belief*, 105; and Ulrich Rudolph (trans. Rodrigo Adem), *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1-17.

⁸² Rudolph, *Al-Maturidi*, 1-17.

⁸³ Madelung, “Spread of Maturidism,” 112-17. Judges from Merv and Khwarazm who upheld the Mu‘tazila’s thesis of the Qur’an were appointed in Egypt from 820; El Shamsy, *Canonization*, 122, 130.

⁸⁴ In *Kitab al-Ibana* it rises and falls, but not in *Kitab al-Luma‘ fi al-Radd ‘ala Ahl al-Zaygh wa-l-Bida‘*; see Izutsu, *Concept of Belief*, 141.

through reason whereas Ash‘aris said it required the sending of a prophet and establishment of divine law;⁸⁵ the Ash‘aris qualified the statement “I am a believer” with “if God wills”;⁸⁶ and they differed over the creation of *īmān* and *kufr* in that the Hanafi-Maturidi view was that both were created acts of human responsibility, even if God was ultimately aware of what choice men would make.⁸⁷ These differences were in part reflections of the geographical location of Maturidis in Samarqand and Bukhara and Ash‘arism’s integrating of the Hanbali critique of rationalist theology and hadith methodology in the intense sectarian milieu of Abbasid Baghdad, but the political choices of dynasties cementing their rule through imposing one rite over another also played a role.⁸⁸ The Ash‘ari school of thought put forward forms of “semi-rationalist” compromise with the traditionists on a range of issues provoked by early dialectical speculation such as faith and its relationship to performing the acts of worship (*‘ibādāt*), free will and causality, the Qur’an as God’s speech, and the certainty of knowledge through hadith, a compromise that was to become expressive of a broad Muslim mainstream.⁸⁹ The line of attack against speculative theology was that it placed restrictions on God’s will and power and subverted Qur’anic meaning through exposing its language to allegorical interpretation (*ta’wīl*), in effect filtering the Qur’anic God through the semantic prism of Aristotelean and Neoplatonic thought.⁹⁰ So although Mu‘tazilism was rejected by the emerging Sunni consensus, elements of rationalism survived through the

⁸⁵ Ibid., 108-19.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 194-203.

⁸⁷ Definitions of *īmān* varied widely in different Ash‘ari, Maturidi, and traditionalist texts from faith as a personal event in one’s life to faith as an essential, idealist category, and the debate over faith in this latter sense was often framed along the lines of Qur’anic debate in terms of faith as created or uncreated, Izutsu writes; *ibid.*, 207-8, 221-4. On *kufr*’s original meaning of ingratitude for God’s benevolence see Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’ān* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 25-6.

⁸⁸ Seljuq rulers ruthlessly crushed the Shafi‘i-Ash‘ari ‘ulama’ of Khurasan, accusing them of theorising that the common people were en masse in a state of *kufr*; see Madelung, “Spread of Maturidism,” 129, footnote 52.

⁸⁹ Melchert, “Adversaries of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal,” 253.

⁹⁰ For example, *istawā ‘alā al-‘arsh* in Qur’an 7:54, 10:3, 13:2, 25:59, 32:4, 57:4; and *‘alā al-‘arsh istawā*, 20:5.

theological and jurisprudential traditions that coalesced to survive the tumultuous classical period as schools of thought.⁹¹

Ibn Taymiyya and his followers mounted the first major counter-attack of the Hanbali traditionists.⁹² Among the works issued in the 20th-century rediscovery of Ibn Taymiyya, al-Darimi's *Radd ʿala Bishr al-Marisi* (Refutation of Bishr al-Marisi, 1939), which an al-Azhar committee had censured but not prevented from publication, particularly exercised Kevseri.⁹³ Al-Darimi expounded the theology of *al-jihāt*, or God's positionality, which was formulated as a rejection of the arguments first attributed to Jahm ibn Safwan that to understand God as possessing limit, boundary, or end would be to conceive of God in human terms and flout the fundamental principle of God's transcendence (*tanzīh*). Kevseri attacked al-Darimi's stance by applying the polemical term *ḥulūl al-ḥawādith*, the notion that God "incarnates actions" or "resides in events", which he considered a form of *taj̣sīm*,⁹⁴ and arguing that to revive this theology was a form of destabilisation of the established system.⁹⁵

The second creedal issue that took Kevseri's attention was that of deferred judgement on faith (*irjāʾ*) and demotion of circumstantial action and acts of worship to a secondary

⁹¹ See A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (Cambridge: University Press, 1932); and Joseph Schacht, "New Sources for the History of Muhammadan Theology," *Studia Islamica*, 1 (1953): 23-42, which argues for Muʿtazili rationalism's survival among the Maturidis in particular.

⁹² Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 11-45.

⁹³ Western scholarship has been unclear on his influence. Some argue that his legal and creedal positions dislodged Ashʿarism from its predominance before the modern period; see George Makdisi, "Law and Traditionalism in the Institutions of Learning of Medieval Islam," in *Theology and Law in Islam*, ed. Gustave Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1971), 75-88, and Josef Van Ess, "The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology," in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, ed. Gustave Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1970), 21-50. El-Rouayheb's work is refutation of this approach; see *Islamic Intellectual History*, 173-234.

⁹⁴ On al-Darimi's theology see *Maqalat*, "Namadhij Mimma fi Naqd al-Darimi Alladhi Ubiha Nashruhu", 262; "Inkar Nuzul ʿIsa wa-Iqar ʿAqidat al-Taj̣sīm," 260-2; "ʿAqidat al-Tanzih," 312-15; "Tahdhir al-Umma min Duʿat al-Wathaniyya," 277-82; "Fitan al-Mujassima wa-Sunuf Makhazihim," 288-95; "Kitab Yusamma Kitab al-Sunna wa-Huwa Kitab al-Zaygh," 296-302; "Al-Siraʿ al-Akhir bayn al-Islam wa-l-Wathaniyya," 304-7. Kevseri suggested Ibn Taymiyya's ideas on *ḥulūl al-ḥawādith* were influenced by philosopher Ibn Malka (d. 1164/5)'s critique of Aristotelian philosophy, *Kitab al-Muʿtabar*; in al-Kawthari, *Muqaddimat*, 143. He also published an edition of Muhammad al-Tabrizi's commentary on Musa ibn Maymun (aka Maimonides, d. 1204)'s anti-*taj̣sīm* premises in *Dalalat al-Ḥaʾirin*; al-Kawthari, *al-Muqaddimat al-Khams wa-l-ʿIshrun* (Cairo: al-Saʿada, 1949). He accused Ibn Taymiyya of using Maimonides's text in framing his arguments against *taj̣sīm*; *Muqaddimat*, 141-5.

⁹⁵ On destabilising the tradition, see al-Kawthari, *al-Ishfaq*, 75-6 and "Manshaʾ Ilzam," *Maqalat*, 227.

status in its evaluation. Later Abbasid writers on sects and heresies referred to the different groups elaborating variations on these basic points in the Umayyad period as the Murji'a, or "those who delay".⁹⁶ Their thinking fared better than that of their contemporaries the Mu'tazila among the early dialecticians, being largely adapted into the Ash'ari and Maturidi systems. However, *irjā'*/*murji'*/*jahmī* (after Ibn Safwan) became terms of abuse in the later writing of their opponents, the mainly Hanbali traditionists who claimed their views were more soundly located in hadith and Qur'an. They in turn were dubbed the Ḥashwiyya, a label suggesting they had "stuffed" their hadiths with unreliable narrators and claims to justify their literal understandings of Qur'anic anthropomorphisms and rejection of the *kalām* enterprise.⁹⁷ Ibn Taymiyya ordered traditionist thinking in a schema of *islām-īmān-iḥsān* by which a Muslim attained stages of faith through actions at constant risk of relapse.⁹⁸ As the most prominent of early juridical figures elaborating rationalist theological views, Abu Hanifa became a target for the traditionists. One of the most well-known attacks was a biographical entry written by al-Baghdadi in his massive compendium *Tarikh Baghdad*.⁹⁹ Kevseri recounts that his publisher friend Muhammad Amin al-Khanji, one of the group preparing the book, had complained to him about the anti-Hanafi material in volume thirteen, which was based on a manuscript in Dar al-Kutub in Cairo.¹⁰⁰ A rushed commentary written by Kevseri for inclusion was edited against his wishes by al-Fiqi, who was also involved in the project, and although eventually al-Azhar intervened, the book was still distributed in India with the funding of Muhammad Nasif. Kevseri's response was his *Ta'nib al-Khatib*

⁹⁶ In *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin*, Ash'ari divided the Murji'a into twelve groups; see Izutsu, *Concept of Belief*, 83-92.

⁹⁷ Jon Hoover, "Ḥashwiyya," in *EI3*; http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30377 (accessed 24 April 2019).

⁹⁸ Izutsu, *Concept of Belief*, 57-60. The actions Ibn Taymiyya had in mind for preferring faith were shari'a prescriptions regarding acts of worship. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitab al-Iman* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1996), 7-8, 15-16, 129-30, 162-4, 204-8, 242-5.

⁹⁹ Fedwa Malti Douglas, "Controversy and Its Effects in the Biographical Tradition of Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi," *Studia Islamica*, 46 (1977): 115-31.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Kawthari, *Ta'nib al-Khatib*, 28-30. Al-Khanji issued a revised edition of vol. 13 the same year with a commentary by al-Dhahabi defending Abu Hanifa, placed after the biography of Abu Hanifa.

(1941) in which he goes through 150 hadith reports concerning Abu Hanifa in meticulous detail, following an introduction that restates his defence of the schools, impugns the character and scholarship of al-Baghdadi, and details some classical works refuting him.¹⁰¹

One clear theme in the reports against Abu Hanifa is that he is a supporter of the Jahmiyya and Murji'a, affording Kevseri the opportunity to give a modern appraisal of these theological debates.¹⁰² Jahm ibn Safwan was at one extreme of the *murji'* spectrum, reported as holding that faith was an inner conviction alone that no act could call into question.¹⁰³ Al-Baghdadi cites reports that seek to highlight the absurdity of these views if taken to the extreme. For example, in one report Abu Hanifa passes by a drunk man standing urinating in the street; when he reprimands him, saying could he could at least do it while sitting down, the man insults him with "just be on your way, you *murji'*" (*a-lā tamurr yā murji'*).¹⁰⁴ In another, Abu Hanifa is asked if a man who kills his father, drinks from his skull, and fornicates with his mother is still considered a believer (*mu'min*), and he says yes.¹⁰⁵ Kevseri rejects the report as a partisan fabrication, but his response takes two approaches. Firstly, he tackles it on methodological grounds, citing in its transmission chain three unreliable figures, one unknown name, and a colleague of Abu Hanifa whose good character means he cannot possibly have related such a report. Secondly, he turns to theology, asserting that despite the extremity of the case the basic principle holds that the established faith of Muslims is not invalidated by actions – "the believer does not exit faith, no matter how great his sin, unless scholars judge a shortcoming to have appeared in his creed" (*al-mu'min la yakhruj min al-īmān mahmā kabura dhanbuhu illā bi-ṭurū' khalal fī 'aqīdatihi 'ind ahl al-ḥaqq*).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 7-28.

¹⁰² Ibid., 83-103, 131-4, 319-20.

¹⁰³ This is the presentation in Andalusian theologian Ibn Hazm's *Kitab al-Fisal fi al-Milal wa-l-Ahwa' wa-l-Nihal* and Ibn Taymiyya's *Kitab al-Iman*; see Izutsu, *Concept of Belief*, 151-4.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Kawthari, *Ta'nib al-Khatib*, 83.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 85-87.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 87.

Kevseri's view in *Ta'nib* is that Hanafi-Maturidism is the most consistent defender of this principle, which was shared across the spectrum of early theological schools but, he believed, was under threat in the modern period. Kevseri draws on the Maturidi and Sufi thinking on shades of *īmān* in hearts that may be more, or less, illuminated than others, which allows for some notion of levels and degrees of faith that is still basically fixed.¹⁰⁷ He also articulates the Ash'ari-Maturidi charge that faith judged through action risks condemning the common people to unbelief, that their statement of faith through following the recommendations of their religious leaders must be accepted (*īmān bi-l-taqlīd*).¹⁰⁸ Kevseri writes that the endurance of faith differs among the prophets, the 'ulama', and the masses and is dependent upon the means by which one first arrived at conviction (*jazm*). The faith of prophets cannot change since it is based on their experience of revelation and the faith of the 'ulama' is based on reflection (*naẓar*), but that of the ordinary people ('*awāmm*) is vulnerable since it was acquired through community.¹⁰⁹ The 'ulama' must then be attendant to the beliefs of the masses since they are susceptible to the arguments of those in positions of authority, he says. So while the roster of minor to major sins will certainly impact the Muslim's level of faith, the Sunni consensus has been that ultimate judgement upon faith is delayed, and were it not for Abu Hanifa and his followers it would have been possible "to declare the mass of fallible Muslims unbelievers through shortcomings in one action or another at one point in time, which would be the greatest calamity" (*ikfār jamāhīr al-muslimīn ghayr al-ma'sumīn li-ikhlālihim bi-'amal min al-a'māl fī waqt min al-awqāt wa-fī dhālik al-tāma al-kubrā*).¹¹⁰ Kevseri had in mind here popular practices related to intercession that cut across a range of Sunni and Shi'a communities threatened by Ibn

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Taymiyya makes this connection to Sufi *aḥwāl* and *maqāmāt* in *Kitab al-Iman*, 152; see Izutsu, *Concept of Belief*, 174, 192.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 119-130.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Kawthari, *Ta'nib al-Khatib*, 134.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 91.

Taymiyya and his followers' reinvigoration of *takfīr*.¹¹¹ In other words, Kevseri perceived self-described Salafi theology as a social danger.

Alongside *Ta'nib*, Kevseri's other main work defending Abu Hanifa was *al-Nukat al-Tarifa* (1946). Here he took issue with a section in the *Musannaf* (Compilation) of hadith scholar Ibn Abi Shayba (d. 849) which said Abu Hanifa had wrongly questioned 125 cases of authenticated prophetic hadith.¹¹² Kevseri said he wrote in response because his opponents had published the section as a separate book in India,¹¹³ the number of issues questioned was miniscule among the tens of thousands of reports Abu Hanifa addressed,¹¹⁴ many of the reports have broken (*mursal*) chains of transmission,¹¹⁵ there is no other evidence he held the views cited,¹¹⁶ none of them concerned cases reflecting general principles of Abu Hanifa's *fiqh*,¹¹⁷ and Abu Hanifa would use independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) in rejecting an *āḥād* hadith.¹¹⁸ The book and the cases in question illustrate Kevseri the *muḥaddith* as much as the *mutakallim*.¹¹⁹ Kevseri rejected the accusation that Hanafi methodology was little interested in hadith, indifferent to the weak *isnād*, over-focussed on the content (*matn*) of reports, and opposed outright to (*āḥād*) hadith.¹²⁰ These became common charges following the widespread acceptance of jurist Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (d. 820)'s revolutionary

¹¹¹ Kevseri singled out the Yemeni scholar al-Shawkani for declaring grave visits and following the schools as acts of *kufṛ*; see "Al-Hijra al-Nabawiyya," in *Maqalat*, 385, and al-Kawthari, *al-Ishfaq*, 70.

¹¹² Scott C. Lucas, "Where are the Legal Ḥadīth? A Study of the Muṣannaf of Ibn Abī Shayba," *Islamic Law and Society*, 25/3 (2008): 283-314.

¹¹³ Al-Kawthari, *al-Nukat al-Tarifa fi al-Tahadduth 'an Rudud Ibn Abi al-Shayba 'ala Abi Hanifa* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-l-Turath, 2000), 6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹¹⁹ Hadith studies were the subject of a ten-point report Kevseri was asked to prepare by al-Azhar rector Mustafa 'Abd al-Raziq during his period of office (1945-1947) but never presented due to the latter's death. He imagined a comprehensive programme examining chains of transmission, character of narrators, and content material to understand the narrator's thinking, and this would allow for part rather than wholesale acceptance or rejection of hadiths; al-Kawthari, "Ihya' 'Ulum al-Sunna fi al-Azhar," *Maqalat*, 481-90.

¹²⁰ See introduction to *Ta'nib al-Khatib*, 7-22, and al-Kawthari (ed. 'Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda), *Fiqh Ahl al-'Iraq wa-Hadithuhum* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-l-Turath, 2002), originally published as the introduction to his edition of Hanafi jurist 'Uthman ibn 'Ali al-Zayla'i (d. 1342)'s *Nasb al-Raya li-Takhrij Ahadith al-Hidaya*.

methodology that rejected Hanafi *ra'y* (dialectical reasoning),¹²¹ Maliki communal practice, and Mu'tazili theories of certitude-through-consensus in favour of utilising Qur'an and hadith (understood as specifically prophetic) as the sources of a generalised Islamic law.¹²²

Kevseri's approach was that narrators who were considered unreliable in their memorisation were not always wrong and those considered reliable were not always right, so that well-known collections of both good and bad hadith could be subjected to close reading and both companions and imams could be considered fallible.¹²³ However, the status of the four imams as absolute *mujtahid* was justified since they were the earliest juridical and theological thinkers to have considered in the most comprehensive manner the earliest material, passed down from the prophet through only a few narrators. Therefore, they lived among generations with a historical memory of the earliest period, they better understood the language of that period before it was subject to semantic transformation, and they were better placed to make a judgement about the character of transmitters (Abu Hanifa, d. 767; Malik ibn Anas, d. 796). Kevseri relates the turn against Abu Hanifa – his use of *ra'y* in *fiqh* and deferred judgement of faith in *'aqida* – to an atmosphere of sectarian retribution following the caliph al-Mutawakkil's lifting of the inquisition in 848, since a preponderance of the *miḥna* judges had been followers of Abu Hanifa in *fiqh*.¹²⁴

Kevseri's opponents took his knowledge of hadith seriously, to the point of making the polemical charge that he considered himself a *mujtahid muṭlaq* in the discipline.¹²⁵ In 1961 al-Albani edited a commentary attributed to a Damascus scholar called 'Ali Ibn Abi al-

¹²¹ This was a form of legal reasoning dominant before the primacy of hadith was established in the Islamic legal tradition.

¹²² El Shamsy, *Canonization*, 44-68.

¹²³ Özafshar, "Muhammed Zahid el-Kevseri," 97. See his criticism of Ibn 'Adi (d. 976)'s collection of weak hadith narrators, *al-Kamil fi Du'afa' al-Rijal* and that of Abu Ja'far al-'Uqayli (d. 934), *Kitab al-Du'afa' al-Kabir* in "Kalima fi Kutub al-Jarh wa-l-Ta'dil," dated 3 Jumada al-Akhira 1357 (31 July 1938), in *Fiqh Ahl al-'Iraq*, 84-93.

¹²⁴ Al-Kawthari, *Ta'nib al-Khatib*, 15.

¹²⁵ Al-Albani, Introduction to al-Mu'allimi, *al-Tankil*, in al-Baytar, *al-Kawthari wa-Ta'addihi*, 143. Al-Albani wrote a longer introduction in 1967 to the second edition: *al-Tankil* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1986), 171-5.

‘Izz (d. 1390) on the 10th-century creedal work of the Hanafī jurist Abu Ja‘far al-Tahawī (d. 933) known as *al-‘Aqida al-Tahawiyya*.¹²⁶ Al-Albani’s choice of Ibn Abi al-‘Izz’s commentary was political in that the work was conciliatory towards Hanbali theology and their sensitivities regarding hadith-based *fiqh*, making it acceptable to 20th-century Hanbalis.¹²⁷ In the 1971 imprint of the book, al-Albani added a long introduction attacking Kevseri as an irredeemably fanatical Hanafī (*ḥanafī ḥālīk fī al-ta‘aṣṣub*) who denies God’s attributes (*jahmī mu‘aṭṭil*).¹²⁸ Its genesis was a report that Kevseri’s student Abu Ghudda had presented to religious authorities in Saudi Arabia where he was lecturing at Riyadh University.¹²⁹ Al-Albani defended himself from charges of sloppy scholarship, but then shifted to taunting Abu Ghudda, a fellow Syrian, for choosing loyalty to Kevseri over what al-Albani called the “Salafī” school of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab.¹³⁰ Like al-Khatib four decades before, al-Albani seemed outraged at Kevseri’s gall in assailing traditionist theology and at the esteem Abu Ghudda bestowed on him in his own writing.¹³¹ Al-Albani was also outraged by Kevseri’s willingness to question *ṣaḥīḥ* hadith in the collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim because they run counter to the logic of reports elsewhere. For al-Albani this was evidence of a juridical mind looking to justify preordained

¹²⁶ Kevseri published a biography of al-Tahawī in 1949 that dismissed Ibn Abi al-‘Izz as an anthropomorphist; *al-Hawī fī Sirat al-Imam Abi Ja‘far al-Tahawī* (Cairo: al-Azhariyya li-l-Turath, 1999), 39. Khan gives the impression Kevseri wrote in response to al-Albani, whose polemics came later; Khan, “Islamic Tradition,” 61-2.

¹²⁷ Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th-10th centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 116-23. The book was first published by the Salafiyya Press in Mecca in 1930/1931, then in Cairo, edited by Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, in 1954; see Shakir (ed.), *Sharh al-Tahawiyya fī al-‘Aqida al-Salafiyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1954), 5-8.

¹²⁸ Nasir al-Din al-Albani (ed.), *Sharh al-‘Aqida al-Tahawiyya* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1971), 44-5. Al-Albani also describes Kevseri as “known for extreme hostility [*adā’ shadīd*] to the people of sunna and hadith” in his 1972 introduction to al-Dhahabi, *Mukhtasar al-‘Uluww li-l-‘Alī al-Ghaffar* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1981), 15. Al-Albani’s earliest criticism of Kevseri was in “Silsilat al-Aḥadith al-Da‘ifa: 3,” *al-Tamaddun al-Islami*, 21 (1954): 657-64. A fuller attack followed in al-Albani’s 1965 edition of al-Mu‘allimī’s *al-Tankil*.

¹²⁹ ‘Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda, ed., *al-Raf‘ wa-l-Takmil fī al-Jarh wa-l-Ta‘dil li-l-Imam Abi al-Hasan al-Muhammad ‘Abd al-Hayy al-Laknawī al-Hindī* (Aleppo: Maktabat al-Matbu‘at al-Islamiyya, 1963).

¹³⁰ Al-Albani, *al-Tahawiyya*, 47.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

outcomes with a Hanafi bias.¹³² The same charge could equally well be directed at al-Albani in his drive to excavate a pre-school legal tradition from the Qur'an, prophetic hadith, and example of the companions of the Prophet. Setting himself the task of identifying weak hadith in the canonical collections in his thirteen-volume *Silsilat al-Ahadith al-Da'ifa wa-l-Mawdu'a wa-Atharuha al-Sayyi' Fi al-Umma* (The Chain of Weak and Fabricated Hadiths and their Negative Impact on the Umma, 1959),¹³³ al-Albani would on occasion discard hadiths in the six canonical collections, rely on the views of later scholars in assessing the reliability of narrators, judge authenticity through comparing lines of transmission in variant reports on the same topic, and resort to analogy to arrive at desired conclusions.¹³⁴ They were not as diametrically opposed to each other as sometimes assumed. Kevseri was not al-Albani's warrior against *āḥād* hadith, and they both objected to the Qur'anist approach of contemporaries like Shaltut.¹³⁵ But while Kevseri saw the 'ulama' as inheritors of the Prophet, guiding the community to divine truth, al-Albani saw them as obstacles,¹³⁶ and they each established methodological approaches to divine sources through which they could defend their favoured theologies.

¹³² Ibid., 32-3. He cites Kevseri's rejection of two hadiths from companions in *Sahih Muslim* (no. 969, 970) against building and decorating graves through other reports that counter the inference from the hadiths alone that destroying graves is legitimate and through noting the many centuries during which the two hadiths had not been activated for that purpose; "Bina' al-Masajid 'ala al-Qubur wa-l-Salah 'alayha," *Maqalat*, 153-6.

¹³³ Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 321-34.

¹³⁴ Christopher Melchert, "Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani and Traditional Hadith Criticism," in Kendall and Khan, *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition*, 43-5; and Kamaruddin Amin, "Nāṣiruddīn al-Albānī on Muslim's Ṣaḥīḥ: A Critical Study of His Method," *Islamic Law and Society*, 11/2 (2004): 149-76.

¹³⁵ Nasir al-Din al-Albani, *Wujub al-Akhdh bi-Hadith al-Ahad fi al-'Aqida wa-l-Radd 'ala Shibh al-Mukhalifin* (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1974), 34-5.

¹³⁶ Point made by Muhammad Abu Zahra, "al-Imam al-Kawthari," J.

Salafism: Origins and definitions

Two problems attend to the historical evolution of *salafiyya*, one lexical and the second semantic. From the term *salaf* as a referent for the first generations of Muslims, the discursive landscape of early 20th-century Islamic thought witnessed the production of *salafī* as a noun describing someone whose views, whether in *fiqh* or *‘aqīda* or other questions, were considered to reflect those of the *salaf* and/or the structure of early Islam as a religious community that did not yet know the complex of sects and ideas that were to develop. These Salafis could then be considered representatives of a modern ideology of Salafism. I will now outline some instances of *salafī/salafiyya* to demonstrate the fluidity of meaning the terms carried, then examine their debut in public discourse as terms embracing movements as diverse as ‘Abduh modernism and the Wahhabi Hanbalis.

The term *madhhab al-salaf* was deployed by various scholars from different backgrounds with different motives and agendas throughout the 19th century, sometimes with reference to theology, sometimes to rejection of *taqlīd* in law. The Yemeni jurist al-Shawkani emphasised juridical *ijtihād* based on Qur’an and hadith as a means of overcoming periods of weakness in the imamate system in which the Zaydi imam was considered an absolute *mujtahid*. Abu Thana’ Shihab al-Din Mahmud al-Alusi (d. 1854), Hanafi mufti in Baghdad and a follower of the Khalidi Naqshbandiyya, developed his ideas of a theology of the *salaf* against a backdrop of Ottoman political intrigues.¹³⁷ In his multi-volume *tafsīr, Ruh al-Ma‘ani* (The Spirit of Meanings), al-Alusi rejected the fundamentals of Ash‘ari doctrine on God’s attributes, causation, and predestination, and attacked the Sufi networks as institutions of state power.¹³⁸ In his book *Ghara’ib al-Ightirab* (Curiosities of Travelling Afar), part

¹³⁷ Basheer M. Nafi, “Abu al-Thana’ al-Alusi: an Alim, Ottoman Mufti, and Exegete of the Qur’an,” *IJMES*, 34/3 (2002): 465-94.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 485-6.

travelogue and part theological discussion, al-Alusi recounted his defence of Ibn Taymiyya's views to the Ottoman sheikh ʿül-Islam ʿArif Hikmet (in office 1846-1854). He ascribes to *madhhab al-salaf* the view that the meaning of obscure Qur'anic passages is known only to God and can be neither taken literally nor stated with conviction to mean something else but uses the term *salafiyyūn* to describe the mass of prominent scholars of the classical period.¹³⁹

Al-Alusi's son Nu'man Khayr al-Din (d. 1899) developed these ideas in his book *Jalal al-Aynayn fi Muhakamat al-Ahmadayn* (Clarity in Judging the Two Ahmads), published in Cairo in 1881. Khayr al-Din took a refutation of Ibn Taymiyya by the Egyptian Shafi'i Ibn Hajar al-Haytami as the point from which to launch his effort to rehabilitate the Damascus scholar. Al-Haytami had issued a fatwa condemning Ibn Taymiyya's creedal positions and his objection to popular practices of intercession. Appearing at the cusp of modern print culture's first great flush, Khayr al-Din's book had considerable impact, on his nephew Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi (1857-1924), on the Damascus ʿālim Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi (al-Qāsimī, 1866-1914), and on Rashid Rida.¹⁴⁰ Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi took over the mantle from his uncle after Khayr al-Din's death in 1899, maintaining correspondence with scholars in not only Damascus, but Kuwait, Jeddah, Najd, Qatar, and Istanbul.¹⁴¹

ʿAbduh uses the term *salafī* in his debate with Farah Antun. In his *al-Islam wa-l-Nasraniyya* articles from 1902 ʿAbduh described three sects in creed, the Salafis, the Ashʿaris, and the Muʿtazila, but he considered the Salafis and Ashʿaris as two branches of Sunni Islam, closer to each other than the Muʿtazila.¹⁴² Both Rida and ʿImara consider the

¹³⁹ Shihab al-Din al-Alusi, *Gharaʾib al-Ightirab wa-Nuzhat al-Albab* (Baghdad: Shahbandar Press, 1909/10), 387-9, 394. See El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 1566) to Khayr al-Din al-Alusi (d. 1899): Changing Views of Ibn Taymiyya among non-Hanbali Sunni Scholars," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 307-8. Also, Edouard Méténier, "al-Alusi family," in *EI3*; http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_22713 (accessed 8 August 2018).

¹⁴⁰ Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 25.

¹⁴¹ Detailed in Muhammad Bahjat al-Athari, *Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi wa-Araʾuhu al-Lughawiyya* (Cairo: al-Kamaliyya Press, 1958), 44. Discussed in Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 25.

¹⁴² ʿAbduh, "al-Ittiḥad fi al-Nasraniyya wa-l-Islam," *al-Manar*, 5/15, 4 September 1902: 405 (*al-Aʿmal al-Kamila*, 3:267); "shiddat al-tabāyun bayna ʿaqāʾid ahl al-iʿtizāl wa-ʿaqāʾid ahl al-sunna salafiyyīn wa-ashāʿira".

term worthy of a footnote in their editions of ‘Abduh: Rida says the *salafiyya* are “those adopting the creed of the *salaf*” (*al-ākhidhīn bi-‘aqīdat al-salaf*)¹⁴³ and ‘Imara says ‘Abduh means Hanbalis and Zahiris who reject Qur’anic *ta’wīl* and take Qur’an and hadith as the sole acceptable sources in law.¹⁴⁴ Three points can be inferred from the passage: ‘Abduh is either coining a new term or using one that had been in circulation for some time; he is applying it to a theological group within *kalām* disputation; and he is conceding the appellation to a group of which he does not consider himself a part. In the same book he regrets a lack of awareness of “the works of the *salaf*” (*āthār al-salaf*) among ordinary Muslims of the era, citing specifically the texts of al-Ash‘ari and al-Maturidi.¹⁴⁵ This reflects ‘Abduh’s usage in *Risalat al-Tawhid* in which the *salaf* are the eminent figures of the first four Muslim centuries, disregarding the taxonomy that defines them as the first three generations.¹⁴⁶

The next notable point in the development of Salafi as an identity marker came in correspondence between Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi and Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi between 1908 and 1913. Here *salafī* is used to refer to individuals of the first generation *salaf*, as well as Ibn Taymiyya and followers; it is also an adjective describing the latter group’s theology,¹⁴⁷ and in one letter included in the collection it describes Ibn Taymiyya’s purported non-*madhhab* allegiance, despite his Hanbali affiliation.¹⁴⁸ Still, the usage as a self-identifier remains timid in letters between the two scholars, and it is notable that al-Qasimi’s group in Damascus had for some time used the phrase *jam‘iyyat al-mujtahidīn*, eschewing any *salafī* label,¹⁴⁹ while their detractors referred to them as followers of *al-madhhab al-jamālī* after al-Qasimi’s

¹⁴³ ‘Abduh, *al-Islam wa-l-Nasraniyya*, 17.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Abduh, *al-A‘mal al-Kamila*, 3:267.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 359.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Abduh (ed. ‘Imara), *Risalat al-Tawhid*, 27-28.

¹⁴⁷ Muhammad ibn Nasir al-‘Ajmi, *al-Rasa‘il al-Mutabadila bayn Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi wa-Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi* (Beirut: al-Basha‘ir, 2001), 47, 60, 74, 190.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 104; “wa-in kāna ḥanbaliyyan fī al-furū‘, fa-huwa fī usūl al-dīn li-madhāhib al-arba‘a ā‘imma”. The letter is from Muhammad al-Makki ibn ‘Azzuz al-Tunisi in Istanbul, dated Dhu al-Hijja 1327 (December 1909/January 1910) and was sent to ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Baytar.

¹⁴⁹ Commings, *Islamic Reform*, 50-55.

name.¹⁵⁰ Al-Qasimi was a scholar like ‘Abduh whose critique of the ‘ulama’ and *madhhab* culture stemmed from his awareness of European advances and he was leery of some of the creedal positions associated with Ibn Taymiyya and his followers.¹⁵¹

The challenge to Sunni traditionalism from scholars in Baghdad and Damascus was intimately tied to the Ottoman Arab provinces’ relationship with the political centre in Istanbul, from the Tanzimat in 1839, to the attempt to consolidate state power under Abdülhamid. A particularly significant figure in this regard was the scholar Abu al-Huda al-Sayyadi (1850-1909), whose career was closely associated with Abdülhamid and his rule.¹⁵² From a prominent Aleppan family of Sufi *ashrāf*,¹⁵³ al-Sayyadi became an adviser to the young sultan in 1879 and expanded the Rifa‘iyya *ṭarīqa* in Baghdad in the hope of better integrating Shi‘a into the empire.¹⁵⁴ He was similar to Naqshbandi shaykhs such as Gümüşhanevi in preaching obedience to authority.¹⁵⁵ Selim Deringil has outlined how Hanafism was propagated as state orthodoxy in unprecedented ways during the Hamidian period, particularly in Arab provinces where it was seen as providing a surer footing for the Ottoman dynasty because of the Hanafi view that the caliph did not have to be a Qurayshi Arab.¹⁵⁶ Abu Manneh argued that these policies consciously aimed to check Arabist and Syrian nationalist identity, such that few books on what would be considered Arab history or literature were printed in Syrian cities in this period, contributing to the exodus of

¹⁵⁰ Mun’im Sirry, “Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and the Salafī Approach to Sufism,” *Die Welt des Islams*, 51/1 (2011): 81.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., *passim*.

¹⁵² Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 65.

¹⁵³ On how Rida’s animus for Abdülhamid and Abu al-Huda drove him to flee Tripoli for Egypt in January 1898, see Ibrahim Ahmad al-‘Adawī, *Rashid Rida, al-Imam al-Mujtahid* (Cairo: al-Mu’assasa al-Misriyya al-Amma, 1964), 108-28.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Eich, “Abū l-Hudā al-Şayyādī”, in *EI3*; http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_SIM_0028 (accessed on 12 August 2018); Itzhak Weismann, “Abū l-Hudā l-Şayyādī and the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism,” *Arabica*, 54/4 (Oct. 2007): 586-92; and Butrus Abu Manneh, “Sultan Abdülhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda Al-Sayyadi,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15/2 (May 1979): 131-53.

¹⁵⁵ Abu Manneh, “Shaykh Ahmed Ziya’uddin,” 105-17.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 43-69.

intellectuals to Cairo.¹⁵⁷ Yusuf al-Nabhani (1849-1932), a jurist from Haifa, was another important figure who upheld the Islamic institutional order of the Ottoman state.¹⁵⁸ In a number of works he condemned attempts to undermine the *madhhab* tradition, the theology of *al-jihāt*, and the discourse against shrine visits and intercession; he took aim at a range of iconoclastic contemporaries including Khayr al-Din al-Alusi, al-Afghani, ‘Abduh, al-Qasimi, and the Wahhabi movement, which was in the process of making a comeback after the Saudi family established the third Najdi state in 1899; and he condemned the use of new media to advance these ideas.¹⁵⁹ His writings appear to presage Kevseri, who had apparently read *Hujjat Allah ‘ala al-‘Alamin fi Mu‘jizat Sayyid al-Mursalin* (God’s Proof to Men re the Miracles of God’s Chief Messenger, 1898) since he makes reference to the work in his 1910 book *Irgham al-Murid*.¹⁶⁰ While al-Nabhani conflated various figures and trends into one, he did not call any of them Salafism.

As can be seen, *salafī* had become a descriptor shifting between a wide spectrum of meanings, from simply early Muslim to modern follower of the theological tradition associated with the Hanbalis, to modern critic of affiliation to established schools of law and their hierarchy of authoritative voices. Salafism as an abstract noun emerges in public discourse with the bookstore and printing press established in Cairo under the name Dar al-Matba‘a al-Salafiyya by Rashid Rida’s colleague Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib. Al-Khatib later wrote that he got the idea of the name from his mentor, the Algerian-origin Syrian teacher Tahir al-Jaza’iri (1852-1920) who was part of a Syrian circle of ‘ulama’ and intellectuals interested in broad themes of Islamic reform and Arabism, including Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi,

¹⁵⁷ Abu Manneh, “Sultan Abdülhamid II,” 147-8.

¹⁵⁸ Amal Ghazal, “Sufism, Ijtihad and Modernity: Yusuf al-Nabhani in the Age of Abd al-Hamid II,” *Archivum Ottomanicum*, vol. 19 (2001): 239-71.

¹⁵⁹ His main works were: *Hujjat Allah ‘ala al-‘Alamin fi Mu‘jizat Sayyid al-Mursalin* (1898), *Shawahid al-Haqq* (1905) and *Raf‘ al-Ishtibah fi Istihalat al-Jiha ‘an Allah* (nda). Al-Alusi responded with *Ghayat al-Amani fi al-Radd ‘ala al-Nabhani* (1909).

¹⁶⁰ Al-Kawthari, *Irgham al-Murid*, 21.

‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Baytar (1837-1916, grandfather of Kevseri’s nemesis Muhammad Bahjat), Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali (1876-1953), and others.¹⁶¹ In 1905 al-Jaza’iri moved to Cairo where he became part of Rida’s circle, which began to think of ‘Abduh and Ibn Taymiyya as iconic heroes of Salafism,¹⁶² despite the fact that ‘Abduh did not consider himself to be a *salafī* and did not accord Ibn Taymiyya any particular esteem. The abstract noun was further propagated through a journal by the name of *al-Majalla al-Salafiyya* (1917-1918) on which al-Jaza’iri served as editing consultant and which attracted the interest of French Orientalist Louis Massignon.¹⁶³ The term was subsequently discussed in various French and English works in the 1920s as a reference to the reform movement of ‘Abduh and al-Afghani, and in 1932 Henri Laoust rendered it in French as *le salafisme*.¹⁶⁴ Salafiyya bookstores opened in Multan in today’s Pakistan, in Damascus, and one was established in Mecca with funding from Nasif to serve the propaganda interests of the expanding Saudi state.¹⁶⁵

In 1930 *salafiyya* was attacked in a booklet written by a supporter of Kevseri, the Egyptian shaykh Yusuf al-Dijwi, and issued in Damascus by Kevseri’s publisher and one-time student Husam al-Din al-Qudsi.¹⁶⁶ The text was a letter of support to Kevseri from al-Dijwi, a member of al-Azhar’s committee of senior ‘ulama’, in which he attacked Ibn Taymiyya for arrogating himself the right of *ijtihād* above other ‘ulama’ and his followers for their use of *takfīr* against other Muslims. Al-Dijwi also criticised ‘Abduh for what blindly following the Europeans (*yasīr warā’ kull nā’iq min al-urubbiyyīn*).¹⁶⁷ The Salafi label was

¹⁶¹ Muhibb al-Din Al-Khatib (unsigned), “al-Wahhabiyya,” *al-Zahra’*, Safar 1345 (February 1926) 2/2: 87, footnote 1.

¹⁶² J.H. Escovitz, “He was the Muhammad ‘Abduh of Syria”: A Study of Tahir Al-Jaza’iri and his Influence,” *IJMES*, 18 (1986): 293-310.

¹⁶³ Henri Lauzière, “The Construction of Salafiyya: Reconsidering Salafism from the Perspective of Conceptual History,” *IJMES* 42 (2010): 374-7.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 378-81. Henri Laoust, “Le réformisme orthodoxe des ‘Salafiya’ et les caractères généraux de son orientation actuelle,” *Revue des études islamiques* 2 (1932), 175-224.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 383. See al-Khatib’s memoir: Hasan al-Samahi Suwaydan, ed., *Min Siyar al-Khalidin bi-Aqlamihim: Ahmad Shawqi, Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahim, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib* (Damascus: Dar al-Qadiri, 1998).

¹⁶⁶ Yusuf al-Dijwi, *Kalima fi al-Salafiyya al-Hadira*, in Ahmad al-Ghammari, *Qat’ al-‘Uruq al-Wardiyya min Sahib al-Buruq al-Najdiyya* (Leiden: Dar al-Mustafa, 2007), 25-33. It is dated 1 December 1929.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 32.

adopted to only a limited degree by al-Fiqi's Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya, whose programme excoriated Sufism, Ash'ari-Maturidi theology, and the *taqlīd* of the schools.¹⁶⁸ Al-Fiqi moved into the Saudi orbit, taking a position as head of publishing in Mecca and funding from King 'Abd al-'Aziz to build the group's Cairo headquarters.¹⁶⁹ Saudi researcher Ahmad Muhammad al-Tahir makes heavy use of the Salafi label in his 2004 history of the organisation.¹⁷⁰ Ansar al-Sunna is often associated with an earlier charity group, al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya, established in 1912, since the two were forcibly merged by the Egyptian government in 1969 for three years. Al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya never made claims to represent anything *salafi* but did embody an anti-Sufi agenda. Both organisations are part of a phenomenon of Islamic charities in modern Egypt which often mixed pious works with political activities – the Muslim Brotherhood being the most well-known example.¹⁷¹ Sensing the currency it had acquired, Hasan al-Banna added Salafi to a list of terms defining the group in a statement of purpose he issued at the Brotherhood's Fifth Conference in 1939. The Brotherhood was a Salafi calling, a Sunni *ṭarīqa* and a Sufi truth, he said, deploying a mix of terminologies to present the group as all things to all men and above the sectarian fray. Al-Banna added that Salafi calling (*da'wā salafiyya*) indicated the Brotherhood's desire for Islam to return to its roots in Qur'an and sunna – nebulous language that no one could dispute, without any agreement on what it meant.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Ahmad Muhammad al-Tahir, *Jama'at Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya* (Riyadh: Dar al-Fadila, 2004), 57, 66-7.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 91.

¹⁷⁰ Al-Albani visited the group's headquarters in Cairo in 1960; *ibid.*, 89.

¹⁷¹ On Islamic charities in Egypt see Ahmad Muhammad al-Tahir, *Jama'at Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya* (Riyadh: Dar al-Hady al-Nabawi, 2004); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Denis Joseph Sullivan and Sana Abed-Kotob, *Islam in Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society vs. the State* (Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner, 1999); Alaa Al-Din Arafat, *The Rise of Islamism in Egypt* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁷² "Risalat al-Mu'tamar al-Khamis," in *Majmu'at Rasa'il al-Imam al-Shahid Hasan al-Banna*, Hasan al-Banna (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1965), 248.

Salafism, Saudi Arabia, and Nasir al-Din al-Albani

In the 1920s concerted efforts were made by Rashid Rida and Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib to bring the Saudi-Wahhabi movement within the purview of their *salafiyya*. Wahhabism's aggressive claim to represent the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya had ensured its frequent citation in polemics against the modernist reformers and had obliged 19th-century 'ulama' who were interested in framing elements of his thought in the language of *madhhab al-salaf* to give some consideration in their writings to what they thought of the Najdis.¹⁷³ Due to their work on *al-Manar*, particularly Rida's criticism of Sufism, "Wahhabi" became a slur directed against both 'Abduh and Rida, and in 'Abduh's period of deteriorating relations with Khedive Abbas the Egyptian ruler had encouraged people to smear him with the word.¹⁷⁴ During a trip to Tunisia in 1903 'Abduh was denounced by Shaykh Salih al-Sharif,¹⁷⁵ the Ottoman agent during the First World War who saw the Ottoman caliphate as a bastion of Islamic unity. Rida was harangued during a lecture in October 1908 at the Umayyad mosque in Damascus by a man Rida described as a North African called Shaykh Salih who had been sent from Istanbul by Abu al-Huda al-Sayyadi to denounce him as a Wahhabi who opposed intercession and the schools.¹⁷⁶ This appears to have been the same Shaykh Salih.¹⁷⁷ After the incident Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi and his followers maintained a low profile for several months,¹⁷⁸ but

¹⁷³ For a review of responses to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab see Hamidi Redissi, "The Refutation of Wahhabism in Arabic Sources, 1745-1932," in *Kingdom Without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious and Media Frontiers*, ed. Madawi Al-Rasheed (London: Hurst, 2008), 157-81.

¹⁷⁴ Ahmad Shafiq Pasha, *Mudhakkirati fi Nisf Qarn*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba'at Misr, 1934), 2:34-9. Cited in Ghazal, "Sufism, Ijtihad and Modernity," 269. Rida first drew attention with his anti-Sufi tract *al-Hikma al-Shar'iyya fi Muhakamat al-Qadiriyya wa-l-Rifa'iyya*, which was first published in *al-Manar*, 1/28, 7 October 1898: 524-34.

¹⁷⁵ Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 130-1.

¹⁷⁶ Rashid Rida, "Rihlat Sahib al-Manar fi Suriyya - 3," *al-Manar*, 11/12, 22 January 1909: 936-53.

¹⁷⁷ Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 130-3; Ghazal, "Sufism, Ijtihad and Modernity," 270, footnote 164. In 1906 he had moved to Istanbul to work with the Ottomans, who Rida opposed; see Peter Heine, "Sâlih ash-Sharîf at-Tûnisî, a North African Nationalist in Berlin during the First World War," *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 33/1 (1982): 89-95. Also, Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam*, 114-5.

¹⁷⁸ Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 130-1.

during the same tour Rida was physically attacked in Tripoli.¹⁷⁹ Rida's activities and the opening of the Salafiyya bookstore and printing press in Mecca in 1927 offered the Saudi state a path to normalising a marginal religious movement that had been in an antagonistic relationship with Istanbul and other regional centres for over a century.¹⁸⁰ In a speech delivered in 1929 'Abd al-'Aziz repeatedly rejected use of the term Wahhabi to describe adherents of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's mission, arguing that the Najdi shaykh was not the founder of a new school but preaching for a return to the belief and practice of the *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, a *mujaddid* not an innovator. This was almost certainly an attempt to link Wahhabiyya with the Salafi wave, yet even then it was only tangentially done in that he avoided explicit mention of the *salafī/salafiyya* formulations as alternative identity markers.¹⁸¹ One reason for this was likely his wider aim of reassuring the Hanafi Hijazis about their fate now that they had been incorporated into the Saudi state, but it speaks to a deeper problem Wahhabiyya had and continues to have with the conceptual innovation of Salafism.

Salafism as a recognisable ideological trademark in Islamic discourse begins to take shape in 1960s Saudi Arabia in the context of the government's nascent projection of an Islamic foreign policy and the activism of Nasir al-Din al-Albani.¹⁸² Al-Albani's influence was felt institutionally through the Islamic University of Medina where he taught briefly from its inception from 1961 to 1963 and the al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba (the Salafi Hisba Group, or Salafi Group for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice), an informal group established by his disciples in 1966. It was al-Albani who heavily propagated the term in the

¹⁷⁹ Yusuf Ibish, *Rihlat al-Imam Muhammad Rashid Rida* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-Arabiya Li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, 1971), 13. Discussed in Ghazal, "Sufism, Ijtihad and Modernity," 270.

¹⁸⁰ Redissi, "The Refutation of Wahhabism," 175-6.

¹⁸¹ "Fi al-Ma'daba al-Kubra," *Umm al-Qura*, 16 May 1929, no. 229, pp.1 and 3. Mouline notes that 'Abd al-'Aziz was attempting, through his Syrian and Egyptian advisors, to appeal to contemporary discourses, to the extent that Muhammad Bahjat al-Baytar was brought over to head an Islamic Institute (*al-Ma'had al-Islami*) in Mecca but it closed after a year for lack of interest among elite Wahhabi families; *The Clerics of Islam*, 9, 111.

¹⁸² On his activities in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s see Stephane Lacroix, "Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and his Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 59-82.

Saudi sphere with motivations and implications beyond Rida's usage, arguing that it was necessary for a Muslim, freed from the constraints of the diverting tradition of *fiqh* schools, to declare his *manhaj* as *salafi*, and even suggesting that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab wasn't fully *salafi* because while his theological positions were sound, he still followed Hanbali law.¹⁸³ Al-Albani's thinking had three main elements: the theology of Ibn Taymiyya, a critique of *madhhab fiqh* that encompassed the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya, al-Shawkani, and the Rida network, and rejection of the participation in political systems favoured by the movements like the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁸⁴ Al-Albani constructs something new, which he gives an appropriately new label, and in that regard his Salafism moves into the territory of ideology in the terms drawn out by Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Michael Freeden¹⁸⁵ since it is a transformation touched by the conditions of modernity. But his *manhaj* remains located in internal critique of the Islamic tradition in a way that Rida's, with his concern for the fate of Islam vis-à-vis the West, was not.

Al-Albani's methodology, his innovative propagation of Salafism, and his casting of Kevseri as its organising Other all came together to coalesce as one package in the 1960s after his initial period of teaching in Syria from 1945.¹⁸⁶ His first book was written in 1952,

¹⁸³ 'Isam Musa Hadi, *al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya: Ahdafuha wa-Mawqifuha min al-Mukhalifin Laha* (Amman: npa, 2013) collects al-Albani's comments from cassettes regarding his concept of *salafiyya*. Hadi gives no dates for the various al-Albani sources he uses.

¹⁸⁴ On al-Albani's rejection of political action, see Hadi, *al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya*, 48-9; and Stephane Lacroix, "Between Revolution and Apoliticism," 58-80. Al-Albani's position on violence against Muslim rulers was ambiguous in that he hovered on the margins of insurrectionary groups. He argued that allegiance should not be given to Al Saud since they are not members of Quraysh but cautioned the Salafi Hisba Group against *takfir* thinking, advising them to read Ibn Taymiyya's *Kitab al-Iman*; see Nasir al-Huzaymi, *Ayyam ma' Juhayman: Kuntu ma' al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2011), 48. Al-Albani was attacked by some Wahhabi scholars for reticence in the question of faith and action; thus, Muslims could not be denounced for visiting shrines if they were unaware of their error (Hadi, *al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya*, 79) and neglect of proscribed prayer was not enough to establish *kufir*, as he wrote in *Hukm Tarik al-Salat* (Riyadh: Dar al-Jalalayn, 1992). These positions were within the scope of Ibn Taymiyya's *Kitab al-Iman*.

¹⁸⁵ Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, 101-2. See page 27, footnote 90.

¹⁸⁶ Olidort has a similar view of al-Albani's focus on Kevseri in the construction of his discourse, though he does not examine the genealogy of the term Salafism; Jacob Olidort, *In Defense of Tradition: Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī and the Salafī Method* (Ph.D thesis, Princeton University, 2015), 193-9. The genealogy is discussed by Yasir Qadhi, "On Salafi Islam," Muslim Matters.org, 28 April 2014; <http://muslimmatters.org/2014/04/22/on-salafi-islam-dr-yasir-qadhi/5/> (accessed 28 April 2019).

Hijab al-Mar'a al-Muslima fi al-Kitab wa-l-Sunna (The Muslim Woman's Head-covering in Qur'an and Sunna; republished in 1991 as *Jilbab al-Mar'a al-Muslima*, The Muslim Woman's Robe), looked beyond the school tradition to direct analysis of hadith material, but without framing his approach as Salafism.¹⁸⁷ During a lecture at the Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyah offices in Cairo in 1960 he was introduced as *al-shaykh al-salafi* known for his *salafiyya*, his ideas were described as the emulation (*yuqallid*) of only the Prophet and rejecting accusations of *tajsim*, and his talk, which defended God's positionality and denounced intercession, referred to right-minded Muslims as *salafiyyūn*, with the clarifying moniker *muḥammadiyyūn*.¹⁸⁸ In his account of membership in the Salafi Hisba Group, a faction of which under Juhayman al-'Utaybi launched the failed Mecca insurrection in 1979, Nasir al-Huzaymi recounts how al-Albani Salafism was the touchstone of the movement: al-Huzaymi was made familiar with the work of al-Albani, visited the Salafi community in Kuwait, learned that being Salafi meant rejecting the intellectual tradition of the schools in creed and *fiqh* methodology, and discovered that Kevseri was their *bête noire*.¹⁸⁹ Al-Albani inspired many students who passed through Saudi Arabia and who knew him during his later years in Jordan,¹⁹⁰ but his renown was also fed by his closeness to Saudi 'ālim 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Baz (1910-1999), who served as Grand Mufti from 1993 to 1999, and his opposition to

¹⁸⁷ Discussed in Melchert, "Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani." 33-51. Al-Albani alters the date of completion from 7 to 9 Jumada al-Awwal 1371 (5 February 1952). *Salafiyya* as an abstract noun also does not appear in *Sifat Salat al-Nabi*.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Albani's lecture on 27 August 1960 can be heard at: <http://www.4shared.com/file/75693629/8f9c2cdd/albani-1960.html?dirPwdVerified=4f3514e1> (accessed on 26 April 2019). This contradicts Olidort's claim that he became interested in Hanbali theology from 1961 when he moved to Saudi Arabia; Olidort, *In Defense of Tradition*, 169. Olidort cites his influences as Rashid Rida, Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi, and Muḥammad Bahjat al-Baytar, though he only had direct contact with the latter, attending some of his classes.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Huzaymi, *Ayyam ma' Juhayman*, 14-15, 169.

¹⁹⁰ Al-Albani student Muqbil al-Wadi'i (1933-2001) took the Salafi banner with him to Yemen where he is considered the father of the movement; 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq (b. 1939) did the same in Kuwait.

the Muslim Brotherhood. This was despite the fact that he was forced out of the kingdom in 1963 and only able to visit intermittently over the following two decades.¹⁹¹

The disconnect between al-Albani's views and Wahhabism's commitment to Hanbalism produced a tension that has put enduring limits on the Saudi state and its scholars' use of *salafiyya* as a label of self-definition.¹⁹² Senior scholars accepted the term but would not embrace it, because of its innovative nature and association with al-Albani's rigid rejection of school affiliation. The Mecca-based World Muslim League's Islamic Fiqh Council issued a resolution in 1987, and republished in its journal in 2005, that condemned both "school fanaticism" (*al-ta'aṣṣub al-madhhabī*) and *lā-madhhabiyya*, the latter of which was a "hateful method" (*uṣlūb baḡhīḍ*).¹⁹³ However, Salafism retained some efficacy in repackaging Wahhabism as a tool of Saudi foreign policy and improving the kingdom's image in Western eyes.¹⁹⁴ After King Faysal assumed power in 1964 US administrations began to work closely with Saudi Arabia as a vanguard of anti-Soviet and anti-Arab nationalist mobilisation in the Middle East. As Rosie Bsheer has shown, this US-Saudi relationship was lodged not so much in petro-imperialism as in the use of Islam to crush the secular Left.¹⁹⁵ The promotion of Islamic themes took on a new urgency due to a confluence of challenges in the period 1979-1980: the Wahhabi insurrection in Mecca, the Iranian

¹⁹¹ On al-Albani's influence in Saudi Arabia see Lacroix, "Between Revolution and Apoliticism," 58-80; also, Olidort, "In Defense of Tradition," 169-202. Al-Albani's disdain for the Brotherhood was not as ideological as it seemed. His position evolved over time and may have had a personal element to it with regards to Abu Ghudda. The difficult environment for Brotherhood activists in the 1960s confirmed his view that political activity was best left alone; Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria*, 107.

¹⁹² See his accusation of Hanbali partisanship against Shaykh Hammud ibn 'Abd Allah al-Tuwayjiri in *Sifat Salat al-Nabi*, 30.

¹⁹³ "Bi-Sha'n al-Khilaf al-Fiqhi bayn al-Madhahib wa-l-Ta'aṣṣub al-Madhhabī," *Majallat al-Majma' al-Fiqhi al-Islami*, Year 4, 2nd edition (2005), 383-6. The first resolution emerged from its tenth session, held in Mecca from 17-21 October 1987. Nabil Mouline suggests Wahhabism was more interested in establishing itself as the heir of classical Hanbalism than appropriating the term Salafism. Between 1960 and 2000, more than 300 classic Hanbali works were edited and published. See Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 45.

¹⁹⁴ Ahmad Mahmud Subhi, *Hal Yu'add al-Madhhab al-Wahhabi Salafiyyan?* (Alexandria: Dar al-Wafa', 2004).

¹⁹⁵ Rosie Bsheer, "A Counter-Revolutionary State: Popular Movements and the Making of Saudi Arabia," *Past and Present*, 239/1 (2018): 233-77. See also Toby Matthiesen, "Saudi Arabia and the Cold War," in *Salman's Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, ed. Madawi al-Rasheed (London: Hurst, 2018), 217-33. On the earlier, oil-based element of the relationship, see Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

Revolution, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. During the reign of King Fahd Saudi Arabia adopted a new approach: it published a new edition of the Qur'an for global distribution through the King Fahd Complex for Printing the Holy Qur'an, the first such undertaking since al-Azhar published its version in 1926 following the dissolution of the Ottoman caliphate;¹⁹⁶ government funding for its coercive morality enforcement apparatus (Hay'at al-Amr bi-l-Ma'ruf wa-l-Nahy 'an al-Munkar) rose from 85.7 million riyals in 1979 to more than 203 million riyals in 1985, and in 1994 it launched the journal *Majallat al-Hisba*, reasserting the state's monopoly in the policing of public morality;¹⁹⁷ and the Saudi government worked with its American counterpart to fund the Afghan mujahidin fighting the Soviets.

Salafiyya with the specific meaning al-Albani had given it began to attain widespread currency from the 1980s. Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, an associate of the Juhayman group and acolyte of al-Albani, deployed the terminology in a systematic manner in *Millat Ibrahim* (The Religion of Ibrahim, 1983).¹⁹⁸ In 1989 Egyptian 'ālim Muhammad al-Ghazali (1917-1996) condemned the “alleged Salafism” (*salafiyya maz'ūma*)¹⁹⁹ challenging the traditional methodology of *fiqh*, provoking a vigorous response from al-Albani and his Saudi followers.²⁰⁰ Kevseri's torch of rejection was most notably taken up by the Syrian scholar Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti (1929-2013), who published two notable refutations of the al-Albani school, *Al-Lamadhhabiyya: Akhtar Bid'a Tuhaddid al-Shari'a al-Islamiyya* (Al-

¹⁹⁶ Walid Saleh, “The politics of Qur'anic hermeneutics: royalties on interpretation,” public lecture, <https://www.international.ucla.edu/cnes/article/110233> (accessed 26 April 2019). Also, interview with Khaled Abou El Fadl: Franklin Foer, “Moral Hazard,” *New Republic*, 18 November 2002.

¹⁹⁷ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 213.

¹⁹⁸ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Millat Ibrahim wa-Da'wā al-Anbiya' wa-l-Mursalin* (c.1984), 33, footnote 10; idem, *al-Kawashif al-Jaliyya fi Kufr al-Dawla al-Sa'udiyya* (Amman: Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad, 1989), 132.

¹⁹⁹ Muhammad al-Ghazali, *al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya bayn Ahl al-Fiqh wa-Ahl al-Ḥadith* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1989), 14-15.

²⁰⁰ See the responses of al-Albani, al-Wadi'i and al-Madkhali in Abu 'Abd Allah Shakib al-Salafi, ed., *Aqwal Ahl al-'Ilm fi Muhammad al-Ghazali al-Saqqa* (Riyadh: Sihab al-Salafiyya, nda). Also, Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2005), 93.

Lamadhhabiyya: The Most Serious Innovation Threatening Islamic Shari‘a, 1969) and *Al-Salafiyya: Marhala Zamaniyya Mubarak La Madhhab Islami* (Salafism: A Blessed Historical Phase, Not an Islamic School, 1988).²⁰¹ In the latter, despite the title, al-Buti effectively conceded that the *lā-madhhabiyya* resisted by Kevseri had successfully transformed itself into a school called *salafiyya*. At this time the term began to appear in Western public discourse. In his 1992 study *L’echec de l’Islam politique* (The Failure of Political Islam) Olivier Roy discussed Salafiyya solely in the context of the early century reform movement.²⁰² In examining what he called the “re-Islamization” of the 1980s and 1990s, he avoided the term Salafi for “neo-fundamentalism”, by which he intended the tradition of disengagement from political processes that was fostered by ‘ulama’ in the Saudi orbit. However, in *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, published twelve years later, this neo-fundamentalism became Salafism. Similarly, the original 2003 edition of Raymond Hinnebusch’s study *The International Politics of the Middle East*, a standard work in the field, contains almost no discussion of Saudi deployment of Islam internationally,²⁰³ while the 2015 imprint notes the Islamisation of foreign policy, citing Saudi state support for Salafi networks in Egypt and Syria.²⁰⁴

If al-Albani found a receptive audience in Saudi Arabia, this was far less the case in his native Syria, where, as in Turkey, Sufi networks and metaphysics retained much of the power they had enjoyed throughout the Ottoman period. The Ba‘th government took an inimical position towards al-Albani and his Salafi movement because, Thomas Pierret argues in a study of Syrian ‘ulama’, the state ceded control of the field of religious education to the existing body of traditionalist ‘ulama’, who upheld Ash‘ari-Maturidi theology, Sufi practice,

²⁰¹ See Andreas Christmann, “Islamic scholar and religious leader: A portrait of Shaykh Muhammad Sa‘id Ramadan al-Būti,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 9/2 (1998): 149-69.

²⁰² Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 11-12, 31-5.

²⁰³ Raymond Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 122.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 84 (2015, 2nd edition).

and *madhhab* adherence, and the ‘ulama’ in turn used the capital they had gained in according legitimacy to orient the state towards their views.²⁰⁵ To popularise his ideas, al-Albani promoted the work of a Tajik shaykh named Muhammad Sultan al-Ma‘sumi (1880-1960) who attained status in Saudi Arabia where he took up residence after studies in Cairo and Damascus. Al-Ma‘sumi authored a fatwa in 1939, and printed in Cairo as a book in 1949, which responded to a request from Japanese converts in Tokyo regarding the obligation to choose a *madhhab*, since Indians there favoured Hanafism and Indonesians preferred the Shafi‘i rite.²⁰⁶ Al-Ma‘sumi’s fatwa said not only that it was not necessary or recommended (*laysa bi-wājib wa-lā mandūb*) for the non-specialised Muslim to follow one school exclusively²⁰⁷ but that any believer could circumvent the schools and ‘ulama’ entirely through direct access to the Qur’an and hadith collections.²⁰⁸ Al-Ma‘sumi gave al-Albani a copy of his book when they met during the hajj pilgrimage in 1949.²⁰⁹

Al-Ma‘sumi’s book began to stir responses in Syria after al-Albani reissued it under the title *Hal al-Muslim Mulzam bi-Ittiba’ Madhhab Mu‘ayyan min al-Madhahib al-Arba’a?*

²⁰⁵ Pierret, *Religion and State*, 23-63, 102. See also Annabelle Böttcher, “Official Islam, Transnational Islamic Networks, and Regional Politics: The Case of Syria,” in *The Middle East and Palestine: Global Politics and Regional Conflict*, ed. Dietrich Jung (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 125-50.

²⁰⁶ The question was relayed to al-Ma‘sumi via two Central Asian Muslims in Tokyo, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Hayy Qur Bi-l-‘Ali and Muhsin Çabakoğlu; al-Ma‘sumi (ed. Salim ibn ‘Id al-Hilali), *Hal al-Muslim Mulzam bi-Ittiba’ Madhhab Mu‘ayyan min al-Madhahib al-Arba’a?* (Riyadh: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Manhajyya al-Salafiyya, 1984), 47. Al-Ma‘sumi escaped Soviet persecution and made his way back to Mecca where he taught Turkish pilgrims at Dar al-Hadith and wrote some works in Ottoman Turkish; al-Hilali, Introduction, *Hal al-Muslim*, 14-15.

²⁰⁷ Al-Ma‘sumi, *Hal al-Muslim*, 55. He comments: “This path is easy to follow, it requires no more than [the six canonical hadith collections]. These books are well-known, you can obtain them in no time; you should know this if you didn’t already.”

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 115-6. It is not clear why Japanese Muslims would not have consulted Abdürreşid İbrahim, the Russian-Tatar who became the first imam of the Tokyo Mosque in 1938. İbrahim has inspired a large literature in modern scholarship as an early figure of transnational Islam and Pan-Asianism. See Noriko Yamazaki, “Abdürreşid İbrahim’s journey to China: Muslim communities in the late Qing as seen by a Russian-Tatar intellectual,” *Central Asian Survey*, 33:3 (2014): 414; Ulrich Brandenburg, “The Multiple Publics of a Transnational Activist: Abdürreşid İbrahim, Pan-Asianism, and the Creation of Islam in Japan,” *Die Welt des Islams*, 58 (2018): 143-72; Komatsu Hisao, “Muslim Intellectuals and Japan: A Pan-Islamist mediator, Abdürreşid İbrahim,” in Dudoignon, Hisao and Yasushi, *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World*, 273-88.

²⁰⁹ It was among books mandated by the Saudi directorate for scientific research, fatwas, preaching and guidance after it was set up in 1971 for use in proselytization abroad; Ayman al-Yassini, *Religion and State in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985), 71. Saudi publications since the 1980s have framed al-Ma‘sumi as a Salafi, though his texts do not use this language at all. Stefan Wild’s claim that al-Ma‘sumi described himself as a *salafī* seems unfounded; Wild, “Muslim und Madhhab,” 679.

(Is the Muslim Required to Follow One of the Four Schools?).²¹⁰ Among several works written in response was al-Buti's *La-Madhhabiyya*.²¹¹ This led to an encounter between al-Buti and al-Albani in 1970 after the publication of al-Buti's first edition. In al-Buti's telling, al-Albani came to him to complain that al-Buti had misunderstood the intent of al-Ma'sumi's book, which was simply that following the methodology of the schools is fine for those among 'ulama' who have not attained the status of absolute *mujtahid*.²¹² Al-Buti defined *lā-madhhabiyya* as the thesis that neither laymen nor non-*mujtahid* 'ulama' are required to follow any of the four schools, exclusively or through shifting freely among them.²¹³ Al-Albani said this was to misunderstand al-Ma'sumi's intent, which his lack of native expression in Arabic may have muddled; he further asserted that there is no such thing as *lā-madhhabiyya* since a layman or 'ālim who has not reached the level of *ijtihād* is obliged to follow the imams of the schools.²¹⁴ Al-Buti was sceptical about al-Albani's claim that both he and al-Ma'sumi advocated nothing more than expanded rights to *ijtihād* among 'ulama'.²¹⁵ Muhammad 'Id 'Abbasi (b. 1938), a disciple of al-Albani, gave his version of the meeting as well as an account of his own session with al-Buti.²¹⁶ Notably in this book 'Abbasi made liberal use of the terms Salafi and Salafism to describe the al-Albani circle as they tried to rebut the charge of *lā-madhhabiyya* that began with Kevseri.²¹⁷ Al-Albani was forced to leave

²¹⁰ Al-Hilali, Introduction, *Hal al-Muslim*, 16-17.

²¹¹ Said Ramadan al-Buti, *Al-Lamadhhabiyah Akhtar Bid'a Tuhaddid al-Shari'a al-Islamiyya* (Damascus: 1970, second edition), 15-26 (preface to 2nd edition). See Muhammad Hamid Hamah, *Luzum Ittiba' Madhahib al-A'imma Hasman li-l-Fawda al-Diniyya* (1970) and Ahmad 'Izz al-Din Bayanuni, *Al-Ijtihad wa-l-Mujtahidun* (1968).

²¹² Al-Buti, *Al-Lamadhhabiyah*, 15

²¹³ Ibid., 16.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 15, 22.

²¹⁵ Al-Buti also notes that if al-Albani is to be believed he is giving far more leeway to al-Ma'sumi than he did to Ibn 'Arabi when he declared him an infidel; *ibid.*, 21.

²¹⁶ Al-Buti records this discussion too; *ibid.*, 133-48, where al-Buti relates a debate with an unnamed figure who appears to be Abbasi. For Abbasi's account, see Muhammad 'Id Abbasi, *Bid'at al-Ta'assub al-Madhhabi wa-Atharuha al-Khatira fi Jumud al-Fikr wa-Inhithat al-Muslimin* (Amman: al-Maktaba al-Islamiyya, 1986 [1970]), 273-35. Abbasi's retort to al-Buti's account of his meeting with al-Albani can be found at 336-46.

²¹⁷ Al-Buti, *Al-Lamadhhabiyah*, 17, footnote 1 acknowledges that they claim to represent *salafiyya*. On al-Albani's rejection of the term, see Emad Hamdeh, "Qur'an and Sunna or the Madhhabs?: A Salafi Polemic Against Islamic Legal Tradition," *Islamic Law and Society*, 24 (2017): 211-53.

Syria for good in 1979, and the circle of ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Arna’ut (1928-2004), the main representative of the al-Albani Salafis who remained in Syria, never gained much following or status,²¹⁸ though Salafism later became influential through the transnational networks established since the 1990s in the context of globalisation and the internet revolution.²¹⁹

An institution exerting hegemonic power over orthodoxy and orthopraxis, al-Azhar no more succumbed to the neo-Hanbali assault on mainstream Ash‘ari theology than did Syrian seminaries.²²⁰ But scepticism about Sufism and *madhhab* adherence found firm roots, firstly through the activities of modernists such as al-Afghani, ‘Abduh, and Rida, then more rigorously through the activities of the Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya.²²¹ Al-Albani here becomes the bridge to *salafiyya*, the link between Ansar al-Sunna and the establishment of an Egyptian Salafi movement from the 1970s. Al-Albani took part in two meetings of a hadith committee established by the waqf ministry in 1960 to try to establish a methodology on authentic hadith; such a rationalising enterprise appealed to the Nasserist state and its Kemalist drive to harness and direct religion in the service of modernisation.²²² Among the figures he met during the trip al-Albani cites four: Muhammad al-Ghazali, who would have opposed his ideas (and he describes as *ustādh* rather than shaykh), Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, the early propagandist for modernist Salafism, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Razzaq ‘Afifi (1905-1994), a former leader of Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya who had moved to Saudi Arabia where he was appointed to the council of senior scholars,²²³ Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Rashid Al

²¹⁸ Pierret, *Religion and State*, 108.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 115.

²²⁰ Al-Azhar held a conference in defence of Ash‘arism in 2010, attended by al-Buti and Husam al-Din al-Farfur; cited in Pierret, *Religion and State*, 127.

²²¹ Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh*, 119.

²²² On his return al-Albani discussed the committee’s work in an interview with a Syrian daily; “Sawt al-‘Arab Tas’ al wa-l-Muhaddith Nasir al-Din al-Albani Yujib,” *Sawt al-‘Arab*, 28 April 1960; <http://www.ahlalhddeeth.com/vb/showthread.php?t=256132> (accessed 2 September 2018). He convinced the ministry to publish Shihab al-Din al-Busiri (d. 1436)’s hadith collection *Zawa’id Ibn Majah*, containing authentic hadith related only by Ibn Majah and not found in the other five canonical collections.

²²³ On ‘Afifi, see Muhammad ibn Ahmad Sayyid Ahmad, *al-Shaykh al-‘Allama ‘Abd al-Razzaq ‘Afifi: Hayatuhu al-‘Ilmiyya, wa-Juhduhu al-Da’wiyya, wa-Atharuhu al-Hamida* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Sawadi, 1418 [1997-8]).

Husayn (d. 1982/3), a Najdi who studied at al-Azhar and rejected *madhhab* methodology,²²⁴ and Shaykh al-Sayyid Sabiq, the head of the ministry's cultural division who had published a *madhhab*-critical manual on *fiqh* in 1946 at Hasan al-Banna's request (republished by al-Albani in 1987).²²⁵ In 1976 the organisation called al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya was established in Alexandria with a mandate uniting the key elements that defined the movement: rejection of Ash'ari-Maturidi theology, *madhhab* methodology, Sufi belief and practice,²²⁶ and the political activism of the Muslim Brotherhood, which with its re-emergence after Nasserist repression was significantly impacted by the al-Albani revolution.²²⁷ Through the discourse of Salafism the creedal questions of *irjā'* and *takfīr* became defining issues of Islam in the public sphere in the later 20th century, following the earlier stage in the construction of modern Islam through the work of figures like 'Abduh and their political heirs like al-Banna.

Salafism and modern scholarship

Scholarship on the Salafi phenomenon has demonstrated three tendencies: firstly, a conflation of the modernist and Salafi movements; secondly, backdating what would be recognisably

²²⁴ See al-Tahir, *Jama'at Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya*, 229-33; and Muhammad Khayr Yusuf, *Tatimmat al-A'lam li-l-Zarkali*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 1998), 1:298.

²²⁵ Al-Sayyid Sabiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna* (Jeddah: Dar al-Qibla al-Thaqafiyya al-Islamiyya, 1945); and al-Albani, *Tamam al-Minna fi Ta'liq 'ala Fiqh al-Sunna* (Amman: al-Maktaba al-Islamiyya, 1987 [1953]). Sabiq writes in his introduction that he wants to challenge *madhhab* partisanship and the idea of the closed door of *ijtihād*, a notion he said Western Orientalists had propagated. Said Ramadan, who married al-Banna's daughter Wafa and established the Brotherhood's regional and international presence in the 1950s and 60s, advanced the same ideas in *Islamic Law: Its Scope and Equity* (1970). Salafi shaykhs such as Abu Ishaq al-Huwayni say Sabiq based his book on al-Shawkani's *Nayl al-Awṭar*; see this archived chatroom <https://www.ahlalheeth.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-44680.html> (accessed 10 August 2019).

²²⁶ On the fate of Sufism in Egypt in the 20th century, the major works are Michael Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt: An Essay in the Sociology of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) and Valerie Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995).

²²⁷ On Salafi influence on the Muslim Brotherhood see Husam Tamam, *Tasalluf al-Ikhwan: Ta'akul al-Utruha al-Ikhwaniyya wa-Su'ud al-Salafiyya fi Jama'at al-Ikhwān al-Muslimin* (Alexandria, Egypt: Bibliotheca Alexandrina/Future Studies Unit, 2010). On today's Salafism in Egypt see A. Shalata, *al-Hala al-Salafiyya al-Mu'asira fi Misr* (Cairo: Madbouly, 2013); Ahmad Salim and 'Umar Basyuni, *Ma Ba'd al-Salafiyya: Qira'a Naqdiyya fi al-Khitab al-Salafi al-Mu'asir* (Cairo: Markaz Nama, 2015); and Richard Gauvain, *Salafi Ritual Purity: In the Presence of God* (London: Routledge, 2013). On Lebanon see Zoltan Pall, *Lebanese Salafis between the Gulf and Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013) and Robert Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon From Apoliticism to Transnational Jihadism* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014).

Salafism today to earlier historical periods; thirdly, feeding Salafism's self-image as the expression of an original essence of Islam. I have argued that *salafiyya* is the outcome of a discursive genealogy in three stages: a proto-*salafiyya* in the 19th century before the terminology takes full form, emergence in public discourse in the early 20th century but with multiple meanings, and the arrival of al-Albani Salafism in the 1960s through the possibilities for mobilisation and intellectual production in Saudi Arabia, marking the beginning of semantic clarity over who the Salafis are and what they represent. Frank Griffel has a similar view, noting the genesis of the term in the modern period, its elastic and jargonistic nature, and its broad application, from rationalist reformers to today's Salafis who see in 'Abduh, al-Afghani, and even Rida²²⁸ the antithesis of almost everything they stand for.²²⁹ Khaled El-Rouayheb also rejects the notion of what he calls a "timeless Salafism" that appears across a variety of writing impacted by modern secular, Islamist, and nationalist readings of history.²³⁰ This position tends to see modernism and Salafism as separate movements and both as recent historical developments.

Another general trend has been to think of them both as part of a broader historical process which could be understood through the Salafi concept. Pierret considers al-Albani's circle as unsophisticated versions of Brotherhood-leaning white-collar professionals he considers to be the true Salafis, united in their drive for purified belief and practice.²³¹ Itzhak Weismann sees the origins of Salafism in the modernist movement which favoured constitutional government against Hamidian authoritarianism and opposed an irrational, ecstatic, and esoteric Sufism.²³² Jonathan Brown takes a longer historical view situated in hadith studies. Following Lucas' suggestion that the post-Shafi'i scholars of the formative

²²⁸ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, 92.

²²⁹ Frank Griffel, "What Do We Mean By 'Salafi'? Connecting Muḥammad 'Abduh with Egypt's Nūr Party in Islam's Contemporary Intellectual History," *Die Welt des Islams*, 55 (2015): 186-220.

²³⁰ El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 15, 191.

²³¹ Pierret, *Religion and State*, 103-5, 141-2.

²³² Weismann, "Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī and the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism," 586-592.

period who most rigorously focussed on producing substantive *fiqh* from purely Qur'an and prophetic hadith could be term Salafis,²³³ Brown suggested Salafi could be used to describe the Ahl al-Hadith movement itself since in his view it forms the heart of Sunnism. Further, their literalist creedal positions, particularly on God's spatial and positional attributes, represent the "original Sunni theological school" – a statement that appears to concede the claims of its adherents.²³⁴ From the 18th century this opposition to different strands of rationalist thinking (law, theology, hadith) transforms into an effervescence of counter-culture reform movements, questioning the notion of consensus in canonical hadith and the institutionalisation of Ash'ari-Maturidism, that Brown divides into Traditionalist Salafism and Modernist Salafism.²³⁵ All of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, 'Abduh, and al-Albani would be subsumed under the rubric of Salafism in this schema.

Another approach has been to think of them as separate trends, but the Salafi among them as more historically authentic. For Henri Lauzière, a student of Bernard Haykel, Salafism is an appropriate name for the theological position of Ibn Taymiyya and his supporters, and on this basis he depicts the expansion of the term to encompass modernists as an act of propagandistic malfeasance by Rida, al-Khatib, and Louis Massignon. While he agrees there was no Salafism by that name before the early 20th century, Lauzière suggests *salafī* was a recognisable epithet in the medieval period (post-classical Islam) for Hanbali dogma. Thus, "premodern Muslims recognized a distinct Salafi school of thought that informed not only theology but also law".²³⁶ Following an initial article on the question published in 2010, Lauzière doubled down on his argument that Hanbali theologians are the

²³³ Scott C. Lucas, "The Legal Principles of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl Al-Bukhārī and their Relationship to Classical Salafi Islam," *Islamic Law and Society*, 13/3 (2006): 289-324.

²³⁴ Brown, *Hadith*, 180-2. He describes Kevseri as an "extreme Ash'ari" (p.181).

²³⁵ Ibid., 251-61. Brown, *Canonization*, 333-4.

²³⁶ Lauzière, "The Construction of Salafīyya," 372.

rightful owners of *salafiyya*, first in response to an article by Griffel,²³⁷ then in a book.²³⁸

Basheer Nafi and Butrus Abu Manneh also think of Salafi as an appropriate term for Hanbali creed but one that expresses a return of Islam to its Arab roots. Nafi talks of the “irrepressible Salafi determination to delineate man’s position and limits” which corrected a long period of Arab-Islamic decline caused by the culture of Sufism and Ash‘ari intellectualism.²³⁹ Abu Manneh discusses Salafism as a complement to the Arab *nahḍa* and response to Ottoman policies of division in Arab provinces.²⁴⁰

The theory of timeless Salafism has been argued most vigorously by Bernard Haykel. In an article that sets out to give “the pre-modern history of this movement”, Haykel cites usages of *salafī/salafiyya/madhab al-salaf* in two texts to argue that Salafism is a legitimate designation for both a literalist approach to the Qur’anic text and scripturalist approach to sources of law. Haykel offers examples of *salaf*, *salafiyya*, and *madhab al-salaf* from Ibn Taymiyya²⁴¹ in particular to imply, without stating it directly, that Salafism was a recognised term denoting the Hanbali school or a branch thereof, ignoring the fact that al-Ghazali and others debated whose views among the schools of Sufis, philosophers, jurists, and

²³⁷ Henri Lauzière, “What We Mean Versus What They Meant by “Salafi”: A Reply to Frank Griffel,” *Die Welt des Islams*, 56/1 (2016): 89-96.

²³⁸ Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). Unaware of Kevseri’s battle over the Salafi label, Lauzière accuses the Egyptian shaykh Yusuf al-Dijwi of wantonly describing ‘Abduh as a Salafi in his booklet *Kalima fi al-Salafiyya al-Hadira* (1930) without realising that al-Dijwi was writing in support of Kevseri; see “The Construction of Salafiyya,” 381-2.

²³⁹ Nafi, “Abu al-Thana’ al-Alusi, 485-6. See also Nafi, “A Teacher of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab: Muhammad Hayat al-Sindi and the Revival of Ashab al-Hadith’s Methodology,” *Islamic Law and Society* 13 (2006): 208-41.

²⁴⁰ Butrus Abu Manneh, “Salafiyya and the Rise of the Khalidiyya in Baghdad in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Die Welt des Islams*, 43/3 (2003): 349-72; idem, “The Sultan and the Bureaucracy: The Anti-Tanzimat Concepts of Grand Vizier Mahmud Nedim Paşa,” *IJMES*, 22/3 (1990): 257-74.

²⁴¹ Bernard Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 38. He cites ‘Abd al-Karim al-Sam‘ani (d. 1166), a Shafi‘i biographer of scholars, who in his *Kitab al-Ansab* described *al-salafī* as “an attribution to *al-salaf* and following their *madhhab*”, which Haykel takes to mean creed. Al-Sam‘ani gives three examples of such people, but their names are missing or illegible in manuscripts; *Kitab al-Ansab*, 13 vols. (Hayderabad: Da‘irat al-Ma‘arif al-‘Uthmaniyya, 1976), 7:168-9. His second example is from Ibn Taymiyya, who used the terms such as *al-āthār al-salafiyya* and *madhhab al-salaf* when discussing theological texts he approved of; Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Fatawa al-Kubra*, 5 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha, 1966), 5:141, 147, 152 (section 141-166); Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu‘at al-Rasa’il wa-l-Masa’il*, 25.

theologians could be said to represent the *salaf*²⁴² and that when the terminology made its appearance in the 20th century there was widespread disagreement about what it meant. However, Haykel seemed to be shy of his own bold theory. Roel Meijer, editor of the 2009 volume in which Haykel's article appeared, wrote in his preface that Haykel had proven the Abbasid origins of Salafism. In his article published one year later Lauzière stepped in to absolve his master of this claim, suggesting Meijer had got ahead of himself in his summation of Haykel's ideas and stating bluntly that the primary sources do not "explicitly corroborate" it.²⁴³ Indeed, it is difficult to envisage any scholar in previous decades advancing the Haykel-Lauzière thesis, with its specific framing and formulations, since the Salafism they sought to furnish with an illustrious historical pedigree had not yet been imagined. Their approach brings to mind Foucault's warning of the dangers of creating "unities of discourse" in disciplines such as the history of science, philosophy, literature, or thought, where there is in fact rupture and discontinuity.²⁴⁴ We can also identify in the discourse of Salafism the aligning of literature to meet the needs of "national classicism" examined by Hans Robert Jauss of the Konstanz school in his study of national literatures, whereby narratives of origin, with their absolute beginning, middle, and totalising end, are deployed in the production of intellectual history conforming to contemporary realities and understandings.²⁴⁵

The wider issue here is that of the organisation of Islamic knowledge, who organises it, when, and why. Since the 19th century there has been a convergence of approach among

²⁴² For example, in al-Ghazali's *Iljam al-'Awamm 'an 'Ilm al-Kalam*. Discussed in Ovamir Anjum, "Cultural Memory of the Pious Ancestors (*Salaf*) in al-Ghazālī," *Numen*, 58/2-3 (2011): 344-74 and Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁴³ Meijer writes, "As Bernard Haykel shows in chapter 1, the name Salafism goes back to the Ahl al-Hadith during the Abbasid caliphate"; "Introduction," *Global Salafism*, 4. Lauzière writes in reference to Meijer's statement, "Although Haykel left *salafiyya* untranslated, his contribution has quickly been taken to mean that a single noun translatable as 'Salafism' goes back to the medieval period. Primary sources, however, do not explicitly corroborate this claim". Lauzière, "Construction of Salafiyya," 371, footnote 9.

²⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002); 23-5, 173, 187.

²⁴⁵ Hans Robert Jauss (trans. Timothy Bahti), *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 51, 54, 110-12.

much Western scholarship and reform trends in centring narrations of the Islamic tradition around legalism and to that end the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya.²⁴⁶ Despite different desired outcomes, they shared an interest in producing fixed knowledge from divine texts, in establishing the centrality of scripture, in imagining a fully-formed first religion “after which the authenticity of the original article is progressively corrupted”,²⁴⁷ and in placing law, rather than the practice of theological reasoning, philosophy, logic, or the experiential phenomena of popular practices, at the heart of their Islam.²⁴⁸ On the other hand, the approach of figures such as Kevseri and al-Buti aligns somewhat with recent directions in Western scholarship critical of the traditional legalistic approach. In *Kubra al-Yaqiniyyat al-Kawniyya* (The Greatest of Existential Certainties, 1969), which addressed modern Western philosophies and ideologies, al-Buti argued that both *lā-madhhabīyya* and the modernist reworking of non-empirical knowledge were a product of British interference following the 1882 occupation of Egypt.²⁴⁹ Turkish religious scholar Hüseyin Hilmi Işık (1911-2001) denounced as “Orientalist unbelievers” (*müsteşrik kafirler*) a broad range of disruptive forces, including political ideologues of the 20th century such as Abul A‘la Maudoodi and Sayyid Qutb – about whom more will be said in chapter five.²⁵⁰

Considered by some an appropriate designation for the modernist reformers and by others a blanket term embracing the gamut of change movements since the 18th century,

²⁴⁶ Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 96. See also Carool Kersten’s comment on the critical thinkers Mohammed Arkoun (1928-2010) and Muhammad ‘Abid al-Jabiri (1936-2010) in Kersten, “Critical Islam: Muslims and their Religion in a Post-Islamist World,” *Singapore Middle East Papers, Volume VI* (2015), 119.

²⁴⁷ Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 219.

²⁴⁸ On scholarship’s sidelining of Sufism as central to Islamic faith and practice, see Bernd Radtke, “Between Projection and Suppression: Some Considerations Concerning the Study of Sufism,” in Frederick De Jong, ed., *Shi‘a Islam, Sects and Sufism*, 70-82. Itzhak Weismann argues that Sufism has created an equally hostile discourse of Salafi and modernist fundamentalisms; “Modernity from Within: Islamic Fundamentalism and Sufism,” in *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 30.

²⁴⁹ Said Ramadan Al-Buti, *Kubra al-Yaqiniyyat al-Kawniyya: Wujud al-Khaliq wa-Wazifat al-Makhluq* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1997), 222-8; idem, *al-Lamadhhabīyya*, 129-30.

²⁵⁰ Hüseyin Hilmi Işık, *The Religion Reformers in Islam* (Istanbul: Ikhlas Publications, 1978), 133; *Dinde Reformcular* (Istanbul: Işık Kitabevi, 1976), 170.

Salafism became the property of al-Albani and his followers. Spurred by the Afghan jihad and the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington of 2001, Salafism metastasised in Western public discourse into a burgeoning field traversing government policy circles, think tanks, and academia, some of it under the rubric of the equally neophyte Security Studies, and this has impacted how Islam is understood as a religion in the general culture, scholarly literature, and Muslim communities in terms of belief, law, practice, governance, economy, political ideology, and insurrectionary force.²⁵¹ It is a victory at the level of discourse that many Muslim scholars, foremost amongst them Kevseri, fought to avoid.

* * *

²⁵¹ See the widely used typology of jihadi Salafism (*jihādiyya*), political Salafism (*siyāsiyya*) and scholarly Salafism (*‘ilmiyya*) developed by Quintan Wiktorowicz; Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29/3 (2006): 207-39. In this schema al-Albani is a quietist figure from whom others deviate. A major text is Meijer’s *Global Salafism*.

CHAPTER 5

Nation State, Islamic State: The Egypt exiles and new political imaginaries

This chapter looks at Akif's fundamental acceptance of the nation-state and reconciliation of Turkish and Islamic identity and sets that against Sabri and Kevseri's theoretical objections and argument that the shari'a system with its notion of a legal and moral core above the manipulations of society was superior to man-made law. Noting that their work came 1. as Egypt finalised the process of codification and de-Islamisation of its courts and 2. as the era of military authoritarianism began its long reign in the Arab region, it looks at how Sabri developed a radical view of Islamic faith and identity in the context of the modern state and how this may have impacted Sayyid Qutb's thinking.

Akif's compromise with *Türkçülük*

A modernist Islamic thinker like Mehmed Akif was far more comfortable with nationalist ideology and the nation-state than his peers in Turkish Islamic thought, Mustafa Sabri and Zahid Kevseri. While on the one hand, and not least in the Ottoman context, nationalism reordered borders, shunted – even annihilated – populations, changed language, reframed history, spawned new popular cultures, it also established politico-juridical arenas in which the Islamic, even if in a form radically different from the premodern and precolonial notion of what constituted Islam, would function within a new epistemic and ontological paradigm. Language played an important part in this process: through the nation-state, Arabic is propagated as official language across what comes to be called the Arab world and Turkish extends to all corners of the Turkish republic in media, education, literature, etc. In other words, two high languages of Islamic civilisation are set in stone as the medium through which generations of Muslims are socialised, and in time, as radical secular-nationalist

experiences such as Kemalist Turkey, Nasserism, the Ba‘th, or Pahlavi Iran arise, new discourses of the Islamic assert themselves hegemonically across all fields of life through reactions to and accommodations with the language, institutions, and ideologies of the 20th-century nation-state.

Resistance to nationalist organisation was, however, stiff among the first generation of Ottoman-Turkish Islamists. Akif was of a generation that experienced nationalism as a means to disestablish Islam and propagate positivist reformulations of political and social structures, and *Safahat* wrestles with this development. Akif began to make concessions to Turkist vocabulary after the war ended and Istanbul fell under occupation, as seen in his *Asım*, published between 1919 and 1924, and texts of his 1920-1921 sermons in favour of Ankara’s challenge to the European powers who had been victorious in 1918. Akif had rejected ethnic chauvinism in the context of the severing of Albania from Istanbul as an independent state in November 1912. In a column published in *Sırat-ı Müstakim* in March 1910, Akif became one of many to take issue with leading CUP intellectual Abdullah Cevdet’s Ottoman translation of Dutch Orientalist Reinhart Dozy (1820-1883)’s *Essai sur l’histoire de l’Islamisme* (1879), published in Cairo in 1908 as *Tarih-i İslâmiyet*. The translation was something of a watershed as the first major Ottoman book publication openly critical of Islam,¹ including the suggestion that the Prophet suffered from epilepsy or a psychogenic muscular disorder, but with an introduction by Cevdet praising the work.² Akif focussed on Dozy’s concluding discussion of whether Islam would lose its power in the manner of European Christianity, for reasons of the ethnic and linguistic diversity of its

¹ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, “Garbcılar: Their Attitudes toward Religion and Their Impact on the Official Ideology of the Turkish Republic,” *Studia Islamica*, 86 (1997): 137. The controversy over Cevdet’s book is discussed in Sevda Ayluçtarhan, *Abdullah Cevdet’s Translations (1908-1910): The Making of a Westernist Culture Repertoire in a Resistant Ottoman Context* (Saarbrücken: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017), 89-149.

² Reinhart Dozy, *Essai sur l’histoire de l’Islamisme* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1879), 22-3. This was a translation of the 1863 Dutch original.

adherents.³ In his view the book “took a blunt axe” (*bir kör baltayı eline alırdı*) to the Ottoman unity of Albanian, Turk, Arab, Laz, Kurd, and Circassian.⁴ In Ottoman Maturidi style, Akif stated that Islam does not permit inspection of an individual’s belief, but, he added, in Cevdet’s case it is legitimate to consider whether he is in fact an atheist. Akif took up the same theme following the Albanian loss in a hadith commentary dated to March 1913 that appeared in the third *Safahat* collection. He depicts both *kavmiyet* and *medeniyet* as ideologies that will cause the disintegration of the realm and says his father would have been appalled at the failure to save Albania.⁵ The final section of *Fatih Kürsüsünde*, the fourth *Safahat* published in 1914, was a paean to the Balkans as a lost Andalusia. More attention to Islamic education through establishing Qur’anic schools for children could have firmed the Albanians’ commitment to Istanbul and prevented rebellion, he suggested.⁶ The same point on preserving Islam’s community of ethnic groups was repeated in his Bayezid mosque sermon of February 1913 and two of his Qur’anic commentaries published in the period 1912-1913.⁷

In *Süleymaniye Kürsüsünde*, published in August 1912, Akif’s mosque preacher rails against *kavmiyet* as a device for creating the division that enables colonial rule, “the earthquake that will destroy Islam at its base” (*İslamı/Temelinden yıkacak zelzele*).⁸ In contrast to *kavmiyet*, *milliyet* is held up as a concept of identity that embraces different ethnicities (*akvam*), a sort of Islamic nationalism, as Gökâlp too understood *milliyet/milliyetçilik* in his writings at this time. But positivist intellectuals, who he implies are those associated with the CUP through his use of the word *terakki*, have gone too far in

³ Ibid., 534-6.

⁴ Akif, “Ebüzziya Tevfik Efendi’ye (Açık Mektup),” *SM*, 18 Şubat 1325 (3 March 1910), 3/78: 409.

⁵ Akif, *Hakkın Sesleri*, in *Safahat*, 28 Rebiulevvel 1331 (7 March 1913), 261-7.

⁶ Ibid., 359-60.

⁷ Akif, “Hutbe ve Mevaiz: Bayezid Kürsüsünde,” *SR*, 20 Kanunısanı 1328 (2 February 1913), 2/48 (9/230): 374; Akif, “Tefsir-i Şerif,” *SR*, 7 Haziran 1328 (20 June 1912), 1/16 (8/198): 293-4; Akif, “Tefsir-i Şerif,” *SR*, 27 Eylül 1328 (10 October 1912), 2/32 (9/214): 101-2.

⁸ Akif, *Safahat*, 230.

their attempts to craft nationalism as a set of characteristics for each people (*her millet için ancak o mahiyettir*),⁹ with religion a secondary or regressive element that can have no role in progress. Akif's preacher, who is modelled on Abdürreşid İbrahim, the Tatar 'ālim who travelled in the Far East, concludes with the example of Japan. Akif/İbrahim argue that Japan has advanced – defeating China in 1895, Russia in 1905, and annexing Korea in 1910 – through staying true to its own values while taking from the West only its technology (“To push through all stages of progress/Let your own ‘spiritual identity’ be your guide/Since hope of salvation without out is futile”).¹⁰ Akif advances here a reasoning that is circular in that Japan's ethnic and linguistic homogeneity could equally well be cited as the cause of its success; it also omits Japan's Confucian, Buddhist, and shamanistic traditions. İbrahim's book on Islam in Japan, *Alem-i İslam ve Japonya'da İntişar-ı İslamiyet* (The Islamic World and the Spread of Islam in Japan), printed in Istanbul in 1912 from material serialised since 1909 in Akif's journal, stressed Japan's patriarchal traditions. A more rigorous attempt to understand Japanese culture and its elements that could not easily be syncretised with Islamic belief and practice was undertaken by writer Samizade Süreyya (1869-1941) in *Büyük Japonya* (Great Japan, 1917). For Akif, however, there was no conundrum because his modernist approach, with its inspiration in 'Abduh, saw the Japanese as Muslims in all but name: a conscientious, hard-working, moral people who in his telling only allowed in as much of Western method as necessary. “Let me say this much: there the clear religion [Islam]/And its bounteous spirit have spread, only its form is Buddha [*Şu kadar söyleyeyim: Din-i mübînin orada/Ruh-ı feyyazı yayılmış, yalnız şekli Buda*],” Akif's preacher declares.¹¹ Another important aim behind this Ottoman interest in Japan, which extended across the

⁹ Ibid., 241.

¹⁰ Ibid., 245; *Bütün edvar-ı terakkiyi yarıp geçmek için/Kendi ‘mahiyet-i ruhiyeniz’ olsun kılavuz/Çünkü beyhudedir ümid-i selamet onsuz.*

¹¹ Ibid., 217-8.

political spectrum, was, as Akif stated, to free Ottomans from dependency on Western scholarship in their knowledge about Asia.¹²

Akif again attacked nationalist sentiment, this time as *kavmiyetçilik*, in his first act of propaganda work against the Allied Powers and their plans to slice Anatolia into European territories and spheres of influence. Several months before those policies were formalised in the Treaty of Sèvres in August 1920, Akif took to the Zağnos Paşa mosque in Balıkesir province to rally against them. Two months after Akif delivered his sermon there in February 1920, Mustafa Kemal split with the sultan's government to set up a parliamentary assembly (*millet meclisi*) in Ankara and Akif quit Istanbul, where his sermon had caused friction with the authorities, for the nationalist stronghold. By *kavmiyetçilik* Akif intended a community so partisan that it could easily fall prey to internecine dispute, his example being the pagan Aws and Khazraj tribes that are said in Islamic tradition to have feuded before the Prophet established his system of government in Medina. Such a *kavmiyetçilik* he equates with *fırkacılık* (partisanship), but it is a term he appears to have used in order to preserve the possibility of retaining an Islamic cast for *kavmiyet* as a Turkish nationalism he could embrace.¹³ Akif's sermon discourse always maintained this ambiguity regards nationalism: for example, he would tell his audience they faced "a national task, a religious obligation" (*bir vazife-i vataniye, bir fariza-ı diniye*) in which there could be no dereliction of duty.¹⁴

This miasmic Turkish Islamic mix pervades a further four sermons that Akif delivered between November 1920 and February 1921 having fully staked his colours to the nationalist cause – moving to Ankara, accepting a seat in its parliament – but now expressed in bellicose

¹² Akif, "Gayet Mühim bir Eser," *SM*, 1 Temmuz 1326 (14 July 1910), 4/97: 322-3. See Selcuk Esenbel, *Japan, Turkey and the World of Islam: The Writings of Selcuk Esenbel* (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2011); Renée Worringer, *Ottomans Imagining Japan: East, Middle East, and Non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹³ Akif, "Mev'ize: Üstad-ı Muhterem Mehmed Akif Beyefendi'nin Karası'de Zağnos Paşa Cami-i Şerifi'nde İrad Buyurdukları Mev'izenin Hulasası," *SR*, 12 Şubat 1336 (12 February 1920), 18/458: 183-6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

language that seems at odds with Akif's humanist demeanour as a leading Muslim intellectual. Speaking at the Nasrullah mosque in Kastamonu on 21 November, Akif asked the question at the outset, should we be compassionate with non-Muslims?¹⁵ He proceeded to go through his experiences with Europeans that would militate against such a position, focussing in particular on his months in Berlin during the war when he was on, as he put it, "an important mission" (*mühim bir vazife*).¹⁶ He states at the outset that he has come to his senses now that he has seen with his own eyes "the injustice, treachery and contempt that the nations we call European see as appropriate for helpless people they took into bondage and ruled".¹⁷ Western culture may be irreligious as a general characteristic today, but that does not mean its education systems do not inculcate a deep anti-Muslim sentiment; they cannot consider as equal in humanity those who do not belong to their ethnic group, religion, or colour (*kendi cinslerinden, kendi dinlerinden, kendi renklerinden*),¹⁸ and this shows in their art, poetry, novels, and newspapers, which "continue to provoke these feelings" (*bu hislerini candlandırır dururlar*).¹⁹ The technical achievements of their civilisation will be attainable by others through the same hard work the Europeans put in, Akif said, but Muslim nations must be internally united if they are to succeed. Stoking division is how the British managed an empire on minimal military resources, he added.

Referring to his audience as both "Muslims" and "Turks", Akif now turned to the threat at hand: that Greek forces are massing and the British, even though they would prefer to save Istanbul as a Muslim city in order to maintain calm in their Indian realm, could allow the Greeks into the capital. Expect Ottoman Greeks, Armenians, and Jews to be deployed among the small police force that Muslim Turks will be allowed to form but Greek and

¹⁵ This sermon was also delivered in Diyarbakır at an unclear date; see Abdülkadiroğlu and Abdülkadiroğlu, *Mev'iza ve Hutbeler*, 144, asterisk footnote. Akif said in Kastamonu he had travelled to many parts of Anatolia.

¹⁶ Akif, "Nasrullah Kürsüsünde," *SR*, 25 Teşrinisani 1336 (26 November 1920), 18/464: 250.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

Armenian militias to attack Muslims nevertheless, Akif says, while financial structures will be established to impoverish them. Experience in India and North Africa shows that neither British justice nor French civilisation are to be trusted,²⁰ so neither can we have faith in any post-war treaty.²¹ The immediate task is thus to end infighting in order to face the threat from the Greek army, which had occupied Izmir in May 1919 and began pushing inland towards Ankara after consolidating its hold of the Aegean coast. To this end, west Anatolia must do what east Anatolians had done and take the fight to the enemy: he cites the specific example of Kars, which Ankara's forces had retaken from the Republic of Armenia the previous month. "Let God grant success to our heroic fighters; may He inflict on this base enemy in Western Anatolia the fate the Armenians rightly suffered [*Cenab-ı Hak o kahraman mücahidlerimize tevfikler ihsan buyursun; Anadolumuzun garbındaki bu sefil düşmanı da Ermenilerin bihakkın uğradıkları akibete uğratsın*]," Akif says. "Now the task of our coreligionists on this side of Anatolia is to rip up this filthy rag [Treaty of Sèvres] by throwing the enemies on other side of Anatolia into the sea."²²

Akif's intent here is ambiguous. Although in the immediately preceding sentences he used the phrase *Yunan ordusu* (Greek army) rather than *Rum*, which would refer to Greeks under Ottoman rule, and he contextualised his citation of the Armenian *akibet* with mention of the battle of Kars, his audience could well have understood his words as a call to evict Greek Ottomans in the manner that Armenian Ottomans had been removed and murdered en masse during the war. The issue was hardly far from public awareness. A military court focussed largely on the treatment of Armenians was established by occupying British authorities in April 1919 with the cooperation of the Istanbul government, and in July 1919 it found the CUP and its wartime leaders guilty of intent to eliminate the Armenians through

²⁰ Ibid., 258-9.

²¹ Ibid., 254-5.

²² Ibid., 259.

the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa. A large number of administrators, officers, and intellectuals were exiled to Malta while the British tried to amass evidence against them from Ottoman documentary material, among them Eşref Sencer. With the Ankara government staunchly opposed to the process, Britain released them in 1921 in exchange for British prisoners of war. Akif was among the Ottoman elite who moved to Kayseri in early 1921 for fear of a Greek siege of Ankara. Eviction was the eventual fate of not only the Greek army, but the Greek Orthodox population of Izmir, its surrounding towns, and the Anatolian interior, firstly through war when Izmir was taken by the national forces in September 1922 and then through diplomacy, with the exchange of populations with Greece agreed in January 1923. Mustafa Kemal sent Akif a note of thanks for his work campaigning against Sèvres.²³

In his later exchange of letters with Sencer, Akif commented on their shared fate of exile and repudiation, a “public trial” (*imtihan-ı aleniye*) they had endured because of the revolutionary excesses (*inkılap namıyla her türlü ifrat*) of the ruling elite,²⁴ but the Armenian issue never comes up in the extant correspondence. Questions over the extent of Sencer’s knowledge of the Armenian deportations dogged him throughout his life.²⁵ The wartime prime minister Said Halim Paşa, whose works Akif translated and whose brother became Akif’s patron, was among those sent to Malta along with Sencer on suspicion of having played a role. However, Süleyman Nazif, a fellow poet and admiring acquaintance of Akif, wrote of his horror at signs of massacre in his native Diyarbakır region and possibly prevented atrocities in Baghdad province when serving as governor.²⁶ Akif was typical

²³ Düzdağ, “Mehmed Âkif Ersoy: Hayatı ve Eserleri,” in Akif (ed. Düzdağ), *Safahat*, xxxi.

²⁴ Letter 4 to Eşref Sencer, 18 May 1931, in Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 90.

²⁵ Fortna, *The Circassian*, 5 (note 8), 10-11, 166-8.

²⁶ David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2006), 306; Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93.

among the Ottoman intelligentsia in moving in elite circles that were likely to have been aware of what was taking place.

The further three published sermons Akif gave during this critical period of the Greek war pursue his themes of the need for unity to face the enemy and his notion of an Islamic nationalism, a readiness to “defend the nation of Islam” (*vatan-ı İslamı müdafaa*) through attention to all obligations of faith including that of jihad.²⁷ For Akif these represent an opportunity to discuss the ideas of his poetry directly with ordinary people outside the parameters of poetic language, his theme of the Muslim nation that throws off its sloth to rise again after decline – a discourse that traverses the modernist and Salafi understanding of Islamic history as gradual corruption of an original purity. For example, he impressed upon his audience the argument that *tevekkül* should be understood as the belief that God will support the believer in realising the aims of his resolute action (*azim*),²⁸ which he developed from ‘Abduh and al-Afghani’s well-known article on the topic in *al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa*.²⁹ Akif had touched on this question before the war,³⁰ and returned to *tevekkül* in his poem in the *Gölgeler* collection “Azimden Sonra Tevekkül” (After Resolve, Faith in God), written in November 1919. These arguments then made their way into the classic Late Ottoman text of Islamic modernism, *Anglikan Kilisesine Cevap*, authored by Jawish and translated by Akif.³¹ Most significant of all is the function of Akif’s sermons. Their intent was to convince the Anatolian populace that Ankara’s National Forces were not a reconstituted CUP movement, that their fight was not against religion and caliphate – indeed, that to join the fight was a

²⁷ Akif, “Tam Müslüman Olmadıkça Felah Yoktur,” *SR*, 13 Kanunevvel 1336 (13 December 1920), 18/466: 279.

²⁸ Akif, “Ye’se Düşenler Müslüman Değildir,” *SR*, 3 Şubat 1337 (3 February 1921), 18/467: 294.

²⁹ Translated and published by Akif as “Kaza ve Kader,” *SM*, 30 Nisan 1325 (13 May 1909), 2/36: 149-50. Note use of the word *azim* in the discussion of *tevekkül*.

³⁰ Akif, *Fatih Kürsüsünde*, in *Safahat*, 346; Akif, “Tefsir-i Şerif,” *SR*, 8 Ağustos 1329 (21 August 1313), 10/258: 381.

³¹ Jawish, “Anglikan Kilisesine Cevap,” *SR*, 27 Eylül 1339 (27 April 1923), 22/563: 129-32.

religious duty incumbent on each person (*farz-ı ayn*) – and that if they were to lose, Muslim Turks would have nowhere else to go.³²

Akif's use of language in this period provides more evidence that he was more accepting of Turkish nationalism than is often assumed, often using terms notably more ideological than the neutral, jurisdictional *vatan* or *memleket*.³³ Around 1921-1922 he composed a poem for a military march that composer Ali Rifat set to music called "Ordunun Duası" (Call of the Army), praising the institution in both ethnic and religious terms for fighting for the *millet*. "We are Turkish men of heroic descent/Muslims who worship God [*Biz Türk eriyiz, silsileyiz kahraman/Müslümanız, Hakk'a tapan Müslüman*]," it declares in one stanza.³⁴ In his letters from Egypt he displayed a strong sense of belonging with Turkish speakers, bewailing the kind of absent communal spirit that had caused Yusuf Akçura and Ziya Gökalp to raise fears of Turkish assimilation.³⁵ He praised his son-in-law Ahmed's decision to vacation in the east of Turkey, since "the nation is a unity that cannot be divided [*vatan bir külldür ki tecezzi kabul etmez*]: its east, west, north, south must be completely one in our thinking",³⁶ and he also praised Ahmed for carrying out his sacred national duty in performing military service (*vazife-i mukaddese-i vataniyeniz*).³⁷ He told his daughter not to complain about life in the east, where they had moved, noting that officials of the British empire did not hesitate to travel the world for the sake of nation (*vatani uğrunda*): "It seems we weren't born into the world, we were born to Istanbul [*bizler dünyaya gelmemişiz*

³² Düzdağ says Akif made a speech to this effect when he first arrived in Ankara at the Hacı Bayram mosque, but it was never published in *Sebilürreşad*; *Safahat*, xxix.

³³ For example, "Mehmet Akif Ersoy nêdên millêtcîliyi deyil, ümmetçiliyi seçdi?" *Modern.az*, 10 February 2015; <http://modern.az/articles/72035/1/#gsc.tab=0> (accessed 13 October 2018).

³⁴ In Akif (ed. Düzdağ), *Safahat*, 493.

³⁵ Letter to Asım Şakir Gören, dated 2 March 1925, in Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 134. "Even strong communities like Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Italians have difficulty finding work, so compare that to Turks who have no community [*hiçbir teşkilatı olmayan Türklerin maruz kalacağı sıkıntıyı artık bir kıyas edin*]," he wrote.

³⁶ Letter to Ahmed, 11 June 1932, in Ömer Hakan Özalp, *Firaklı Nâmeler Âkif'in Gurbet Mektupları* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2011), 70.

³⁷ Letter to Ahmed, 31 December 1933, *ibid.*, 106-7.

İstanbul'a gelmişiz],” he joked.³⁸ In a letter of 29 April 1935, Akif wrote to his friend Şefik Kolaylık: “May God give power and strength to you, so you can keep on working for the good of the nation [*vatanımızın hayrı için uğraş dur*].”³⁹ Then in a letter dated 19 July 1935 he recalled a recent trip to Antakya, his first visit to the republic in a decade, writing rapturously of “a lush Turkish land [*yemyeşil bir Türk yurdu*] with trees, gardens, olive groves, vineyards staring upon the Taurus mountains, running down to the Asi river”.⁴⁰

Akif also used the phrase *Allah büyük* (for *Allāh akbar*) in some of his later letters,⁴¹ *Tanrı* for God in his Kastamonu sermons (1920-1),⁴² and *ırk* meaning ethnic group in *Asım* (1919-24)⁴³ and in his national anthem. The latter example counters earlier usages of *ırk* that were clearly pejorative.⁴⁴ Akif would more often than not use the Ottoman Rumi calendar, sometimes both Rumi and Islamic, but rarely only Islamic. Akif’s use of *millet* is more problematic. We have already seen how Gökalp attempted to claim the term for Turkish nationalism, and thus rejected any talk of Islamic *milliyetçilik* as suggestive of an Islamic unity of nations. This was consistent with the Young Turk usage of *millet* as a non-religious racial community or state, so the Germans or the Turks could be a such a nation.⁴⁵ Feroz Ahmad has noted, however, that the word retained its sense of religious community well into the republican period;⁴⁶ indeed, Erbakan’s Millî Görüş (Religious Vision) movement – from which he formed his political parties – embraced the term *millî* as a codeword for the lost religious unity of the caliphate though the word had come to mean “national”. Akif could

³⁸ Letter to Suad, 19 April 1934, *ibid.*, 116-19.

³⁹ Letter to Şefik Kolaylık, 29 April 1935, in Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 119-120.

⁴⁰ Letter to Emine Abbas Halim, 25 June 1935, in Günaydın, *Mektuplar*, 146-7.

⁴¹ Letter to Eşref Sencer, 18 May 1931, *ibid.*, 91.

⁴² Akif, “Ye’se Düşenler Müslüman Değildir,” *SR*, 3 Şubat 1337 (3 February 1921), 18/467: 293-6.

⁴³ Akif (ed. Düzdağ), *Safahat*, 504; use of *ırkın torunu* in reference to a feisty Turkish wrestler.

⁴⁴ See his reference to *ırk davaları* in his *tafsîr* of Qur’an 8:25; Akif, “Tefsîr-i Sure-i Enfâl, 25,” *SR*, 20 Eylül 1328 2/31 (9/213): 82. He notes how Germans consider the Asian race as “different” (*başka*) in *Berlin Hatıraları*, in Akif (ed. Düzdağ), *Safahat*, 441.

⁴⁵ On the late 19th century debate on *millet* as a religious concept but given new nationalist meaning, see David Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism, 1876-1908* (London: Cass, 1977), 23-5.

⁴⁶ Feroz Ahmad, “Feroz Ahmad replies,” *The American Historical Review*, 102/4 (1997): 1302-3; reply to M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, “To the Editor,” *American Historical Review*, 102/4 (1997): 1301-2.

then freely deploy *millet* with all its ambiguity, knowing it meant different things to different audiences. Ethnic and religious concepts are fused in the “İstiklal Marşı” in which he talks of independence as the right of a God-worshipping nation (*Hakkıdır, Hakk’a tapan, milletimin istiklal*) and “my hero people” (*kahraman ırkım*).⁴⁷ These shifts in language were noted by some of his contemporaries.⁴⁸

Several decades later, a nationalist writer like Cemal Kutay could even put a nationalist gloss on Akif’s life in his account of his role working for the government in his wartime mission to Najd. Through the memory of Sencer, who Kutay interviewed as the basis for his account first published in 1963, Akif is depicted as emerging from the arduous experience of the desert as a changed man, cured of delusions of Islamic unity and romantic notions of “the East” with a more pragmatic nationalist focus for his Muslim faith. “Now I know better what I want for my religion and my nation [*dinim ve milletim için*],” Akif is quoted saying by Sencer.⁴⁹ He also tells Sencer: “Eşref, what is this scene, this poverty, this decline, this primitiveness [*bu inhitat, bu iptidailik*]? Its basic catastrophe, this spiritual collapse [*ruhi izmihlal*], what is it?”⁵⁰ The implication for the reader is that Akif has now understood that Turkey must detach itself from the Islamic East. Kutay even argues that the final section of Akif’s “Berlin Hatıraları” (dated 18 March 1915), in which an Englishman imagines a caliph in only name and separation of Arabs and Turks, was Akif’s prediction of rising *Türkçülük*.⁵¹ In Kutay’s telling, Akif witnessed Arabian degeneration when a Wahhabi judge in the Rashidi town of Ha’il showed himself greedy for Ottoman money. In this incident, which probably took place in early January 1916, Sencer attended the meeting with Akif and Shaykh Salih al-Sharif. The judge began by praising the Turks for great services to

⁴⁷ “İstiklal Marşı,” Akif, *Safahat*, 709.

⁴⁸ See Halim Sabit, in Edib, *Mehmed Âkif*, 546.

⁴⁹ Kutay, *Necid Çöllerinde Mehmet Akif*, 122.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 123. “Berlin Hatıraları,” Akif, *Safahat*, 453-4.

Islam except for allowing Muslims to seek intercession through visiting shrines, which led to a theological discussion on actions that negate faith. After Sencer arranged for new annual payments of gold coins to the judge, who is only described as blind, they returned to their creedal dispute. The narration of the debate fits the standard trope of Wahhabi disdain for Ottoman Islam but its details on the question of faith and action suggest a kernel of truth to the recollection. “Among all peoples there are people incapable of understanding, but there should be no more extremism [*taassup*]. Anyone who says, ‘there is no god but God’ and means it in his heart is a Muslim. Everything else is between him and God,” the Shaykh is reported as telling his Maturidi guests in conciliatory words of farewell.⁵²

Sabri’s view of the National Struggle

Mustafa Sabri wrote at length about Ankara’s *millî mücadele* (national struggle)⁵³ in its immediate aftermath, in his first Arabic-language work *al-Nakir* (1924). Sabri’s first target in the book was the decision taken by the Ankara parliament in November 1922 to strip the caliph of any authority over government; his secondary aim was to question Ankara’s conduct during the war, which for Sabri speaks to the nature of the secular-nationalist ideology guiding it. Sabri made here his first comments presaging the dark view on individual responsibility that he was to advance in *Mawqif al-‘Aql* some two decades later, in that he talked not only of the *lā-dīniyyīn*, meaning the irreligious clique who form the Ankara government, but questioned the Islam of Muslims under their rule. The first was a familiar theme in Late Ottoman religious discourse, but the second was a new direction for someone within the Hanafi-Maturidi Ottoman fold. “Unfortunately, for some time the situation of

⁵² Ibid., 211-17.

⁵³ This was the first term used to describe the post-1918 fighting that led to the republic. The republic later propagated *istiklal harbi* (war of independence) and *ulusal kurtuluş savaşı* (national war of liberation).

Muslims is that more than ninety-five percent of them live under foreign rule, while the affairs of the rest who are less than five percent are in the hands of the irreligious who are nominally Muslim,” Sabri wrote.⁵⁴ He continued: “The situation of this second group is worse than the first, in that the irreligious are fiercer enemies to the Islamic religion than its other enemies and more cunning in sabotaging and misrepresenting it.”⁵⁵ Given the views expressed in his most recent book at the time, *Dinî Müceddidler* (1922), by “the irreligious” Sabri intended not only the Kemalists of Ankara but modernist intellectuals. Though its members number fewer than “the sincere Muslims” (*al-mukhlisîn*), together they are in a position to wage war on Islam from the inside, he said, which began with stripping the caliphate of its powers but will end with removing religion’s role entirely from worldly affairs and politics (*shu ’ûn al-dunyâ wa-l-siyâsa*).⁵⁶ Sabri argued, however, that in his view Muslims living under the authority of a government that rejects the supervisory ordinances of shari‘a are liable to be considered apostates; in other words, their individual claims to belief are not enough to preclude the communal requirement to establish religious governance (*lā tanfa ’uhum diyānatuhum min haythu afrāduhum mā lam yuqirrū bi-ḥukm al-dîn wa-ḥukūmatihi ’alayhim*).⁵⁷ What risked facilitating the Kemalists in their task was that the pious (*al-mutadayyinūn min al-muslimîn*) attended to only their own religious observance, while the mass of ordinary believers (*‘awāmm al-mu ’minîn*) were oblivious and intellectuals and ‘ulama’ too fearful for their lives to speak out.⁵⁸

In Sabri’s analysis it was Ankara’s victory in Izmir that had enabled the Kemalists to move ahead with their plan for the caliphate, part realised at the time of his writing, and what he suspected was their undeclared plan to remove Islam from public policy altogether and

⁵⁴ Sabri, *al-Nakir*, 4. The Arabic is not clear: Sabri could also mean that the five percent living under the rule of the irreligious are themselves nominal Muslims for that reason.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 4. He cites a supporting view on this point from Rashid Rida in his book *al-Khilafa* (1921).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 83. Sabri refers to an article he published in 1923 on this topic in *al-Ahram* and *al-Muqattam*.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 5-6.

restrict it to private space.⁵⁹ This ran counter to publicly stated positions and acts such as establishing the Ankara publications committee and commissioning the Jawish-Akif book on modern Islam. The occupation of Anatolia by Greece and Istanbul by Britain and France was a result of both the CUP's fatal mistake of entering the war and their despotic rule, not the product of caliphal despotism (*istibdād*), Sabri said.⁶⁰ Sabri compared the orderly surrender of Bucharest to the Central Powers in May 1918, which he witnessed personally, to the destruction that befell Izmir after Ankara's forces took over.⁶¹ He also condemned the Turco-Greek population exchange of 1923 as heaping more suffering upon Anatolians for a disingenuous narrative of Islamic chauvinism (*'asabiyya islāmiyya*) with the ulterior motive of bringing Kemalist supporters from Rumelia into the Turkish state.⁶² The ultimate aim was to create a "secular-national state" (*dawla lā-dīniyya qawmiyya*) that would be cut off from "its Ottoman and Islamic past" (*māḍīhā al-'uthmānī wa-l-islāmī*) on the basis of "ethnic chauvinism for the Turkish nation" (*al-'aṣabiyya al-jinsiyya li-ummat al-turk*), Sabri charged.⁶³ By *lā-dīnī* Sabri meant a state in which legislation is devoid of explicit derivation in religious principles, the judiciary operates outside the structures of religious institutions, and the symbols of the state are ethnically nationalist rather than based on religion. In some passages he gave the French *laïque* in parentheses in translation of *lā-dīnī* as it appeared in citations from Arabic or Ottoman newspaper articles.⁶⁴ The grey wolf, which Kemalists had taken to placing on postage stamps, he ridiculed as a pre-Islamic symbol that ethnic Turks, including his own family, had never heard of.⁶⁵ Sabri said what he had forsaken was neither his *jins*, by which he meant ethnicity, nor his Turkish Muslim *qawm*, by which he meant

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10-11. He says they plan to remove the shari'a courts, following CUP changes to their status in 1917.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 24, footnote 40; 28, footnote 41.

⁶¹ Ibid., 104.

⁶² Ibid., 98.

⁶³ Ibid., 105.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 17-18, 93. Sabri's use of *lā-dīnī* often equates to the English term secular, though there are historical differences between the functioning of secularism in, say, Britain, the United States, France or Turkey.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 58-60.

people, but rather a clique that had wronged both people and caliph through placing secularism (*lā-dīniyya*) before faith and ethnicity (*jinsiyya*) before Islam.⁶⁶ We can add to this somewhat humanist face Sabri gives his anti-nationalism the further point he made that during his Ottoman years, contrary to some press reports, he never once issued the death penalty.⁶⁷

The important element in Sabri's critique of nationalist ideology, and which sets him apart from modernist intellectuals such as Akif, is his analysis of the nature of the nation-state rather than his view of nationalism in the abstract. Sabri homes in on the fact that nation-state modernity has been received through war, militarisation of the state, and suppression of political life and free expression. In contrast, the shari'a court system was not there to oppress society, rather its function was to check the power of the ruler and thus act as a protective structure for society; removing the institutional framework of shari'a allows the military caste to do as it pleases. Thus, in Sabri's view a restricted role for religion, by his understanding of religion as an institutional state structure, is incompatible with the notion of freedom (*kayfa yumkin al-tawfīq bayn al-ḥurriyya wa-l-dīn al-muqayyad?*).⁶⁸ Freedom should mean the freedom of nations to form their governments (*ḥurriyyat al-umam tujāh al-ḥukūmāt*), not freedom of governments to act independently of the Islamic system.⁶⁹ The foundation of both the CUP and the Kemalists' power was not the will of the people as expressed through election but acts of the army and outcomes of long drawn-out conflict between civilian and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 39. The Turkish translation uses *ırkçılık* for *jinsiyya* and *millet* for *qawm*; Sabri (ed. and trans. Oktay Yılmaz), *Hilafetin İlgasının Arka Planı* (Istanbul: İnsan, 1998), 144.

⁶⁷ Sabri, *al-Nakir*, 18 (note 32). Sabri naming both the CUP as Free Masons (*bannā'ūn aḥrār*; *ibid.*, 10) and the nationalist novelist Halide Edib as Jewish (*ibid.*, 31, note 47) is intended as a slur. However, Yılmaz incorrectly translates Sabri as describing the CUP/Kemalists as *dönme* (Jewish converts to Islam); Sabri, *Hilafetin İlgasının*, 143, footnote 14.

⁶⁸ Sabri, *al-Nakir*, 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 84.

military wings of the CUP:⁷⁰ “The military that we employed and prepared to protect us are those who attacked us with their weapons, although we had begged them to preserve our independence, our property, our freedom, our dignity, and our nation. But these sanctities became a plaything in their hands.”⁷¹ It was an army outside civilian control that ran amok in Izmir and provoked rebellion against it in a number of Anatolian cities.⁷²

Sabri outlines an ideal legislative framework, a static, conservative system in which laws are created and amended at a minimum. He sees three levels: a base of shari‘a laws, which he says is consonant to a degree with what physicists call natural laws, followed by constitutional law with protections against revision, and then circumstantial legislation.⁷³ His main example of arbitrary legislation enacted by the Kemalists is the Treason Law of 1920 (Hıyanet-i Vataniye Kanunu), which established the death penalty for questioning the legitimacy of the Ankara parliament and led to the creation of independence tribunals the same year. The law was amended in April 1923 to include opposition to the abolition of the sultanate and in February 1925 for establishing organisations using religion for political aims.⁷⁴ The period 1922-1924 was critical in the victory of Kemalist republicanism over contesting visions of the post-war state which were not limited to the system of shari‘a and sovereign caliph advocated by the ‘ulama’ and devout intellectuals.⁷⁵ Following the declaration of the republic in October 1923, three forms of republicanism were in conflict:

⁷⁰ Ibid., 72. For modern scholarship on this question see: Hanioğlu, *A Brief History*, 164-5; Dankwart Rustow, “The Army and the Founding of the Turkish Republic,” in *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization under Atatürk and Reza Shah*, ed. Touraj Atabaki and Eric Zürcher (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 164-208; Frank Tachau and Metin Heper, “The State, Politics, and the Military in Turkey,” *Comparative Politics*, 16/1 (Oct. 1983): 17-33; Feroz Ahmad, “Military and Politics in Turkey,” in *Turkey’s Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Celia Kerslake, Kerem Öktem, Philip Robins (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 92-116.

⁷¹ Sabri, *al-Nakir*, 73.

⁷² Ibid., 72.

⁷³ Ibid., 85.

⁷⁴ Ergün Aybars, *İstiklal Mahkemeleri* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1975), 43-54.

⁷⁵ Banu Turnaoğlu, “Ideological struggle during the formative years of the Turkish Republic,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 52/4 (2016): 677-93.

Islamic, liberal, and radical, centred around Mustafa Kemal as president.⁷⁶ Criticism of Kemalist authoritarianism led to trials of journalists from 1923 and a split in the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, or RPP), in 1924, after which the RPP consolidated its position in a single-party state. A series of laws followed targeting Ottoman Islamic institutions – the courts, the sheikh ül-Islam's office, the dervish orders, and Islam as religion of state. To Sabri, the preeminent voice among the disenfranchised religious class, there was nothing liberal about the secular republic at all.

Sabri's radical discourse in Egypt

Two decades later Sabri returned to these arguments. The final section of *Mawqif al- 'Aql* is an essay on modern legal and political systems titled, "On the impermissibility of separating religion from politics in Islam". Published in 1949, it was written after Sabri had observed close-up the theological transformations of Egyptian Islamic discourse since the end of the caliphate and gradual erosion of the institutional system of Egyptian Islam. 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq's book *al-Islam wa-Usul al-Hukm* (1925) advocated abandoning entirely the shari'a court system, which under Ottoman inspiration and later British encouragement began to operate on twin civil and Islamic tracks from 1848, and in 1948 the revised Egyptian Civil Code was drafted by 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri, merging shari'a, French, and American law and becoming the basis for civil codes in a number of post-colonial Arab states.⁷⁷ Sabri notes other changes such as ending the requirement for the shaykh al-Islam, as head of the shari'a

⁷⁶ Turnaoğlu's terminology; *ibid.*, 686.

⁷⁷ Guy Bechor, *The Sanhuri Code and the Emergence of Modern Arab Civil Law (1932 to 1949)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Nathan Brown, *The Rule of Law in the Arab World: Courts in Egypt and the Gulf* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997).

courts and issuer of fatwas, to approve government contracts and agreements and relegation of the shaykh of al-Azhar's status in official protocol.⁷⁸

Sabri starts by arguing that separation of religion from state is a “governmental revolution against the religion of the people”,⁷⁹ which leads to the apostasy of not only those in government but ordinary Muslims under its control. Indeed, he states clearly: “It entails the apostasy of individuals [*irtidād al-afrād*] too because of their acceptance of obedience to this apostate government, which claimed independence from the rule of Islam to which it had previously submitted”.⁸⁰ The result is that society, or the nation (he uses the word *umma*), becomes apostate itself, through obedience to such a government that claims to derive its authority from that same society. Thus, while it could be said there was no substantive difference between this government and foreign occupation, the latter would be more benign in that it would not interfere in the religious affairs of the people while deriving its authority from external forces in external locations.⁸¹ This, Sabri says, is his view of the Kemalist government: if Izmir was for a time under Greek control, now all Turkey and its people have “slipped from the hand of Islam” (*kharajat min yad al-islām*).⁸² Such thinking might not appear shameful to those who consider “the nation alone to be above all else” (*al-waṭan faqat fawqa kull shayʿ*), but true Islam considers that the Muslim “finds his nation through Islam” (*yatawaṭṭan maʿa al-islām*).⁸³

Sabri is rejecting here the widely stated opinions of Shaykh al-Maraghi during his two stints as rector of al-Azhar (1927-1929, 1935-1945) regarding the Turkish republic as a

⁷⁸ Sabri, *Mawqif al-ʿAql*, 4:358. By shaykh al-Islam Sabri is apparently referring to the Dar al-Iftaʿ, formally established in 1895, which in fact never retained the control over shariʿa courts enjoyed by the Ottoman sheikh ūl-Islam. See Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dār al-Ifṭāʾ* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 100-6.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 281.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 282.

⁸¹ Ibid., 284-5.

⁸² Ibid., 285.

⁸³ Ibid., 285.

model modern Muslim state whose secularism, which for Sabri meant *ḥukūma lā-dīniyya*, did not detract from the Islamic faith of its Muslim subjects. In comments published in 1936 al-Maraghi said it was unreasonable (*min ghayr al-ma‘qūl*) for laws, texts, and principles of the early Islamic period to apply today.⁸⁴ Sabri says he has included this section on separation of religion and state, although his book is fundamentally concerned with creedal questions, because of the bitter experience of the Kemalist revolution (*al-inqilāb al-kamālī*) which many Muslims had not foreseen.⁸⁵ This now is the fate Sabri foresees for Egypt, and his key argument throughout the four volumes is that ‘Abduh’s failure to refute the arguments for secularism put forward by Farah Antun was a foundational moment.⁸⁶

In Sabri’s understanding, modern governments want to free themselves of the Islamic juridical system in all its aspects – its law, its courts, its justices – in order to free themselves from “Islam’s supervision” (*riqābat al-islām*). He goes further than his previous analysis, which stressed the illiberal authoritarianism of a regime established by military officers, to draw a generalised picture of the post-colonial surveillance state, since not only religion but all aspects of social, economic, and political life are now under the purview of the government. “The politics which the government side appropriates and the religious side cedes, and which entails sovereignty and supervision over every person within the boundaries of the country [*al-siyāda wa-l-ishrāf ‘alā kull man yadkhul taḥt saqf al-bilād*], necessarily places religion and everything else in the country under the absolute authority of the government [*lā budd an taḍa ‘al-dīn taḥt amr al-ḥukūma wa-nahyihā ma‘ kull mā yadkhul taḥt dhālik al-saqf*],” Sabri writes.⁸⁷ A state assuming such powers could choose not to oppress religion, as with Britain’s protectorate in Egypt, or it could choose to oppress, as with

⁸⁴ Ibid., 285, 359; citing *al-Ahram*, 28 February 1936.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 286.

⁸⁶ Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 1:162-3, where he summarises his view on the apostasy of modern state citizenry.

⁸⁷ Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 4:293.

Kemalist rule in Turkey. What Sabri expresses here is the notion of removal of shari‘a structures allowing for the full Foucauldian requisitioning of state and nation and constitution of the modern subject. While the examples he cites are always Egypt and Turkey in their experiences of Western imperial power on the outside and Westernising forces on the inside, his concept of the totalitarian nature of the modern state was formed in the shadow of Europe’s experience with fascist movements, and what he saw possibly saw as their emulation in the Middle East.⁸⁸ In other words, the advantage of shari‘a is the very *jumūd* that Europeans and reformist intellectuals identified as a backward non-modern characteristic. Divine law stands above man-made law, which is fashioned by men for their interests, and easily so in parliamentary systems in which just one seat is enough to allow majoritarian rule;⁸⁹ divine law prevents elites from gaming the system for their own ends. Thus, *jumūd* has been a factor for stability throughout Islamic period when “no Muslim state or nation from east to west complained of the stagnation of Islamic shari‘a and separating religion from state to end stagnation never crossed anyone’s mind”.⁹⁰ “In Europe there is a body of modernist scholars [*al-‘ulamā’ al-mujaddidīn*] who consider the law a living entity that develops in the same way as social relations that are regulated by the law. But once law is written it becomes independent of those who wrote it, developing according to social circumstance. Therefore, it should be interpreted in a manner that avoids stagnation and that is commensurate with life,” Sabri says.⁹¹ It is the desire to create such a European-style juridical system that motivates the

⁸⁸ On Kemalism and fascist movements see Fikret Adanır, “Kemalist Authoritarianism and Fascist Trends in Turkey during the Inter-war Period,” in *Fascism Outside Europe: The European Impulse against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism*, ed. Stein Larsen (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2001), 313-61; Vahram Ter-Matevosyan, “Turkish Experience with Totalitarianism and Fascism: Tracing the Intellectual Origins,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 19/4 (2015): 387-401.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 332-3.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 345-6.

⁹¹ Ibid., 344. Note the new originalist movement’s text-based view of the US constitution and rejection of judicial interpretation according to social and political trend; see Scott Soames, “Justice Scalia’s Philosophy of Interpretation: From Textualism to Deferentialism,” in *Justice Scalia: Rhetoric and the Rule of Law*, ed. Brian G. Slocum and Francis J. Mootz III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 21-34.

modernist ‘ulama’ and intellectuals in their assault on the methodology of *taqlīd* and espousal of unconditional *ijtihād*.⁹²

So Sabri’s basic arguments are that Muslims in a secular state risk exiting Islam and that the secular state is the province of tyrannies of administration, surveillance, and coercion. These are positions that demonstrate the radicalism that a defender of “old knowledge” and the premodern order was capable of, taking Sabri beyond the Maturidi-Ash‘ari approach of the tradition he represented and its measured view on questions of faith. Sabri’s view on the function of the shari‘a state and the consequences of its demise presage the work in Western scholarship of Wael Hallaq. In a series of studies Hallaq has challenged the prevalent Western paradigm that imagines a vast unchanging corpus that was only shaken from its stagnation through the work of reformers like al-Afghani and ‘Abduh and their “reopening” of *ijtihād*. His is a conceptualisation of the ‘ulama’ who from the Umayyad and early Abbasid period carved a socio-political role for themselves as a class defending society from the arbitrary power of rulers, which they succeeded in restricting to certain fields vis-à-vis the shari‘a system’s extensive authority.⁹³ Sabri and Hallaq each use a distinctive lexical framework: while Sabri talks of separation of religion from politics, Hallaq talks of the politicisation of law as a legislative tool such that there can be no state sovereignty without state-manufactured law. They express essentially the same point: that the 1,000-year-old premodern system in which law was a sacred domain based on principles emanating from outside the realm of the polity was abrogated by the notion of law as an instrument of state power.

⁹² Ibid., 349-52.

⁹³ Also, Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 97-110.

Indeed, Hallaq argues that the premodern shari‘a state was not by modern definition a state at all, more of an “Islamic proto-state”.⁹⁴ The premodern connotation of the Arabic/Ottoman term used to describe the modern state, *dawla/devlet*, was of dynastic houses that came and went – over and above the shari‘a-sanctioned community – in a rotation (*tadāwul*) of power at the top of the social system.⁹⁵ Sabri’s use of the term *siyāsa* expresses his focus on the ruler as the nodal point of the premodern *dawla*. Again echoing Sabri, Hallaq further argues that the apparatus of coercion swept that system aside and surveillance replaced the obedience to God of the premodern shari‘a society. Hallaq writes: “Where once God – or church – commanded loyalty and willing obedience, it is now the state and the ideological nation, nationhood and nationalism that demand such devotion. The world of the Shari‘a, by contrast, lived under the full shadow of an omniscient God who – by one of the most cardinal tenets of Islam – knew each and every particular of human conduct and misdemeanor.”⁹⁶ To what degree this was the outcome the reformers wanted is not clear. As we have seen, Samira Haj argues that ‘Abduh never intended the collapse of social and religious morality to occur in the new order, but the work of Late Ottoman and Egyptian Liberal Era intellectuals clearly points to the desire for a society in which God is decentred and the Enlightenment subject moves to the foreground. Hallaq has been criticised for a formulaic if not romantic paradigm of Islamic governance that fails to account for the complex distribution of power outlined by Tezcan between Ottoman rulers who claimed extensive privilege to enact public law and the realm of shari‘a, which the Late Ottoman

⁹⁴ Hallaq, *Shari‘a*, 549.

⁹⁵ Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics and Modernity’s Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 62-3.

⁹⁶ Hallaq, *Shari‘a*, 309.

constitutionalists, ulema included, fought to preserve.⁹⁷ This was an idealised image shared by Sabri.

Sabri's analysis also bears comparison to the contemporaneous work of German political scientist Carl Schmitt on the notion of sovereign exception: juridical rule exercised by a state authority that does not need law to create law, that with the "monopoly to decide" retains the power to suspend the law and place itself outside it.⁹⁸ Sovereignty manifests itself in this capacity to suspend and restore the legal order while claiming to be part of that order; thus, sovereign power establishes spatial and juridical limits (*Ortnung* and *Ordnung*) to the polity. This is the problem of man-made law and the possibility of tyranny that Sabri believed the shari'a solved. Sabri gives an example of Turkish elites gaming the system to their own ends in the Ottoman polity's twilight years: Sabri notes that he supported the CUP-led drive in 1908 to limit the sultan's freedom to dissolve parliament, but when Abdülhamid's successor Mehmed Reşad was under their thumb the Unionists tried to alter those constitutional stipulations to give power back to the sultan.⁹⁹ Schmitt is explicit that this absolute power claimed by the modern state once belonged to God, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver, or in Hallaq's description of Schmitt's ideas, "earthly political power was the new God".¹⁰⁰ Schmitt made a systematic argument in his *Politische Theologie* (Political Theology, 1922) that the post-Enlightenment state retained secularised versions of Christian theological concepts and structures.¹⁰¹ Schmitt developed his ideas further in *Der Begriff des Politischen* (The Concept of the Political, 1932), which outlined

⁹⁷ The implication of Crone and Hinds' model of the Umayyad-Abbasid state that "sat on the top of society" was also that it remained analytically applicable to subsequent Muslim states; *God's Caliph*, 109; for criticism of Hallaq see Said Salih Kaymakci, "Wael Hallaq's *The Impossible State*," *Maydan*, 18 December 2016; <http://www.themaydan.com/2016/12/book-review-wael-hallaqs-impossible-state-said-salih-kaymakci/> (accessed 27 October 2018). Also, Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, 234-5.

⁹⁸ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 [1922]), 5-15.

⁹⁹ Sabri, *Mawqif al-'Aql*, vol. 4, 331, footnote 1.

¹⁰⁰ Hallaq, *Impossible State*, 89.

¹⁰¹ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36-52.

four frames of thought that dominated successive eras after the transformations in religious authority of the Reformation: the rational scientific thinking of the 17th century, the moral concerns of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, the economic focus of the 19th century, and finally the technology of the 20th century, “soulless mechanism in the age of technicity”.¹⁰² Pondering the imminent collapse of the Weimar republic, Schmitt theorised that it represented a liberal archetype of neutral, depoliticised space that was incapable of defending itself from radicals on the periphery who would use the order to upend the order. Only juridical theory that recognises the need for exceptional action can save such a state.

Some of Schmitt’s ideas foreshadow the work of Hannah Arendt on 20th-century totalitarianism and Foucault’s notion of “biopolitics”. In *The Human Condition* (1958) Arendt takes the launch of the first space satellite in 1957 as a starting point for considering questions of the liminality of human social and political activity,¹⁰³ and merges this with a critique of the recurrent theme in Western political thought from Plato to Marx of the “making” of societies through forms of political action in which ordinary people (*animal laborans*)¹⁰⁴ are viewed as merely raw material – thinking that helped produced the Nazi and Stalinist systems she discussed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Arendt traces these developments in Europe to economic changes instituted by the massive appropriations of church and peasant land during the Reformation,¹⁰⁵ which has parallels to the seizure of waqfs by the modernising Muslim polity and disruptive policies of agrarian reform and industrialisation. She describes a premodern private familial realm in which the apolitical “good life” (*vita activa/bios politikos*) of contemplation bears a resemblance to the

¹⁰² Schmitt, *Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007), 95. The key chapter was “The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations”, from a lecture in 1929 that was first published in 1930.

¹⁰³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1-3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 79-93.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 61-73.

premodern insulated world of the believer in Sabri and Hallaq's shari'a state (but in which 'Abduh and Akif's *al-sa'y wa-l-'amal* had no place).¹⁰⁶

Foucault used the term biopolitics (first in 1976) to refer to the state's increasing hold over all aspects of human life throughout the 19th century and the problematisation of questions such as health, sanitation, birth-rate, longevity, race, and need for rationalising systems of surveillance, punishment, and registration.¹⁰⁷ Its unparalleled bureaucratic capacities produced a "totalizing form of power",¹⁰⁸ which he examined in detail in *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (1975) and *Histoire de la sexualité: La volonté de savoir* (1976). Giorgio Agamben synthesised the ideas of Schmitt, Foucault, and Arendt to argue that juridical exception and the biopolitical model intersect in the modern state through its placing biological life – or "bare life", his rendering of *zoe* in Aristotle's *Politics* – at the centre of its calculations, so that it is possible to go further than all three of them to state that "the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power".¹⁰⁹ The Nazi concentration camp is posited as an archetypal site of this bio-state of normalised exception, a place for treatment of its surplus humanity. Agamben's influential thesis has been read into a range of contemporary political questions, often at his own instigation, from the extra-territorial incarceration of Guantanamo Bay to permanent states of emergency across Arab states.¹¹⁰ Taking these writers as a whole, their extensive use of terminologies from ancient Greek political philosophy has been questioned, in particular the implication that 20th-century Western politics carries an original genetic coding from ancient Greece

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 22-58.

¹⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (New York: Picador, 2003), 239-64.

¹⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, "The Birth of Biopolitics," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, vol. 1, ed. Foucault and Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 73; idem, "Why Study Power? The Question of the Subject," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 213.

¹⁰⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 6.

¹¹⁰ Idem, *State of Exception* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

with Aristotle as its foundational text.¹¹¹ In his discussion of European philosophy Sabri makes no reference to contemporaries such as Schmitt or Arendt, and he has little direct comment on the rise of totalitarian movements in Europe, citing only the Turkish republican experience as an example of the tyranny of modernity unchecked by the moral edifice of shari‘a. His alarm about the modern condition that arose in the West but spread globally as a universal value is expressed independently.

Kevseri’s understanding of the living tradition

Rather than Sabri’s old knowledge, Kevseri talks of a living tradition across the Islamic sciences, and this difference in nuance reflects his understanding of a polyvalent episteme with equal room for the prescriptions of the law, explorations in *kalām*, intellection of Sufi metaphysics, popular practices, etc. Sabri is first and foremost a *mutakallim* defending largely unchanging statements of belief; there were limits to his acceptance of Sufi metaphysics, whereas Kevseri, as his early work *Irgham al-Murid* demonstrates, was very much a product of Ottoman Sufi intellectual culture. This highlights an important point about how Kevseri understood Islamic faith as transmitted through scholars as much as it was preserved in foundational texts: thus his extensive interest in the biographical genre of *ṭabaqāt* literature and the deft intertextuality in his method of constant citation of previous writers’ work.¹¹² In Kevseri’s description of the threat at hand he continually talks of the Islamic legal and theological structure as a living tradition. This is what he appears to be expressing with his extensive use of the descriptor *mutawārith*, whether it be *al-fiqh al-mutawārith*, *al-ḥukm al-*

¹¹¹ James Gordon Finlayson, “Bare Life and Politics in Agamben’s Reading of Aristotle,” *The Review of Politics*, 72 (2010): 97-126.

¹¹² On this point see Norman Calder, “The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy,” in *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, ed. Farhad Daftary (London: I.B. Tauris/Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2000), 78-9.

mutawārith, *al-aḥkām al-mutawāritha*, *al-‘aqīda al-mutawāritha*, etc.¹¹³ Kevseri’s use of this term precedes the spread of its cognate *turāth* amongst later Muslim intellectuals such as Hasan Hanafi, Muhammad ‘Abid al-Jabiri, Abdallah Laroui, Mohammed Arkoun, and Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah (such that they came to be called the *turāthiyyun*) who applied the hermeneutics of the Western academe to critique the objectified tradition from the outside.¹¹⁴ In Kevseri’s occasional use of *turāth* he intends a corpus of what he understands to be orthodox beliefs and practices (sunna) under assault from an array of disruptive sects revived from the past or innovated in the present.¹¹⁵ For Kevseri the basic principles of shari‘a stood as a regulating base-line for the governed and the governing.¹¹⁶ He argued at length against the *maṣlaḥa* and ‘urf advocated by modernist reformers and for *fuqahā’* oversight of parliamentary legislators dealing in positive law (*qawānīn waḍ‘iyya*).¹¹⁷ But he was at pains to stress the fallibility of *mujtahids*¹¹⁸ and the flexibility of legal reasoning within its shari‘a confines. Kevseri outlined a social, moral, and political responsibility that the religious class have to the tradition they represent and that produced them, such that they should neither “rigidly hold to the past nor renounce it to please the atheists” (*al-jumūd ‘alā kull qadīm wa-lā al-juḥūd musāyaratan li-l-mulḥidīn*).¹¹⁹ For Muhammad Rajab al-Bayumi

¹¹³ See al-Kawthari, “Hadith Ramadan: al-Tajdid,” *Maqalat*, 115; “Hawl Fikrat al-Taqrīb bayn al-Madhahib,” *Maqalat*, 124; “Hawl al-Tadhiya ‘an al-Awlad: Islah wa-Idah,” *Maqalat*, 218; “Mansha’ Ahl al-Dhimma bi-Shu‘ar Khas wa-Hukm Talabbus al-Muslim bihi ‘Ind al-Fuqaha’,” *Maqalat*, 221, 223; “Nazar al-Mar’ ila Shar‘ Allah Mi‘yaru Dinihi,” *Maqalat*, 234; “Al-‘Aqida al-Mutawaritha wa-l-Fiqh al-Mutawarith,” *Maqalat*, 247-49; “Inkar Nuzul ‘Isa wa-Iqar ‘Aqidat al-Tajsim,” *Maqalat*, 261; *al-Tarhib bi-Naqd al-Khatib*, in al-Kawthari, *Ta’nib al-Khatib*, 378.

¹¹⁴ See Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1997), 219-41, and Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics: New Muslim Intellectuals and the Study of Islam* (London: Hurst, 2011).

¹¹⁵ Al-Kawthari, “Al-Mawlid al-Nabawi wa-l-Da‘wa al-Nabawiyya,” *Maqalat*, 368.

¹¹⁶ See his example of Aleppan Seljuq ruler Nur al-Din Zengi (d. 1174)’s insistence on adhering to judicial process in dealing with brigandage; al-Kawthari, “Nazar al-Mar’ ila Shar‘ Allah Mi‘yaru Dinihi,” *Maqalat*, 236.

¹¹⁷ Al-Kawthari, “Min Anba’ al-‘Ilm wa-l-‘Ulama’,” *Maqalat*, 456.

¹¹⁸ Al-Kawthari, *Ta’nib al-Khatib*, 12; al-Kawthari, *al-Tarhib bi-Naqd al-Ta’nib*, 392; al-Kawthari, *Saf‘at al-Burhan*, 49; al-Kawthari, “Min Anba’ al-‘Ilm wa-l-‘Ulama’,” *Maqalat*, 462.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 455.

(d. 2011), the editor of *Muqaddimat al-Kawthari*, this made Kevseri the “guardian of the Islamic tradition” (*amīn al-turāth al-islāmī*).¹²⁰

It would be an exaggeration to understand Kevseri as the scholar who steps outside the tradition in the manner of al-Jabiri and Arkoun while remaining a member of its elite corps of interpreters. However, Kevseri’s approach can be compared to the understanding of an Islamic discursive tradition proposed by Talal Asad in his influential essay “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam” (1986). Asad challenges narrations of the Middle East as essentially Islamic and of Islam as uniquely political – paradigms which became dominant across a range of academic disciplines and media discourse from the 1970s with the collapse of modernisation theory and rise of Islamic political movements.¹²¹ Asad says anthropologists have also had a tendency to present a diverse range of phenomena under the rubric “Islamic”, though lacking any centrifugal force, be it theological, institutional, political, or otherwise. His response is a rejection of both essentialist and nominalist approaches to advocate a “discursive tradition” that relates itself to both lived experience as well as the theoretical framework of founding texts and thought systems, “a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present.”¹²² In Asad’s view this interpretation undercuts the notion – that Sabri and Kevseri contemplate – of a stable premodern Islam destroyed by modernity, since by definition a complex and evolving tradition could not be overturned as if it were a unity of values.¹²³

Influenced by Alasdair MacIntyre’s discussion of tradition in *After Virtue* (1982), Asad was addressing a theoretical debate in anthropology over how to describe Islam, quite

¹²⁰ Al-Bayumi, *Muqaddimat al-Kawthari*, 13.

¹²¹ Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” *Qui Parle*, 17/2 (Spring/Summer 2009): 5-8.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 30. He has in mind Michael Gilks, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt* (1973) and Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (1981).

apart from its iterations in other disciplines traversing both Western scholarship and Muslim intellectual production as theology, or world religion, or ideology. On the one hand, Abdul Hamid el-Zein had argued that the diversity of believers' lived experience in different contexts meant it was not possible to talk of a single analytical category called Islam; on the other, the work of Clifford Geertz and Ernest Gellner imagined rituals and social structures that were archetypically Islamic.¹²⁴ Asad's discursive tradition did not reject the notion of a scripture-based starting point, but avoided essentialist Orientalist discourse while addressing anthropology's fear of totemistic unities. Thus, he offered a path for scholarship across a variety of disciplines to navigate the questions of both orthodoxy and unity versus diversity, with the inspiration of MacIntyre's proposal that a living tradition should be understood as a "historically extended, socially embodied argument" about the goods that constitute the tradition.¹²⁵

The approaches of Sabri/Hallaq and Kevseri/Asad are more likely differences of emphasis within the same broad paradigm rather than a question of incompatible analyses. Kevseri is no less attentive to the deconstruction of the shari'a state; indeed, he is the sharpest critic of reforms to the waqf system. Ottoman efforts to bring waqfs under close state supervision had begun in the 1820s; following the Turkish republic's example in 1924, many countries enacted legislation to limit the freedom of waqf founders to establish foundations and limit their terms of life. In 1954 Egypt centralised the administration of public waqfs in one government ministry and abolished waqfs whose beneficiaries were deemed to be familial.¹²⁶ As inalienable tax-free land established by an individual to generate income and

¹²⁴ Abdul Hamid el-Zein, "Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6 (1977): 227-54. Discussed in Ovamir Anjum, "Islamic as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 27/3 (2007): 658.

¹²⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 257.

¹²⁶ Wael Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 138. Pascale Ghazaleh, ed., *Held in Trust: Waqf in the Islamic World* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011).

provide services for broadly defined charitable purposes, the institution of the waqf played a central role in the political, economic, and social history of Muslim societies from the early period. Kevseri cites French minister Edouard Engelhardt's *La Turquie et le tanzimat, ou Histoire des reformes dans l'Empire ottoman depuis 1826 jusqu'à nos jours* (1881) – published in 1912 in Turkish translation by the historian Ali Reşad Bey (1877-1929) – in which waqf was framed as a hindrance to free sale of real estate and revenue for the public treasury.¹²⁷ Engelhardt said France had given advice to this effect to the Ottoman government in 1867.¹²⁸ In 1942 Kevseri argued publicly against plans to seize control of the al-Azhar mosque waqf and spend it on state schools rather than the international body of Azhari students¹²⁹ and he rejected the Egyptian government's division of waqfs into “charitable” (*khayrī*) and “family” (*ahlī*) as a false taxonomy to facilitate the process of state appropriation.¹³⁰ As *ders vekili* he had resisted government plans to seize the Laleli school through its status as a *vakıf*. French intent was to “facilitate foreigners’ owning what they want and building what they want”,¹³¹ Kevseri said, thus integrating the Ottoman state into the capitalist system on Western Europe’s terms. Hallaq has the same analysis: French politicians and scholars were instrumental in creating a discourse among elites of the Late Ottoman and successor states of economic malaise caused by family endowments holding up the free-market economy.¹³²

¹²⁷ Al-Kawthari, “Khuturat al-Masas bi-l-Awqaf al-Islamiyya,” *Maqalat*, 197; Edouard Engelhardt, *La Turquie et le tanzimat, ou Histoire des reformes dans l'Empire ottoman depuis 1826 jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Cotillon, 1882), 208. Sabri also cites this book as evidence of the collaboration between European governments and local elites, finally revealed upon its Turkish translation, to remodel Islamic social, economic, legal, and political structures along what he calls Christian lines; *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 4:348, footnote 1, and 1:80-1.

¹²⁸ Al-Kawthari, “Muhadatha Qadima Hawl al-Waqf al-Ahli,” *Maqalat*, 195; Engelhardt, *La Turquie*, 209.

¹²⁹ Al-Kawthari, “Dhikra al-Hijra al-Nabawiyya wa-l-Azhar al-Sharif,” *Maqalat*, 398 and “Al-Azhar Qubayla ‘Idihi al-Alfi,” *Maqalat*, 478-9.

¹³⁰ Al-Kawthari, “Muhadatha Qadima,” *Maqalat*, 190-7.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹³² Hallaq, *Shari‘a*, 471. On the 19th century reconstitution of the Ottoman legal system, see 401-20; on that of Egypt, see 420-5.

Sabri and Sayyid Qutb: A meeting of minds

Sabri was an admirer of Sayyid Qutb before his transformation into an Islamic writer. He mentions Qutb three times in the first volume of *Mawqif al- 'Aql* when he was still merely a conservative light on the Egyptian literary scene. Firstly, he praises Qutb for his review of 'Abd Allah al-Qasimi's *Hadhihi Hiya al-Aghlal*, one of the numerous works of this period that were met with the charge of atheism.¹³³ Qutb wrote that he had invited al-Qasimi to his home to talk, but became alarmed when al-Qasimi praised British colonialism and the materialism of the West despite what Qutb terms the West's "inhuman methods in war and beyond" (*wasā'il ghayr insāniyya fī al-ḥurūb wa-ghayr al-ḥurūb*).¹³⁴ Still, he decided to give the book a chance for the sake of freedom of thought since there were calls in Saudi Arabia for al-Qasimi's trial for apostasy, but he was shocked at al-Qasimi's argument that only belief in individual human capacities would help Muslims face the challenge of the West.¹³⁵ Sabri was impressed by Qutb's comments, especially his dismissal of al-Qasimi as a "Don Quixote", by which Qutb meant that al-Qasimi was a vacuous *poseur* defending Western secularism with no original thinking of his own.¹³⁶ Sabri also noted Qutb's interventions in the public debate about the Qur'an and modernist thinking about its metaphysical, supranatural aspects. Qutb was part of a literary set traversing the Left and Islamism that accused the intellectual giants of the interwar period – Tawfiq al-Hakim, 'Abbas al-'Aqqad, Taha Husayn – of failing to develop a national culture independent of colonial power.

In 1947 the trope of demystification of the Qur'an became the subject of intense public debate when Fuad University considered a thesis by student Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah in 1947 by the title *al-Fann al-Qisasi fi al-Qur'an* (Narrative Art in the Qur'an).

¹³³ Sabri, *Mawqif al- 'Aql*, 1:13, 92.

¹³⁴ *Al-Sawadi* journal, 11 November 1946; published in Muhammad 'Abd al-Razzaq Hamza, *al-Shawahid wa-l-Nusus min Kitab al-Aghlal* (Riyadh: Matba'at al-Imam, 1948), nn.

¹³⁵ 'Abd Allah al-Qasimi, *Hadhihi Hiya al-Aghlal* (Cologne: Al-Kamel Verlag, 2000), 16.

¹³⁶ Hamza, *al-Shawahid*, ss.

After the ministry of education exonerated Khalafallah and his supervisor Amin al-Khuli, an Arabic language professor, of arguing that Muhammad was the author of the Qur'an the thesis was published as a book in 1950. Sabri noted that defenders of the thesis saw the rejection of allegorical interpretation as an attack on 'Abduh himself, which for Sabri only proved his point that 'Abduh had acquired a hallowed position as the founder of Egyptian modernist Islam.¹³⁷ This brought Sabri to a discussion of Qutb's commentary on the affair, which had some weight given Qutb's work *al-Taswir al-Fanni fi al-Qur'an* (Artistic Representation in the Qur'an, 1944). Over three articles in the journal *al-Sawadi* Qutb accused Khalafallah and al-Khuli of making sensationalist claims to advance their careers, echoing Sabri's view of 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq and Taha Husayn's fortunes.¹³⁸ However, Sabri accused Qutb of misjudging the seriousness of the issue because of faults in Qutb's own theological understandings, since Qutb revealed that he was ridden with doubt over elements of the Qur'an such as the resurrection.¹³⁹ Qutb concluded by saying he was an intellectual (*rajul fikr*), not a religious scholar whose pure dogma would hinder free thought, so he would be open to anyone helping him find the truth. Sabri's response was that Qutb only needed recourse to reason and logic since the free human mind would be a lantern lighting the path to certitude¹⁴⁰ and the only place for allegorical understanding in the Qur'an is its human imagery in language when talking of God.¹⁴¹

Sabri valued Qutb, whom he regarded as "the closest to the right path among those erring in evaluation of the Qur'an" (*aqrab al-dāllīn fī taqdīr al-qur'ān min al-hudā*), and gave him the excuse of being a layman unlettered in Islamic sciences.¹⁴² Indeed, Sabri's text

¹³⁷ Sabri, *Mawqif al-'Aql*, 1:320-4. The incident presaged the tribulations of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd in the 1990s, a point he made himself: Abu Zayd, "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'an," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 23 (2003): 8-47.

¹³⁸ Cited in Sabri, *Mawqif al-'Aql*, 1:325-6.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 327.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 328.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 329.

¹⁴² Ibid., 329, footnote 1.

gives the impression of a certain familiarity between the two men, and Ali Ulvi Kurucu, a student of both Sabri and Kevseri in Cairo, confirms this in his memoirs. Qutb would attend the same salons of Mahmud Shakir in which Sabri would take part with Kurucu.¹⁴³ Kurucu confirms that Sabri had begun reading Qutb and appreciating him during this period when Qutb began writing more on Islamic issues. Sabri prayed for him to find right guidance and admired his writing style, saying: “His literary knowledge and fine style have helped him, and were he not such a litterateur his writings would not have this strength, appeal, and spirituality”.¹⁴⁴ Qutb would have had at least two other opportunities to become familiar with Sabri’s work: the publication of *al-Qawl al-Fasl* in 1942 with the blessing of al-Banna and the publication of *Mawqif al-‘Aql* in 1949, after al-Banna’s death in February 1949 and before Qutb’s return from the United States in August 1950. Qutb would likely have been aware of the relationship between Sabri and al-Banna and perhaps of their differences: Sabri altered al-Banna’s proposed title *al-Qawl al-Fasl bayn Imanayn* to remove the reference to two faiths, since he had moved to his radical position that the *īmān* of Muslim reformers was in doubt.¹⁴⁵

The large literature on Qutb has focussed heavily on the question of his transformation from liberal litterateur to Islamic ideologue:¹⁴⁶ his foreign travel from November 1948 (travelling to Britain, Switzerland, and Italy on his return), his acquaintance with the Indian Muslim *‘ālim* Abul Hasan Nadvi (1914-1999) during hajj, and through him with the ideas of Abul A‘la Maudoodi, his imprisonment from 1954. Many have noted not

¹⁴³ Kurucu, *Hatıralar*, vol. 2, 301.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Kurucu, in al-Qawsi, *Mustafa Sabri*, 448.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 442-3.

¹⁴⁶ The many works on Qutb include John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (London: Hurst, 2010); James Toth, *Sayyid Qutb: The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Gilles Kepel (trans. Jon Rothschild), *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); ‘Abd al-Fattah al-Khalidi, *Sayyid Qutb: Min al-Milad ila al-Istishhad* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 2007); Adnan Musallam, *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* (Westport, Conn.; Praeger 2005).

only his disdain for America's secular culture but also its racist hierarchies,¹⁴⁷ topics he often revisited in subsequent writings. Giedre Sabaseviciute, Omnia El Shakry, and others have argued that Qutb's conversion to Islamism was more of a gradual transition than a sharp turn and one in harmony with a broader internal shift within Egypt's post-war intellectual scene.¹⁴⁸ Sabri's identification of Qutb's religious leanings is consonant with that conclusion. Qutb had a regular column in the journal *al-Risala* but was involved in other projects such as *al-Fikr al-Jadid* (1948) which brought together intellectuals of different backgrounds with a shared commitment to critique of the ruling elites. *Al-Fikr al-Jadid*, which ran from January to March 1948, brought Qutb further into contact with Brotherhood intellectual networks: it was owned by Muhammad Hilmi al-Minyawi, a member of the Brotherhood's consultative assembly, and published by Brotherhood-linked publishing house Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi.¹⁴⁹ It was because of his sharp critical writing that the education ministry sent Qutb abroad to avoid arrest by the palace.¹⁵⁰ After his return in August 1950, Qutb began writing for the Brotherhood outlets *al-Da'wa* and *al-Muslimun*; in 1952 the Brotherhood printed his books *Al-'Adala al-Ijtima'iyya fi al-Islam* (Social Justice in Islam, 1949) and *Ma'rakat al-Islam wa-l-Ra'smaliyya* (The Battle of Islam and Capitalism, 1951); and after he became formally a member in 1953 Qutb was appointed editor of its official journal *Majallat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimin* in 1954.

¹⁴⁷ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 148-9; the seventh edition adds African Americans to a list of Western injustices in chapter five that includes genocide of American Indians, racial laws in South Africa and Russian treatment of Muslims (p.228). See Qutb, *al-'Adala al-Ijtima'iyya fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar Ihya al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1954), 53. See Toth, *Sayyid Qutb*, 65 for a summary of other reasons posited by scholars.

¹⁴⁸ Giedre Sabaseviciute, "Sayyid Qutb and the Crisis of Culture in Late 1940s Egypt," *IJMES*, 50/1 (2018): 85-101. See also Yoav Di-Capua, "The Intellectual Revolt of the 1950s and 'The Fall of the Umma,'" in *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections on/of the Political in Arabic Literature since the 1940s*, ed. Friederike Pannewick and Georges Khalil (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 2015), 89-104; and Omnia El Shakry, "The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East," *American Historical Review* 120 (2015): 920-34.

¹⁴⁹ Sabaseviciute, "Sayyid Qutb," 92-3.

¹⁵⁰ Toth, *Sayyid Qutb*, 58.

Al-‘Adala al-Ijtima‘iyya is usually cited as the first work of Qutb’s Islamic phase.

Written just before his American sojourn, it continued the themes of social justice, corruption, anti-colonialism, and Islamic solutions that had attracted attention in his *al-Fikr al-Jadid* writing. The book’s message was revolutionary: Muslim rulers who ape Western materialistic systems, be they capitalist or socialist, do not merit obedience because only the shari‘a system can ensure social justice and equality. Qutb brings together various themes prevalent in modernist and Salafi thought of the period but expresses them in an ideological, anti-colonial vocabulary that is squarely outside the traditional genres of Islamic scholarship that Sabri, Kevseri, and some of their opponents would use. Islam is discussed in ideological terms as a political animal of the public sphere with the Qur’an as its manifesto.¹⁵¹ Behind the new language, Qutb has adopted the theory of decline and rejection of the *kalām* and *falsafa* tradition as both futile and foreign;¹⁵² he downplays paranormal phenomena as a basis for belief (*dīn lam ya‘tamid ‘alā al-khawāriq wa-l-mu‘jizāt*);¹⁵³ he condemns positivist philosophy for allowing no place for morality,¹⁵⁴ which explains its imperialist lust;¹⁵⁵ he denounces writers such as Haykal for attempting materialistic understandings of the motives of early Muslim leaders;¹⁵⁶ and he outlines a just economic system that forbids usury, pursues wealth redistribution through Islamic taxes, and views property as a trust from God.¹⁵⁷ Qutb writes: “Obedience to the ruler [*walī al-amr*] is derived from obedience to God and the Prophet, because the ruler in Islam is not obeyed for himself, but due to his establishing the shari‘a of God and His prophet; he derives the right of obedience from fulfilling this alone. If

¹⁵¹ On this point see Adnan Musallam, “Sayyid Qutb and Social Justice, 1945-1948,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 4/1 (1993): 62-3; Yvonne Haddad, “The Qur’anic Justification for an Islamic Revolution: The View of Sayyid Qutb,” *Middle East Journal*, 37/1 (Winter 1983): 14-29; William Shepard, “Islam as a ‘System’ in the Later Writings of Sayyid Qutb,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 25/1 (Jan. 1989): 31-50.

¹⁵² Qutb, *al-‘Adala al-Ijtima‘iyya*, 22-3.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 252-6.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 176-7.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 151-61.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 105-45.

he deviates obedience lapses, and his order becomes non-binding [*idhā inḥarafa ‘anhā saqāṭat ṭā‘atuhu wa-lam yajib li-amrihi al-naḥd*].”¹⁵⁸ Egypt is no longer “Islamic” (*islāmī*) because it has replaced the shari‘a system with French law, Qutb says.¹⁵⁹ The contrast to Sabri’s ideas, formed in light of the Turkish republic’s policies, is subtle: where Sabri sees political oppression in the post-shari‘a state, Qutb here sees economic oppression. Writing in the colonial context of a yet-to-become independent Egypt, Qutb has still not drawn out Sabri’s implication of an apostate society.

Al-‘Adala al-Ijtima‘iyya went through numerous reprints which altered the text to reflect, firstly, Qutb’s changing relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and, secondly, his radical thinking in light of his prison experiences from 1954 to 1964.¹⁶⁰ These changes were observed in his other writings. His next major work was *Ma‘rakat al-Islam wa-l-Ra’smaliyya* (1951), which toughened his arguments against both imperialism and its local partners and moved closer to Sabri’s vision of political oppression in a society denuded of its protective shield of shari‘a. Now he talked of exploitative *ṭughāt*, a Qur’anic term in its alternative plural *ṭaghūn* and the singular *ṭāghiya*, signifying transgressive, oppressive peoples or rulers,¹⁶¹ by which he intended elements among the ruling elites who prefer religious sentiment to remain restricted to superficial manifestations of faith and fear the shari‘a system.¹⁶² On the contrary, “Islam must rule” (*lā budd li-l-islām an yaḥkum*),¹⁶³ and the ruler who does not establish shari‘a justice loses his right to loyalty (*saqāṭat ṭā‘atuhu*).¹⁶⁴ Its replacement with a Western political system – parliamentary democracy – and the law that system enshrines – a melange of European codes – has failed to establish social justice and

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 97.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 225-7.

¹⁶⁰ William Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism: A Translation and Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), ix-lix; Musallam, “Sayyid Qutb and Social Justice,” 61.

¹⁶¹ See Qur’an 37:30, 38:55, 51:53, 52:32, 68:31, 69:5, 78:22.

¹⁶² Sayyid Qutb, *Ma‘rakat al-Islam wa-l-Ra’smaliyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1993), 6, 37, 103-6.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 56.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 74.

Egyptians have lost faith in the possibility. Democracy has meant not only capitalist exploitation of millions of impoverished and disenfranchised peasants but a system of unchecked abuse by the state's coercive apparatus, of which he cites two graphic examples.¹⁶⁵ Torture is the story of every political detainee in the history of modern Egypt, Qutb writes, posing the question, "Was it constitutional parliamentary democracy that produced this, is responsible for it, and should be distanced from government since it is under its watch that these abominations are committed?"¹⁶⁶ Egypt's legal system brings together elements derived from different social, historical, theological, and customary contexts that do not reflect Egyptian realities, thus there is a conflict between "the spirit of legislation and the spirit of the people for whom the legislation is prescribed".¹⁶⁷ The solution is for Egyptians to take affairs into own hands – "the toiling masses, deprived and duped, must deal with the issue by themselves; they must think of means of salvation and choose".¹⁶⁸ This means of salvation is not to be found in political parties, communism, the United Nations or the West, which based on his experience of American attitudes towards the Palestinian question (*ḥarb Filisṭīn*) he says feels "violent animosity ['adā' 'anīf]" to Islam, the East and coloured people generally,¹⁶⁹ but in "Islam": "O people, this is the path, this is the path!" (*ayyatuḥā al-jamāhīr, hādhā huwa al-ṭarīq, hādhā huwa al-ṭarīq!*).¹⁷⁰ In Qutb's evolving conceptualisation of Islam as a modern ideology, Islam is becoming a political order yet to be established (*ḥukm al-islām*).¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 77-9.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 79-80.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 113.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 122.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 63. See Shepard, "Islam as a 'System'," 31-50.

Abul A‘la Maudoodi’s ideas in Qutb’s conceptual framework

Qutb first met Abul Hasan Nadvi in Mecca in 1950, and it was through Nadvi that Qutb became familiar with the work of Maudoodi. Through them both Qutb introduced terminologies that he elaborated into a unique framework of thought. During a subsequent visit to Qutb’s home in Cairo in January 1951 Nadvi asked Qutb to write an introduction to the 1951 edition of Nadvi’s book *Madha Khasira al-‘Alam bi-Inhitat al-Muslimin* (What Did the World Lose Through the Collapse of the Muslims?, 1945) in which he made innovative use of the term *jāhiliyya* in his argument that Islamic leadership can restore moral and spiritual order to the world.¹⁷² Nadvi took the term beyond the literary trope of an unbalanced Arabian moral order set right by the mission of the Prophet,¹⁷³ which was Maudoodi’s use of the term,¹⁷⁴ by applying it polemically to the hegemonic global position of the European political, economic, and social order and the risk for Muslims of becoming “allies of European *jāhiliyya*”.¹⁷⁵ He also suggested the term could encompass the immoral behaviour of Muslim leaders in earlier periods.¹⁷⁶ In his preface Qutb expanded on these citations, writing that “*jāhiliyya* is not a period of limited time but a special spiritual and mental characteristic”.¹⁷⁷ “The Europeans have for long produced history for the world from their Western point of view, informed by their materialist culture and philosophy and by Western chauvinism [‘*aṣabiyya*] and religious chauvinism,” he said.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷² On visiting Qutb, Abul Hasan Nadvi, *Madha Khasira al-‘Alam bi-Inhitat al-Muslimin* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Iman, 1994), 27. Nadvi records a meeting with Kevseri in February 1951 during his Cairo trip, but reprimands him for engaging in “sectarian debates” (*munāqashāt madhhabīyya*); idem, *Mudhakkirat Sa’ih fi al-Sharq al-‘Arabi* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risala, 1975), 52.

¹⁷³ The term is usually translated as “age of ignorance” as an antonym to knowledge (‘ilm), but its original meaning was the arrogant unbridled passion of tribal society, the opposite of the *ḥilm* of the Prophet i.e. the moral reasonableness of civilised men; Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’ān*, 28-35 and Ignác Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. 1 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967), 201-8.

¹⁷⁴ Maudoodi, *al-Mustalahat al-Arba‘a*, 15-22.

¹⁷⁵ Nadvi, *Madha Khasira*, 229.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 122-3.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 12.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 13.

The major impact of these ideas was felt in Qutb's vast work of *tafsīr*, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (In the Shadow of the Qur'an), whose long period of composition spanned the excitement of the monarchy's last days and the despair of post-colonial dungeons.¹⁷⁹ It began as a series of articles in the journal *al-Muslimun* from January 1952 to March 1954,¹⁸⁰ followed by others written between 1954 and 1959 while in prison and then published together as a revised six-volume set in 1961 and revised and reissued again by his brother Muhammad in 1978.¹⁸¹ Tracing the development of Qutb's thought is complicated by these various stages of publication, censorship, and editing. Like 'Abduh and Akif before him, Qutb set out to produce a *tafsīr* in unorthodox contemporary terms, relating the Qur'anic text to the conditions of modernity that concerned him – in his case, the political system in which Muslims lived. His final work, *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Signs on the Way, 1964), for which he was sentenced to death, was intended as an abridged version of some sections of *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* for his growing number of followers,¹⁸² and yet still written under the gaze of prison censors.¹⁸³ A number of other prison works were published in the following years, including *Hadha al-Din* (This Religion, 1962), *Khasa'is al-Tasawwur al-Islami wa-Muqawwimatuhu* (Characteristics and Bases of the Islamic Imaginary, 1962), *al-Islam wa-Mushkilat al-Hadara* (Islam and the Problem of Civilisation, 1962), and *al-Mustaqbal li-Hadha al-Din* (The Future Belongs to This Religion, 1965). Qutb was feted by the military government in its early days as a Muslim anti-colonial writer of renown, invited in August 1952 to address the coup leaders including Nasser (Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir, 1918-1970) on “intellectual and spiritual liberation in Islam”. In an account of the evening given by Qutb's colleague Ahmad 'Abd al-

¹⁷⁹ Qutb is said to have been particularly affected by the murder by prison guards of 21 of his Brotherhood colleagues in 1957.

¹⁸⁰ “Fi Zilal al-Qur'an,” *al-Muslimun*, 1/3 (28 January 1952), 237-40; 1/4 (March 1952), 331-9; 1/5 (27 March 1952), 434-42; 1/6 (November 1952), 534-42; 1/7 (June 1953), 749-54; 1/8 (July 1953), 752-62; 3/1 (February 1954), 357-64; 3/5 (March 1954), 453-60.

¹⁸¹ Toth, *Sayyid Qutb*, 81.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 80. Olivier Carré, *Mysticism and Politics: A Critical Reading of Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān by Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 8.

Ghaffur 'Attar in 1967, Qutb declared that although the revolution had come he wasn't sure he wouldn't end up in prison.¹⁸⁴ Qutb acted as a liaison between the Brotherhood and the Free Officers, but the relationship soured in 1953 due to a number of factors: Qutb turned down Nasser's offer of minister of education, Brotherhood factions were drawn into the rivalry between Nasser and the first republican president Muhammad Najib, and, more broadly, the Brotherhood was unwilling to place its mass organisation in the service of the military regime on Nasser's terms.¹⁸⁵

Fi Zilal al-Qur'an begins with a discussion of Qutb's notion of the new *jāhiliyya* into which Muslims have regressed:¹⁸⁶ *jāhiliyya* "surges on the earth" (*tamūj fi al-arḍ*),¹⁸⁷ mankind "lives through the concepts of *jāhiliyya* in east and west, north and south",¹⁸⁸ Islam has been "sidelined from leadership for *jāhiliyya* to take over once again" in the form of materialism (*al-māddiyya*).¹⁸⁹ However, since Islam is not only a set of theological doctrines but a "general declaration to liberate men from their state of slavery" (*i 'lān 'āmm li-tahrīr al-insān min 'ubūdiyyat al-'ibād*), it requires a mobilisational element, an offensive jihad of arms (*al-jihād bi-l-sayf*).¹⁹⁰ His model is the Medinans who prepared themselves in the utopian Islamic proto-state for an assault on the pagan cultic centre of Mecca, symbolising the liberation of all mankind.¹⁹¹ So while within Muslim territory protection of the faith and functioning of the state are fundamental obligations, the ultimate aim is to take on that which

¹⁸⁴ Al-Khalidi, *Sayyid Qutb*, 302-4. Nasser is said to have stood up to say in reply, "they will only get to you over our dead bodies, we promise you in the name of God." The account is likely embellished.

¹⁸⁵ For a summary see Carré, *Mysticism and Politics*, 4-8.

¹⁸⁶ Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, 6 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1992), 6:3549-50: Muslims must have "honest intent to jihad to make his religion victorious among all religion, as God has desired, and not hesitate between word and action". All citations are from the 1978 version edited by Muhammad Qutb. For guidance through the text I have relied on Olivier Carré's *Mysticism and Politics*, but I will analyse Qutb's arguments separately from the question of how they relate to the Qur'anic verses in question.

¹⁸⁷ Qutb, *Fi Zilal*, 1:11.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 1:11.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 1:16-17.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 3:1435.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 3:1437, 4:2122.

lies outside the Islamic zone (*dār al-islām*),¹⁹² contrary to the arguments of Orientalists who have tricked Muslims into believing that jihad has no universal aims.¹⁹³ Qutb makes clear his inspiration on these points in Maudoodi, citing extensively from *al-Jihad fi Sabil Allah*, the 1960 Arabic translation from Urdu of his first pamphlet *al-Jihad fi al-Islam* (Jihad in Islam, 1927).¹⁹⁴ Qutb's ideological lexicon developed around this revolutionary view of Islam: he calls for a “*fiqh of action*” (*fiqh al-ḥaraka*) that reflects current realities,¹⁹⁵ in contrast to the “*fiqh on paper*” (*fiqh al-awrāq*) of previous eras.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, *ḥaraka/ḥarakāt/yataḥarrak* are key concepts throughout *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, expressing the sense of revolutionary movement and dynamic community that Qutb sought to convey.

There are several themes that overlap with Sabri's ideas. Qutb accepts Ash'ari causality without diluting divine intervention in human affairs in the manner of 'Abduh, Akif and other modernist thinkers.¹⁹⁷ There is none of the modernist penchant for rationalising paranormal phenomena or devaluing the notion of *al-ghayb* (the unseen/unknown). To reject the unseen because we cannot comprehend it experientially is to “relapse into the state of animals who live only in the realm of that which is sensed [*al-maḥsūs*]”,¹⁹⁸ he says (echoing Kevseri), highlighting the Qur'anic phrase (2:3) *alladhīna yu'minūn bi-l-ghayb* which Sabri had used for the title of his book on political theory.¹⁹⁹ Secularism is a great prison sectioned off by the iron bars (*quḍbān ḥadīdiyya*) of empirical knowledge that block Islam's “fountains of knowledge and light”.²⁰⁰ Secular-materialism is advocated by “agents” (*ʿumalā*) in the

¹⁹² Ibid., 3:1441.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 3:1443.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 3:1444-52.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 4:2006. The term *fiqh al-wāqīʿ* is derived from this passage. He also uses *al-fiqh al-ḍarūrī* (necessary *fiqh*); 3:1619.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 4:2006.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 1:503: “God organises causes and effects according to His will, then requires man to perform his duty, expend his effort, and fulfil his obligations.” See Daniel Gimaret, *La doctrine d'al-Ash'arī* (Paris: Cerf, 1990).

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 1:59.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 1:39-40, 2:1113-22. This encompasses belief in the existence of angels and jinn.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 6:3684.

guise of professors, philosophers, researchers, poets, artists, and journalists who “bear only the names of Muslims”.²⁰¹ Unlike the positivists (*al-madhāhib al-waḍ‘iyya*), those who believe in God regard unquestioned belief in the unseen as a measure of faith.²⁰²

Most notable of all, Qutb’s concept of *ḥākimiyya* expresses Sabri’s concept of *ḥukm al-islām*, the divinely sanctified society in which no internal actor is able to manipulate the political and juridical system for his own ends. Tyrannical power (*tāghūt*) is that which does not recognise God’s juridical authority (*ḥākimiyya*)²⁰³ and juridical systems based on positive law turn their subjects into slaves (*‘ubūdiyyat al-bashar li-l-bashar*) through conferring the sovereignty of men over men (*ḥākimiyyat al-bashar li-l-bashar*).²⁰⁴ The claim that *ḥākimiyya* is a neologism invented to translate Maudoodi’s *hukumat-i ilahiya* (sovereignty of God) into Arabic from around 1946 onwards is inaccurate.²⁰⁵ The term *hākimiyet* was used in Ottoman Turkish and appears in Şemsettin Sami’s Turkish-Arabic dictionary published in November 1899, with the French *souveraineté* given in explanation.²⁰⁶ Said Nursi used it in an Ottoman article published in 1920 with the meaning of the absolute authority of the Qur’an in matters where there is no dispute in Sunni jurisprudence.²⁰⁷ Sabri used *ḥākimiyya* in his Arabic book *Mawqif al-Bashar Taht Sultan al-Qadar* (1934), in which he first outlined his turn away from Maturidi free will: Just as it was an act of God that brought each human into existence, God’s intervention is no less in the continuing motions of life, and to assume otherwise would be to

²⁰¹ Ibid., 1:415.

²⁰² Ibid., 3:1338.

²⁰³ Qutb, *Fi Zīl al-Qur’an*, 2:926-7.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 4:1940.

²⁰⁵ This claim is made by Stéphane Lacroix, “Ḥākimiyya,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 3, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30217 (consulted 6 December 2018); also, Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 214. The Urdu phrase was used in the Jamaat-i Islami’s founding statement published in *Tarjuman* journal, May 1941; see Irfan Ahmad, “Genealogy of the Islamic State: Reflections on Maududi’s Political Thought and Islamism,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15/2009: 154.

²⁰⁶ Şemsettin Sami, *Qamus-i Türki* (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1996), 537.

²⁰⁷ Said Nursi, “Kur’an-ı Azimü’ş-Şa’nın Hakimiyet-i Mutlakası,” *SR*, 6 May 1920, 18/463: 242-3. It also appears in his *Lem’alar* (Istanbul: Sözler, 2012), thirtieth Lem’a, 368, as an Arabic invocation used by the Turkish devout (*elhamdülillah ‘alā rahmāniyetihi ve ‘alā ḥākimiyetihi*), though Arabic speakers did not say this.

“compare the ownership and sovereignty of God to any sovereignty or ownership” (*lā tushabbih mālīkiyyat al-khāliq wa-ḥākimiyyatahu bi-ayyati ḥākimiyya aw mālīkiyya*).²⁰⁸

Further, the term appeared in Urdu in a 1939 speech and pamphlet, *Islam ka Nazariyya-i Siyasi* (The Political Concept of Islam), that was subsequently issued in Arabic as *Nazariyyat al-Islam al-Siyasiyya* (The Political Theory of Islam) in Lahore in 1946 and Cairo in 1950;²⁰⁹ it also appeared in the 1955 translation into Arabic of *Quran ki Char Bunyadi Istilahain* (Four Concepts in the Qur’an). It was from this second book that Qutb likely became familiar with the term.²¹⁰ Written in 1941, Maudoodi intended it as a statement of Jamaat-i Islami policy against the Muslim League’s plan for a secular Muslim state in post-colonial India. It argued that Muslims had at an early stage forgotten the Qur’anic understandings of Arabic terms which have implications for Islam as a total system impacting the individual and the state. Though not a central term in the work, *ḥākimiyya* was used in the Arabic edition to articulate Maudoodi’s central idea of a political order in which God is sovereign and *dīn* itself is identified with the modern state.²¹¹ In this manner Maudoodi hoped to create in Muslims an attitude that would prevent their dissolution in Hindu society. After Pakistan’s founding Maudoodi gave this practical form in an elected legislative body whose work was a form of *ijtihād*, usurping the traditional role of the ‘ulama’ (what Maudoodi

²⁰⁸ Sabri, *Mawqif al-Bashar*, 230. Sabri, *Mawqif al-‘Aql*, 3:433-4.

²⁰⁹ It states: “*al-ḥākimiyya* (sovereignty) [sic] is God’s alone and legislation [*tashrī‘*] is in his hands.” Abul A‘la Maudoodi (trans., Muhammad ‘Asim al-Haddad), *Nazariyyat al-Islam al-Siyasiyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1967), 27.

²¹⁰ The book, *al-Mustalahat al-Arba‘a fī al-Qur‘an*, is cited in a footnote as a source for Qutb’s ideas in the Muhammad Qutb edition; 1/927. Calvert misstates the translator as Nadvi; it was translated by Muhammad Kazim Sabbag in Lahore.

²¹¹ See Maudoodi, *al-Mustalahat al-Arba‘a*, 71: (*ḥākimiyya siyāsiyya*), 93 (defined as the English “sovereignty”, and which in itself is defined as *istikhdām al-quwwa al-qāhira*, 116), 120-1 (as the notion of God’s authority expressed through the Qur’anic term *dīn*). Maudoodi’s collaborator Khurshid Ahmad considers that the term *ḥākimiyya* has been overanalysed; interview, Leicester, 23 February 2019. On the evolution of the concept in South Asian Islamist circles prior to Maudoodi’s usage see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “The Sovereignty of God in Modern Islamic Thought,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 25/3 (July 2015), 389-418.

called theodemocracy).²¹² Qutb did not develop the term in any manner beyond Maudoodi's framework.²¹³ Where Qutb was innovative was in conceptualising *jāhiliyya* as a condition of regression in human society²¹⁴ and setting it in a binary framework with *ḥākimiyya*.²¹⁵ Yet over *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*'s 4,000 pages he did not go so far as Sabri in declaring the apostate nature of the modern Muslim subject.

Qutb's final works

This takes us to Qutb's more explicitly activist works of his final period of writing in the 1960s in which he draws closer to the outright denunciation of the modern state and its citizens. In his short book *Hadha al-Din* Qutb distils his arguments in a softer and more easily digestible manner, reasserting his concept of a divine politico-juridical framework that frees man from the self-serving interest of other men and Islam's calling to retake the emancipatory reins of global leadership. The same year, Qutb published *Khasa'is al-Tasawwur al-Islami*²¹⁶ in which he argued that the Qur'an is no more a subject text for the deliberations of *tafsīr*, *kalām*, or *falsafa* than it is for the treatments of Hegelian rationalism or Comteian positivism, but a manifesto for action that Muslim society (*al-jamā'a al-muslima*) must embrace.²¹⁷ This is the basis of what he describes as the "Islamic thought" (*al-fikr al-islāmī*) that expresses the true "Islamic concept" (*al-taṣawwur al-islāmī*) of

²¹² Abul A 'la Maudoodi (trans. Khurshid Ahmad), *The Islamic Law and Constitution* (Karachi: Jamaat-e-Islami Publications, 1955), 166. On Maudoodi's Islamic state, see Vali Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 80-106; Charles Adams, "Mawdudi and the Islamic State," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 99-132; Haroon K. Ullah, *Vying for Allah's Vote: Understanding Islamic Parties, Political Violence, and Extremism in Pakistan* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 75-89.

²¹³ Both Maudoodi and Qutb link the term to the numerous uses of the lexical derivations of *ḥukm* in the Qur'an, such as *al-ḥukm lillah* (40:12).

²¹⁴ Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, 2/891: "the *jāhiliyya* is not a historical period but a state that comes into existence when its characteristics are found in a circumstance or order."

²¹⁵ Shepard, "Sayyid Qutb's Doctrine of *jāhiliyya*," *IJMES*, 35/4 (2003): 521-45.

²¹⁶ Its original title was *Fikrat al-Islam 'an Allah wa-l-Kawn wa-l-Hayat wa-l-Insan*, which bears a resemblance to not only Maudoodi's title *al-Mustalahat al-Arba 'a fi al-Qur'an* but also Sabri's *Mawqif al-'Aql*.

²¹⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Khasa'is al-Tasawwur al-Islami wa-Muqawwimatuha* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2002), 7.

revelation.²¹⁸ He faults, forgivingly, ‘Abduh for stressing reason (‘*aql*) as if it were the antithesis of revelation (*wahy*)²¹⁹ and Iqbal for suggesting the experience of the human soul transcends death as apologetic responses to Western materialism.²²⁰ *Al-Mustaqbal li-Hadha al-Din* (1964), written to reassure followers in the face of brutal repression, was a degree more political in its message. Qutb now hailed the “vanguards of the Islamic awakening” (*talā’i ‘al-ba‘th al-islāmī*) around the Islamic nation (*al-waṭan al-islāmī*) who had survived attempts to smother Islam such as that of Atatürk’s Turkey.²²¹ Political systems that do not establish Islamic rule are “*jāhiliyya* systems” (*nuḥum jāhiliyya*), he states bluntly,²²² before proceeding with an analysis of the soulless “civilisation of the white man”, a phrase he adapts from Bertrand Russell,²²³ and citing heavily from French biologist-turned-eugenicist Alexis Carrel’s *L’homme, cet inconnu* (1935) and its critique of industrial civilisation,²²⁴ as well as American Secretary of State John Dulles’s *War or Peace* (1950) and its critique of Soviet communism and Nadvi’s *Madha Khasira*.

Qutb began writing *Ma‘alim fi al-Tariq* in 1962, passing pages of the manuscript to the outside world through his visiting sisters. It begins with a stark statement of the state of humanity in light of the nuclear arms race, the surest proof of the bankruptcy of Western values: “Humanity stands today on the edge of the precipice; not because of the threat of annihilation hanging over its head, which is a symptom of illness not the illness itself, but because of its bankruptcy in the world of values.”²²⁵ Europe’s democracy and communism are failed systems, despite the genius of their material production, but mankind needs new

²¹⁸ Ibid., 17.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 18-20.

²²⁰ Ibid., 20-22.

²²¹ Sayyid Qutb, *al-Mustaqbal li-Hadha al-Din* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1993), 7-8.

²²² Ibid., 10.

²²³ Ibid., 47-8.

²²⁴ Ibid., 59-67; translated as *al-Insan Dhalik al-Majhul* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma‘arif, nda). Qutb discussed Carrel at length throughout *al-Islam wa-Mushkilat al-Hadara* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1992), esp. 9-23.

²²⁵ Sayyid Qutb, *Ma‘alim fi al-Tariq* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1979), 3.

leadership, one based on values (*qiyam*). Islam is not the name of an ethnic group on a specific territory, but a supranational *umma* that lost its sense of self (*wujūd*) and effective presence (*shuhūd*)²²⁶ by breaking its links to God's shari'a to join the body of post-colonial regimes referred to as the "Islamic world". This world exists in a state of *jāhiliyya* because sovereignty has transferred from God to mankind. The Islamic rebirth requires a vanguard that will take the Qur'an as its guide to recognising the "signs on the road" (*ma'ālim fī al-ṭarīq*) in order to change themselves before they move to the stage of saving humanity.²²⁷ The Islamic movement's basic task (*manhaj al-ḥaraka al-islāmiyya*) is thus to return to the Qur'an.²²⁸

The vanguard is called to take concrete measures. The Islamic movement must seek to remove the regimes and authorities supporting *jāhili* belief systems through preaching and force,²²⁹ since those with power over God's servants will not give up their authority through persuasion.²³⁰ The new Muslim society must build up its organisational capacities in preparation for war against it.²³¹ Once the "jihadist movement of Islam" (*ḥarakat al-islām al-jihādiyya*) has liberated men from their arbitrary politico-juridical systems they will be free to choose their beliefs away from political pressure.²³² The Muslim community will be honest with both those living in Islamic countries who claim they are Muslims (*yaz'umūn annahum muslimūn*) and those outside the Islamic nation in explaining that God wants to rescue them from the impure *jāhiliyya* in which they live.²³³ Europeans have tricked Muslims into

²²⁶ Qutb's use of *wujūd* and *shuhūd* appears intended to integrate the language of Sufism in his ideology. He also made extensive use of the Sufi concept of *dhawq*, on which see Denis Gril, *EI3*; http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_26001 (consulted 2 December 2018).

²²⁷ This summarises Qutb's introduction; 3-10.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 57. He cites from Ibn al-Qayyim's *Zad al-Ma'ad*.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 60-1.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

²³² *Ibid.*, 63-4.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 161-2.

thinking there is a difference between civilised society and Muslim society.²³⁴ In overcoming this challenge they should look to the first Muslims who held to their faith through much suffering.²³⁵ They must also realise that the Prophet did not liberate peoples from despotic Persian and Byzantine rule for the sake of Arabism (*al-‘urūba*) or an Arab despot (*tāghūt ‘arabī*),²³⁶ since what such ideologies miss is that it is Islam itself that is the target of colonialism and colonialism is in fact a cover for the continuation of the European Crusader wars.²³⁷

Qutb’s lexical framework avoids the traditional discourse of Islamic theology. In place of *takfīr*, *irjā’*, *īmān*, *ridda*, *jahmiyya*, or *ḥashwiyya*, Qutb develops his core concepts of *jāhiliyya/ḥākimiyya* with terms such as *ḥaraka*, *taṣawwur*, *qiyāda*, *ṭalī‘a*, *jamā‘a muslima*, etc. Qutb borrowed from the ideas of the modernist and Salafi discourses of the period without adopting their language: he posited the Qur’an as the sole basis of a purified faith but had little interest in the demystification of the text of ‘Abduh’s followers or the war on Sufism of Ibn Taymiyya’s adepts. Indeed, Carré sees him as a form of *derviche politique*²³⁸ for whom the Sufi warrior was an exemplary modern Muslim.²³⁹ What Qutb did was to reconstitute the Islamic discursive tradition as an ideology of anti/post-colonial resistance located in Third World movements of the time. Among his contemporaries perhaps the most trenchant comparison is to be made to a thinker whose direct influence is not traceable at all: Frantz Fanon (1925-1961). A psychiatrist from the French colony of Martinique who worked with French and Algerian patients during the Algerian war of independence, Fanon wrote three books, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), *A Dying Colonialism* (1959), and *The Wretched*

²³⁴ Ibid., 106-7.

²³⁵ Ibid., 176-7.

²³⁶ Ibid., 23-4. This was a clear allusion to Nasser.

²³⁷ Ibid., 186.

²³⁸ Olivier Carré, “Eléments de la ‘aqīda de Sayyid Qutb dans ‘Fī zilāl al-qur’ān’,” *Studia Islamica*, 91 (2000): 194.

²³⁹ Carré, *Mysticism and Politics*, 173. On classes of faith in Medina, *ibid.*, 166-8.

of the Earth (1961) that resonated to only a limited degree with the Arab Left at the time. It is not known if Qutb was aware of the contemporary translation of Fanon's last work as *Mu'adhdhabu al-Ard*, but it dealt with precisely the problem of decolonisation and the reproduction of colonial iniquity by successor regimes that Qutb addressed. Qutb critiqued what he saw as both collaborator national elites in the period before 1952 who championed European liberal democracy – the system of political and economic liberalism that evolved in Britain, Germany, France, and the United States – and the post-1952 regime of national liberation that adapted the methods of European totalitarianism to its ends. One reason Qutb was more radical during this second phase was his realisation that the oppressor was now indigenous and Muslim. For his part, Fanon could not sound more Qutbian than when he writes, “Let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw their inspiration from her,” or “Humanity is waiting for something from us other than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature”.²⁴⁰ Indeed, Omnia El Shakry has suggested that Qutb and Fanon should be read alongside each other in the canon of literature on Arab decolonisation.²⁴¹

Who influenced Qutb?

The question of influences, both experiential and ideological, has pressed heavily in the vast literature on Sayyid Qutb. In terms of events these have included the Palestine war, his American sojourn, and Nasserist persecution and in terms of individuals Maudoodi, Ibn Taymiyya, al-Banna, Lenin, and Carl Schmitt. Some of these cases are clear. Qutb mentions

²⁴⁰ Frantz Fanon (trans. Constance Farrington), *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 2001), 254.

²⁴¹ Omnia El Shakry, “‘History without Documents’: The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East,” *The American Historical Review*, 120/3 (2015): 920-934. See also Ibrahim Abu Rabi', “Sayyid Qutb: From Religious Realism to Radical Social Criticism,” *Islamic Quarterly*, 28/2 (1984): 112.

Maudoodi often, even in his interrogation by prosecutors before trial;²⁴² he also cited regime violence as a reason for at least the idea of violence against the state,²⁴³ an argument that became prominent in later Brotherhood writing about the period. Links to Lenin are hard to prove, but some have pointed to the idea of the vanguard that must mobilise the workers to create the revolution in his *What Is to Be Done?* (1902).²⁴⁴ The arguments concerning Ibn Taymiyya appear to be based on the use to which Qutb's followers put his ideas after his death. Emmanuel Sivan sees his influence in Qutb's belief in the illegitimacy of Muslim rulers who do not rule through shari'a²⁴⁵ and describes Qutb as a neo-Hanbali advocate of apostasy, but as we have seen Qutb did not use such language. Ibn Taymiyya is a central figure in key texts of the radical movement usually classified as Jihadi Salafism in which Qutb is sometimes also cited,²⁴⁶ but Hüseyin Işık's writing makes clear why Qutb's innovative eclectic approach would place limits on Salafi embrace of him.

The influence of fascist or totalitarian ideologies of the era has been claimed by many scholars, particularly Qutb's interest in Alexis Carrel, who worked with the Vichy regime.²⁴⁷ Though this interest can be traced to 1941, Qutb only appears to have read Carrel closely

²⁴² Al-Khalidi, *Sayyid Qutb*, 435. The text of the interrogation is reproduced in full.

²⁴³ Sayyid Qutb, *Limadha A 'damuni?* (London: Saudi Research and Publishing Company, 1980), 62; "If we knew that detention would lead to a fair trial and legal penalties – even under the mad-made laws in place – no one would have thought of responding to aggression with force."

²⁴⁴ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 16, 231; Glenn Robinson, "Jihadi information strategy: sources, opportunities, and vulnerabilities," in *Information Strategy and Warfare: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, ed. John Arquilla and Douglas A. Borer (London: Routledge, 2007), 92.

²⁴⁵ Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval theology and modern politics* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1990), 94, 102.

²⁴⁶ Qutb was influential for revolutionary groups in Egypt and other countries. A group of Brotherhood prisoners led Shukri Mustafa formed a group called Jama'at al-Muslimin which took Qutb's notion of separation from *jāhili* society as its founding principle. The group had interactions with Juhayman's Salafi Hisba Group; see al-Huzaymi, *Ayyam*, 49-51. 'Abd al-Salam Farag, a member of the Jihad group that assassinated Anwar Sadat in 1981, cites Ibn Taymiyya at length but makes no mention of Qutb in *Jihad, al-Farida al-Gha'iba* (1982) and Jordanian 'ālim Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's *Millat Ibrahim* (1984), a seminal text for today's Jihadi Salafism, cites Ibn Taymiyya extensively and Qutb occasionally. However, al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's *Fursan fi Rayat al-Nabi* (2001) makes extensive reference to Qutb as the initiator of an Islamic revolution against internal and external enemies of Islam.

²⁴⁷ Youssef Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism: The Story of Islamist Movements* (London/New York: Continuum, 2010), 149-157; Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993), 77-101; Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 157-9.

after Nadvi and Iranian thinker Ali Shariati (1933-1977) cited him in their works.²⁴⁸ Qutb was attracted to Carrel's anti-materialist sentiments, his belief that religion is a universal system based on human nature but that religious truth is ultimately beyond the understanding of all men, including those of Western science. In the same book Carrel propounded the creation a new elite of the mentally and physical superior who should withdraw from society in preparation for its renewal through sterilisation and euthanasia of society's insane and criminal "defectives",²⁴⁹ ideas that bear striking similarities to Qutb's notion of vanguard-led purification. His biological thinking regards the role of women clearly appealed to Qutb.²⁵⁰ Qutb translated none of Carrel's eugenics, but of all the texts in interwar Europe's wave of anti-Enlightenment critique it is striking he should choose this one. Carrel's status as Nobel Prize winner for chemistry in 1912 certainly gave him an impeccable status for Qutb. Qutb was not above criticising him, describing Carrel as a prisoner of Western reason in seeing more not less Western knowledge as the way out for modern man, but Qutb did not go beyond the material that concerned him directly.²⁵¹ Choueiri suggests Qutb's description of international capitalism as the work of an exploitative Jewish financier class was inspired by European anti-Semitism that he may have picked up from Carrel, though it was muted in *L'homme, cet inconnu*.²⁵² However, Qutb had already entered that territory in an article titled "Ma 'rakatuna ma 'a al-Yahud" (Our Battle with The Jews, 1951) published after the 1948 war in Palestine.²⁵³ Overall it seems more appropriate to think of Qutb as finding validation in

²⁴⁸ Nadvi, *Madha Khasira*, 193-4. Ali Shariati, article (title unavailable) in *Nashriye-yi Farhang-i Khurasan*, 2/6 (1955): 1333-7; cited in David Hamilton, *The First Transplant Surgeon: The Flawed Genius of Nobel Prize Winner, Alexis Carrel* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2017), 557-8. Also, Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 91-2.

²⁴⁹ Alexis Carrel (trans. Charles. E. Rosenberg), *Man, The Unknown* (New York/London: Harper and Bros, 1939), 17, 140-1, 153, 164.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 50-1. Qutb quotes this in *al-Islam wa-Mushkilat al-Hadara*, 134-5.

²⁵¹ Qutb, *al-Islam*, 167-72; Carrel, *Man*, 19-20.

²⁵² Qutb, *al-Islam*, 101.

²⁵³ This was one of a group of articles first published in *al-Da 'wa* in the period 1951-1954 and as book by the same name in 1970; Sayyid Qutb, *Ma 'rakatuna ma 'a al-Yahud* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1993), 20-38. Qutb accuses Jews of responsibility for calamities including communism and the end of the Ottoman caliphate.

Carrel of an independently evolving worldview located in a crisis of thought regarding modernity, decolonisation, and Islam.

Joseph-Simon Görlach reaches a similar conclusion, that while there were parallels between Islamic political thought and European totalitarian ideologies, in particular fascism, social and historical context was fundamental to the formation and characteristics of each of them.²⁵⁴ Surface similarities to European fascism could be drawn too in the example of the Brotherhood's paramilitary activities, its mass organisation, and totalist programme for society (which Carré argues was a blueprint for Nasserism).²⁵⁵ Qutb built on Brotherhood discourse formulated by al-Banna which used the concepts of the *ḥaraka islāmiyya*,²⁵⁶ the *manhaj/minhāj*,²⁵⁷ Islam as a total system for life with the Qur'an at its centre,²⁵⁸ the *mu'min* as a category apart among the mass of Muslims,²⁵⁹ the attack on European positive law,²⁶⁰ the condemnation of materialist political systems.²⁶¹ His movement's aim was to propagate what it called correct Islam (*islām ṣaḥīḥ*) but Al-Banna made a point of rejecting *takfīr*.²⁶² Like Maudoodi, al-Banna discussed *jāhiliyya* without the implications drawn out by Qutb.²⁶³ Where al-Banna was fundamentally different from Qutb was in his belief in a mass movement that is engaged socially, economically, and politically with society at large, not hiding in the wings. This reflects the different circumstances in which they lived. In his final years Qutb wanted to save a movement facing extinction, and it was in thanks for his efforts

²⁵⁴ Joseph-Simon Görlach, "Western Representations of Fascist Influences on Islamist Thought," in *Cultural Transfers in Dispute: Representations in Asia, Europe and the Arab World since the Middle Ages*, ed. Jörg Feuchter, Friedhelm Hoffmann, Bee Yun (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2011), 149-68. Also, Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship Versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

²⁵⁵ Carré, *Mysticism and Politics*, 197.

²⁵⁶ Hasan Al-Banna, *Mudhakkirat al-Da'wa wa-l-Da'iya* (Kuwait: Maktabat Afaq, 2012), 167.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 167.

²⁵⁸ Al-Banna, *Majmu'at Rasa'il*, 247.

²⁵⁹ Al-Banna, *Mudhakkirat*, 159. See Mitchell, *Society*, 319.

²⁶⁰ Al-Banna, *Majmu'at Rasa'il*, 118, 148, 276-9.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 220-4. Al-Banna, *Mudhakkirat*, 66.

²⁶² See *Risalat al-Ta'alim*, point 20, written in 1935; al-Banna, *Majmu'at Rasa'il*, 20, 246.

²⁶³ Ibid., 8. Al-Banna said in reference to Turkey that ethnic nationalism had "revived jāhiliyya customs".

in that regard that the revived Brotherhood accepted Qutb's work into its canon and separated Qutb from those raising arms and openly excommunicating Muslims in his name.²⁶⁴

The claim of influence from Schmitt is made by Khaled Abou El Fadl, who writes that many of Qutb's ideas and phrases in *Ma'alim Fi al-Tariq* are adapted from the German political scientist. Abou El Fadl does not explain further except to say that it was through Western thinkers like Schmitt that Qutb provided a detailed vision of the "idealistic and utopian Islamic state".²⁶⁵ There are no translations of Schmitt's work, published in 1922 and 1932, for Qutb to have become familiar with it.²⁶⁶ Given that Qutb was content to quote at length a lesser thinker such as Carrel it seems probable that he would have cited Schmitt by name. Abou El Fadl was most likely referring to Schmitt's observation that modern juridical formulations secularise what was once the absolute sovereignty of God, which, as argued earlier, bears similarities to Mustafa Sabri's concept of *ḥukm al-islām* and its usurpation in Kemalist Turkey and liberal Egypt. However, Qutb did not need to receive these ideas from Schmitt or any other European thinker: they were propagated around Cairo over many years by Sabri, who attended the same salons as Qutb, and set them forth in his 1942 book *al-Qawl al-Fasl*, whose publication was curated by al-Banna, and then in *Mawqif al-'Aql*, where Sabri singled Qutb out for praise among the Egyptian intellectuals of the period. Qutb's concept of God's *ḥākimiyya* encompassed Sabri's *ḥukm al-islām* in politico-juridical terms and Sabri's *ḥākimiyya* in terms of creed. But in all of Qutb's extensive ideologising of the Islamic tradition he never went as far as Sabri's declaration of the apostasy of the modern Muslim.

²⁶⁴ Barbara Zollner, "Prison Talk: The Muslim Brotherhood's Internal Struggle during Gamal Abdel Nasser's Persecution, 1954 to 1971," *IJMES*, 39/3 (2007): 427.

²⁶⁵ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, 82-3. Also, Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 192.

²⁶⁶ *Political Theology* seems only to have been published in recent years in Arabic: Rania al-Sahili and Yasser al-Sarut, trans., *al-Lahut al-Siyasi* (Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Study, 2018) and Fadil Jatkar, trans. *Azmat al-Barlamanat* (Beirut: Ma'had al-Dirasat al-Istratijiyya, 2008).

Qutb attempted to clear up his meaning regards this last point in the months before he was executed. Under the eye of prison censors, he documented his view of the breakdown in the republic's relations with the Brotherhood and explained some elements of his ideas that led to his impending execution. Qutb recounted how a fissure developed in Brotherhood ranks between Qutb and his followers, on one side, and the Brotherhood leadership held in another prison, on the other, over his theory of the vanguard. By this he meant seclusion from society to focus on moral education since society was not yet ready for the Islamic system and training in guerrilla activities to repel the state's security apparatus if it came calling. Qutb rejected claims he was engaging in *takfīr*: "We do not do *takfīr* – this has been relayed wrongly – but we say that people have become ignorant about the truth of faith, unable to conceptualise its true meaning, and far from the Islamic life; thus they became similar to the state of societies in the *jāhiliyya* [*fi ḥāl tushbih ḥāl mujtamaʿāt al-jāhiliyya*]. So, the starting point in the movement should not be establishing the Islamic system but replanting *ʿaqīda* and Islamic moral education. The issue is the method of the Islamic movement, not judgements about people."²⁶⁷ Qutb said he was often asked, presumably by interrogators, why his group acted as if they were the only Muslims, to which he responded that Islam is about more than group prayers, hajj pilgrimage, and Islamic conferences, it is "a complete system of life" (*niẓām ḥayāh kāmila*). Even in these responses Qutb avoided recourse to traditional terminologies and a clear statement on who is a believer and who is not.

The Brotherhood's leader Hasan al-Hudaybi, alarmed by the radical turn that Qutb's followers were taking, wrote a book in 1969 that was widely understood as a response to the Qutbist trend, *Duʿat La Quḍat* (Preachers, Not Judges).²⁶⁸ Its publication in 1977 four years after al-Hudaybi's death was specifically linked by the publisher to the appearance of Qutb-

²⁶⁷ Qutb, *Limadha Aʿdamuni*, 23-4.

²⁶⁸ Barbara Zollner has argued that the book was a joint project of leading Brothers and al-Azhar scholars; *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2009).

inspired groups such as Shukri Mustafa's Jama'at al-Muslimin, which had isolated itself from society according to Qutb's model.²⁶⁹ Al-Hudaybi restated the Ash'ari-Maturidi view on faith and commission of grave sins (*al-kabīra*)²⁷⁰ and tried to deflect blame for the controversy over *takfīr* from Qutb to Maudoodi. Simply uttering the testimony of faith (*shahāda*) is enough to be considered a Muslim and it is not for men to doubt the sincerity of faith,²⁷¹ he said, but the followers of Maudoodi have used his *Four Concepts in the Qur'an* as an argument for questioning faith on the basis of actions.²⁷² Though Qutb was not named, he was almost certainly on al-Hudaybi's mind: he said that "ideologues, theorists and researchers" (*aṣḥāb al-fikr wa-l-naẓar wa-l-bāḥithīn*) had given the false impression that *ḥākimiyya* was a term in the Qur'an or hadith.²⁷³ "It is incumbent upon us not to become attached to the terminologies of fallible men and to hold fast to the word of God and the infallible Prophet," al-Hudaybi wrote.²⁷⁴ Not only that, *ḥākimiyya* has been misunderstood as meaning that men have no call to formulate any legislation for themselves;²⁷⁵ it is all well and good to deal with the Qur'an and hadith directly but authoritative knowledge matters.²⁷⁶ Al-Hudaybi rejected not only the claim that Muslims who obey a ruler defined as *ṭāghūt* can be deemed *kāfir*,²⁷⁷ but that the absence of an Islamic government negates the faith of all subjects within a political space, the claim that Sabri had advanced with more clarity than Qutb.²⁷⁸ The various elements of this critique indicate that al-Hudaybi's book was intended as a rebuke to not only Maudoodi but both Qutb and his followers.²⁷⁹

²⁶⁹ Hasan al-Hudaybi, *Du'at La Qudat* (Cairo: Dar al-Tiba'a wa-l-Nashr al-Islamiyya, 1977), 12 (publisher's preface).

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 45-57, 70-2, 180.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 20.

²⁷² Ibid., 25, 44-5.

²⁷³ Ibid., 77.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 78.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 85.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 189.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 181-5.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 172.

²⁷⁹ Zollner thinks it targets only Qutb's followers; "Prison Talk," 425.

It is in the context of this debate that the term *islāmī* emerges in Arabic as a term for adherents of the Brotherhood, its offshoots in Egypt, and similar religious movements in other countries. Since words with the adjectival ending *-ī* (properly *-iyy*) can also function as Arabic nouns, the potential for the application of *islāmī* to individuals of the movement flows from its use as a description of that movement. Both al-Banna and Qutb propagated the term *ḥaraka islāmiyya*, thus the word always had the potential to work as shorthand for adepts of the *ḥaraka*. However, the term appears to have emerged as a compromise to describe followers of different groups of the *ḥaraka islāmiyya* in light of the claim by some of Qutb's followers that they alone were the true Muslims. This conflict was the source of a sharp divide in the prisons in the late 1960s, particularly in 1967 when the regime demanded that prisoners declare support for Nasser. Shukri Mustafa, who was released in 1971, went further in denouncing fellow inmates who did not agree with his Qutbist group.²⁸⁰ The transformation of meaning can be seen in the prison memoir of Ahmad 'Abd al-Majid, who spent ten years behind bars over the case involving Qutb. 'Abd al-Majid writes that if a ruler is negligent in applying Islamic ordinances then "he is no longer an Islamic ruler" (*lam ya 'ud ḥākiman islāmiyyan*), and any community of Muslims that accepts such a situation is also "no longer *islāmī*, no matter what claims it makes".²⁸¹ He goes on to say that the "Muslim ruler" must not only avoid commission of major sins on a personal level but ensure application of Islamic laws. *Islāmī*/non-*islāmī* appear to function here as euphemisms for Muslim/no longer Muslim (or at the least, deficient in Islam) among the post-Nasser radical groups.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ On Shukri Mustafa, see Ahmad Ra'if, *al-Bawwaba al-Sawda': Safahat min Tarikh al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* (Cairo: al-Zahra' li-l-I'lam al-'Arabi, 1985), 398-401, 539, 573-5, 583-4. See Tariq Ramadan, *Aux Sources du Renouveau Musulman* (Paris: Bayard Editions/Centurion, 1998), 27-9.

²⁸¹ Ahmad 'Abd al-Majid, *al-Ikhwan wa-'Abd al-Nasir: al-Qissa al-Kamila li-Tanzim 1965* (Cairo: al-Zahra li-l-I'lam al-'Arabi, 1991), 229.

²⁸² See the al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya document, "al-Haraka al-Islamiyya wa-l-'Amal al-Hizbi," in *al-Nabi al-Musallah 1: al-Rafidun*, Rif'at Sid Ahmad (London: Riad El-Rayyes, 1991), 219. Also, former al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya member 'Abd al-Mun'im Abu al-Futuh, *Shahid 'ala Tarikh al-Haraka al-Islamiyya fi Misr 1970-1984* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2012), 57, 116.

The word as a term for individuals is absent from official Brotherhood literature in the early years after the movement's revival from 1976 when it began to reestablish itself in public life – neither al-Hudaybi's *Du'āh La Quḍāh* nor his successor 'Umar al-Tilmisani's memoirs use it, nor does it appear in the official journal *al-Da'wa*, most likely because of this genealogical relationship with *takfīr* and the implied claim to be the sole bona fide Muslims.²⁸³ On the other hand, in Syria Nasir al-Din al-Albani used the term in 1972 in reference to “preachers” and “writers”, including Qutb, who talk of Islamic government (*ḥukm islāmī*) but without a rigorous approach to questions of creed and hadith methodology i.e. lay expertise outside the realm of the 'ulama'.²⁸⁴ The Arabic Islamist emerges in Egypt, then, as a noun generated by the movement itself in a context of repression and regeneration,²⁸⁵ but also in at least one case with reference to the phenomenon of the political actor addressing Islamic issues in the public sphere, and this stands in contrast to the Late Ottoman Islamist, which was a neologism coined by its opponents. The English term masks these semantic histories.

* * *

²⁸³ Al-Tilmisani argues the intent behind the Brotherhood's name was not to stake an exclusive claim to Muslim identity but simply to suggest “a group from among the Muslims”; *Dhikrayat La Mudhakkirat* (Cairo: Dar al-I'tisam, 1985), 35.

²⁸⁴ Al-Albani, *Mukhtasar al-'Uluww*, 56-60. He related this to his time at the Islamic University of Medina where many Muslim Brotherhood cadres were employed.

²⁸⁵ To make the term pejorative, opponents have had to contort it to *islāmawī*.

CHAPTER 6

The Late Ottomans' impact on Turkish and Egyptian Islamic thought

This thesis has taken three Ottoman Turkish Muslim thinkers on the cusp of critical debates in Islamic thought in the early to mid-20th century and analysed them in terms of the changing functions of the *‘ālim* and the intellectual, the transformation from shari‘a state to nation state, and the gathering of public activities – political, economic, intellectual, social, etc. – into national domains of operation. It traced their engagement with those questions from their experience of the Ottoman state’s final years to their exile in Egypt during the Turkish republic’s radical phase. These ‘ulama’-intellectuals wrestled with both external and internal challenges of destabilisation of the Islamic tradition and reordering of its institutions. Mehmed Akif seized the opportunity presented by the end of Hamidian restrictions on public debate to bring the modernist thought of Muhammad ‘Abduh into the Ottoman Turkish sphere and, like Iqbal, craft a contemporary Islamic discourse comparable to Enlightenment humanistic thought in an Ottoman Turkish language at once national and Islamic. Akif’s national-linguistic focus limited his influence among Egyptian peers but helped establish him as the Late Ottoman intellectual of choice for the Islamic movement which gathered force in Turkish political and social life in the later 20th century. Ahmed Muhiddin provided an early recognition of Akif’s Turkish Islamism in his study of the Late Ottoman *Kulturbewegung*, describing his thought as “a microcosm of the new Turkish world”¹ and noting the intersections between nationalist and reform Islam thinking (foundational Ur-Islam, simplified shari‘a, free *ijtihād*),² and biographer Mehmet Emin Erişirgil was similarly prescient in noting parallels between Akif and Ziya Gökalp that help explain the evolution of

¹ Muhiddin, *Modern Türklükte*, 58.

² Ibid., 114-17.

Akif as an alternative intellectual representative of the Turkish republic.³ Critical here was Akif's act of resistance – his exile in Egypt and refusal to hand over a superlative Turkish Qur'an – which set him apart from the many others in the reform fold who were co-opted into working with the secular nationalist regime.⁴

Mustafa Sabri and Zahid Kevseri are of a different order. From among the ranks of those trained in the familiar fields of knowledge of the 'ulama' class, they were defenders of an epistemic and ontological system that 'Abduh, his peers, and his admirers felt required change in one way or another, but in their defence of "old knowledge" (or Muhiddin's "historical Islam") their approaches diverged. Reflecting his educational role in the Late Ottoman religious hierarchy, Kevseri operated by and large within the boundaries of premodern knowledge, writing on questions of *fiqh*, hadith, and *kalām* according to the accepted methodologies of those categories. He identified the central challenge to the tradition as the internal critique of the theological-juridical culture that had prevailed over some 1,000 years, particularly in al-Azhar and Ottoman institutions, a critique that had not developed as *apologia* vis-à-vis Europe. Kevseri feared that this destabilising critique was gaining legitimacy through its assumption of the powerful semantic framing of *salafiyya* with its implicit privileging of ethnic Arab understandings of Islamic faith and practice, and which overlapped with both religious modernist and Arabist *nahḍa* discourse. This iconoclastic trend contained two dangerous elements in his view: it dusted off the shelves and brought

³ Erişirgil argues that Akif's *Fatih Kürsüsünde* contains a critique of Gökalp overlooked by scholars, but that there was much in common between the two (losing fathers at a young age, extracurricular acquisition of Arabic and Persian, learning French but never visiting Europe, veterinary college, valuing scientific positivism, dismissing ulema as obscurants). There appears to have been a mutual respect – Gökalp said of Akif, "don't compare him to this or that, he's something completely different" – but Akif rejected an effort by Talat Paşa to effect a reconciliation between them: "This dispute didn't emerge from personal issues that we could quickly fix by meeting". Erişirgil, *İslamcı bir Şairin Romanı*, 199-201. See Erişirgil's Gökalp biography, *Bir Fikir Adamının Romanı: Ziya Gökalp* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1984), 71-82.

⁴ Şerif Mardin points to Şemsettin Günaltay, a colleague of Akif who published *Zulmetten Nura* in 1913 and worked on a commission formed in 1928 that recommended Turkicising prayer ritual; Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 144. *Zulmetten Nura*, for which Akif wrote a preface of praise, extols *ijtihad* and condemns fatalism.

into the mainstream a theology that had for centuries remained marginal for good reason, i.e. its revitalising of the question of *takfīr*, and it undermined the architecture of legal thinking constructed in the Abbasid period through an attempt to excavate an earlier tradition based solely on Qur'an and prophetic hadith that Kevseri dubbed *lā-madhhabiyya* and al-Albani most fully articulated. Kevseri was the first scholar to elaborate these counterarguments with such force, and for that reason he functions as a *bête noire* for the Salafi movement. Kevseri also upheld the experiential ontology of Sufism which complemented his Maturidi resistance to questioning the faith of the believing masses.

Sabri directed his energies to the modernist Islamic theology that traded in some elements of the Salafi movement's discourse – antipathy for the methodology of the dominant juridical culture, reservations about Sufi institutions and metaphysics, a purificatory drive towards rationalisation – but had entirely different motivations: rather than reconfigure the substance of the shari'a state system, it aimed to break up its form. Sabri saw the Late Ottoman religious reformers as apologists for the vague notion of spirituality that religion to which religion had been reduced by the ravages of Enlightenment thought⁵ and enablers of the positivist and materialist trends that since the late 19th century had taken hold in influential quarters of the Ottoman elite. The social engineering of the early Turkish republic confirmed Sabri's worst fears regarding these trends; his horror was to discover that the Egyptian intelligentsia, including many of its most prominent 'ulama', were advancing the same agenda despite the nominal independence Egypt had attained in 1922 and absence of Kemalist revolutionary nationalism. Sabri identified 'Abduh as the notional founder of this trend, coming to a belated realisation of the nature of the ideas heavily propagated by Akif and his circle. Sabri considered the modernists to be engaged in a process of what Max

⁵ See his numerous references to Kant's notion of innate morality as a sign of divine truth that is unknowable to the believer through reason alone. Sabri, *Mawqif al-'Aql*, 1:232, 247; 2:24, 88, 206, 370-5; 3:71-75.

Weber had called in the European context “demagification” (*Entzauberung*),⁶ a cleansing of religion of non-rational interpretations of reality, distilling from Islam’s rich theological tradition whatever elements diminished divine intervention in man’s affairs and augmented human agency.

Building on his political function as sheikh ūl-Islam in the critical final years of the Ottoman empire, Sabri turned his attention to the question of the nation-state. The Islamic system, at least in theory, would never require theories of the sovereign exception because internal manipulations threatening the integrity of the system were unimaginable in a juridical order whose ultimate arbiter was God. Internal challenges to the working of this system had come from historical Shi‘i movements such as the Isma‘ilis or contemporary movements such as the Ahmadis in British India with their reopening of the closed door of revelation, or to a lesser degree the Salafis with their juridical methodology, but the post-Enlightenment European state, as it encroached on Muslim society in diverse ways, overturned the model completely. This West European system, which he usually refers to as simply “democracy” (*al-dīmūqrāṭiyya*), allows interest groups to manipulate the system for their own interests, through constitutional amendments and subsequent legislation that pay no heed to the ordering principles of shari‘a and its custodian ‘ulama’ in the form of judges, fatwa givers, mosque preachers, teachers, and public intellectuals. Sabri wrote that the Muslim subject is thus exposed to both the arbitrary physical abuse of the secular ruler and the risk of apostasy if he does not take decisive action to alter this state of affairs.

Sabri’s thought accords with a rejectionist tendency vis-à-vis European political systems received through varying forms of colonial coercion in different geographical and social contexts, from Said Halim in Late Ottoman Istanbul, to Abul A‘la Maudoodi in

⁶ Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Max Weber, H. H. Gerth, and Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 2013), 139.

India/Pakistan, to Hasan al-Banna in liberal Egypt, to Sayyid Qutb in Nasserist Egypt. Sabri's impact on Qutb in particular cannot be discounted, concealed by the anti-Ottoman spirit of the times and the unwillingness of Arab writers to acknowledge the unfashionable influence of passé Turks. Their rejection of European thought was framed in Islamic terms, despite sharing much with critiques of the West circulating within the West itself. It can be understood as an expression of disillusion, since Europe's political, economic, technological, and philosophical evolution had produced the ideologies of: liberal democracy, which was propagated through the colonial mission; fascism, which plunged Europe and the world into war; and socialism, whose atheistic element made it a non-starter for these thinkers. The contrast between the iniquities of ascendant European civilisation and its injustices around the world, on the one hand, and the grand propaganda surrounding its universalist ideals, on the other, is a theme that runs throughout modern Islamic thought, from al-Afghani, to Sabri, to Qutb.⁷

The question of typology looms large. Sabri and Kevseri express a conservative traditionalism that in Sabri's case bleeds into an activist practice and ideological approach that merges elements of the modernist, the Salafi, the Sufi, the *faqīh*, and the *mutakallim* and eliding with Said Halim's proposition of "Islamisation". It would be wrong to see either of them as defenders of the old who would object *tout court* to such manifestations of the new as al-Banna's organisation. Both are figures who can be observed on the edges of this ideologisation of the Islamic tradition – that is, the process of rethinking, reformulating, and rendering Islam in ideological terms – that flowed from the post-Enlightenment reification identified by Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Armando Salvatore: Kevseri's student Abu Ghudda became the leader of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Sabri collaborated with al-Banna, and

⁷ See Taha Abdurrahman's critique of Western modernity, *Su'al al-Akhlaq: Musahama fi al-Naqd al-Akhlaqi li-l-Hadatha al-Gharbiyya* (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-Arabi, 2000).

their Cairo students considered Sabri, Kevseri, al-Banna, and Qutb collectively as the heroes of their era. Both understood that radical ruptures had taken place in the Islamic episteme that required radical solutions; their venturing into the arena of public debate and their considerable output during their Egyptian years are also testament to the fact that they appreciated a new approach was in order. The disruption of the era also put severe strains on their Maturidism. Sabri strayed from his Maturidi roots on the question of free will towards a *jabrī* Ash‘arism and developed an innovative position on apostasy that was outside the Ash‘ari-Maturidi mainstream.⁸ Despite his forceful rearticulation of Maturidi rationalism on *īmān* and the (un)created Qur’an, Kevseri could still suggest that, like Ahmadi ideology, radical Salafi *lā-madhhabīyya* should be classified as non-Muslim belief and practice. Akif, too, typical of the discourse of *dinsizlik* deployed against the Ottoman positivists, could suggest that Dozy’s Turkish translator had demonstrated by his writings that he was no longer a Muslim, a confession that Sabri beseeched the modernist reformers to make in the interests of fair public debate in *Dinî Müceddidler*.⁹

The range of terminologies used by thinkers such as Akif, Sabri, and Kevseri in the construction of their thought was specific to them but not so discrete as to render comparison impossible, and the same can be said for the thought of Qutb, Maudoodi, Fanon or Schmitt, in that the intent behind and context informing the particular idiom they chose is largely knowable. The literature on Salafism has exposed the dangers of the construction of false discourse, but these writers, each with their own *Einbildungskraft*, or conceptual imagination with its own cluster of terms and phraseology,¹⁰ display a mutual translatability across terminological, geographical, and political fields. Sabri and Kevseri could be classified as

⁸ Kurucu relates an occasion in 1944 when Sabri shocked his students in saying that even children should be ready to sacrifice their lives for God; Düzdağ, *Hatıralar*, 2:107-8.

⁹ Sabri, *Dinî Müceddidler*, 5-6.

¹⁰ The term is Gadamer’s; Joel Weinsheimer and Donald J. Marshall, “Translator’s note,” in *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), xii. See Gadamer, 410-17 and Izutsu, *Concept of Belief*, 228-32.

within the realm of thought belonging to pre-industrial societies in the schema outlined by Patricia Crone, the closed system of world cultural blocs that had found durable solutions to the problems of pre-industrial organisation as opposed to the aberrant European arena of constant contestation, with its perpetual shifts from what Schmitt called the conflictual to the neutral domain that becomes again an arena of struggle.¹¹ In a short period of historical time a great shuffling of functions had taken place among the various categories of *‘ālim*, Sufi, intellectual, preacher, activist. Islam became “Islam”, generating a range of definitions and connotations for both the Muslim and the European that constituted a radical break with the past. It is perfectly possible then to write the Ottoman exiles into a comprehensive history of modern Islamic thought that avoids the Arab-centric tendencies that characterise the field while still recognising the transformative nature of the period, since it was transformative in more than just the production of national identities and nationalist modes of knowledge and perception.

Turkish republican Islam and Said Nursi

This brings us to the trajectory of Islam as politics, theology, and law in Turkey following the loosening of the Kemalist guardrails from 1950, and its relation to the legacy of Akif, Sabri, and Kevseri. That in turn requires a reckoning with the work of a figure who has dominated discussion of Turkish Islam in the 20th century: Said Nursi. Nursi was born in 1878 to a Kurdish family in the remote Eastern Anatolian village of Nurs, after which he was named, in the Taurus mountains south of Lake Van. He grew up in a Khalidi-Naqshi environment but was also influenced by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir Jilani (d. 1166), the founder of the Qadiri

¹¹ Patricia Crone, *Pre-Industrial Societies: Anatomy of the Pre-Modern World* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 147-75; Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 90.

order, as well as al-Ghazali and Illuminationist philosophers such as Suhrawardi (d. 1191).¹² It was because of Nursi's great capacity for text memorisation that he acquired the nickname Bediüzzaman ("wonder of the age") from his teacher Molla Fethullah Efendi.¹³ Sometime around 1899 he moved to Istanbul where he gave informal lessons in Islamic sciences and famously presented a petition to the palace for a revamped school system in the east where he said Kurds were disadvantaged by not knowing Turkish. He proposed that they should offer a mixture of religious and modern knowledge (*ulum-i diniye ve fûnûn-ı lazıme-i fenniye*) but under the name of *medrese* since it was more familiar to the local populace than the modern *mekteb*.¹⁴

During this time Nursi stayed in the family home of Eşref Sencer, based on a recommendation he obtained from palace advisor and governor of Dayr al-Zur (in Syria) Nüzhet Paşa. This seems to have given Nursi his entrée to the court, but it also establishes a link to the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa that remains unresolved in the sources.¹⁵ In 1907 he had moved to Istanbul where he was tried and acquitted by a military court in 1909 for membership of the Muhammadan Union after it was accused of fomenting the anti-CUP insurrection of that year. Kutay claims Nursi was then on secret missions in eastern Anatolia in 1912, Edirne in 1913, and Libya in 1915 and involved in spreading the jihad proclamations. Şükran Vahide, author of a Nursi biography, says his known role fighting in the Great War suggests he may have been involved on some level.¹⁶ Nursi led a military regiment in the Van region in 1915

¹² Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 12; Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 71, 215.

¹³ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 13.

¹⁴ The Ottoman text can be found in Necmeddin Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen Taraflarıyla Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Nesil, 1999), 92. It was first published in *Şark ve Kürdistan Gazetesi*, 19 November 1908, issue 1. It's not clear if he was given an audience with Abdülhamid himself, but palace courtiers sent him for psychiatric tests for his impudence; Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 43-4.

¹⁵ The claim was advanced by the journalist Cemal Kutay, who interviewed Sencer before he died; Kutay, *Çağımızda bir Asr-ı Saadet Müslümanı Bediüzzaman Said Nursî* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya, 1980). Stoddard's study, which was also based on access to Sencer, makes no mention of Nursi in its list of agents. On Nursi staying at Sencer's home, see Fortna, *The Circassian*, 29-30; and Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 78.

¹⁶ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 104-5, 111-29.

before he was captured in March 1916 by the Russians in Bitlis. He escaped from prison in Kosturma in early 1918, arriving back in Istanbul in June of that year via Warsaw, Vienna, and possibly Berlin.¹⁷

By the end of the war Nursi was a recognised authority alongside the other major Muslim scholars of the period. He was appointed by the CUP government to the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye which was tasked after the war with responding to the presumed Anglican Church request about Islam. Nursi adopted a strong anti-colonial stance, withdrawing from political life in Istanbul until in 1922 he finally acceded to Ankara's requests to join the rival political authority.¹⁸ He immediately understood the Anglican affair in the context of British attempts to win over Istanbul Muslims and break the back of any resistance. In a booklet issued in 1920 Nursi addressed the question of how to interact with infidel rule. "A man tries to kill you, throwing you to the ground and putting his foot on your throat, then he asks you contemptuously about your religion. The way to silence him is to go quiet in anger then spit in his face [*cevab-ı müskit küsmekle sükût edip yüzüne tükürmektir*]," he wrote.¹⁹ He then offered four terse answers to Boutwood's questions: "1. What is the religion of Muhammad? The Qur'an. 2. What did it give to thought and life? Affirming the unity of God and acting upright. 3. What are its solutions to the trouble of the times? Preventing usury and the requirement for zakat. 4. What does it say to the tumult of the times? That man will be judged by his efforts and so will those who amass wealth [*laysa li-l-insān illā mā sa'ā wa-lladhīna yaknizūn al-dhahab*]."²⁰ Nursi inaugurates here what became a central element of his discourse after the war as an opponent of the British occupation and then of the Kemalist regime: challenging atheism through an inward turn to spirituality, ritual, and Qur'an as the

¹⁷ Ibid., 131. Nursi cites his ties to Enver and imprisonment in *Mektubat*, appendix to eleventh letter, 76-7.

¹⁸ Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen Taraflarıyla*, 258.

¹⁹ Bediüzzaman (Said Nursi), *Rumuz* (Istanbul: Evkaf-ı İslamiye Matbaası, 1920), 23

²⁰ Ibid., 24. The last question abbreviates Boutwood's query about the political and spiritual forces shaping the world for good or bad; the first part of the response cites Qur'an 53:39 and the second part Qur'an 9:34.

miraculous font of faith (the title of the book, *Rumuz*, or Signs, is reminiscent of Qutb's "signs on the road").²¹

Though honoured with a parliamentary welcome in November 1922, Nursi grew disillusioned with the lack of piety shown by most members, particularly over the ritual prayers, so he distributed a statement in January 1923 that marked the beginning of the breakdown in his relations with Atatürk. The duty of parliamentarians was to preserve religious rites, not to allow Europe-enamoured imitators (*Avrupa meftunu frenk mukallidleri*) to do the West's job of breaking down Islamic culture, Nursi wrote.²² Like Akif, he rejected offers from Mustafa Kemal to cooperate further, including a post as general preacher of the Eastern Provinces.²³ It was at this time that Nursi made the critical decision to switch to Turkish from Arabic in order to reach a mass public. Nursi said it was during the publication of *Habab Min 'Umman al-Qur'an al-Karim* (A Bubble from the Ocean of the Qur'an) in 1923 that he came to this point.²⁴ He wrote in a preamble that he realised he would have to use Turkish given the magnitude of the task of countering the spread of atheist thought (*dinsizlik fikri*).²⁵ In spring of 1923 Nursi quit Ankara for Van, but following the Shaykh Said rebellion he was jailed in 1926, the beginning of long years of detention and trial which only ended in 1956. During those years he devoted himself to the reformulation of much of his work and ideas in Turkish under the generic title *Risale-i Nur*, a compendium of loose Qur'anic commentary, theological reflection, and personal history, using the name Said Nursi, with its play on the word *nur* (light), rather than the Said-i Kürdi, Bediüzzaman Said

²¹ For further evidence of this Qur'anic turn, see his article "Kur'an-ı Azimüşşa'nın Hakimiyet-i Mutlakası," *SR*, 6 May 1920. Re his forty published articles from 1908 to 1920, see Nurettin Ceylan, *Gerçeğin Aynasında*, 286-90.

²² Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen Taraflarıyla*, 262. For full text see 260-9.

²³ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 171. Nursi writes of the incidents in *Şualar*, 381-2.

²⁴ *Habab* is part of a collection of treatises composed in the period 1921-23 but published as *al-Mathnawi al-'Arabi al-Nuri* in 1955. *Habab* was rewritten in Turkish in 1934 around the single theme of causation under the title *Tabiat Risalesi* and included in the *Lem'alar* collection of the *Risale-i Nur* compendium as well as *al-Mathnawi*'s Turkish imprint, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*.

²⁵ Nursi, "Tabiat Risalesi," in *Lem'alar*, 183.

Molla, Bediüzzaman Said or simply Bediüzzaman by which he was known until 1923. Handwritten in Ottoman and in later years transliterated into Latin script, the texts were dictated to scribes who would copy them for silent distribution to study groups around the country, such that these writings themselves became the focus of government persecution. Like Akif's refusal to deliver a Turkish Qur'an, this work was a vast act of resistance to the Kemalist regime and its project to decentre religion. Nursi's final act was a return to the overtly political: to support the Democrat Party in the 1950s by directing his followers to give it their vote, while overseeing the translation of his Arabic works to Turkish and printing them in the Latin script.²⁶

Nursi's thought is highly personalised, branded with his stamp like a consumer product. He saw himself as a cypher whose material – words taken down by others, written text shifting from Arabic to Turkish – emanated Qur'anic truths through the vessel of his person. There is something in this of Akif's notion of himself as an artist through whom God does his work, and both recall the prophetic function of revealing the speech of another. Nursi's views on creed, law, shari'a, state, and Sufi metaphysics were largely formed before his years of internal exile and expressed first in his Arabic *Mathnawi*, which forms something of an Urtext for everything that followed. Thoroughly trained in the common corpus of Islamic tradition, he was more naturally drawn to the Sufi masters concerned with techniques of arrival at knowledge of God. In *Mektubat* (Letters) he praised the path of Jilani, Shaykh Naqshband, and Sirhindi as a means to achieve the truths of faith (*hakā'ik-i imāniye*) and attain paradise but suggested that in troubled times a quicker route to the secrets of the Qur'an was his *Sözler* (Words) collection.²⁷ God has provided *Sözler* as "spiritual flashes from the miracle of the Qur'an, an antidote to errant atheism [*i'caz-ı Kur'an'ın manevi*

²⁶ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 322-3.

²⁷ Said Nursi, *Mektubat* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya, 1997), fifth letter, 26-7.

lum 'atından olan malum sözler, şu dalalet zındıkasına bir tiryak hasiyeti],” he wrote.²⁸

Elsewhere he was fairly typical of his time in placing limits on Sufi metaphysics: the testimonies of Ibn ‘Arabi in *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya* or ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili in *al-Insan al-Kamil* to attaining knowledge of God (*velayet*, *şuhud*) should be accepted as they are, but the truths of faith are more properly arrived at through Qur’an and sunna.²⁹ Nursi reprimanded Sabri for his criticisms of Ibn ‘Arabi, who he said is not expected to be an exemplary guide in everything he wrote (*her kitabında mühdī ve mürşid*),³⁰ but warned that nevertheless Ibn Arabi’s theosophy could be misunderstood as merging God and His creation into one.³¹

Nursi wanted to centre the believer in the Qur’an as the response to the challenge of positivist philosophies and veneration of the individual,³² but merging legalistic and Sufi approaches to the text. This combination reflected the Ottoman state tradition that honoured the Sufi orders and their thought culture alongside the İlmīye and its requirements.³³ Muslims should follow the prescribed observances (*ibādāt*) to assert personal strength vis-à-vis the materialist menace but must understand the individual’s place. Nursi often referred to the individual in the third person as *al-nafs* (the self) or *‘anā’* (the ‘I’), suggesting a possible familiarity with Iqbal’s writing on *khudi*.³⁴ He wrote in *Dhayl li-l-Qutra* (Addendum to The Droplet), a part of the *Mathnawī*, that this modern self seeks to establish a sense of its own divinity (*dā’irat rubūbiyyat naṣsihā*) and deny God through empirical arguments. “Know! O ‘I’, you have learned [*i’lam! Ya ‘anā’ qad ‘alimta*] that of the thousands of possibilities only a certain part is in your hands; so build on that weak voluntary element [*al-juz’ al-ikhtiyārī*]

²⁸ Ibid., 27.

²⁹ Ibid., eleventh letter, 81-3.

³⁰ Nursi, *Lem’alar*, twenty-eighth Lem’a, 285-6. Şerif Mardin’s description of Nursi as “repelled” by Sabri’s view seems overstated; Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 143.

³¹ Nursi, *Lem’alar*, twenty-eighth Lem’a, 284-5.

³² Nursi, “Kur’an-ı Azimü’ş-Şa’nın Hakimiyet-i Mutlakası,” *SR*, 6 May 1920, 18/463: 242-3.

³³ Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 184.

³⁴ Jibran Khalil Jibran’s *The Prophet* talked of self-knowledge but was published in 1923. Freud’s seminal study on the human psyche was also published in 1923, as *Das Ich und das Es*, or *The I and the It*.

what it can bear,” he wrote.³⁵ In a notable passage, Nursi explained that for thirty years he had been “struggling against two false gods” (*muḡādala ma ‘a ṭāghūtayn*): subjective understandings of the individual (*anā*) that make him independent of God and materialist understandings that transform nature into Nature, an entity in its own right rather than a creation of God.³⁶ He explained that via his Arabic texts he had succeeded in destroying these idols so that the veil of this imagined Nature was ripped away to reveal the fact of God’s work and natural law (*al-sharī‘a al-ḡiṭriyya*) and the individual (*anā*) was revealed as existing in the shadow of God (*huwa*).³⁷

Although Nursi largely avoided the formal discussions of *kalām*, he was firmly within the Maturidi tradition regards predestination, the particular will (*cüz-i ihtiyari*),³⁸ and major sin not being considered proof of false faith.³⁹ Men have become have become obsessed with causality and natural causes (*esbab-perest, tabiat-perest*) in their wont to establish actions as independent of God’s power,⁴⁰ he said, but he did not rethink his position as Sabri did.⁴¹ While ‘Abduh and Akif stressed human agency to exhort Muslims to engage in the building of their nations, Nursi urged action to affirm belief in God: he saw no cause to imply fault with received creed to make that point. As for law, he rejected the modernist/Salafi call to rework the methodological and institutional culture of *fiqh*: on core issues he said there is no need for new legal thinking (*ijtihād*), which more often than not has destructive intent,⁴² and

³⁵ Nursi, *Dhayl li-l-Qatra*, in *Qatra, Habab, Habba, Zahra, Dhurra, Shamma* (Istanbul: Necmeddin İstikbal Matbaası, 1923), 11. The inverted commas around *anā* are in the original text. Also, in *al-Mathnawi al-‘Arabi al-Nuri*, ed. Ihsan Qasim al-Salihi (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1994), 170.

³⁶ Nursi, *Habba min Nawatat Thamra min Thamarat Jinan al-Qur’an*, in *Qatra*, 4.

³⁷ Ibid., 4. There is some confusion over the grammar of this passage, particularly the last sentence. The editor of *al-Mathnawi* has altered some elements as if they were printing errors or grammatical mistakes on Nursi’s part; 221. Turkish and English translations airbrush the difficulties aside since the broad meaning is clear; see Abdülmecid Nursî, trans., *Mesnevi-i Nuriye* (Istanbul: Şahdamar Yayınları, 2014), 107; and Huseyin Akarsu, trans., *al-Mathnawi al-Nuri* (Somerset, NJ: Light, 2007), 171.

³⁸ Nursi, “Kader Risalesi” (twenty-sixth Söz), in *Sözlür* (Ankara: Diyanet Vakfı, 2016), 567-603.

³⁹ Nursi, *Lem’alar*, thirteenth Lem’a, 78-9.

⁴⁰ Nursi, “Tabiat Risalesi,” 193-4.

⁴¹ His position was Maturidi but could appear otherwise in that he was addressing a public he feared was under the spell of positivist voluntarism; Colin Turner, *The Qur’an Revealed* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2013), 95-6.

⁴² Nursi, *Habab min ‘Umman al-Qur’an al-Hakim*, in *al-Mathnawi*, 182.

the multiplicity of schools is appropriate to the different conditions of different communities.⁴³ In foregoing the familiar genres of writing Nursi created a discourse framed in the language of Anatolian Sufism but which transferred the charisma of the Sufi shaykh into a supra-*tarikat* text in that, like the ‘ulama’ renouncing school affiliation, he never identified with any particular order.⁴⁴ Nursi’s approach to the state was also different from that of his contemporaries: while his aim was to prevent the Kemalist republic from breaking the hold of faith outside its metropolitan centres, he did not pathologise the state as the focus of his thinking in the manner of Sabri, al-Banna, Qutb, Maudoodi, and many others. His legacy was claimed by movements such as that of Fethullah Gülen (b. 1941) whose methodology was more infiltration of state institutions and the discourse of civic rights than open political contestation and theorising about the nature, Islamic or otherwise, of the modern state.

Turkish Islamism from 1950

The literature on Nursi is immense, giving the impression that the Turkish Islamic movement emerged almost singlehandedly from his oeuvre. This has been tempting to accept because Nursi remained in Turkey and produced his material in first Arabic, then Ottoman Turkish, and then modern Turkish. Nursi’s supporters tell the story of an envoy, Ahmet Ramazan Ağabey, sent by Nursi to Cairo in 1951 to give copies of *Risale-i Nur* to al-Azhar and pass a message to the Muslim Brotherhood through Said Ramadan, a son-in-law of Hasan al-Banna. Ağabey also sought out Sabri and Kevseri and years later offered recollections of his meeting with Sabri. In one recent account Sabri tears up on receiving Nursi’s messenger, telling him,

⁴³ Nursi, “İctihad Risalesi” (twenty-seventh Söz), in *Sözler*, 600-2.

⁴⁴ This point is made by Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 230.

“he resisted, he stayed in the country” (*o direndi, memlekette kaldı*),⁴⁵ although earlier published versions do not mention this detail which serves to perpetuate the narrative of Turkish Islam’s survival as the work of Said Nursi.⁴⁶ Indeed, Vahide tells us: “Of all the Islamists of the previous era, Nursi stands out as unique in carrying forward into the Republican period the great debate between Westernism and Islam, and presenting the case of Islam and the Qur’an in a way that was to be enthusiastically taken up by large numbers of people.”⁴⁷ Ibrahim Abu-Rabi’ writes that Nursi and his followers were the only group to defend intellectually the bond between Turkish nation and Muslim *umma*.⁴⁸ Şerif Mardin argues that it was Nursi who was fundamental in facilitating Turkey’s reception of modernity through an Islamic paradigm.⁴⁹ How justified are these views?

Two major trends regarding religion can be observed in the evolving republic: on the one hand, the continued strength of Islam as a social phenomenon, a way of viewing the world, a form of organisation, and a daily practice; on the other, Islam articulated in an innovative manner as a political force, in other words what I have called its ideologisation. This re-Islamisation, as it is often termed, was made possible by İsmet İnönü’s decision to end the one-party state after the Second World War and loosen restrictions on public observance of faith. This was a multi-faceted process involving many religious figures with claims to authority located in historical Sufi networks but also the emergence of an Islamic print media. The Democrat Party, which won a landslide victory in the first multiparty elections in 1950, played heavily on themes of popular religious culture, attracting the

⁴⁵ Ömer Özcan, “Osmanlının son Şeyhülislam’ı Mustafa Sabri Efendi’nin Said Nursi pişmanlığı,” *Risale Haber*, 12 March 2017; <https://www.risalehaber.com/osmanlinin-son-seyhulislami-mustafa-sabri-efendinin-said-nursi-pismanligi-296674h.htm> (accessed 30 December 2018).

⁴⁶ Necmeddin Şahiner, *Son Şahitler Bediüzzaman Said Nursi’yi Anlatıyor* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya, 1994), 195-6. Nursi cites the mission in *Risale-i Nur* 27, aka *Emirdağ Lahikası* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya, 2018), 390-1 (2:275).

⁴⁷ Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 192.

⁴⁸ Ibrahim Abu-Rabi’, ed., *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi’s Risale-i Nur* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), ix.

⁴⁹ Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 229.

support of not only the Nurcu movement but shaykhs within various Naqshbandi chains. A new level of politicisation kicked in with the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi), established by Erbakan in 1970 and reformed as the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, MSP) in 1972. There were many other actors in this process. The poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek promoted the idea of an Islamic “Great East” (*Büyük Doğu*) that would revive the caliphate and overturn the secular republic with a journal of that name published intermittently from 1943. His was a conservative nationalism that was at first supportive of Erbakan’s Religious Vision but became critical of Erbakan’s concessions to the Left after the MSP joined government in 1974 and accused him of mimicking the Great East thesis.⁵⁰ The Nurcu movement also had a conflicted relationship with Erbakan: the Gülenists supported the 1980 coup and the early neoliberal policies of Turgut Özal that Erbakan opposed.⁵¹

As an engineering student from Konya, Erbakan was urged to enter the political sphere by Mehmed Zahid Kotku (1897-1980), the leader of the Gümüşhanevi chain of the Khalidi Naqshbandi based at the İskenderpaşa mosque in Istanbul.⁵² They shared a conviction about the importance of an independent industrial economy: Kotku chose him to lead the project after Erbakan sent him an essay on post-war industrialisation in Germany, where he was studying,⁵³ and Erbakan often talked later of his debt to Kotku in the “industrialisation

⁵⁰ Umut Uzer, “The Genealogy of Turkish Nationalism: From Civic and Ethnic to Conservative Nationalism in Turkey,” in *Symbiotic Antagonisms: Competing Nationalisms in Turkey*, ed. Ayşe Kadioğlu and Emin Fuat Keyman (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011), 129.

⁵¹ Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16, 170.

⁵² On the Khalidi Naqshbandi in modern Turkey see Hakan Yavuz, “The Matrix of Modern Turkish Islamic Movements: The Naqshbandi Sufi Order,” in *Naqshbandis in Western and Central Asia: Change and Continuity*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga (Istanbul: Svenska Forskningsinstitutet, 1999): 129-46; Birol Yeşilada, “The Refah Party Phenomenon in Turkey,” in *Comparative Political Parties and Party Elites: Essays in Honor of Samuel J. Eldersveld*, ed. Birol Yeşilada (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 123-50; Sencer Ayata, “Traditional Sufi Orders on the Periphery: Kadiri and Nakşibendi Islam in Konya and Trabzon,” in *Islam in Modern Turkey*, ed. Richard Tapper (London: Tauris, 1991), 223-53; Hamid Algar, “The Naqshibendi Order in Republican Turkey,” *Islamic World Report*, 1/3 (1996): 51-67; Şerif Mardin, “The Nakşibendi Order in Turkish History,” in Tapper, *Islam*, 121-42; Svante E. Cornell, “The Naqshbandi-Khalidi Order and Political Islam in Turkey,” Hudson Institute, 3 September 2015; <https://www.hudson.org/research/11601-the-naqshbandi-khalidi-order-and-political-islam-in-turkey> (accessed 15 August 2019).

⁵³ Hasan Bitmez, Saadet Party assistant to the chairman for foreign affairs and former official at the International Islamic Federation of Student Organisations; interview with author, Gebze, 23 August 2018.

struggle” (*sanayileşme mücadelesi*).⁵⁴ The Khalidis under Kotku’s guidance were inheritors of an anti-colonial discourse linked to their politicised nature as allies of the state and the İlmîye in the 19th century.⁵⁵ So while religious awareness was an area in which Nursi was fundamental, and the Nursi groups inspired by his work were motivated by the idea of reconciling faith with modern science, political mobilisation was led by adepts of the İskenderpaşa-based Khalidi line who were well-placed to pioneer Islamic discourse in electoral politics. If the leading groups of the period of transition from empire to republic – Young Turks, CUP, Kemalists – can be considered a new military-bureaucratic class,⁵⁶ the conservative Anatolians who moved into political life and the bureaucracy from the 1950s with increasing force were equally a class that came to rival the secular republicans of the military, the judiciary, the presidency, and other key institutions of state.⁵⁷ The dynamic of Anatolian hinterland versus republican centre of power spoke to a historical feature of the country’s political geography. Ernest Gellner once argued that in the Turkish context political power did not inexorably run from the periphery to the centre, rather Ottoman ruling elites governed through an idea of the state as “a gift from the tribe”.⁵⁸ In the same vein the Islamic movements flourished as a consequence of the state’s failure to reconfigure hinterland religion through its modernisation policies. Indeed, Erbakan’s movement adopted a political structure suited to this circumstance. Its youth arm (Millî Gençlik Vakfı) was structured as a series of independently run groups organising their own activities in the provinces without a

⁵⁴ Necmettin Erbakan, *Davam: Ne Yaptıysam Allah Rızası İçin Yaptım* (Ankara: Milli Gazete, 2014), 9.

⁵⁵ Butrus Abu-Manneh notes Gümüşhanevi’s quietism vis-à-vis other Khalidiyya branches. He considers Erbakan to be a continuation of this quietism, which seems an odd conclusion considering Erbakan launched a political movement. Abu-Manneh, “Shaykh Ahmed Ziya’üddin el-Gümüşhanevi,” 116-17.

⁵⁶ Bertay argues they formed a new class: Lecture on Ottoman and Turkish History, EDEP İhtisas Merkezi, Ibn Haldun University, 10 July 2017. For class analysis of empire and republic see Halil Bertay and Suraiya Faroqi, ed., *New Approaches to State and Peasant in Ottoman History* (London: Cass, 1992).

⁵⁷ David Shankland, *Islam and Society in Turkey* (Huntingdon: Eothen, 1999).

⁵⁸ Ernest Gellner, “The Turkish Option in Comparative Perspective,” in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 233-44.

unified education curriculum.⁵⁹ This atomistic approach was adopted by the İbda group, a Necip Fazıl-inspired student movement that broke with Erbakan in the 1970s and later developed a paramilitary arm. İbda adopted a strategy of forming small, autonomous cells around the country which could act on their own initiative, and in this spirit of fragmentation it also published a multitude of magazines spreading its message in different formats, making it more difficult for the state to shut it down.⁶⁰

Erbakan's movement established links with the Muslim Brotherhood at an early stage. The Brotherhood's long experience, its tribulations during the Nasserist period, and its revival in the 1970s were a source of inspiration for the Islamic *Kulturkampf* in Turkey. The ideas of Sayyid Qutb and Hasan al-Banna transferred to Turkey with the rise in Islamic publishing from the late 1940s. Contacts between the two movements were instituted between Erbakan and Mahdi Akif (1928-2017), then an advisor to the World Assembly of Muslim Youth in Riyadh, after Akif's release in July 1974 from twenty years in prison. Akif was a senior figure of the group's old guard, close to al-Banna after he joined in 1943 and close to Qutb in prison, and was among those who read *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* before publication.⁶¹ He became an important figure in the Brotherhood's international organisation after it was formally founded in 1982,⁶² serving as director of the Islamic Centre in Munich until 1987. Erbakan and Akif wanted to focus on transnational Muslim youth, so initiated summer camps in Cyprus, Malta, and Turkey in coordination with the already existing International Islamic Federation of Student Organisations (IIFSO).⁶³ A committee of Brotherhood chapters visited Erbakan in Turkey in 1976, including Ibrahim al-Misri from the Islamic Group in Lebanon, Kamal al-Hilbawi, who was then chairman of WAMY and later

⁵⁹ Bitmez, interview.

⁶⁰ Ruşen Çakır, *Ayet ve Slogan: Türkiye'de İslami Oluşumlar* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1991), 170.

⁶¹ Victor Willi, *The Fourth Ordeal: A History of the Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, 1973-2013* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 109-10.

⁶² Ibid., 110.

⁶³ Bitmez, interview.

the Brotherhood's spokesman in London, and Mustafa Tahhan, a member of the Brotherhood's Lebanese chapter who in later years encouraged Erbakan to publish and translated him into Arabic.⁶⁴ Also involved was Khurshid Ahmad, Maudoodi's close confidante in the Jamaat-i Islami of Pakistan, and later the Malaysian Islamic Party, when a formal council for coordination between Islamic movements was established in 1988.⁶⁵ An agreement was made among these groups that the Egyptian Brotherhood would not try to recruit or operate in Turkey or Pakistan because equivalent movements already existed.⁶⁶ The first camp was held in North Cyprus in 1977 when Rauf Denktash, then president of the newly established Turkish Federated State of Cyprus, gave them the use of eight sea-front villas.⁶⁷ The first and only camp in Turkey was brought to an end in Konya in 1980 during the military coup, when some 300 activists including Akif were asked to leave.⁶⁸

Differences emerged between the Turkish and Egyptian organisations over strategy: Erbakan argued the Brotherhood should apply itself to the open public arena as a political party and the Brotherhood urged Erbakan to concentrate on being a movement united by the discipline of education.⁶⁹ The Brotherhood's leader during this period, 'Umar al-Tilmisani, took the movement into electoral politics in 1984, but resistance to open political engagement persisted among its ruling clique after al-Tilmisani's death in 1986, with drastic consequences when it formed a short-lived government in 2012.⁷⁰ By the 1980s the Turkish cohort at al-Azhar had grown to around 3,000.⁷¹ Erbakan's movement was never a chapter of the Egyptian organisation, formally imbedded in its structure and receiving instructions on policy from Cairo. Despite that, Erbakan would sometimes refer to the Egyptian *murshid*

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Kamal al-Hilbawi; interview, London, 6 September 2018.

⁶⁶ Bitmez, al-Hilbawi, interviews.

⁶⁷ Al-Hilbawi, interview.

⁶⁸ Munir, interview.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Willi, *Fourth Ordeal*, passim.

⁷¹ Ibid.

(leader) as his own *mürşit* (for example, during a trip to Cairo in 1993), but he only spoke in this manner as a mark of respect to the Brotherhood as the foundational organisation.⁷² The close links extended to intermarriage between the Erbakan family and Brotherhood leader Ibrahim al-Zayat; Hasan al-Banna's son Sayf al-Islam married a Turkish student who was introduced to him by Ali Yakub Cenkçiler.⁷³

Sabri and Kevseri's Turkish students played a key role in spreading word of the Brotherhood and translating their works when they returned to Turkey in the mid-1950s. Qutb became an important figure because of the work of Emin Saraç, Ali Yakub, and others.⁷⁴ *Al- 'Adala al-Ijtima 'iyya* was first published in translation in 1962 by Çağaloğlu publishing house in Arabic and translated by Yaşar Tunagür, a member of the World Muslim League and vice director of the government's Diyanet administration.⁷⁵ Dedicating the book to "our enlightened youth" (*münevver gençliğimiz*) its translators noted that it had been chosen by American Council for Learned Societies in 1953 as the first in a series of Arabic translations to English.⁷⁶ At the time Qutb was understood to be an intellectual critiquing socialism through Islamic discourse, which made him popular in both nationalist and religious circles, but opinions began to change after Saraç's translation and İsmail Hakkı Şengüler and Bekir Karlığa's translation of *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (*Fizılal-il-Kur'an: Kur'an'ın Gölgesinde*) in 1968. *Ma 'alim fi al-Tariq* was published almost immediately as *Beklenen Lider İçin Yoldaki İşaretler* (Signs on the Path for the Awaited Leader, 1966) by Hilal

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Kurucu, *Hatıralar*, 2:311-2; interview with Berat al-Banna; Istanbul, 20 August 2018.

⁷⁴ Ashraf 'Abd al-Ghaffar, a former Muslim Brotherhood Guidance Council member who left Egypt in December 2013, said Saraç and Cenkçiler were arrested in the 1954 crackdown; 'Abd al-Ghaffar; interview, Istanbul, 17 August 2018. There is no confirmation of this. Cenkçiler's memoir says he returned to Turkey in 1957.

⁷⁵ Hakan Köni, "Saudi Influence on Islamic Institutions in Turkey Beginning in the 1970s," *Middle East Journal*, 66/1 (2012): 105.

⁷⁶ Yaşar Tunagür and Adnan Mansur, trans., "Foreword," Seyyid Kutub, *İslamda Sosyal Adalet* (Istanbul: Çağaloğlu Yayınevi, 1962).

magazine, one of the leading Islamic journals of the period.⁷⁷ Ali Yakub was the lead translator of *Jahiliyyat al-Qarn al- 'Ishrin* (1964) by Qutb's brother Muhammad, published by Cağaloğlu as *20. Asrın Cahiliyeti* in two volumes (1967, 1971). Largely a summation of Sayyid Qutb's ideas, it argued that *jāhiliyya* expresses the psychological mindset of modern society that rejects Islam as a way of life and politico-juridical system. Mustafa Runyun (1917-1988), a student of Sabri and Kevseri during twelve years in Egypt, returned in 1950 to take the post of preacher in Istanbul's Hacıbayram mosque. He published a series of eighteen booklets in 1967 under the collective title *Dinî Hikâyeler* (Religious Tales), translations of stories of the prophets for children published in 1947 by Qutb and the novelist 'Abd al-Hamid Jawda al-Sahhar.

Runyun's preaching during the period of Democrat Party government was typical of the Islamic discourse couched in nationalist language of the period – stressing the prescribed prayers, building mosques, holding the Ramadan fast, making pilgrimage, active work, refusing bribes, avoiding alcohol, and acknowledging the Turkish nation (*Türk milleti*)'s glory realised through Islam.⁷⁸ Runyun also had a platform to address the listeners of state-owned Ankara Radio and his radio talks were printed in booklets, some of which he published on his own account.⁷⁹ This Islamic revival manifested itself primarily through the religious print media that appeared from around 1945; at least ten papers were established between 1945 and 1949 and at least sixteen more in the period 1950-52, including the journals *Büyük Doğu* (1943-1975), a vehicle for Necip Fazıl, the revived *Sebilürreşad* (1948-1966), which heavily promoted Akif, and the more independent *Hilal* (1958-1991).⁸⁰ The

⁷⁷ Published by Salih Özcan, a former student of Nursi who helped established the Saudi-backed Islamic bank in Turkey and served as National Salvation Party parliamentarian; Köni, "Saudi Influence," 104.

⁷⁸ Mustafa Runyun, *Hacıbayram Minberinden Hutbelerim* (Ankara: Diyanet, 1956).

⁷⁹ Runyun, *Dinî ve Ahlakî Konuşmalar* (Ankara: Diyanet, 1955); Runyun, *Dinî ve Ahlakî Müsahabelerim*, 3. vols. (Ankara: Ayyıldız Matbaası, 1957/58).

⁸⁰ Gavin Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk: Provincial Newspapers and the Negotiation of a Muslim National Identity* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2011), 124-5.

main aim of these publications was to establish the acceptability of religious discourse in public space and cast off the charge of reactionism (*irtica*), and they reflected the broad concern with the question of Islam and the state that had dominated political debate since the late 19th century, *contra* the civil society discourse prevalent from the 1990s.

Hilal provides a register of the concerns of the time. It covered a wide range of international Muslim issues, with articles about or by writers in Turkey or abroad, but two figures dominated among them, rarely passing unmentioned for long in its issues: Akif and Nursi. The first issue carried on its cover Akif's well-known line from *Çanakkale Şehidlerine* (To the Gallipoli Martyrs) which likened Ottoman soldiers sacrificing their lives in battle to suns setting for the sake of the crescent moon (*bir hilal uğruna, ya Rab ne güneşler batıyor*).⁸¹ Akif and Nursi's images often featured on the cover⁸² and most issues carried some material from Nursi's *Risale*. Describing a literary salon in Erzurum in 1963 in which Kemalist literary critic Nurullah Ataç attacked Akif as worthless for Turkish national poetry, an article in 1966 defended him as the greatest and most thoughtful Muslim Turkish poet of the era (*son devir müsülman Türklüğün en büyük ve mütefekkir şairidir*).⁸³ His Indian counterpart Iqbal also featured prominently through translations and articles, and Ali Ulvi Kurucu, the student of Sabri and Kevseri who had moved to Medina, often supplied poetry and articles. By contrast, Sabri, the radical opponent of the republic who died in Egypt, was honoured only briefly in the early issues, with excerpts of *al-Qawl al-Fasl*, his tract on Islam and the modern state, running in issue three and four.⁸⁴ Early issues presented Nasser in flattering terms, publishing a translation of the preface to a book on Islam he had written, in

⁸¹ *Hilal*, 1/1 (Nov 1958), cover.

⁸² For Akif, *Hilal*, 1/12 (Jan 1960); re Nursi on the occasion of his death, *Hilal*, 1/14 (April-May 1960).

⁸³ Semaheddin Cem, "Akifimiz," *Hilal*, 5/56, March 1966, 23.

⁸⁴ Mustafa Sabri, "Gaybe İnananları inanmıyanlardan ayıran kesin söz," *Hilal*, 1/3 (Jan 1959), 21; 1/4 (Feb 1959), 19.

which he concluded: “As long as I live, with all my power, determination and faith I will work to make the Islamic call an undeniable truth.”⁸⁵

Material by Qutb began appearing from 1963⁸⁶ – one article published shortly after his release in December 1964 described him as “the true Muslim” (*hakikî Müslüman*) for choosing jail to win God’s favour⁸⁷ – and the first material on al-Banna was published in 1965.⁸⁸ The tone shifted significantly with the beginning of Qutb’s trial. “What the Egyptian dictator Nasser is doing to Muslims is unprecedented in history, his massacres and tortures outdo the pharaohs,” its editorial commentary said.⁸⁹ Another article said Muslims had to consider one way or another what their response would be: “If the hand holding a sword over the head of any Muslim anywhere is not broken today then tomorrow it will come down on your head. Justice will have its revenge. So, let’s not stand and imagine justice, let’s make it happen.”⁹⁰ The following issues featured material in translation by Qutb, al-Banna, Maudoodi, Nadvi, and ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Awda, a Brotherhood judge who was executed in 1954, and with Qutb’s death in August 1966 two issues ran translations of *Ma‘alim fi al-Tariq*, “the work that provoked the death penalty”, until *Hilal*’s full book version was confiscated and its translator arrested.⁹¹ But *Hilal* issued a rush of Qutb’s other works in translation as books and excerpts in the subsequent months.

⁸⁵ Cemal Abdülnasır, “İslam Daveti,” *Hilal*, 1/7 (May 1959), 9-10.

⁸⁶ Seyyid Kutub, “Habil ve Kabil,” *Hilal*, 4/38 (April 1963): 20-1; idem, “İslam Kumandanlığını Yapacaktır,” *Hilal*, 5/53 (July 1965), 5; idem, “Kur’an Yolunun Esası,” *Hilal*, 5/54 (Aug 1965), 27-8; Mühibbizade, “Seyyid Kutub Kimdir?” *Hilal*, 5/54 (Aug 1965), 20-1.

⁸⁷ İsmail Kazdal, “Hakikî Müslüman,” *Hilal*, 5/49 (February 1965), 7.

⁸⁸ Mühibbizade (Nihat Armağan), “Şeyh Hasan-El Banna Kimdir?” *Hilal*, 5/53 (July 1965), 20-1.

⁸⁹ Editorial comment, “Hilal’den Size,” *Hilal*, 5/56 (March 1966), 1.

⁹⁰ Idem, “Mısır’da Olup Bitenler,” *Hilal*, 5/56 (March 1966), 2.

⁹¹ Hamza Türkmen, “Seyyid Kutub’un Mesajını Anlamak ve Geliştirebilmek,” *Urvetü’l Vuska*, 28 July 2014; http://urvetulvuska.net/seyyid-kutubun-mesajini-anlamak-ve-gelistirebilmek-hamza-turkmen_d91800.html (accessed 6 January 2019).

These early publications did not use the term *İslamcı/İslamcılık* to describe the Islamic movement and its adherents. These remained largely terms of analysis,⁹² and devout intellectuals who rose to prominence in the period when Erbakan's Welfare Party went from strength to strength did not like the term.⁹³ If we were to attempt to define the point at which Islam becomes Islamism, the definition would focus on two stages: firstly, the point at which the constituent parts of the Islamic tradition, in its recognisable genres of talking, writing, and thinking about *kalām*, *fiqh*, *falsafa*, *taṣawwuf*, etc., fragment and disconnect to reform in new discursive arrangements belonging to the public sphere, and secondly the deployment of this discourse in the political arena, with all that implies in terms of organisation, seeking public office, contestation in electoral processes, and engaging mass media. The second stage is only attained through the first, and the first alone is sufficient to talk of Islam rendered as ideology. If the first stage is enough to qualify as "Islamism" then we are obliged to talk of Said Nursi as much as of Sayyid Qutb as an Islamist. If the second stage of political contestation was a requirement, then the Muslim Brotherhood would only qualify as Islamist from 1942 when al-Banna first tried to run for office or 1984 when the Brotherhood took part en masse in parliamentary elections. With this broad definition, Akif would count as an Islamist, Kevseri most likely would not, unless we considered his use of print media as a enough of a qualifying factor on its own, while Sabri would stand in middle ground: acting politically as the Ottoman parliamentarian, as sheikh ül-Islam, and as a writer in Egypt, though in defence of the old order in as much as that was possible.⁹⁴

⁹² Runyun used *İslamlik* in 1957 for Islam; Runyun, *Dini ve Ahlaki Musahabelerim* (Ankara: Ayyıldız matbaası, 1957), 1:9, 36. Erişirgil describes Akif as *islamcı* in his 1958 biography; Tarık Zafer Tunaya's *İslamcılık Cereyanı* (The Islamist Trend, 1962) is one of the first analyses of the Ottoman/republican movement to use the term.

⁹³ Michael Meeker, "The New Muslim Intellectuals in the Republic of Turkey," in Tapper, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 189.

⁹⁴ See William Shepard's typology; "Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology," *IJMES*, 19/3 (1987): 307-35.

In Turkey and Egypt official institutions such as Diyanet and al-Azhar held to their traditional positions on theological questions and upheld the juridical methodologies they had always followed, within the new boundaries first established in the mid to late 19th century concerning issuance of fatwas, fields of shari‘a law application, educational curricula, etc. However, these new boundaries meant they wielded diminished authority,⁹⁵ and this may have further impacted the reception and spread of iconoclastic thinking in both societies. While on the one hand Nursi adopted a supra-*tarikat* approach, Hayrettin Karaman (b. 1934) advanced a form of *lā-madhhabiyya*, not as a Salafi in the manner of al-Albani or al-Ma‘sumi, but as a modernist reformer in the style of ‘Abduh. A graduate of the Imam-Hatip schools which were allowed to open in the 1950s, Karaman wrote his thesis at the Istanbul Higher Islamic Institute on *ijtihād* in the early Islamic period. He later became a professor at the same institute when it was transformed into a theology faculty. Karaman advanced his view of *ijtihād* over *taqlīd* and *talfīz* between the schools,⁹⁶ in *Dört Risale* (Four Treatises, 1971), *İslam Hukukunda İctihad* (Ijtihad in Islamic Law, 1975), and the journal *Nesil* (1976-80).⁹⁷ The Gülen movement also embraced supra-*madhhab* themes but as a form of inclusive pluralism, embracing all without privileging one group over another.⁹⁸

As for al-Albani’s more radical attempt to produce a pre-*madhhab fiqh*, it made its way into Turkey from the 1990s through self-described Salafi preachers who had studied in Saudi Arabia such as Abdullah Yolcu (b. 1958). Through his own material and translations of al-Albani and leading Saudi scholars, Yolcu used the Guraba publishing house that he established in Istanbul in 1992 to propagate the contemporary ideology of Salafism, with

⁹⁵ Masooda Bano, “Introduction,” in *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change. Volume 1, Evolving Debates in Muslim Majority Countries*, ed. Bano (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

⁹⁶ Karaman translated Rida’s “Muhawarat al-Muslih wa-l-Muqallid” series as *İslam’da Birlik ve Fıkıh Mezhepleri* (1974).

⁹⁷ Michelangelo Guida, “The New Islamists’ Understanding of Democracy in Turkey: The Examples of Ali Bulaç and Hayreddin Karaman,” *Turkish Studies*, 11/3 (2010): 359-60.

⁹⁸ Hilmi Demir, “FETÖ: Mezhepler Üstü Din Öğretimi ve Alevi Açılımı,” *Türkiye Gazetesi*, 1 June 2018; <https://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/yazarlar/hilmi-demir/602515.aspx> (accessed 13 January 2019).

particular emphasis on popular practices and the theology of faith proven through action, but tailored towards a Turkish audience. Previously, Salafi had been understood according to the creedal division outlined by ‘Abduh and which Ismail Hakkı articulated in his book of modernist theology *Yeni İlm-i Kelam* (1920). Thus, according to an article in *Nesil* published in 1977, Selefiyye was the rejection of rationalist approaches to scripture, but nothing to do with rejecting the legal *madhhab*.⁹⁹ This purely creed-based definition was upheld by Diyanet in its catechism first published in 1999 and still in print.¹⁰⁰ Reflecting his al-Albani influence, Yolcu introduced not only a reinvigorated critique of Sufism¹⁰¹ but the open assault on the Hanafi-Maturidi system that Kevseri had feared. It is too early to ascertain if transnational Salafism has had a significant impact on belief and practice,¹⁰² but in the face of these trends nationalist writers have indulged a fetishisation of Hanafi-Maturidism as the expression of a non-Arab, liberal Turkish Islam.¹⁰³ The Turkish Islamist movement, on the other hand, has held to classic Ottoman Maturidism: Erbakan would often make mention of the concept of the particular will (*irade-i cüz’iye*) in his public disquisitions and writings on creation and human responsibility.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Bekir Topaloğlu, “Selefiye,” *Nesil*, 1/7 (April 1977): 3-7. The article named as Salafis Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim, and al-Shawkani, and in contemporary Turkey Nursi student Ahmed Husrev Altınbaşak (1899-1977), a student of Nursi, mosque imam Celaleddin Ökten (1882-1961), and İsmail Hakkı himself.

¹⁰⁰ Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, *İlmihal 1: İman ve İbadetler* (İstanbul: Diyanet, 1999), 23. In 2015 Diyanet amended the definition to include movements since the 1980s; idem, *Daiş’in Temel Felsefesi ve Dini Referansları Raporu* (Ankara: Diyanet, 2015), 8.

¹⁰¹ On the anti-Sufism of Ercüment Özkan, see Alberto Fabio Ambrosio, “Mapping Modern Turkish Sufism and Anti-Sufism,” in Ridgeon, *Sufis and Salafis*, 59-70.

¹⁰² Hilmi Demir sees signs of a shift; “Nakşibendilik Selefileşiyor mu?” *21. Yüzyıl*, No. 70 (January 2014).

¹⁰³ Mehmet Zeki İşcan analyses the phenomenon in “Türk Basınında Matüridi ve Matüridilik,” *Marmara University İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları*, No. 261 (2012): 478-92.

¹⁰⁴ Erbakan, *Davam*, 23. On Turkish scholars among contemporary intellectuals calling for a new theological approach see Wielandt, “Main Trends of Islamic Theological Thought,” 749-53.

The influence of Akif, Sabri, and Kevseri

The question of influence is related to the notion of canonicity in Turkish Islam, a category that has been defined largely around the figure of Said Nursi and the Gümüşhanevi Naqshbandis. Turkish Islam has been no less constructed along national lines than literature and other fields in which textual authority is established through the vector of national identity.¹⁰⁵ We see how easy it has been for nationalist thought to shut Sabri and Kevseri out of the history of Turkish Islam, and how much easier it has been to embrace a figure like Akif who penned a national anthem and staged a tragi-heroic return home to die. Here their works in the widest sense, including the acts of their life as well as their writings, take on meanings detached from intent and action. The field of hermeneutics has shown how after words are committed to writing the text acquires an autonomy beyond the control of its originator.¹⁰⁶ Akif has been read as a Turkish thinker, Kevseri a Muslim scholar, Sabri a cantankerous rejectionist like King Canute commanding the English tide in vain. However, the Turkish exiles in Cairo formed a crucial bridge between the Late Ottoman and modern periods in Turkish Islamic thought and could be injected into the narrative of Islamic intellectual history in its broadest sense. Sabri and Kevseri left deep traces in the arena of Arabic-language Islamic discourse. For Late Ottoman religious thought and for the transposition of that thought into the Islamic fields in Turkey and Egypt, including the history of the Muslim Brotherhood, these thinkers form a missing link in our understanding.

In their writings they were among the last major Muslim thinkers of their generation to grapple with modes of being and thinking produced by post-Enlightenment Europe. Engaging with the positivist and materialist trends that were the most recent manifestation of European thought, they were often given to a reductive view of Western intellectual history.

¹⁰⁵ Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, 51.

¹⁰⁶ Paul Ricoeur (trans. David Pellauer), *Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 135.

They were not alone in this: as Gadamer notes, modern European philosophy for long imagine there had been a continuity in the Western philosophical tradition despite the fragmentation caused by the reception of Greek concepts in Latin, the reception of those Latin concepts in modern languages, and the emergence of a new historical consciousness.¹⁰⁷ Notions of advance and regression played heavily on modern-era Muslim thinkers – some integrating these in their conceptualisation of the Islamic tradition, but others such as Sabri and Kevseri roundly rejecting such classifications.

For example, they had to deal with the rejection of Sufism as empty superstition and over-indulgent intellection by their modernist counterparts and the related caricature of Islam as a fatalistic religion. Among the reformers the accusation of fatalism produced theological tinkering to stress human agency and the search for a Martin Luther, against which Sabri in particular had a visceral reaction. Yet had they delved further back than the 19th century or read theorists such as Max Weber, they would have realised the vexed nature of the question of predestination during the Reformation in that the Calvinists had adopted that very position. In Weber's view, expressed in his 1904 study of Protestantism and capitalism, the Calvinist belief that those slated for salvation must demonstrate their elect status through unemotional pious works and systematic ethical conduct was the guiding force behind the formation of the Protestant work ethic that he saw as the characteristic feature of European modernity. He also offered new ways of thinking about traditions of asceticism and their fate, in that Protestant piety was to him an externalisation of the pious life of the monastery. With this ascetic spirit informing emerging capitalist society, now the idea of duty in one's calling inhabited modern lives "like the ghost of dead religious beliefs".¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxiii.

¹⁰⁸ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 124. Weber was not translated into English until 1930; to my knowledge it did not feature in Late Ottoman debate.

Among other distinctive aspects to the thinking of the three Late Ottomans in question the thesis has noted: a tendency to construct the Muhammad ‘Abduh of their imagination, in spite of the context and evolution in his thought, and a romantic objectification of shari‘a as central to Muslim identity and experience, which fostered in all cases – the modernists seeking to change it or the conservatives out to defend it – the trend towards statist politicisation of religion. If the Islamist movements represent one of the most distinctive epochal responses to the disruption of modernity, the Salafis present themselves as circumventing it almost entirely. On the other hand, the recent era of Muslim philosophers, who could perhaps be described as post-modern in their approach,¹⁰⁹ have not only fully embraced the notion of irrational religion but placed it at the centre of their analysis of political and economic degradation in modern Muslim countries. The Late Ottoman thinkers would not go so far. They focussed their attention on the problematisation of the Islamic tradition, which they understood as challenged in radical ways, producing new ways of thinking and doing Islam. Their major contribution lies in providing deeper insights into the nature of those disruptions.

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¹⁰⁹ See Talal Asad’s discussion of the poet Adonis’ view of the “power of tradition” in the Arabic episteme; *Formations of the Secular*, 54-6.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Sabri's letter to the Vatican, 1925

Roma 14 Mai 1925

Emminence,

Depuis la grande guerre, les peuples, surtout ceux de l'Orient, sous la poussée des lois économiques, ou sous l'impulsion des aspirations nationalistes, cherchent une nouvelle orientation, pour créer une nouvelle ordre sociale.

La conséquence de cette orientation, a eu pour résultat la chute des monarchies, et en même temps malheureusement la destruction de la religion.

Sous la direction habile des nouveaux apôtres, des meneurs, des loges maçonniques, le Khalifat, un des remparts les plus importants du conservatisme, de la modération et de paix en Orient est renversé.

Inutile de rappeler ici l'étendu, l'importance géographique, économique du monde musulman ainsi que le nombre des croyants.

Ce monde porte sur son sein des chrétiens, des institutions religieuses, des églises, des écoles dépendant en grande partie de Saint Siège.

A Son Eminence

Le Cardinal GASPARRI

etc. etc. etc.

Saint Siège



D'après nos informations dignes de foi, nous croyons savoir que des nouvelles aventures attendent ces pays, surtout au Proche Orient, non seulement au préjudice de l'élément musulman, mais aussi à celles de l'élément chrétien. Le fanatisme du bas peuple des deux partis, peut-être exploité au premier signal, que ceux-ci recevront des centres intéressés de pêcher dans l'eau trouble.

Le Khalifat, puissance modératrice du monde musulman n'existe plus pour empêcher les nouveaux malheurs et barrer chemin à ces nouvelles idées destructrices de l'ordre social.

De l'autre côté la grande rivalité d'intérêts qui sévit entre les grandes puissances mandataires ou possesseurs ou voisins des contrées ou pays musulmans, les rend aveugles et il n'y a aucune espoir d'aide, de collaboration, de la part de celles-ci, pour apaiser les nouvelles passions, les nouvelles aspirations venant de l'Est vers l'Occident.

Or pour empêcher tous ces malheurs, dans la mesure du possible, un comité de patriotes Turcs et des éminents personnalités du monde musulman s'est constitué pour restaurer le Khalifat en Turquie et de donner à l'Islam son chef spirituel et temporel, et par ce moyen, tâcher de refouler les ondes dangereuses de l'Asie vers leurs sources.

Ce comité commencera à prêcher par l'entremise de ses émissaires, ses publications, sa propagande aux musulmans du monde ses vrais intérêts, l'obéissance et la loyauté envers les gouvernements dont ils dépendent, la fraternité envers les chrétiens en général, et pourvoir en même temps aux moyens de restaurer le Khalifat.

Le Coran ne dit-il pas que le peuple du Christ est le plus proche de l'Islam, puisque ce peuple a ses évêques, ses religieux qui lui prêchent le bon chemin et dans le même livre le Bon Dieu nous rappelle qu'il a donné aux cœurs des chrétiens la clémence et la bonté.

Nous croyons que la Saint Siége a tout intérêt de collaborer avec nous, dans la voie, qu'elle lui est convenable, soit pour empêcher des nouveaux malheurs dans les pays mêlés des adeptes des deux religions, soit pour protéger ses églises et ses institutions contre de nouveaux changements et ainsi préserver sa propre position contre les mêmes courants qui pourront, le cas échéant, venir un jour lui donner un choc irréparable.

D'ailleurs aujourd'hui dans le monde il n'y a plus la lutte entre musulmans et chrétiens mais il y a plutôt la lutte entre les religions et l'irreligion.

Pour les raisons et les buts ci-haut exposés et encouragés par la promesse qu'une proposition écrite dans ce sens sera étudiée avec bienveillance, j'ose de demander à Votre Eminence, jusqu'à quel point je pourrai compter sur l'aide morale et matérielle de Saint Siége dans la voie apaisante dont ce comité, que j'ai l'honneur de présider a fait le noble but.

Veuillez agréer, Eminence, l'assurance, de ma haute considération.

Signée: Moustafa Sabri
ancien Cheik-ul-Islam de Turquie.

Moustafa Sabri



7

Appendix 2: Chronological list of Kevseri's articles (original publication dates)

Cited in this thesis:

- "Hawl Kalima Tu'za ila al-Suyuti Ghalatan," *al-Islam*, 5/32, 9 October 1936 (*Maqalat*, 307-11).
- "Al-Hijra al-Nabawiyya," *al-Islam*, 6/1, 19 March 1937 (*Maqalat*, 383-6).
- "Al-Lamadhhabiyya Qantar al-Ladiniyya," *al-Islam*, 6/40, 24 December 1937 (*Maqalat*, 129-36).
- "Tahdhir al-Umma min Du'at al-Wathaniyya," *al-Islam*, 8/19, 3 June 1939 (*Maqalat*, 277-82).
- "Al-Azhar Qubayla 'Idihi al-Alfi," *al-Islam*, 10/30, 22 August 1941 (*Maqalat*, 478-9).
- "Al-Risala wa-l-Azhar," *al-Islam*, 11/18, 22 May 1942 (*Maqalat*, 317-21).
- "Mansha' Ilzam Ahl al-Dhimma bi-Shu'ar Khass wa-Hukm Talabbus al-Muslim bihi 'Ind al-Fuqaha'," *al-Islam*, 11/23, 26 June 1942 (*Maqalat*, 219-27).
- "Muhadatha Qadima hawl al-Waqf al-Ahli," *al-Islam*, 11/29, 7 August 1942 (*Maqalat*, 190-6).
- "Mazhar Jadid fi al-Azhar al-Hadith - 2: Al-'Aqida al-Mutawaritha wa-l-Fiqh al-Mutawarith," *al-Islam*, 11/41, 6 November 1942 (*Maqalat*, 247-49).
- "Mazhar Jadid fi al-Azhar al-Hadith - 6: Nazar al-Mar' ila Shar' Allah Mi'yaru Dinihi," *al-Islam*, 11/46, 12 November 1942 (*Maqalat*, 233-8).
- "Ihya' 'Ulum al-Sunna fi al-Azhar," *al-Sharq al-'Arabi*, 1/43, 16 May 1947 (*Maqalat*, 481-90).
- "Kashf al-Ru'us wa-Libs al-Na'al fi al-Salat," *al-Sharq al-'Arabi*, 1/45, 30 May 1947 (*Maqalat*, 165-80).

Other:

- "Al-Ishfaq 'ala Ahkam al-Talaq," *al-Islam*, 5/32, 30 October 1936 (not in *Maqalat*).
- "Shar' Allah fi Nazar al-Muslimin," *al-Islam*, 6/25, 3 September 1937 (*Maqalat*, 96-101).
- "Musannafat al-Imam Abi Ja'far al-Tahawi," *al-Islam*, 6/34, 5 November 1937 (*Maqalat*, 408-13).
- "Al-Din al-Islami wa-l-Ta'assub al-Madhhabi," *al-Islam*, 6/40, 24 December 1937 (not in *Maqalat*).
- "Hawl al-Lamadhhabiyya wa-Du'atiha fi Misr," *al-Islam*, 6/42, 7 January 1938 (not in *Maqalat*).
- "Al-Hijra al-Nabawiyya, Fatihat 'Ahd Jadid Fayyad," *al-Islam*, 7/3, 18 March 1938 (*Maqalat*, 376-8).
- "Tarjamat Katib Chalabi, Mu'allif Kashf al-Zunun 'an Asami Kutub wa-l-Funun," *al-Islam*, 7/4, 25 March 1938 (*Maqalat*, 414-8).
- "Mulid Khatim Rusul Allah, 'Alayhi Azka al-Salawat," *al-Islam*, 7/11, 13 May 1938 (not in *Maqalat*).
- "Fath al-Mulhim fi Sharh Sahih Muslim," *al-Islam*, 7/32, 7 October 1938 (not in *Maqalat*).
- "Taraf Min Anba' al-'Ilm wa-l-'Ulama' - 1," *al-Islam*, 8/41, 8 December 1939 (*Maqalat*, 440-4).
- "Kulayma Hawl al-Maharib," *al-Islam*, 9/6, 15 March 1940 (*Maqalat*, 142-7).

“Hawl Mas’alat al-Mihrab: Intihak Hurmat al-Haqiqa wa-l-Tarikh Musayaratan li-l-Hawa,” *al-Islam*, 9/7, 22 March 1940 (*Maqalat*, 148-52).

“Al-Din wa-l-Fiqh,” *al-Islam*, 10/4, 21 February 1941 (*Maqalat*, 92-5).

“Idah La Budd minhu bi-Munasabat Maqal li-Azhari,” *al-Islam*, 10/33, 12 September 1941 (*Maqalat*, 479-80).

“A-Naskh al-Ahkam min Haqq al-Imam?!! Kama Yadda ‘ihi ‘‘Alim Fadil’ fi al-Risala,” *al-Islam*, 11/36, 25 September 1942 (*Maqalat*, 102-8).

“Mazhar Jadid fi al-Azhar al-Hadith - 7: Athar al-‘Urf wa-l-Maslaha fi al-Ahkam,” *al-Islam*, 11/47, 18 December 1942 (*Maqalat*, 239-42).

“Kalima hawl al-Ahadith al-Da‘ifa,” *al-Islam*, 15/48, 15 November 1946 (not in *Maqalat*).

“Al-Isra’ wa-l-Mi‘raj,” *al-Islam*, 16/29, 13 June 1947 (*Maqalat*, 370-3).

“Min ‘Ibar al-Tarikh,” *al-Sharq al-‘Arabi*, 2/5, 11 July 1947 (not in *Maqalat*).

“Hawl Hadith al-Tajdid,” *al-Islam*, 16/41, 12 September 1947 (*Maqalat*, 117-9).

“Hajj Bayt Allah al-Hiram,” *al-Islam*, 16/44, 3 October 1947 (*Maqalat*, 186-9).

“Usturat Qatl Murtadda Sharr Qatla fi ‘Ahd al-Siddiq,” *al-Islam*, 18/36, 8 July 1949 (*Maqalat*, 65-70).

Appendix 3: Ottoman letter written by Kevseri, 1952, to his brother in Düzce

هـ

سوکلی قرده ستم نجاتی
 بیور سولور و دعا را ایدرز هر ایلینز ترهالی که بیور
 صحتزاجی و کل اللہ تقدیرین رضی بر سلامت یا نایله
 هر دایم دعا کرنی بکلرز هر ایلینز سزه و افراد عالمه سزه
 کماله اشتیاقه ایدم و دعا را ایدرز هیچ برینه اوز
 قدره ایمان هر غیر سیکری غصیفه نیر ۱۰ اسکی مکتوبین
 آلمشکرده آهیه برده دن قونوسور
 آرقدا سه ده بنده بیک از لیسز الله لطفه منتظر
 صورانه احباب سولور ایدرز سز را بیور عاقبت
 تمنا ایدم قرده مح ۱۲۷۱
 فی ۸ صبا ده الاخر
 برادرز
 محمداهد الکوره
 بشارع الصبا ستم
 بالقاهره

Courtesy of Dr. Hamdi Arslan

اولاً انا . ایکن کون . ملام .
 نقیض فلا انما لم یفعل . غایت کلام . اشاره به
 برید آیه صبر . صبر ایستادن . خوار و ذلیل
 ایستادن . مودت . با خود سوء . او نهی . بر سر
 ذات . قسم اعظم و قسط با یکدیگر . معنی
 با صبر و نه بر سر . ایستادن . بر سر
 مودت و نه . مودت با یکدیگر . او نهی . بر سر
 ایستادن . ایستادن . ایستادن . ایستادن
 که او در مودت با یکدیگر . ایستادن
 نادر است . حق مودت و نه مودت . ایستادن
 مودت ایستادن . مودت با یکدیگر . ایستادن
 با ایستادن . مودت با یکدیگر . ایستادن

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