

CHAPTER 4:
ARABIA TO THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Arabia is important to many literatures. Through the nineteenth century, however, its spatial divisions faced mainly outwards: Hijaz towards both Egypt and the Ottoman centre; Najd towards Iraq; Oman and Ḥaḍramawt towards Indian Ocean worlds. There was little immediate feeling of shared experience. Nor did foreign empires, which elsewhere provoked such feelings, usually show interest in direct control. Ḥaḍramawt's graves and genealogies, meanwhile, were the moral centre of connections reaching India and Java; East African Muslims looked also to Oman. Across much of Eurasia were names from Hijaz and Yemen dating to the age of conquest. As the world came increasingly under Western dominance Arabia seemed the great exception, and by the late nineteenth century printed forms in Mecca allowed pilgrims to take Arabian names that attached them to the cradle of Islam.¹

1. The general setting

Yemen, though few of its specific regions, possessed agriculture sufficient for its needs. Oman had both African and Indian trading spheres. Najd and al-Qaṣīm shunned outsiders, yet the *Lam' al-shihāb* (1817) depicts the men as living decades abroad while the women showed an appetite for imported textiles.² The great pilgrim caravans traversed north and central Arabia: rulers taxed these, as they did traders, and the badu robbed them or extorted protection-money, encouraging authors to write as if all Arabia were nomads. In central Arabia, as in Yemen or Oman, most people (including many tribesfolk) were farmers, not mobile pastoralists. But Arabia was poor, and chronicles often mention famine.

A significant Jewish population lived in Yemen, paying *jizya* to tribal protectors or to government; a few *bānyān*, or non-Muslim Indian traders, were tolerated in Yemen and Oman; and 'Christian' (European) travellers occasionally passed through the hinterland. Life was felt to be Islamic not least because non-Muslims were absent or controlled. Themes of more localised identity recur also. In Mecca, wherever husbands went, Meccan-born women claimed a right to remain in the holy city, and Guarmani's account of Jabal Shammar (near Ḥā'il) reveals the same logic:

The inhabitants of the Gabal willingly give their daughters in marriage to strangers (even though these may be the simplest of travellers), taking them back when their 'husbands' leave, on the condition that should the latter not return within a given period they must consider themselves divorced.³

Although exceptions are found empirically, the moral rule was that males engaged with abroad (where they might be inhabitants of several places) and females were identified with home. Descent and marriage express what Ho calls 'a resolute localism'.⁴ The cultural expression is everywhere a mass of names, stories, and forms of dress; the political expression is a plethora of emirates, which makes Arabia's usual history a list of 'petty wars and intestine broils'.⁵

Tribes (*qabā'il* or *ʿashā'ir*) were important in most regions. Much analysis has been incautious, but the crux of tribalism is a simple assumption that people are related of their nature; divisions among them are God-given, and relatedness implies responsibility. The implication may be rejected: tribes are not solidary groups. Appeals to tribalism, however, had often a distinctive flavour. The ʿUjmān of Najd, in 1860, were thus urged on by maidens in embellished camel-litters; an Omani tribe, around 1870 (very much the age of firearms), said archaically, 'Our judge is the sword-blades of India and straight lances'.⁶ In Yemen urban centres of learning were supplemented by *hijras*, enclaves under tribal protection, identified with learned families. In Ḥaḍramawt were protected *ḥawṭas*. Tribal law existed, which in Yemen was condemned by the learned as *ṭāghūt*.

In Oman a great division of Hināwī tribes against Ghāfirī is conspicuous, and failure to unify under learned persons is condemned as clannishness (*ʿasabiyya*). Most Omani *ʿulamā'* themselves claimed tribal genealogies, however. In Najd the leading families of settlements shared tribal identities with the nomads around them, and dominant groups along the Gulf littoral claimed descent from tribes inland.⁷ Even where tribes and towns stood conceptually opposed, in Hijaz, one finds townsmen dressing as badu on a saint's day, and princely families had their sons raised by desert tribes.⁸ A Basran author in 1869 claimed his town showed tribal and 'Arab' virtue, for 'the stranger is honoured among them, and the guest respected'.⁹ One needs to ask who failed to count in such moral systems.

A striking feature of Najd and Hijaz is the detestation shown *ithnaʿasharī* Shiʿites. Cursing them from the pulpit at Mecca dates from the mid-eighteenth century Ottoman-Persian wars, and suspicions that *al-rāfiḍa* (those 'refusing' the early caliphs) cursed among themselves companions of the Prophet gave an edge to prejudice. Yet (Shiʿī) Zaydīs had people who, favouring ʿAlī, cursed even Abū Bakr, and Zaydīs did not suffer systematic loathing; as great a doctrinal difference existed with Ibādīs, who discounted both ʿAlī and ʿUthmān, but at Mecca Ibādī visitors pass unremarked.¹⁰ Often, unhistorically, *ithnaʿasharīs* were associated with the *ʿajam*, Persians distinguished by dress and language. Africans, meanwhile, were called *zunūj* or *ʿabīd* on account of skin-colour; 'Christians' (i.e. Europeans) and Turks were viewed with distaste 'because their skins are fair, and their beards long, and because their customs seem extraordinary ...'¹¹

The British, the 'Christians' immediately at issue, bombarded Ra's al-Khaima in 1809 and 1819. In 1820 they imposed a maritime truce on the Gulf, which fixed in place ruling families; in 1839 they seized Aden.¹² In local sources they receive little space, however. They controlled certain ports, and otherwise aimed to limit influence by other powers. Through the eighteenth century (Turkish) Ottoman concerns with Hijaz had been similar. Ottoman suzerainty extended to Jidda, while beyond this, despite the importance of the holy places, the Amīr of Mecca was autonomous. At the turn of the new century, however, the Wahhābīs of Najd appeared in Iraq, Oman, Yemen and Hijaz. Their pillage of Karbalā' and massacre of its people in 1802 was a shock to the Muslim world (an Ottoman massacre in 1843 receives less notice); in 1803 they took Mecca and in 1807 rejected the state-sponsored pilgrim caravans from Egypt and Syria. The Ottomans despatched their then vassal Muḥammad ʿAlī of Egypt, whose troops retook Medina and Mecca in 1812-13, and in 1818 destroyed the Saʿūdī/Wahhābī capital of al-Dirʿiyya. Egypt retained Hijaz until 1840.

2. Confessional groups and dynasties

The Ottomans, re-established from 1841, maintained in the holy cities an ecumenical regime.¹³ Each Sunnī *madhhab* was allotted a face of the Ka'ba for its prayers; in each of Medina and Mecca would ideally be four *muftīs*; there were multiple judges, imams and preachers; and each holy city had a shaykh of its '*ulamā*'. From about 1869 the position at Mecca was held by Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān (1817-86), the Shāfi'ī *muftī*, whose contacts with Muslims abroad were numerous. At Mecca and Medina the four schools interacted freely. Elsewhere Ḥanafīs were identified with Ottoman officialdom and with parts of India, but in Arabia were not much localised (the Shammar near Ḥā'il and the Ḥarb are exceptions); Ḥanbalīs were associated with Najd, Shāfi'īs dominated western and southern Arabia, and Mālikīs were conspicuous in the east. In Bahrain Shaykh Muḥammad Khalīfa (r. 1843-68) had around him famous Mālikī '*ulamā*', but also Ḥanbalīs and a few Shāfi'īs of whom one became chief *qāḍī*.¹⁴ Sunnī political divisions obscure a world of Shi'ī learning that covered eastern Arabia.¹⁵ Beyond the 'four schools' and the *ithna'asharīs*, meanwhile, were three important *madhhabs*.

Zaydīs dominated Yemen, and rule was reserved to *sayyids*, the Prophet's kin. Interaction with (Sunnī) Shāfi'īs had changed the Zaydī imamate, and a movement of 'renewal' associated with Muḥammad al-Shawkānī (d. 1834) affected both *fīqh* and governance; the imamate itself had survived since the ninth century, however, which later would fascinate reformers elsewhere. Ibādīs in Oman claimed a still longer presence, tracing themselves to the aftermath of the Khārijī schism.¹⁶ Long ago, says al-Kharūṣī (misleadingly) in the 1840s, all Oman was Ibādī except for people in the sea-ports; when Wahhābism came, it attracted 'many ignorant "Arabs" living in the wilderness ...'¹⁷ The Wahhābīs, he says, are 'a recent *madhhab*, not from old times'. The Wahhābī/Sa'ūdī domain, our third main grouping, included often al-Aḥsā' (with a large Shi'ī population, plus Sunnīs of many schools) and usually al-Qaṣīm (mainly Ḥanbalī), which demand separate histories.¹⁸ Though Wahhābī activity provides a unifying thread among Arabian events, the core of the venture remained the area near Riyadh and al-Dir'iyya.¹⁹

Learned Ḥanbalīs fled central Arabia for Basra, al-Zubayr, Baghdad and Syria.²⁰ From Basra into southern Iraq was predominantly Sunnī until perhaps mid-century: conversion to Shi'ism accompanied Indian-funded canals to Najaf and extensive new settlement, the camel-herding tribes remaining Sunnī. But many confessions were stable geographically. A common form is thus 'the Najdī' or 'the Yemeni'. And events can look different according to where one stands. When Sa'ūd and 'Abd Allāh fought for leadership of the Wahhābī state in the 1860s, the former went to Najrān and sought help from al-Makramī, which from Najd appears simply the man's name; in Yemeni sources the Makārīma are conspicuous as Ismā'īlīs, in Najrān and to the west of Ṣan'ā', and it is hard to imagine what doctrinal accommodation was possible.²¹ Political events provide at most a time-line.

Briefly, the Āl Bū Saʿīdī sultans in Oman inherited the Yaʿāriba seaborne empire, and Aḥmad Saʿīd (d. 1783) held the titles sultan and Ibādī imam. From about 1805, his grandson Saʿīd (d. 1856) dominated Muscat, hence oceanic politics; Saʿīd's paternal uncle Qays bin Aḥmad retained loyalties inland. Saʿīd's own interests shifted towards Zanzibar as early as 1830, and in 1861 the realm was divided under British auspices, with one of Saʿīd's sons taking Zanzibar, the other Muscat.²² Barghāsh Saʿīd of Zanzibar (r. 1870-88) was important in an Ibādī intellectual 'renaissance' linking North Africa with Oman. Rulers at Muscat (entitled sultans) meanwhile faced in Oman the possibility of fresh imams claiming greater legitimacy than they. Ḥamūd ʿAzzān was approached to be imam in 1846, but the venture foundered; his nephew ʿAzzān Qays ruled briefly, 1868-71. Both descended from Qays bin Aḥmad. The term *sayyid*, elsewhere reserved to the Prophet's kin as a synonym of *sharīf*, in Oman means descendants of Aḥmad Saʿīd 'Āl Bū Saʿīdī'.

Central Arabia was dominated by Wahhābism. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's descendants, the Āl al-Shaykh, continued providing key *ʿulamāʾ*, and their imams were the Āl Saʿūd. The first Saʿūdī state (1745-1818) had expanded from Najd through the richer area of al-Aḥsāʾ. In the early nineteenth century they drew clothes, foods and even cooks from there; the great historian of Wahhābī Najd, Ibn Ghannām (d. 1811), was brought from al-Aḥsāʾ to al-Dirʿiyya.²³ The second Saʿūdī state (c. 1824-91), based on Riyadh, repeated the process. It flourished under Imam Fayṣal (r. 1834-37, 1843-65) whose sons, Saʿūd and ʿAbd Allāh, soon afterwards disputed power. Their civil war, while showing certain *ʿulamāʾ* at their best, lost al-Aḥsāʾ to the Turks (1871),²⁴ and eventually Riyadh was lost to the Āl Rashīd of Ḥāʾil (1891). The spread of literacy in Najd was impressive; the name of Wahhābism itself spread widely. But, except for ʿAsīr, few outsiders came to Najd for study.

The early Wahhābīs prospered in ʿAsīr,²⁵ and *sharīfs* from there took the coast further south when Egypt withdrew. Yemen lost the Red Sea ports. Al-Mutawakkil Aḥmad (r. 1809-16) was succeeded by his son al-Mahdī ʿAbd Allāh (r. 1816-35), but the grandson al-Manṣūr ʿAlī (d. 1871) established no effective control. In 1849 the Ottomans made an attempt on Ṣanʿāʾ. There were multiple claimants to the Zaydī imamate, coastal *sharīfs* were as powerful as highland imams (both were descendants of the Prophet), and Yemeni historians call the mid-nineteenth century 'the time of corruption'.²⁶ Literate tradition survived. Ṣanʿāʾ struggled to defend itself, however, and tribesmen from the north moved south. While early in the century one finds learned visitors to Ṣanʿāʾ and (lowland) Zabīd from throughout Islam, by 1860 Yemen was largely abandoned to its troubles.

By contrast the holy cities, and the port-town of Jidda, made Hijaz cosmopolitan. Mecca was one of few places where (Muslim) strangers were easily assimilated; here also many *ʿulamāʾ* did not journey abroad in search of knowledge, and a lifetime in the holy city was common. Local power was held by *sharīfs*, one of whom would be recognised as Amīr by Ottoman *fīrmān*. Among intrigues at Istanbul and local rivalries, the position was disputed between two lines, the Dhāwī ʿAwn (ʿAbādila) and Dhāwī Zayd. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib Ghālib of the Dhāwī Zayd was thus twice Amīr (1851-55, 1880-82), and Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Muʿīn (Muḥammad ʿAwn) of the other line also ruled more than once: roughly 1827-36, 1840-51, 1856-58.

3. Autonomy, rank, status

Non-Islamic empire beyond Arabia could be aligned with *al-dunyā*, or worldly things. Aḥmad ʿAlī al-Junayd (1783-1858) of Ḥaḍramawt was famous for scholarship and generosity, and distrustful of foreign commerce, but his piety rested in part on payments from a brother in (British-controlled) Singapore.²⁷ Ḥaḍramī politics from the 1840s was dominated by *condottieri* returned from Hyderabad; Ḥaḍramīs as far afield as Java lived beneath the shadow of Dutch and British power. Aḥmad al-Muḥdār (d. 1887) continued denouncing a corrupt outer world, and Aḥmad Bin Sumayṭ (d. 1925), born in the Comoros and famous in Zanzibar, depicted Ḥaḍramawt as a sacred homeland,²⁸ yet Ḥaḍramawt's moral autonomy depended throughout on foreign income. Such patterns do much to define Arabia's meaning at the period.

Rulers in Oman, without Zanzibar, were pressed for funds and, from Thuwaynī Saʿīd (r. 1856-66) to Fayṣal Turkī (r. 1888-1913), faced claims that Islam was ruined. Sultans at Muscat leaned increasingly on British support. In Ibādī accounts one finds towns such as al-Rustāq described as *amṣār* (defended places, on the model of early Islamic garrisons) and Nizwā as 'the kernel (*bayda*, the precious centre) of Islam and the seat of the kingdom of the Arabs';²⁹ but equating the imamate with inland Oman and sultans with the coast, or Hināwī tribes with Ibādism and Ghāfirī with imported belief, misleads. The tribes of the interior were as much involved with Zanzibar as those near sea-ports.

Inland, the tendency of men in al-Qaṣīm and Najd to travel abroad (not only to trade in Iraq or India, but as labourers on the Suez canal)³⁰ was matched by their determination that outsiders not reverse the process. Egyptian invasions in 1818 and the 1830s, then Ottoman threats in the 1870s, provoked arguments from Najd that Muslims should retreat beyond their influence (that is, make *hijra*) and sever commerce with them; the issue recurred in 1896-7, and perhaps again in 1904-5, when al-Qaṣīm was disputed between the Āl Rashīd of Ḥā'il and the Āl Saʿūd.³¹ Like the oceanic regions of Arabia, the land-locked centre, while deeply engaged with a larger world, claimed moral autonomy.

The extreme case was Hijaz, where donations from elsewhere allowed the pursuit of an 'Islamic' life without regard to non-Muslim power. The pilgrim caravans from Syria and Egypt each carried not only the *maḥmal* (a camel-borne palanquin representing royal honours) but also the *khizāna*, 'treasure'. The scale of subsidies was huge.³² Pilgrims often emphasised 'visiting' the Prophet over the *hajj* itself; morals in Mecca were widely thought dubious; large non-Arab populations existed, and Mecca itself saw Medina as less compromised by imported customs; yet as part of Arabia the region stood ideally apart from a corrupting world. In 1903 the Begum of Bhopal rationalised buying off armed badu with the thought that 'these people were dwellers in Arabia and as such deserving of alms ...'³³ Such concepts of privilege were also at play internally.

At the start of Islam, Arabia paid the tithe (*ʿushr*) while conquered areas paid land-tax as *kharāj*, and in the nineteenth century, as Ottoman reforms in the north unfolded, it mattered where Arabia ended and Iraq began.³⁴ Elsewhere forms of tax may have mattered as greatly as its net sum. Shāfiʿīs in Lower Yemen objected to paying *kharāj* to Zaydī conquerors; now Ibādīs in Oman identified *kharāj* they paid Wahhābīs with earlier Persian tyranny. The Wahhābīs themselves had in central Arabia inverted the payments between settled *ḥaḍar* and nomadic *ʿarbān* or 'Arabs',

making towns dominant, and apart from the importance to the treasury of *ghanīma* (booty), which was great, payments denoted moral order.

Everywhere people other than rulers and *‘ulamā’* are often called *ra‘iyya* (subjects). Quite apart from tax, they were not all equal. Few were free of debt, many paid wealthier neighbours what less scrupulous minds would think interest, and most lacked the noble genealogy that, from India to Africa, coloured Muslim views of Arabia. The lower-most strata intermarried with ex-slaves. At the other pole of status, the *sayyids* of Yemen and Ḥaḍramawt refused to give wives to non-*sayyids*.

Slaves drew foreign intervention. The British in 1822 forbade sales in Zanzibar to Christians; in 1847 they banned shipping slaves from there to Arabia; in 1861 they imposed on Bahrain a treaty banning seaborne slaving. Under pressure, the Ottoman government in 1855 outlawed importing slaves, provoking riots in Mecca.³⁵ Two ranked worlds existed: that beyond Islamic borders, where no rules applied, and that within Arabia, where slaves were made subordinate kin and by many accounts despised their un-Islamic origins.³⁶ Abolitionism compromised Arabia’s status, and Islam’s autonomy, as surely as would have inverting marriage rules. Slaving was disputed in Bahrain as late as 1911; when an imamate was again launched in Oman, in 1913, the British were accused of permitting the forbidden (tobacco and alcohol) while forbidding licit transactions in slaves and arms.³⁷

A second intrusion derived from British-dominated commerce.³⁸ The vigour of local trade is often understated; but long-distance shipping fell into non-Arab hands, and in the age of steam local ship-building everywhere decayed. Indian merchants were already important in oceanic trade and finance. Muslim Indians (*khoja*) were more numerous; non-Muslims (*bānyān*) are said to have mobilised capital more efficiently. Both often now claimed British protection. In a treaty with Oman (1873) Indian extraterritoriality and restrictions on slavery mark equally British intervention. In 1858 a dispute over ships, debt and nationality had led to riots at Jidda, where ‘Christians’ (*naṣārā*) and their protégés were lynched; murder was provoked by quarantine arrangements in 1895. Such incidents were few, however. People lamented, the more distantly the more intensely, a ‘growing despotism in the world of the perilous *Naṣārā*’,³⁹ and at home little happened. Everywhere through the nineteenth century, however, Europeans found Arabian connections, which particularly in British and Dutch eyes were (mis)identified often as Wahhābī.

4. Wahhābism and ‘reform’

The term ‘Wahhābī’ was used by Arabian authors of a movement centred specifically on Najd, which sometimes they call a *madhhab*, sometimes a *dīn*, a new religion. Scathing dismissals of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* and *Kashf al-shubuhāt* are notorious.⁴⁰ More interesting is that in Yemen Ibn al-Amīr (d. 1769) had praised the Wahhābīs then finally opposed them, and Muḥammad al-Shawkānī (d. 1834), who knew Ibn al-Amīr’s work intimately and taught one of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s grandsons, did the same two generations later, as if between principles and practice lay a gap. The practice of early Wahhābism was not forgotten. Daḥlān in the 1880s thus tells how in 1803 at al-Ṭā’if ‘they went killing the infant who fed at its mother’s breast ...’:⁴¹ everything was carried off as loot, he writes, except books, which were ripped apart.

The second Saʿūdī state (c. 1850) was less intemperate than the first, yet dismay persisted at Wahhābī *takfīr*, ‘declaring infidel’ people who thought themselves Muslims. Ibādīs distinguished *kufr nifāq*, whose practitioners were hypocrites, from the *kufr juḥūd* of polytheists; much Yemenī theory was more severe; late Wahhābī thought on *takfīr* was itself detailed.⁴² What distinguished Wahhābīs nonetheless was their willingness to denounce as polytheists (*mushrikīn*) all who differed from them. On the other hand, their imams often recognized borders with other powers, ignoring absolutist logic.

Though Mecca was told better to copy (*qallada*) Sunnī tradition than risk Shiʿism,⁴³ Wahhābīs are often said to have vilified all dependence (*taqlīd*) on schools of law. Rejecting sectarian labels, not least ‘Wahhābī’, they claimed to follow simply the prescriptions of Islam. Their particular profession of *tawḥīd* (the unicity of God) implied political obedience, and a letter of appointment, dated 1855, sets out a *qāḍī*’s duties towards his people: ‘you must pray with them as a congregation on Friday, instruct them in the mighty *tawḥīd*, and judge among them as God prescribes’.⁴⁴ Congregational prayers were obligatory and the male population would be heard on their catechism, making of ‘*aqīda*’ very much a ‘creed’. Coherent doctrine begins emerging as later generations unpacked Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb’s statements. His grandson Sulaymān ʿAbd Allāh (d. 1818) wrote *Taysīr al-ʿazīz al-ḥamīd fī tafsīr kitāb al-tawḥīd*; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ḥasan (d. 1869) wrote *Faṭḥ al-majīd*. The rulings of ʿAbd al-Laṭīf ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 1876) show scholarly confidence, and arguments around Bin Jirjīs, an Iraqi Ḥanbalī who twice in mid-century stopped at ʿUnayza, match the texture of learned controversy in Oman or Yemen.⁴⁵ But dissenters contended that where argument was offered Wahhābīs were simply Ḥanbalīs; in so far as ‘*aqīda*’ was enforced without argument they were innovators like the savage Khārijīs.

Practical effects are hard to judge. The founder of Oman’s Bū Saʿīdī dynasty had been given a domed tomb at al-Rustāq; this was still a place of visitation (*mazār*) in the 1850s despite waves of Wahhābī enthusiasm. In Yemen certain tombs were demolished in the early 1800s, but one later finds people returning to interest in the dead and imams themselves visiting ancestral graves. On the other hand, Aḥmad Ibn ʿĪsā of Najd, in the 1880s, when Saʿūdī/Wahhābī power had disappeared, prevailed on the Amīr of Mecca to demolish domes in Hijaz, those of Khadīja and of Eve being left for fear of public reaction.⁴⁶ Such issues as ‘approaching’ God (*tawassuʿ*), and its relation to venerating the dead, are everywhere more prominent at the century’s end than at the start. Yet often debates precede Wahhābī influence, or what seems influence is parallel development, and Wahhābism figures in a far broader discourse of renewal (*tajdīd*) and reform (*iṣlāḥ*).

Reform can mean many things. In Ḥaḍramawt, local dynasts returning from Hyderabad, of whom the Qaʿayṭīs and Kathīrīs were greatest, were taken up in mid-century by *sayyids* wishing ‘Islamic’ order.⁴⁷ This *sayyid* history turns on what to Wahhābīs was anathema: descent-based holiness, the visiting of tombs, and Sufī practice organised around the ʿAlawīyya order, whose influence extended far abroad. In the course of the nineteenth century every power in reach, whether local or imperial, was approached for Ḥaḍramī purposes. What ‘reform’ meant will have changed between Ṭāhir Ḥusayn (d. 1826), whose efforts began before Ḥaḍramawt

suffered Wahhābī raids, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Mashhūr (d. 1902), in whose own time (1882) an ‘advisory treaty’ was signed between the Qaʿayṭīs and the British.

A very different history is elaborated by Daḥlān for Mecca. A succession of ‘raids’ provides challenges to hierarchical order, and even when in 1803 the Meccans are summoned to hear their Wahhābī conqueror they assemble ‘according to their ranks’: the Amīr and the *sayyids*, the *qāḍīs*, the *muftīs* and ‘*ulamā*’, then the common people. A sense of elaborate status is apparent in accounts by visitors. And Daḥlān’s own last entry in *Khulāṣat al-kalām* relates ceremoniously how in 1882 ʿAwn al-Rafīq was named Amīr, at the valley of Minā on 11 Dhū ’l-Ḥijja, ‘for every year on that day the [Ottoman] *firmān* is read out confirming the Amīr of Mecca ...’⁴⁸

5. Worlds of learning

In Daḥlān’s time, it is said, there were only six copies of *al-Khulāṣa*. Printing appeared in Ṣanʿā’ with the Turks in the 1870s, a press was established in Mecca in 1883, but what general publishing there was developed in Egypt or even Zanzibar. Before this, merchants in al-Qaṣīm read newspapers from Istanbul; afterwards, certain Ḥaḍramīs suspected journals as distractions from scholarship, and Arabia long after print appeared was chiefly a manuscript culture. ‘Modern’ schools appeared late: in Hijaz (from 1874) they owed much to Indians, and in Ḥaḍramawt (from 1887) to expatriate reformers.

Nor was prose the only important medium. The Āl Thānī of Qatar, for example, were patrons of poetry. Western presentations obscure how even general history is laced with verse, and much further poetry is preserved orally.⁴⁹ ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Āl al-Shaykh (d. 1876), the outstanding figure among late Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’, pursued legal controversies in didactic verse, while among *ithnāʿasharīs* such figures as Ḥasan al-Dimastānī (d. 1864) and ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1870) were as famous. Early in the twentieth century (Sunnī) Mālikī law was arranged by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-ʿAlajī in some 4,000 couplets; Muḥammad al-ʿAmrī, an Algerian of Medina, commemorated the Hijaz railway. Importantly, people memorised polemic verse that emerged from disputes among ‘*ulamā*’.

The self-presentation of ‘*ulamā*’ obscures much. Fāṭima bint Aḥmad ‘al-Fuḍayliyya’ (d. 1832) and the Indian scholar Khadīja bint Ishāq (d. 1892) of Mecca are among the few women mentioned. The role of women in bequeathing *waqf* is sometimes apparent; ordinary people, whether male or female, appear only in generalities. Accounts may instead stress textual derivations, as when al-Ḍamadī, reporting heads being severed in battle (1817), digresses on the precise legality of ‘transporting heads from one place to another place distant’.⁵⁰ A certain unworldliness is evident. Sulaymān ʿAbd Allāh (d. 1818) thus confessed he knew the men in books of Tradition better than he did those around him in al-Dirʿiyya;⁵¹ biographical collections praise ‘*ulamā*’ who refused political appointments, and accounts of pious indigence are common. Nor do all accounts depict successful mastery of knowledge. Al-Ḥusayn al-Sharafī of Ṣanʿā’, who knew legal systematics (‘*ilm al-furūʿ*’), ‘became muddled in his mind’ and thought he was the Mahdī, hoarding sea-shells for alchemical researches.⁵²

Scholars harassed by Wahhābīs claimed questions were posed to which there was no brief answer; ‘Abd Allāh Abū Buṭayn (1780-1865) in al-Qaṣīm preferred following a local *qāḍī*’s decision though he thought it faulty, for difference (*khilāf*) as such was evil.⁵³ ‘The rivalries of learned people draw some to speak wickedly of others, which then spreads and circulates,’ says al-Ḥaydarī, ‘God the exalted forgive [both] them and us’.⁵⁴ Much may be lost, however. The Āl Sulaym of ‘Unayza, for instance, won virtual independence of the Āl Sa‘ūd in 1861-62. By Guarmani’s account, in the backwash of Wahhābī power ‘Islamism was to give way to pure Deism’:

Oh Believers! there is no other divinity but God ...

Deny the existence of angels, djinn, afrit, and devil; for the Creator has no need of intermediary spirits ...

Deny the divine origin of all writings, the Koran, the Bible and the Gospels; for the Book of God is read in His works ...⁵⁵

It is hard to guess if the traveller simply misunderstood. We know still less about ‘millenarian’ ideas in Yemen, some of which involved Jewish prophecy; and the Faqīh Sa‘īd, who in 1840 declared himself the Mahdī, is only the most famous of many supposed heretics dismissed as ‘Sufis’.⁵⁶

Sufi orders (*ṭuruq*) drew attention from Western powers. Le Chatelier, alarmed for French colonialism, writes of them threatening ‘the progress of civilisation’ and lists many orders in Hijaz.⁵⁷ In Hijaz, however, unlike the ‘Alawiyya of Ḥaḍramawt, they were not explicitly reformist, and in much of Arabia to seek ‘brotherhoods’ is to overconcretise a discipline of mind. Though Zaydism had long distrusted Sufi orders, Sufism was current among Zaydī scholars; even in (Wahhābī) al-Qaṣīm one finds followers of Qādirī and Naqshabandī thought.⁵⁸ Nor did ecstatic rituals enjoy uncritical acceptance elsewhere. When Ibrāhīm Bin Jāsir of Burayda broke up such a meeting at Mecca, Sharīf ‘Awn (r. 1882-1905) agreed he was right to do so.⁵⁹

Jurisprudence and Sufism alike bordered other domains of knowledge. *Ḥisāb al-jumal*, for instance, gave numerical values to the alphabet, filling life with chronograms. Sharīf Ghālib, asking when Wahhābī power might end, was told *quṭr’a dābiru ‘l-khawārij*, ‘the Khārijīs will be wiped out’, which spelled AH 1227 [1812], the year Egypt’s army reached Medina; many Yemenis expected the Mahdī in 1849, when the Turks briefly took Ṣan‘ā’, for the Islamic year 1265 spelled *gharsa*.⁶⁰ The imam of the Filayhī mosque in Ṣan‘ā’, who once paralysed al-Mahdī ‘Abd Allāh (r. 1816-35), had a powerful command of ‘the science of names and letters and a strong grip on devils and the jinn’; in Oman, Nāṣir Abī Nabhān al-Kharūṣī (d. 1847) knew ‘the science of the secret’.⁶¹ In the shadow of modernist reformers there is a tendency to leave unexplored the logic.

6. Temporal power and Arabian Islam.

In much of Islam, the eighteenth century saw interest in ‘reform’. Reading later concerns into earlier is problematic, and some historians invoke too easily a period’s ‘mood’.⁶² Nineteenth century Arabia perhaps shows such a mood, however. A rhetoric emerged whereby strong rulers, not themselves men of learning, would follow the advice of scholars. This was the basis of the alliance between the Āl al-Shaykh and the Āl Sa‘ūd that made Wahhābism; al-Shawkānī’s reformist view of the Zaydī imamate

was similar; Shāfi'ī *'ulamā'* in Ḥaḍramawt formed councils to instruct their rulers.⁶³ In Oman, though in classical Ibādī theory a *shārī* imam, 'selling' himself to God, would as ruler invalidate dispute, Sa'īd al-Khalīlī said, 'the learned are rulers of the kings, and the kings are rulers of the subjects'.⁶⁴ Even among Ibādīs and Zaydīs the ideal of a single person combining piety, learning and the power to right wrong was under pressure.

In 1869 *'ulamā'* in Oman wrote to North African Ibādīs, 'Your brothers the Omanis in this age have risen for God the exalted, waging *jihād* in His cause ...' But 'Azzān Qays (r. 1868-71) was technically a 'weak' Imam: *'ulamā'* claimed his authority in confiscating opponents' property, yet that authority depended on their own consensus.⁶⁵ The Zaydīs recognised *muḥtasib* imams, though such would-be rulers as al-Hādī Ghālib (d. 1885) or al-Mutawakkil Muḥsin (d. 1878) did not claim the status. Several Yemenis attempted restoring the older (Hādawī) ideal of a 'complete' imam whose virtue would be self-evident: Aḥmad 'Alī al-Sirājī made a 'summons' in 1831, Muḥammad al-Wazīr in 1854, al-Hādī Sharaf al-Dīn in 1897. By the time imams who were truly scholars established influence, however, Turkish administration was supplementing ideals of order, and in the period after 1918 imamate of many kinds in Arabia turned, where imperialist space allowed, into 'kingdoms'.

Much earlier, learned persons faced the Sunnī dilemma that the best of rulers are close to the *'ulamā'* and the best *'ulamā'* shun rulers. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Tamīmī (d. 1838/9) of al-Zubayr was a brilliant intellect, yet Ibn Ḥumayd regrets his taste for 'princes and events'; Abū Buṭayn (d. 1865), respected yet also well-liked as *qāḍī* in 'Unayza, is described as exceptional.⁶⁶ Worldly *'ulamā'* nonetheless have their place in history. Aḥmad al-Kibī (1824-99), who once left a corrupted *Ṣan'ā'* (that is, made *hijra*), was later judge and statesman under Turks and imams alike; Zayn al-Ābidīn 'Abd al-Shukūr of Mecca (d. 1871) was a favourite of Sharīf 'Abd Allāh and managed his political correspondence. Rulers reciprocated. Sālīm Sulṭān (d. 1821) was thus remembered as an admirable governor of Muscat who observed conscientiously the times of prayer and debated poetry: he was 'bountiful towards Muslims of merit,' and kept around him men of letters. Or again Daḥlān at Mecca on Muḥammad 'Awn (d. 1858): 'the *majlis* of our lord Sharīf Muḥammad was always replete with learned persons, men of letters, and seekers after knowledge; ... he conducted many raids ... and in all of them had victory and triumph'.⁶⁷ The image is of Muslim gentlemen who might have adorned any age.

7. The Pan-Islamic period through the First World War

'Abbās of Egypt (d. 1854) spent freely for support in Arabia; his successors were interested in the Red Sea, and the Ottomans remained alert to either Persian or Egyptian influence in the Gulf.⁶⁸ In 1858-9 the Porte pressured Shaykh Muḥammad of Bahrain, who flew Ottoman and Persian flags from opposite corners of his fort. In 1861, however, facing new Wahhābī threats, he succumbed to Britain. In 1862 the Ottoman governor of Massawa^c, in Sudan, spoke of controlling the Aden straits; Egypt's assumption of control over Massawa^c in 1866 only complicated rivalries in western Arabia, and the Ottomans in the following year briefly claimed sovereignty over Ḥaḍramawt. The Suez Canal (1869) gave means to intervene in Arabia directly.

In 1871 the empire deployed 4,000 regulars to conquer al-Aḥsā' and 9,000 to suppress a rising in 'Asīr which they feared had Egyptian backing. The latter force

took Şan‘ā’ in 1872. This forward policy brought to power in Istanbul reformers favouring pan-Islamic projects; the accession of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (r. 1876-1909) confirmed their ascendancy, and even Ḥafṣa became a feature of pan-Islamic diplomacy in the 1870s when (the Indian-born) Sayyid Faḍl of Ḥaḍramawt, who earlier fought the British in Kerala, sought help there.⁶⁹

While Britain maintained its peripheral control, there unfolded in parts of Arabia an Ottoman *risorgimento*. The military venture in al-Aḥṣā’ foundered, though the Turks kept possession until 1913. By the early 1900s, however, they had 30,000 troops in Yemen, and with them came obsessions often written of as specific to European imperialism: statistical order, straight roads and public drainage, uniforms, schools, and a doctrine of progress.⁷⁰ In Yemeni accounts the Turks appear now as ‘*ajam*, definitively non-Arab foreigners, as the Persians had long seemed elsewhere.

Ottoman attempts to force Turkish clothes and the red *ṭarbūsh* on Yemenis drew the response that Yemeni dress was ‘Islamic’.⁷¹ Photographs of the holy cities show *ṭarbūsh* and ‘modern’ uniform beside robes and turbans, and the Begum of Bhopal describes the Syrian *maḥmal* arriving at Medina in 1903:

full royal honours were paid to it in its progress; a guard-of-honour composed partly of local troops and partly of the troops that accompanied it formed an escort and the whole procession marched to the music of a brass band.⁷²

Brass bands gave offence in non-Ottoman Oman. The modernist Islam of the empire and expectations of Arabia by reformers elsewhere were oftentimes at odds. But Mecca as the ‘sounding board’ of Islam returned usually a muffled note. ‘Abd al-Qādir of Algeria made the *ḥajj* in the 1860s; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839-97) may have done so many times; and Raḥmat Allāh Khalīl (‘Kayranawī’), who fled India after 1857 and whose anti-Christian tract *Iḥḥār al-ḥaqq* (c. 1863-4) is famous, lived in Mecca until his death in 1890/91. One would not know their world importance from local sources.

Daḥlān’s ‘Islamic Conquests’ (*al-Futūḥāt al-islāmiyya* c. 1885-6), unlike *al-Khulāṣa*, saw print and was widely spoken of; he himself gave *fatwās* to correspondents as far afield as Daghestan and Java. But a postscript to his Meccan history says of the penultimate year of the Islamic century: ‘among the strange events (*ḥawādīth gharība*) in the year ‘99 [1881-2] was that a man called Muḥammad Aḥmad appeared in Sudan ..., and many people thought he was the Mahdī’.⁷³ The impression is of events in a faraway country of which Hijazi ‘*ulamā*’ knew little. The people of al-Qaṣīm, by contrast, sent somebody to check.⁷⁴ When he returned he said the Sudanese themselves expected salvation from a descendant of Qaḥṭān, that is, from the ‘original’ Arabs of Arabia.

The millennial year AH 1300 (1882-3) passed quietly. In 1900, however, al-Kawākibī’s *Umm al-qurā* depicted an imagined meeting at Mecca of Muslim notables, and the Ottoman government treated the account as all but real. As early as 1879 ‘Abd al-Qādir had been rumoured to think of an ‘Arab’ kingdom; al-Afghānī floated a tale in 1883 that Britain planned an Arab Caliphate; the Ottomans’ own language of empire included ideas of Arab ‘revival’.⁷⁵ Arabia by the century’s end was filled with the imaginings of others.

As Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā would argue post-1918, Muslims were being brought together by European technologies of empire. The telegraph had been expensive, the mail remained slow; but steam ships, although pilgrimage figures do not rise dramatically, were moving ordinary people in large numbers; and from the 1880s, though few in Arabia read it, Arabia's affairs were played out in a trans-regional Islamic press. Thus the Turks in Yemen provoked massive Zaydī resistance, and such complaints as the following, from al-Manṣūr Muḥammad (r. 1884-1904), later gained coverage in *al-Manār*.

We have seen how officials do not administer God's laws, do not respect what God has forbidden, ... and do nothing of God's book or the *sunna* of God's Prophet; ... they flaunt before God their wine-drinking and carnality between males; ... the word of the Jews and Christians is raised high ...⁷⁶

Yemen became a focus of Muslim concerns about the empire's nature. The coup of the Young Turks in 1908 was refracted through the same lens; and when Imam Yaḥyā (r. 1904-48) won a truce in 1911, the contrast of not only Arab and Turk but Islamic and governmental law was highlighted.

The Idrīsī state in ʿAsīr (1906-34),⁷⁷ established by a collateral relative of North Africa's Sanūsīs, was another matter for leading articles: the Ottoman-Italian war of 1911-12 saw the Idrīsīs and Imam Yaḥyā take opposite sides. And in 1905 and 1915 the press was filled with an issue still more distinctive of the age, a Ḥaḍramī controversy over marriage between *sayyids*' daughters and non-*sayyid* men.⁷⁸ This struck at a traditional moral order. Symptomatically it began among Ḥaḍramīs abroad (in Java and Singapore), engrossed scholars from throughout Islam, and focused on Arabia.

During World War One the Idrīsī gained support from Britain. Imam Yaḥyā in Yemen and Ibn al-Rashīd at Ḥā'il did so from the Turks. In 1902 ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl Saʿūd had taken Riyadh from the Rashīdīs, and in 1913 he seized al-Aḥsā' as his ancestors had done before: he too gained limited support from Britain. But in neither Islamic nor imperialist terms was 1914-18 climactic for Arabia. Britain feared a dry wind blowing through the East; the Turks themselves must have had some hope when they called for *jihād* against the Triple Entente. The initiative fell instead to Ḥusayn ʿAlī, Amīr of Mecca (r. 1908-24). Installed by the Young Turks, he had then opposed them yet been denounced before 1914 as a tool of secularists; launching his revolt in June 1916, with British support, he now became an Arab nationalist hope, but his own propaganda was primarily that the Ottomans had fallen under secular influence. In the post-war years Arabia would see a string of visitors, some pan-Islamist and some pan-Arabist, pursuing visions of a broader unity. The reality they faced was a half-dozen major principalities. In 1919, on the other hand, there was fear in Yemen that 'the Franks' (the British) would seize all the Ottomans had claimed; but Arabia was judged, in Lloyd George's words, 'too arid a country to make it worth the while of any ravenous Power to occupy'.⁷⁹

8. Conclusion

Grand narratives of Muslim anti-imperialism must be treated cautiously. Ibādī ‘*ulamā*’ in East Africa, says Wilkinson, had sought common ground with other Islamic groupings to confront colonialism, ‘but it is very much to be questioned whether the main line of ulema there, or in Oman, really had much pan-Arab, pan-Islamic or for that matter pan-anything vision’.⁸⁰ Their problems were more immediate. So too were those of Zaydīs in Yemen, Shāfi‘īs in Hijaz or even Ḥaḍramawt, and Wāḥhābīs in Najd.

Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā’s ideal of the Caliphate as a grand-imamate (c. 1922) found its focus by elimination. There was simply nowhere plausible left beyond ‘Christian’ control but parts of Arabia, and Riḍā suggested as an interim caliphal candidate Imam Yaḥyā of Yemen, thus capturing an imagined complex of independence from imperialism, descent from the Prophet, and Arabia as the cradle of Islam.⁸¹ The quieter continuities of learning received less attention. The lives of Arabians, attempting as best they could to be good Muslims, received even less, and most of the history of this real Arabia remains still to be recovered.

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 3. C. Guarmani *Northern Najd: a journey from Jerusalem to Anaiza in Qasim* (London 1938), p. 57; cf. Hurgronje *Mekka*, p. 88.
 4. E. Ho *The Graves of Tarīm; genealogy and mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley, 2006), pp. 63 ff.
 5. Badger’s introduction to Ibn Ruzayq, *History of the imāms and sayyids of Omān* (London 1871); for local identities, A. al-Fahad ‘The ‘*imāma*’ vs. the ‘*iqāl*’ hadari-bedouin conflict and the formation of the Saudi state’, M. al-Rasheed and R. Vitalis eds. *Counter-Narratives* (New York 2004), pp. 39-40.
 6. A. Vassiliev *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London 2000), p. 181; A.H. al-Sālimī *Tuḥfat al-‘ayān bi-sīrat ahl ‘umān* (Cairo 1961), vol I, p. 253.
 7. al-Fahad ‘The ‘*imāma*’, p. 39, M. al-Nabhānī *al-Tuḥfa al-nabhāniyya fī tārikh al-jazīra al-‘arabiyya* (Beirut and Bahrain 1986), p. 81.
 8. Hurgronje *Mekka* p. 43; I. Rif‘āt Pāshā *Mir‘āt al-ḥaramayn*, 2 vols. (Cairo 1925), vol. I, p. 203.
 9. I.F. al-Ḥaydarī *‘Unwān al-majd fī bayān aḥwāl baghdād wa-l-baṣra wa-najd* (Baghdad n.d.), p. 162.

10. B. Haykel *Revival and reform in Islam: the legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge 2003), pp. 148-9, 160, 167-9; A.Z. Daḥlān [*Khulāṣat al-kalām fī bayān*] *Umarā' al-balad al-ḥarām* (Beirut n.d.), p. 299, henceforth *Khulāṣa*.
11. J.L. Burckhardt *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahabys* (London 1930), vol. I, p. 283, cf. Hurgronje *Mekka*, p. 39.
12. R.J. Gavin *Aden under British rule 1839-1967* (London 1975) provides a good account of British strategic concerns throughout the period.
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14. al-Nabhānī *Tuḥfā*, p. 112, cf. ibid. p. 143 for the pattern under 'Isā 'Alī (r. 1869-1923).
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23. Abū Ḥākima *Lam'*, p. 176; A. al-Ḥāmid *al-Shīr fī 'l-jazīra al-'arabiyya 1150-1350* (Riyadh 1986), p. 58.
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32. Ochsenwald *Religion*, Rifāt Pāshā *Mir'āt*, vol. II, pp. 309 ff., Hurgronje *Mekka*, pp. 173-4.
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35. Daḥlān *Khulāṣa*, p. 362; al-Ḥibshī *Ḥawliyyāt*, pp. 251, 351.
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40. Daḥlān *Khulāṣa*, p. 303, Ibn Ruzayq *History*, pp. 229-30, al-Ḥaydarī 'Unwān, p. 228.
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 47. Freitag *Indian Ocean*, al-Kindī *Tārīkh*, Gavin Aden, pp. 156-73.
 48. Daḥlān *Khulāṣa*, p. 379, cf. Rif‘āt Pāshā *Mir‘āt*, vol. I, pp. 49-51.
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 51. al-Bassām ‘*Ulamā’*, vol. II, p. 432.
 52. Zabāra *Nayl*, vol I, p. 398.
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 56. Zabāra *Nayl*, vol. II, pp. 226-7, al-Ḥibshī *Ḥawliyyāt*, pp. 90-9, cf. *ibid.* pp. 41, 500.
 57. A. Le Chatelier *Les Confréries musulmanes du hedjaz* (Paris 1887). For a sober account, Ochsenswald *Religion*, pp. 42-7, 53-4.
 58. Zabāra *Nayl*, vol. I, pp. 20, 116, 316, vol. II, pp. 80-1, 351, al-Ḥibshī *Ḥawliyyāt*, p. 243; al-Bassām ‘*Ulamā’*, vol. V, p. 159.
 59. al-Bassām ‘*Ulamā’*, vol. I, p. 280.
 60. Daḥlān *Khulāṣa*, p. 329; al-Ḥibshī *Ḥawliyyāt*, pp. 188-9, cf. al-Sālimī *Tuḥfā*, pp. 204-5.
 61. Zabāra *Nayl*, vol. I, pp. 134-5; Hoffmann ‘Ibādī identity’, pp. 209, 210, cf. Doughty *Arabia*, vol. I, p. 301, vol. II, p. 17, 121.
 62. A. Dallal ‘The origins and objectives of Islamic revivalist thought 1750-1850’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113 (1993), ‘Appropriating the past: twentieth century reconstruction of pre-modern Islamic thought’, *Islamic Law and Society* 7 (2000).
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 65. al-Sālimī *Tuḥfā*, pp. 247-9, 252, 256-8, cf. Wilkinson *Imamate*, pp. 154-62.
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67. Daḥlān *Khulāṣa*, p. 348, cf. Ibn Ruzayq *History*, pp. 241-2, al-Nabhānī *Tuḥfa*, p. 136.
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 81. M.R. Riḍā *La Doctrine du califat* (Beirut 1938), pp. 89-90, 118-19, 191.

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