

Brandeis University
Crown Center for Middle East Studies
Crown Paper 2 July 2009

From Visiting Graves to Their Destruction

The Question of *Ziyara* through the
Eyes of Salafis

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Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments, and Robert Cohen for his impeccable copy editing.

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Introduction

*A RESPECT FOR THE TERRAIN OF DEATH, ALONG WITH THE INDIVIDUAL
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OCCASION...¹*

In a collection of fatwas, religious opinions, issued by a group of prominent Saudi legal scholars (*ulama*), we find the following question: “I live in a neighborhood that has a graveyard, and every day I walk along a path that passes beside it. . . . What is obligatory upon me in this situation? Should I always give the greetings of peace to the deceased, or what should I do? Please give me some direction.”² It must be stressed that questions of that sort are very common. The answer of Ibn Baz (1912–99), once the highest mufti of Saudi Arabia and a revered Islamic scholar, may not be surprising given that the Prophet Muhammad himself is said to have greeted the dead when passing by their graves, and that this practice is encouraged even by fierce critics of grave visitation. But the answer is not what matters in this context. It is, rather, the question itself, which encapsulates the ambiguity with respect to graves and related customs in certain parts of the Islamic world today and the consequent uncertainty regarding proper conduct on the part of ordinary believers. It also shows how the influence of some clerics permeates the everyday life of Muslims, who feel compelled to ask for guidance in every sphere of daily life.³

While the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, is a universal rite in Islam, the *ziyara*—literally, “visitation,” a notion that encompasses all venerated places such as graves and shrines of saints, trees, wells, and rocks—is also universally popular, but lacks the authority of the Qur’an. In a narrower meaning, this term specifically designates grave visitation, *ziyarat al-qubur*, which is recorded

in the Prophetic tradition (*hadith*). However, some scholars have rejected the authenticity of several of these hadiths, and the meaning of others has been interpreted in many different ways. The beliefs and rituals associated with the *ziyara* led in many instances to tension with the *ulama* who condemned grave visitation. Vigorous debates and divisions also emerged very soon after the rise of Islam around questions such as the legality of building domes over graves; the permissibility of women visiting graves; the kinds of utterances, such as prayers and supplications, allowed in graveyards; the propriety of praying directly to the dead, and of seeking intercession on behalf of oneself or others; whether it is allowed to make physical contact with a grave; and the maximum height to which a grave can be erected without becoming an idol.

The vigorous opposition with respect to certain practices can be confidently traced to Hanbalite scholarship. Among which stood out Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), one of the most famous medieval Islamic jurists and theologians, whose influence is still palpable in current Sunni discourse. Ibn Taymiyya spent a large portion of his life in prison for his teachings; his last imprisonment was caused by his issuance of a legal opinion reportedly denouncing the visitation of the Prophet’s grave.⁴ Ibn Taymiyya was defeated by his opponents, the *ulama* of Egypt and Syria, and died in prison together with his legal opinions condemning grave visitation and the belief in intercession. Despite his failure to prevail in his lifetime, however, Ibn Taymiyya left an influential legacy for subsequent generations—who, in the following centuries, still felt impelled to engage in similar debate, whether in refutation of his arguments or in defense of them. His spiritual legacy, perhaps oversimplified and whether justifiably or not, found a fertile ground in the person of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab and has also been appropriated by today’s Salafis.

The term “Salafi” can be confusing because it is defined in a number of ways. Salafis in general are those who follow the example of the early Muslim community (*salaf*). For them, religious legitimacy lies in the Qur’an and in the transfer (*naql*) of prophetic traditions from each generation to the next: The authenticity of such traditions derives from the credibility of their transmitters and the soundness of their narrative chain (*isnad*). (The same criteria are invoked to reject and repudiate the traditions of “heterodox” groups, called *ahl al-bid‘a*, as opposed to the orthodox *ahl al-sunna*.) As the study of traditions—which were regarded as a second source of law, after the Qur’an, and as helping to define the ideal of orthopraxis—formed an important part of orthodoxy, traditionalism prevailed in the Sunni schools of law. In the sphere of dogma and theology, traditionalism finally triumphed in the Hanbalite creed, defeating the teachings of theologians who depended primarily on reason (*‘aql*)—whereas the Hanbalites were, with some exceptions, literalists, subjecting reason to the

Qur'an and Sunna, both also called *naql*. In the realm of dogma, the Hanbalites followed the method of the early Muslims (*madhhab al-salaf, tariqat al-salaf, minhaj al-salaf*).⁵ This particular method, as Salafis claim, is based on a literal understanding of the text, which they apply even to ambiguous or potentially ambiguous texts, to which other theologians prefer to assign metaphorical and allegorical meanings. Hanbalism, being the only school that was both legal and theological (Hanafites, Malikites, and Shafi'ites were only legal schools), has significantly influenced the creeds of contemporary Sunni Muslims, who oppose innovative—and to them, therefore, heretical—religious practices. Although all Sunni Muslims hold great respect for the *salaf*, Salafis stand out in putting a strong emphasis on dogma.

However medieval this topic may sound, the issue of visiting graves is in fact even today a highly contested area of religious practice. The “idolatrous” custom of visiting graves quite often elicited condemnation—or, under the right historical and social conditions, provoked violent reactions throughout the region, be it the destruction of the graves of saints or of entire cemeteries in Yemen or similar acts that continue to occur today in Saudi Arabia. This study thus aims to illuminate a phenomenon that some, in a rather simplistic way, call “a decades-long demolition campaign” overseen by Saudi religious authorities, whose driving force, they argue, has been “the austere state faith that the House of Saud brought with it when Ibn Saud conquered the Arabian Peninsula in the 1920s.”⁶ We will also examine the evolution of *ziyara* and the main themes related to it, and show how its opponents understood it differently at different times—and how it was gradually simplified and finally turned from a mere legal issue into a key doctrinal one.

Contemporary Destruction of Graves and Its Legalization

Probably the largest incident of graves destruction in the contemporary Middle East occurred in Yemen. In September 1994, approximately two thousand men, armed with rocket-propelled grenades, explosives, and shovels, demolished the cemetery built around the shrine of a local saint in Aden. Not only was his sanctuary destroyed along with some elaborate wooden decor, but many graves were exhumed and their remains burnt. This event was not the result of a mere rampage; it was a well-prepared and systematic action. (A bulldozer had even been brought along to level the graves.) The violent attack, clearly inspired by the practice of *ziyara* and rooted in disagreement over basic issues connected with grave culture, set off further incidents of grave destruction elsewhere in Yemen.⁷

Many individuals and organizations in Saudi Arabia as well as the governments of Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, and Oman condemned the attack and offered to finance the rebuilding of the complex. On the other hand, the attack on the Aden cemetery was supported in some sermons in Saudi Arabia. In 1998, despite vocal protests throughout the Muslim world, in Saudi Arabia itself the grave of the Prophet's mother, Amina bint Wahb, was demolished in al-Abwa' village. The mosque and tomb of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq in the neighborhood of the Prophet's Mosque (*al-masjid al-nabawi*) in Medina was destroyed by dynamite and flattened on August 13, 2002. The Hijazis similarly lament the destruction of the grave of Khadija, the first Prophet's wife.⁸ The Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs also called for the demolition of the dome over the Prophet's Mosque and for leveling the graves of Muhammad, Abu Bakr, and 'Umar.

The groundwork for such statements was prepared by the Permanent Committee (*al-Lajna al-da'ima*), a body that was composed of Ibn Baz and other prominent senior *ulama* of Saudi Arabia. The Committee made a clear declaration regarding this issue: "Building over graves is a disagreeable heresy (*bid'a*) . . . and leads to polytheism (*shirk*). It is therefore incumbent upon the ruler of Muslims or his deputy to remove what is over graves and level them to the ground."⁹ Ibn Baz and other senior *ulama* also imposed an absolute (*mutlaq*) prohibition against women's visiting graves; indeed, they considered this issue to be so important that the relevant fatwas are usually classified as "doctrinal" (*'aqa'id*). The reason is, according to Ibn Baz, that women are "impatient," and their visitation of graves or attendance at funerals might pose a temptation (*fitna*)¹⁰ for men. Therefore, Ibn Baz concludes, it was out of God's mercy that He prohibited women from *ziyara*.¹¹ For men, on the other hand, it is recommended (*mustahabb*) according to Ibn Baz that they visit the graves of the Prophet and his companions—but it is not permitted to touch or kiss these graves or to perform circumambulation around them. However, Ibn Baz, against popularly accepted belief, asserts that visiting the Prophet's grave is not obligatory (*wajib*) for Muslims and is by no means a legal and necessary part of the hajj.¹²

Another Saudi religious authority, Ibn 'Uthaymin (1925–2001), held more or less the same position as Ibn Baz, and he also prohibited women from intentional (*qasdan*) grave visitation. However, he argued, if no visitation is intended, such as when passing a grave along the way leading to home, there is nothing wrong (*la ba's*) in greeting the deceased.¹³ The reason for the prohibition is that if a woman is allowed to visit a graveyard, she will be exposed to wicked and sinful people who may come to such an empty place, and something with detestable consequences may happen to her.

It is fair to add that not all the Salafi ulama advocated these stern opinions. The revered hadith scholar Shaykh Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (1914–99), for example, did not find any substantial proof for forbidding women from *ziyara*. Al-Albani wrote that the hadith “God cursed women who visit graves and people who build mosques over them and light them with lamps,” on which many Salafis base the prohibition, is weak, and as such has no credibility. In his opinion, both the prohibition and the later exception that can be found in the hadith collection were directed at men and women alike, and everything that is allowed to men is allowed to women.¹⁴

In the case of Yemen, Muqbil ibn Hadi al-Wadi'i (d. 2001), a student of al-Albani and one of the leading figures of Salafi Islam in Yemen at that time, had voiced his support for the destruction of graves on widely circulated cassette tapes. Al-Wadi'i, who studied at the Faculty of Shari'a at the Islamic University in Medina, wrote a thesis entitled “Ruling about the Dome Built over the Prophet's Grave” (*Hukm al-qubba al-mabniya 'ala qabr al-rasul*), in which he demanded that the Prophet's grave be brought out of his mosque and the dome destroyed, because the presence of the holy grave and the noble dome constituted major innovations.¹⁵ Al-Wadi'i says that his interest in this topic arose when he encountered a fatwa answering the following question: “Is it permitted to build domes over graves?” The answer was positive, on the basis that “the community of believers already accepted the dome built over the Prophet's grave.” Al-Wadi'i disapproved, and in his treatise he reiterates the basic concepts connected with this issue, drawing from the collections of hadith and frequently quoting Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad al-Shawkani (see below), among others. He blames the Ummayyad caliph al-Walid ibn 'Abd al-Malik (668–715) for incorporating the Prophet's grave into the mosque, and the Mamluk sultan of Egypt, al-Mansur Qalawun al-Salihi (1222–90), for building the dome above the grave.

Al-Wadi'i concludes that such building is illegal and is an act of infidelity (*kufri*). Therefore it is a duty for Muslims to return the mosque and the grave to their original condition from the time of the Prophet—meaning moving the mosque westward so it does not encompass the grave, and also destroying the dome.¹⁶ Finally, he exhorts the *ulama* to teach Muslim society about the harm entailed in building over graves in general, and to remind rulers that it is their duty to destroy such structures.¹⁷ In another book entitled *Khomeinian Heresy in Saudi Arabia (al-Ilhad al-khumayni fi ard al-haramayn)*, al-Wadi'i condemns the heretical practices of Shiite Islam. It is noteworthy that al-Wadi'i himself visited in person many such prohibited places in Iran: He twice visited the grave of “imam of the heresy” Khomeini, and also the graves of Imam Zade Salih, Imam Shah 'Abd al-'Azim, and Imam 'Abdallah. In the early 1980s, after

his return to Yemen from Saudi Arabia, al-Wadi'i opened a religious school in Sa'da to propagate a puritanical Salafi interpretation of Islam and confront the Shiite movement. He also launched an open onslaught over the matter of Zaydi tombs, declaring his intention of destroying the tombs of the Zaydi imams and their domes in Sa'da. His zealous followers carried out his ideas and destroyed many of the gravestones in the cemeteries just beyond Sa'da's city wall.¹⁸

Changing Views since Muhammad

The verdicts of these contemporary *ulama* were not a complete novelty. The Sunni legal stance on the issue of *ziyara* has gone through a long evolution, extending well beyond a couple of decades. And the phenomenon of grave visitation by no means emerged only with the rise of Islam: Pre-Islamic Arabs were familiar with the cult of the dead as well. The Qur'an refers to *ansab* (upright stones that were erected by the graves and venerated) as cult objects of pagan Arabs. The graves of deceased heroes and saints in particular were believed to benefit people seeking protection and help. Another common practice was erecting a tent (*qubba*, which later became the name for a domed grave or mausoleum) over the grave of a dead person and spending some time there after the burial. In the same manner, families used to annually renew the wailing ceremony and the sacrifice of a camel for a deceased beloved person. It is safe to say that various pagan rituals revolving around the cult of the dead persisted until modern times.¹⁹

Muhammad himself was accustomed to visit the graves of his deceased companions and to intercede with God on their behalf, but the ambiguity both of his practice and of the traditions that he left behind bequeathed succeeding generations a legacy of uncertainty. Attempts to bring some clarity, by either transforming pre-Islamic funeral customs into Islamic Sunna or eradicating them entirely, can be found in hadith collections, embodied in often contradictory rules. The hadith collections, as will be subsequently shown, contain, for example, hadiths both favoring and forbidding visiting tombs or performing prayers at graves and in graveyards. The Prophet's death and the events that immediately followed set an example for the times to come. Funeral ceremonies and seeking God's forgiveness for the sins of fellow believers played central roles in defining Muslim piety during the first century of Islam, although their origins were rooted in different religious traditions. These Islamic rituals thus very soon began to be contested and consequently underwent fundamental transformation.

The Building of Funerary Structures and the Leveling of Graves

Muhammad's death brought with it an immediate controversy regarding the proper means of burial and the appropriate structure of the grave. Some argued that prophets should be buried precisely where they die, while others preferred transporting Muhammad's corpse to his mosque or to the cemetery of al-Baqi' in the vicinity of Medina, where some of his companions were already buried. Eventually the first approach gained the upper hand, and Muhammad was buried in the room where he died, which belonged to his wife 'A'isha. It was said that after the Prophet's burial, 'A'isha continued to occupy the same room, without even a curtain between her and the tomb. Only later on, vexed by the crowds of visitors, did she allow construction of a wall around the grave, which she then kept visiting unveiled. When 'Umar's corpse was added, she always covered her face. Muhammad's burial place, regularly demolished and reconstructed and at some points even decorated with gold and mosaics,²⁰ has always been a source of disputes, and has been seen by many traditionalists as violating their "pure" ideals.

Islam's objection to tomb building arose mainly from its desire to clearly separate graves from places of worship and to prevent the practice of praying at the gravesite. Religious rules intended to accomplish those purposes appear in later, thematically classified collections of hadiths in special chapters entitled "funerals" (*jana'iz*). These chapters seek to precisely regulate the procedures to follow when an individual in the Muslim community dies. The debate about graves also revolved around the principle of the leveling of graves (*taswiyat al-qubur*). From the outset, Muhammad had discouraged and prohibited any tendencies toward building funerary monuments. That is why, for instance, the Prophet himself—according to hadiths recorded by al-Tirmidhi, Muslim, and others—sent out 'Ali to destroy elevated graves; and later 'Ali, during his rule, sent out one Abu al-Hayyaj al-Asadi on the same mission with the words: "Do not leave any statue without destroying it nor any raised grave without leveling it." The prohibition of building pretentious domes was probably observed until the oldest *qubba*, Qubbat al-Sulaybiyya in the Iraqi city of Samarra, was erected in the middle of the third century of the Hijra, violating the principle of *taswiyat al-qubur* for the first time.²¹

Until the thirteenth century, descriptions of funerary architecture in Islamic literature and its position in Islamic law were of secondary interest.²² Debates about the proper style of mausolea and visits to graveyards arose in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the monumental tombs of the Ayyubids (who

ruled Egypt, Syria, and other regions of the Middle East in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) and the Mamluks (who ruled Egypt between 1250 and 1517) in Damascus and especially Cairo completely eclipsed—no doubt to the annoyance of many—the mosques and madrasas. Perhaps the need to reconcile religious requirements with the reality of contemporaneous funeral customs led to the decision by Sunni theologians not to broadly stigmatize all funerary architecture as prohibited (*haram*) by Islamic law. Buildings over graves were instead classified as reprehensible (*makruh*), a weaker designation which did not convey a strict prohibition. Al-Shafi'i (767–820), Malik ibn Anas (715–96), and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855), three of the four eponyms of Islamic schools of religious jurisprudence, are all reported to have agreed that building over graves should be categorized only as *makruh* and not as *haram*. The fourth, Abu Hanifa (699–767), is reported to have regarded structures over graves as legal and not reprehensible.²³

The Role of Women

Because of women's substantial exclusion from communal prayers, the practice of *ziyara* represented an attractive form of religious practice to women, as it was both a social event and a spiritual undertaking. Gravesite rituals were and are occasioned by personal life crises, and a person observing them typically asks the deceased holy person for intercession with God on their behalf.²⁴ Although it has often been controversial, the practice of women visiting graves is amply substantiated in Muslim tradition. Among the important Muslim women associated with the cult of the dead is Muhammad's own daughter Fatima, who used to pay regular visits to the grave of Hamza, which was clearly marked by a gravestone. Another example was set by the Prophet's wife 'A'isha. During her funeral, held in 678—which in many ways represented the antithesis of the later Islamic ideal—huge crowds of both men and women came to offer her homage without any protests from the jurists. And a famous hadith related by Umm 'Atiyya and recorded by Bukhari, Ibn Maja, and others—"We were forbidden from following biers, yet it was not enforced"—shows that during the life of the Prophet the praxis was not fully established, and women were not excluded from gravesite ceremonies.

The tradition very early became a source of ideological polarization, however, in relation to women's religious prerogatives. A particularly misogynist campaign against women and their public roles in funerary and grave culture originated in the city of Kufa in the late 7th century and later on became part of canonized hadith collections. Some Kufan traditionalists narrated that the ancestors "used to padlock women indoors" before the men would depart for funerals, because if women attended them, they might be a source of

temptation and heretical innovations and lead the Muslim community astray. It is interesting to compare these Kufan traditions with those originating in Medina, as the latter differed markedly in tone and reflected a relatively sympathetic attitude toward women. However, owing to the influence of Ibn Hanbal and others who endorsed the stricter interpretation, it was the Kufan traditions that succeeded in transforming Muslim funerary norms.²⁵

Ibn Taymiyya and His Times

Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), a Syrian polymath and Hanbalite theologian and jurist, was probably the foremost critic of the heretical practices in Sunni Islam. He also significantly contributed to the legal debate about *ziyara*, helping to define its meaning and function.²⁶ In Muslim scholarship, Ibn Taymiyya is known as a great reformer (*mujaddid*), a destroyer of heretical innovations (*mumit al-bid'a*), and a reviver of the tradition (*muhyi al-sunna*).²⁷ A man of great intellect, enormous erudition, and controversial personality, he is a crucial figure in the development of Sunni Islam, within which his opinions to a large extent have constituted, though not exclusively, Muslim fundamentalist thought. But his prolific writings have also been a source of inspiration for many reformers. The latter drew mainly on his interpretation and conception of who were the first Orthodox Muslims, with respect to what they believed, how they believed, and how they conducted themselves.

Ibn Taymiyya lived in times that saw a huge proliferation of pilgrimage sites and shrines, inhabited among others by Muslim scholars and Sufis. During his lifetime he also witnessed a golden age of Sufism, when Sufis occupied positions in the state apparatus and some exercised significant influence over political leaders. Moreover, these were times when the numbers of both Christian and Jewish pilgrims from Europe had multiplied as compared with previous centuries—largely owing to the crusaders' conquest of the Holy Land and securing the routes. It is also important to mention that Jews, Christians, and Muslims oftentimes followed the same rituals during grave visitations and sometimes even venerated the same places. These were also times when Abbasid influence was long gone, and the power vacuum was filled by various local dynasties that undertook to restore many shrines and considered devotional culture an effective means of establishing their presence and legacy. Ibn Taymiyya spent a substantial part of his life in Damascus and Cairo, the latter being the capital city of the Mamluk state, of which Syria (*al-Sham*) was a part. In his lifetime Cairo achieved its widest expansion to date, and community activities in the growing graveyards were extensive.

The role of the dead in the Islamic society of this age was important in many respects. Notably, funeral culture was a significant means of attaining legitimacy. The Fatimids (who ruled over varying areas of Egypt and the Maghrib in 909–1171), for instance, buried their dead inside Cairo, but they also built a congregational mosque at al-Qarafa cemetery (which is now known as the City of the Dead) and built a multifunctional funerary and residential complex where they re-interred their dead brought with them from the Maghrib. The subsequent dynasty of Ayyubids followed the same tradition. Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (1138–93) built a madrasa in the eastern part of the cemetery around the tomb of al-Shafi‘i, a founder of the madhhab to which the Ayyubids adhered. Ayyubid sultan al-Kamil (1180–1238) built a dynastic tomb for the Ayyubids above al-Shafi‘i’s grave, which was previously venerated by the Shiite Fatimids on account of the imam’s lineage going back to the Prophet Muhammad.²⁸

As a reaction to the cults and practices of the Shiite Islam of the previous ruling dynasties (Buyids, Fatimids), the issue of grave visitation—involving a variety of religious practices, including pilgrimage, grave veneration, asking the dead for intercession and help, and some fetishist practices—emerged as a critical one in Sunni Islam. The question of visiting the grave of the Prophet, as well as the graves of other prophets and pious men, was of utmost importance. (The issue of visiting private graves was discussed as well, although it was of considerably less significance.) Although the first concerted opposition to *ziyarat al-qubur* had appeared in ninth-century Iraq, and again arose in eleventh-century Syria, the most serious opposition crystallized in the circles of Hanbalite scholars. However, it was not Ibn Hanbal himself who was concerned with the practice of *ziyara*, but subsequent generations of his disciples.

One of the first Hanbalite condemnations came from Ibn ‘Aqil (1039–1119). Ibn ‘Aqil did not completely reject grave visitation; he simply insisted that it should be done in accordance with Sunni tradition, wherein certain traditions regarding *ziyara* existed. He specifically criticized going on journeys toward graves; gatherings in the shrines at nighttime, because “beardless youths and women [would mix] together with wanton men”; and the exaltation of graves and their reverential treatment—for example, by kindling fires, kissing the tombs, and perfuming them.²⁹ Praying at a grave, or facing toward a grave in prayer, was considered by strict believers to constitute idolatry. As such, it violated the principle of the unicity of God (*tawhid*). In later times, the Hanbalite Ibn Qudama al-Maqdisi (d. 1223) formulated that attitude in the following manner: “The special treatment of graves by means of praying by

them is similar to the veneration of idols (*asnam*) by prostrating (*sujud*) oneself before them and wishing to draw near to them.”³⁰

Ibn Taymiyya’s Criticism and Its Reception

Ibn Taymiyya criticized elaborate funeral architecture, including the construction of distinctive monuments over graves, as contradictory to the simple way of the *salaf*.³¹ According to Ibn Taymiyya’s famous disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292–1350), who did much to spread the ideas of his teacher, the *salaf* were aware of the human temptation (*fitna*) to venerate “things elevated above the ground” (*nasab*, pl. *ansab*), be they stones, trees, idols, or graves.³² Both Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim considered grave veneration to be a source of idolatry (*asl al-asnam*). But not only idolatry itself was considered to constitute “polytheism”—or, more precisely, “associating things with God” (*shirk*); this accusation took in also Christianity and Judaism. In his famous *Book of the Necessity of the Straight Path in Opposing the People of Hell* (*Iqtida al-sirat al-mustaqim li-mukhalafat ahab al-jahim*), Ibn Taymiyya warns the community of believers against imitating Christians and Jews in their feasts and habits. He states that even outer imitation can change the believer and make him one of the other. Inner imitation is even worse. He criticizes Christianity for its icons and sculptures, mediating role of its clergy, as well as, the cult of saints (*awliya’*) and their relics (*athar*).

In Christianity, the saints were believed to possess enormous power, and through their relics the living could seek the patronage and assistance of the dead. While the relics were important across the medieval Christian East, the veneration of icons flourished in Byzantine lands in particular. Some Christians believed that saints were capable of performing miracles with divine assistance, and so could cure the sick, counter famine, quell fires, and defeat enemies. As residents of the divine court, they could put in a good word with God on behalf of the living in order to win divine favor for them.³³ It was this aspect of his religion that Ibn Taymiyya attacked.

As far as Islam itself, Ibn Taymiyya refuted Shiite practices and some practices of the Sunni Sufis, which existed within the domain of orthodox Islam and mingled with it. In Ibn Taymiyya’s thought, all these innovative practices and cults were associated with heretical understandings of an otherwise legal conception of grave visitation. Ibn Taymiyya’s animosity to heretical practices regarding *ziyara* must be viewed in the context of his dichotomic conception of God’s unicity (*tawhid*): *tawhid al-rububiya* and *tawhid al-‘ubudiya* (also *tawhid al-uluhiya*). The first of these terms, to put it simply, expresses the idea of the creation of all things by God. According to Ibn Taymiyya, all Muslim sects

share a belief in this self-evident dogma. For this reason, with the exception of the heretical opinions of philosophers, *tawhid al-rububiya* represented no threat to the Muslim community. The latter concept, which stems from the first, means rendering all worship exclusively to God. God, as the only creator, possesses the right to be worshiped by both humankind and jinn. To associate other things with God entails a flagrant violation of this principle.

Ibn Taymiyya advocated the opinions of a small intellectual elite, of which he was a leading figure. He and his adherents, most notably Ibn al-Qayyim, criticized the well-established practices of Sunni Islam and its religious institutions. In this context it must be pointed out that neither Ibn Taymiyya nor his disciples attacked Sufism as such. They were themselves members of the famous Sufi order of Qadiriya.³⁴ However, they criticized the ideas of pantheistic Sufism (*al-ittihadiya*) advanced by Ibn ‘Arabi as well as the innovative practices of Sufi orders—encompassing, for example, dancing and singing (*sama’*) in graveyards. Although Ibn Taymiyya was a protagonist of religious pragmatism and political utilitarianism, in theology, specifically with respect to *tawhid*, he held an uncompromising position, even if he was sometimes forced to cautiously formulate his opinions or even modify them in order to protect his life.³⁵

Ibn Taymiyya was a very controversial figure of complicated character, and his arrogance, along with his hostility to his adversaries, made him many influential enemies. He spent the majority of his life in prison, defending his positions and attacking both theologians and philosophers. His sympathizers, often refer to his “hardship” or “trial” by the Arabic term *mihna*, referring to the similar *mihna* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. According to the Sunni interpretation, Ibn Hanbal’s trials are connected with his defense of the dogma that the Qur’an is eternal and uncreated, and his adamant refusal of heresies. Ibn Taymiyya’s last *mihna* occurred in 1326: He was arrested, imprisoned without trial, and by a decree of the sultan, which was read out in the Umayyad Mosque, deprived of the right to issue legal opinions (*ifta’*). The reason for this was the discovery of Ibn Taymiyya’s fatwa on grave visitation, authored by him seventeen years earlier and exploited by Ibn Taymiyya’s adversaries. This event was connected with yet another incident. After Ibn al-Qayyim, in full accordance with his master’s teaching, had preached in Jerusalem about the intercession of the prophets and denied that one could set out to visit the Prophet’s grave without first going to the Prophet’s mosque, a group of Ibn Taymiyya’s sympathizers was arrested. Ibn al-Qayyim, after he had been beaten and paraded on a donkey, was imprisoned along with Ibn Taymiyya.³⁶

Distinctions within *Ziyara*

As a jurist, Ibn Taymiyya distinguishes between two kinds of *ziyara*: long-distance journeys (*safar*, *shadd al-rihal*, *imta' al-rihal*), undertaken with the object of paying a visit to graves or other religious places, and *ziyara* itself. With respect to the first, he relies primarily on the following hadith: “The saddles shall not be fastened except for the three mosques: al-Haram Mosque, my mosque [the Prophet’s mosque in Medina], and al-Aqsa Mosque.”³⁷ Ibn Taymiyya interpreted this hadith to mean that it is prohibited to undertake a journey for religious purposes to places other than those indicated.³⁸ Ibn Taymiyya viewed these journeys, which were very popular in his days, as acts of *kufr* and *shirk*—in particular because he regarded them to be illegal substitutes for the required annual pilgrimage to Ka’ba.

As for the reference to the al-Aqsa Mosque, Ibn Taymiyya thought it denoted all mosques built by the prophet Sulayman.³⁹ It is therefore permissible and recommended (*mustahabb*) to travel to these mosques in order to perform legal worship, including ritual prayer (*al-salat*), invocational prayer (*al-du’a*), remembrance of God’s name (*al-dhikr*), reading of the Qur’an (*qira’at al-qur’an*), and spiritual retreat (*al-i’tikaf*)⁴⁰—in other words, worship of the kind practiced in the Prophet’s Mosque and other mosques, with the exception of the al-Haram Mosque in Mecca. Here, some additional worship practices are legal, namely circumambulating the Ka’ba (*tawaf fi al-ka’ba*), touching of the Yemenite corners of the Ka’ba (that is, the ones facing Yemen: *istilam al-ruknayn al-yamaniyayn*), and kissing the Black Stone (*taqbil al-hajar al-aswad*).⁴¹ The most criticized practice in this context is equating the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat al-Sakhra*) with the al-Haram Mosque in Mecca. Relying on hadiths, Ibn Taymiyya also wrote that the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem does not belong to the Haram (sacred) mosques in Mecca and Medina. Those who pray facing the Rock instead of the Ka’ba are unbelievers, and if they do not repent they are to be killed.⁴²

Ziyara for Ibn Taymiyya represented not only a legal but also a semantic issue.⁴³ If he was a fierce critic of *ziyara*, it was only the heretical and innovative *ziyara* that he pronounced illegal; he makes a distinction between heretical *ziyara* (*ziyara bid’iyya*) and legal *ziyara* (*ziyara shar’iyya*, *ziyara mashru’a*). According to him, *ziyara* is a legal term (*ism shar’i*), but its original meaning was changed so that it came to denote heretical practices.⁴⁴ For that reason, he argues, Imam Malik disliked saying “I visited the Prophet’s grave” (*zurtu qabr al-nabi*), because people understood it in the prohibited way. Ibn al-Qayyim makes a similar distinction. He calls legal *ziyara* “grave visitation of the unitarians” (*ziyarat al-muwahhidin li’l-*

qubur), and he sees in it an act of charity (*ihsan*) both to the dead and to the visitor himself, for the latter is rewarded by God. As for illegal visitation, Ibn al-Qayyim terms it “visitation of polytheists” (*ziyarat al-mushrikin*), and asserts that it has its origins in idolatry.⁴⁵

Ibn Taymiyya defines legal visitation in the following way: to greet the dead and petition for them in the manner of the prayer for the dead (*salat ‘ala al-janaza*), as the Prophet instructed his companions when they were visiting graves. God recompenses the living for praying on behalf of a dead believer, as long as he is not a hypocrite (*munafiq*) or an unbeliever (*kafir*).⁴⁶ In this legally permissible act of *ziyara* the living does not have any need for the dead, nor does he make a direct request of the dead person (*mas’ala*) or seek intercession (*tawassul*) on his own behalf. But God has mercy upon the dead as a result of the prayer of the living for the dead and his act of charity toward the dead, and God recompenses the living for his act.⁴⁷

The point is that legal visitation is useful for the dead on account of the charitable behavior of the living, and it is useful for the living too, but only because God might reward them. Ibn Taymiyya strongly rejects all kinds of mediation, intercession, and seeking help through the dead. He says that in the visitation of the dead is *memento mori* (*i’tibar, ‘ibra*). Accordingly the Prophet abrogated his first ban regarding grave visitation. “I was prohibiting you from grave visitation, but now you can visit them, because it will remind you of the Afterworld.”⁴⁸ It is also possible to visit the graves of unbelievers—because the Prophet himself visited his mother’s grave, crying so much that it made bystanders cry, too. The Prophet said: “I asked my Lord for permission to request forgiveness for her, but He did not allow me that. So I asked him for permission to visit her, and he gave it to me. So visit graves, because they remind you of death.”⁴⁹

The Prophet’s Grave, Intercession, and the Leveling of Graves

Ibn Taymiyya performed the hajj to Mecca and Medina in November 1292 and was back in Damascus in February 1293, bringing with him the subject for his treatise on rituals of the Pilgrimage (*manasik al-hajj*), in which he denounced certain heresies.⁵⁰ He was mainly concerned with the fact that Muhammad’s grave had been incorporated into his mosque, although the Prophet specifically warned against making his grave into a place of “frequent congregation and devotions” (*‘id*) and “a worshiped idol.”⁵¹

Ibn Taymiyya argues that as long as the Prophet’s room (*al-hujra al-nabawiya*) had been separated from the mosque—that is, until the time of al-Walid ibn

‘Abd al-Malik—nobody had entered it for ritual prayer, rubbing (*tamassuh*), or invocational prayer; instead, believers performed worship in the mosque.⁵² When the salaf belonging to companions (*sahaba*) and followers (*tabi’un*) greeted the Prophet and wanted to pray (*al-du‘a*) they faced the *qibla* (direction to which Muslims turn to pray), not the grave—because invocational prayer is, according to one hadith, the essence of devotion (*al-du‘a mukhkh al-‘ibada*) and as such belongs exclusively to God. Similarly with regard to standing (*al-wuquf*) while greeting the Prophet, Abu Hanifa said that here too the *qibla* is to be faced, not the grave—although the majority of imams argued that it is the grave that is to be faced in this case. But nobody said that *qibla* is to be faced during invocational prayer.⁵³ And this is out of protection of God’s unicity, because treating graves as places of worship is akin to “associating [things] with God.” All imams agreed that the grave is not to be rubbed nor kissed.⁵⁴

The same pious deeds that are performed in the Prophet’s room—praying (*al-salat*), greetings (*salam alayhi*), praising (*thana*), paying respect (*ikram*), and mentioning the Prophet’s merits and good qualities (*dhikr mahasin wa fada’il*)—can be performed in other mosques, too. The Prophet said: “Do not turn my abode into a place of visitation, for your prayers reach me wherever you are.”⁵⁵ Of prominent importance in this context are two traditions: “May Allah curse the Jews and Christians who took the graves of their prophets as places of prayer” and “Verily, those before you took graves as places of prayer, so do not take graves as mosques, as I forbade you that.” Ibn Taymiyya prohibits traveling exclusively for the purpose of visiting the Prophet’s grave, but it is customary (*sunna*) to visit it after praying in his mosque, because it was the way of the *sahaba*. To support his arguments, Ibn Taymiyya invokes the aforementioned hadith about “setting out for journeys.” After visiting the Prophet’s grave in a legal way it is also desirable (*mustahabb*) to visit the graves of the martyrs of the battle of Uhud and to pray in the al-Quba’ Mosque, the first mosque built by the Prophet.

Ibn Taymiyya criticizes hadiths encouraging visitation of the Prophet’s grave, pronouncing them all forgeries (*mawdu‘*) and lies (*kidhb*). According to him, most famous are “He who performs the pilgrimage and does not visit me, has shunned me” and “Who visited my grave must ask me for intercession.” Ibn Taymiyya notes that although some of these hadiths are part of Daraqutni’s collection, they are not included in the main hadith collections of Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, and Nasa’i, nor are they part of the *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal. He observes that with regard to visiting the Prophet’s grave, *ulama* rely only upon hadiths according to which the Prophet must be greeted (*al-salam wa al-salat alayhi*).⁵⁶ As for the contents of hadiths encouraging visitation, they contradict the principle of *tawhid al-uluhiya*.

Ibn Taymiyya strongly condemned the practice of asking the deceased Prophet—and other prophets and *salihun*, dead or alive—to intermeditate (*shafa'a*) between a believer and God. This, as well as visiting the Prophet, was legal when Muhammad was alive. But the religious customs that Ibn Taymiyya witnessed resembled far too much the practices of Christianity, he believed, in terms of the mediating role of Jesus and the Church. Ibn Taymiyya also dealt with the particular question of prayer (*du'a'*) at the Prophet's grave. He emphasizes that there is no need to go to his grave in such a case because prayer can reach the Prophet from any place. The intention of *du'a'* is asking God's mercy for the Prophet, not asking the Prophet himself for help or intercession (*shafa'a*). While he strongly condemned this specific kind of *shafa'a* since he considered it to constitute *shirk* and be a violation of *tawhid*, he did not reject *shafa'a* as such: He believed in mediation during the Prophet's lifetime, as well as in eschatological Prophetic mediation on the Day of Resurrection. This mediation is possible only with God's permission, as stated in the Qur'an, however, it is valid only for those who do not associate anything with God (*ahl al-tawhid*).⁵⁷

Ibn Taymiyya argues that the prohibition against treating graves as places of prayer is not based only on the impurity of such places;⁵⁸ the true reason lies in concern over the temptation of worshiping the dead (*khawf al-fitna bi al-qabr*). This was the opinion of Imam al-Shafi'i and other *salaf*, who commanded leveling these graves (*taswiyat al-qubur*) and effacing what might arouse the temptation (*ta'fiyat ma yatafattan bihi minha*). Ibn Taymiyya offered the example of Daniel's grave, which the second caliph 'Umar had effaced because his governor, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, informed him in a letter that people were asking the prophet for rain. 'Umar reportedly ordered Abu Musa to dig up thirty graves in the daylight and bury the prophet's corpse, unmarked, in one of them in the night.⁵⁹ Ibn al-Qayyim holds a similar position. According to him, the Prophet ordered his followers to destroy elevated graves (*al-qubur al-mushrif*),⁶⁰ on the grounds that the temptation of elevated graves (*fitnat ansab al-qubur*) is the temptation of idolatry.⁶¹ The Prophet also prohibited whitening (*tajsis*, with gypsum) graves, writing (*kitaba*) on them (including the writing of Qur'anic verses), and making memorial plaques (*alwah*), as well as putting on graves anything but dirt.⁶² It is noteworthy in this connection that the idea that graves are unclean places is also found in the New Testament: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous" (Matthew 23:27–29).

In his struggle to reform Sunni Islam, Ibn Taymiyya dared to deal with very problematic questions in a way that was not always welcomed, because he represented the Islam of an intellectual elite, which engaged with the realm of ideas more than it reflected the reality of popular beliefs and practices. As a result, Ibn Taymiyya left an uneasy legacy for his colleagues and for subsequent generations of ulama of the Mamluk era. More than two centuries after his death, learned Muslim scholars like al-Suyuti (1445–1505) and al-Sakhawi (1428–97) still found it necessary to engage Ibn Taymiyya’s ghost and refute his arguments.⁶³

Al-Dhahabi, who is believed to be a reliable source, describes Ibn Taymiyya’s funeral: “It was estimated that some sixty thousand people were there, and fifteen thousand women in the street [who] wept and grieved for him all the more. He was buried in the Sufi cemetery beside his brother People paid visits to his grave, and he was seen in a number of good dreams.”⁶⁴ Some authors point to Ibn Taymiyya’s being buried in the Sufi cemetery as a seeming paradox. George Makdisi notes with reference to this alleged paradox, however, that some writers, under the delusion that Ibn Taymiyya was the sworn enemy of Sufism, have wanted to see in this fact an ironic twist of fate. But it was, of course, nothing of the kind; for there was nothing more natural for Ibn Taymiyya, a Sufi, than that he should be buried among Sufis.⁶⁵ Moreover, the fact that Ibn Taymiyya had his own cenotaph was not criticized even by his disciples. Yet it is incongruous not only with his own ideas, but also with the views adopted in a more simplistic way by the current Salafi sheikhs—however humble his grave in Damascus may appear.⁶⁶

Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab and His Legacy

Some of the principles and ideas that inspired Ibn Taymiyya, and whose effect was felt only among a relatively small intellectual circle of his followers, reappeared victoriously some four centuries later in the Wahhabi movement, which took them well beyond the positions of Ibn Taymiyya. This movement destroyed, or attempted to destroy, most of the monuments that symbolized the history of the Arabian Peninsula. Yet before that, in October 1711, the same principles caused a short-lived religious riot—known as the “pre-Wahhabi *fitna*”—among mostly illiterate Turkish soldiers in Egypt, led by a Turkish student of religion. Fundamentalist fervor, inspired by Ibn Taymiyya’s teachings, made them attack Sufi institutions, rituals, and beliefs. Among other things, they opposed the practice of burning candles and oil lamps at the graves of saints and kissing their thresholds, and labeled those pursuing

such practices unbelievers. The movement also obliged Muslims to destroy the domes that had been built over graves.⁶⁷

In eighteenth-century Najd, in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, a new movement emerged that strictly opposed folk practices and rules that differed from the tradition and from the Qur'an, and also combated the cult venerating pious men and ancestors who were believed to intercede on behalf of the living. At this time the worship of stones and sacred trees had become quite common, along with the veneration of the graves of saints: People would either make requests directly to the saint or seek their intercession with God. Some scholars in these times even associated these customs with the pagan practices that were prevalent in the age of *jahiliyya*, before Islam.⁶⁸

One of the first acts of Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92), the founding father of the movement and its religious leader, was thus to demolish the graves associated with “innovative” rituals. The destruction of a grave was one of three acts—the other two being cutting down a sacred tree and stoning an adulteress—that came to symbolize the nature of the Wahhabi movement. The grave in Wadi Hanifa destroyed by Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab himself reputedly belonged to Zayd ibn al-Khattab, brother of the second caliph 'Umar. It was a famous site of veneration, visited by many people who offered prayers to Zayd; but it was far from the only such place of visitation: Among other famous graves were those of the Prophet's wives Khadija and Maimuna bint al-Harith, where men mingled freely together with women. In Najd, people sought intercession with God at the grave of a blind hermit who was believed to be blessed. Near Dir'iyā there was a cave on a hill that was believed to belong to a young girl with similar spiritual power.

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab regarded the question of grave visitation to be so important that he devoted many pages of his treatises to its discussion. The omnipresent theme of his doctrine is rendering worship exclusively to God. In *tawhid*, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab puts large emphasis on worship (*tawhid al-ubudiya*), in a similar fashion to Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab condemned all kinds of *shirk* and opines that exaggeration in venerating human beings, dead or alive, is equal to idolatry. He claims that *shirk* has many forms like spiritual retreat (*i'tikaf*) at the graves of famous people such as prophets, sahāba, or saints; undertaking long-distance journeys because of *ziyara* in order to dwell at a pious man's grave and asking him or God for something.⁶⁹

He also asserts that the mere profession of creationism (*tawhid al-rububiya*)—a belief shared by the Abrahamic religions, that God is a creator and sovereign master of all things—does not make one who associates things with God

(*mushrik*) a Muslim. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab considered the worship of idols a capital sin and the most flagrant kind of associating things with God (*al-shirk al-akbar*). With regard to Judaism and Christianity, he sees *shirk* in the mediatory role of angels, Jesus and ‘Uzayr.⁷⁰ In Islam, it is mainly an exaggeration in venerating prophets and pious men: “One man goes to the grave of a prophet; another man to the grave of a companion [of the Prophet], such as Zubayr or Talha; another to the grave of a venerable man. . . . And the worship of idols is *shirk*, which puts a man outside of Islam.”⁷¹

Relying mainly on hadiths and the Qur’an, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s most famous work, *The Book of God’s Unicity (Kitab al-tawhid)*, describes a variety of *shirk* practices, such as occultism, the cult of the righteous (*salih*), intercession, oaths calling on other than God himself, sacrifices or invocational prayers to other than God, and asking other than Him for help. Important things about graves are remarked on in a chapter entitled “About the Condemnation of One Who Worships Allah at the Grave of a Righteous Man, and What if He Worships [the Dead] Himself.”⁷² Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab starts by quoting a hadith: “Umm Salama told the messenger of Allah about a church she had seen in Abyssinia in which there were pictures. The Prophet said: ‘Those people, when a righteous member of their community or a pious slave dies, they build a mosque over his grave and paint images thereon; they are for God wicked people.’ They combine two kinds of *fitna*: the *fitna* of graves and the *fitna* of images.” He then continues with another hadith: “When the messenger of Allah was close to death, he . . . said: ‘May Allah curse the Jews and Christians who make the graves of their prophets into places of worship; do not imitate them.’” From this hadith Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab derives the prohibition of building places of worship over graves, because that would mean glorification of their inhabitants, which would amount to an act of worship to other than Allah.

The next chapter is entitled “About Exaggeration in the Graves of the Righteous, and How They Become Idols Worshipped besides Allah.” At the end of this chapter, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab quotes the aforementioned hadith about God’s curse of women who visit graves. This hadith later served as the basis for some of today’s Salafi *ulama* completely prohibiting women from *ziyara*. One of the last chapters, which deals with the question of intercession, is entitled “Allah May Not Be Asked to Intercede with His Creatures” and is introduced by the following hadith: “A Bedouin came to the Prophet and said: ‘Oh, messenger of Allah! The people are exhausted, families are starving, and wealth has perished, so pray to your Lord for rain, and we will seek Allah’s intercession upon you and yours upon Allah.’ The prophet said: ‘Allah is exalted! Allah is exalted!’ He continued to say so until the effect of it was apparent in the faces of his companions. Then he said: ‘Woe to you! Do you not know who Allah is?

Allah's nature is far greater than that, and there is no intercession of Allah upon anyone!"

Yet, to make things even more complicated, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab commented on the issue of *ziyara* in his other writings in a rather different way, and in direct opposition to his opinions as stated in the *Kitab al-tawhid*. In his letters to various Muslim leaders and scholars, he made it clear that he was never against visits to the grave of the Prophet. In one letter, for instance, he complains that people accuse him of things that he has never said, such as his supposed claim "that . . . if I could destroy the dome [of the mosque] of the Prophet I would destroy it, . . . and that I forbid visits to the Prophet's tomb, and to those of one's parents and others. . . . My answer to these matters is: Glory be to Allah, this is a grave slander!"⁷³

Whichever message Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab meant to deliver, in the first decade of the nineteenth century, northern Arabians imbued with his fundamentalist ideas led many campaigns in the Arabian Peninsula. In 1801, Wahhabis ravaged the Iraqi cities of Karbala and later Basra, killing their inhabitants and destroying shrines, including al-Husayn's mausoleum. The booty from these raids enabled the Wahhabis to begin a conquest of the western part of the Arabian Peninsula. In 1803 they seized Mecca and Medina and smashed many of their graves and sacred places, as well as those in other places, including Hijaz and Hadramawt. Wahhabis focused their destruction of tombs on these that were domed, because each domed structure marked the burial place of a saint deemed to have miraculous powers. As mentioned by John Lewis Burckhardt, during the siege of Medina, considerable portions of its treasures, more particularly all the golden vessels, were seized by the chiefs of the town, ostensibly for the purpose of distributing them among the poor, but they instead divided them among themselves. When Ibn Saud took the town, he entered the Prophet's tomb himself, penetrated behind the curtain, and seized every valuable thing he found; he sold some to the Sharif of Mecca, and the rest he carried with him to his hometown of Dir'iyah.⁷⁴ The only shrine that remained intact was the Prophet's mosque; its destruction would probably have been far too dangerous, and might potentially have aroused the entire Islamic world.

Muhammad al-Shawkani

Muhammad al-Shawkani (1759–1839) was a Yemeni jurisprudent and a contemporary of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab; but it is a common misreading to associate al-Shawkani's teachings with those of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Al-Shawkani first welcomed some of the Wahhabis' traditionalist message that corresponded with his own views. He was also impressed with the works of

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, and after his death praised him in a poem. The Yemenis soon withdrew their support from the Wahhabis, however, after hearing that the latter were promoting some indiscriminate acts, such as excommunication of fellow Muslims. Yemeni traditionalists were not inspired by the ideas of the Wahhabis; in fact, they reckoned the Wahhabis to be inferior to them in terms of scholarship and accused them of extremism. Al-Shawkani also believed that the practice of blindly following someone else’s opinion without understanding or even knowing the textual proof underpinning it was strictly prohibited.⁷⁵

The Yemeni scholars, who felt threatened both ideologically and militarily by the Wahhabis, offered their own answer to the contentious issue of grave visitation. Their principal text, in the form of a fatwa, was written by al-Shawkani in 1801 under the title *The Book of Well-Strung Pearls Rendering the Word on God’s Unicity Exclusively to Him* (*Kitab al-durr al-nadid fi ikhlas kalimat al-tawhid*). The book is dominated by the same themes as Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s *Kitab al-tawhid*: namely, *tawhid* and *shirk*. Al-Shawkani also used arguments similar to those of the early Wahhabis; but unlike them, he did not condemn the visitation of graves. In that regard, al-Shawkani’s views are much closer to, and were influenced by, those of Ibn Taymiyya and are not as simplistic as those of the Wahhabis.⁷⁶

Although al-Shawkani supported the destruction of graves if venerators of dead saints gathered around them and worshiped them, he criticized Wahhabis for calling the visitors of graves unbelievers. Al-Shawkani was mainly concerned with the possibility that grave visitation could become institutionalized and deceive ordinary people into believing that the dead person could fulfill their needs. Such beliefs, and the practices accompanying them, would thus detract from God’s unicity. At the end of his fatwa, however, al-Shawkani allows visitation of graves if it serves mainly to enable prayer to God for the soul of the dead, and as long as a bad example is not set for the ignorant masses.⁷⁷ In his other writings, al-Shawkani stresses that building a dome over a grave is *bid’a*.⁷⁸ He also emphasizes that leveling graves that exceed the legal height is an imperative duty (*wajiba mutahattima*).

European Travelers

European travelers to Mecca and Medina in the times when Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s followers took control over these cities left us valuable descriptions of the ceremony of visitation at the Prophet’s grave. Their records clearly prove that even the zeal of the Wahhabis was not able to eradicate some “un-Islamic” customs. Many visitors continued to prostrate themselves in front of Muhammad’s grave, rubbing their cheeks with the dust. Johann Ludwig

Burckhardt (1784–1817), a Swiss traveler and Orientalist who visited Mecca and Medina in 1814–15, recorded an interesting description of some of these ceremonies. Among other things, he mentions that the visitors invoked their own intercession in heaven, and distinctly mentioned the names of all those of their relatives and friends whom they wished to include in their prayers.⁷⁹ In a description of visitations of Hamza's grave, he also observes that Hamza and his companions are invoked to intercede with God in order to obtain for the pilgrim and all of his family faith, health, wealth, and the utter destruction of all their enemies.⁸⁰ Burckhardt also noticed that in Medina—though this was not the case in Mecca—it was thought very indecorous for women to enter the mosque, and that those women who came from foreign parts visited graves during the night, after the last prayers, while local women hardly ever ventured to enter the mosque.⁸¹ And he remarks how during the time of the Wahhabis nobody dared to visit other holy places in the vicinity of Mecca without exposing himself to their hostility.⁸²

Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821–90), who in 1853 set off on the hajj, reports that during visitation of the Prophet's grave, men should not kiss it, touch it with the hand, press the bosom against it, or rub the face with dust collected near the sepulcher. He also writes that those who prostrate themselves before it—as was the habit of many pilgrims, especially from India—are held to be guilty of deadly sin.⁸³ Burton also mentions the usual prayers recited at the Prophet's grave, citing, among others, the following passage: “We thy friends, O Prophet of Allah, appear before thee . . . longing to . . . obtain the blessings of thine intercession, for our sins have broken our backs, and thou intercedest with the Healer. . . . O Prophet of Allah, intercession! Intercession! Intercession!” Burton himself concluded how this had to be offensive to the Wahhabis, who consider it blasphemy to assert that a mere man—even Muhammad—can stand between God and a believer.⁸⁴

Eldon Rutter was an English traveler, who performed his first hajj in 1925 and thus had the opportunity to witness the new order imposed under the political auspices of Ibn Sa'ud, founder of the modern Saudi Arabia. Rutter observed that Wahhabis, as well as other puritans, were largely influenced by the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, and that it was through reading his books that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab felt impelled to begin his campaign. (This was information that Rutter heard on many occasions from various learned sheikhs.)⁸⁵ Rutter also mentions one of his companions, who committed a *bid'a* by saying at the Prophet's grave, “We beg that thou wilt intercede for us.”⁸⁶ And he describes a raised platform, north of Fatima's enclosure, where several of the eunuchs would usually sit and invite pilgrims of distinction to join them and perform their prayers there. The advantage of the platform lay in its unique position:

When the worshiper was stationed there and faced Mecca for his prayers, he also faced the Prophet's grave.⁸⁷

The Al-Baqi' Cemetery

In the early history of Islam, the Prophet's grave was not the only object of pious visitations in the vicinity of Medina. Among other celebrated, and until today also controversial, destinations was the oldest cemetery in Medina, called Baqi' al-Gharqad ("the field of thorny trees," also called Jannat al-Baqi' or simply al-Baqi'). In Saudi Arabia this site is among the most venerated by the Shiites.⁸⁸ Muhammad himself used to visit this cemetery on a regular basis and greet the dead.⁸⁹ The first companion buried in the al-Baqi' cemetery was 'Uthman ibn Maz'un, who died in 624 during the Battle of Badr. Muhammad is said to have buried his friend himself, placing two rocks over the grave to clearly mark it. (In the second half of the seventh century, Marwan I, who governed Medina, ordered the elimination of the gravestone marking Ibn Maz'un's burial site.) Al-Baqi' was also the place of final rest for many important figures of Islamic history—the third caliph 'Uthman ibn 'Affan⁹⁰ and Imam of Medina Malik ibn Anas being the most famous. Many of the Prophet's relatives were also buried there: his infant son Ibrahim and grandson Hasan, several of his wives, his uncle 'Abd al-Muttalib and aunt Safiyya, and many others. The graves of the most famous dead had grand cupolas and domes built over them. As John Lewis Burckhardt observes: "Indeed so rich is Medina in the remains of great saints that they have almost lost their individual importance, while the relics of one of the persons just mentioned would be sufficient to render celebrated any other Moslim town."⁹¹

The domes and mausolea of the cemetery were largely destroyed by the early wave of Wahhabi zealots in 1806, only to be restored in splendid aesthetic style by the Ottoman sultans and destroyed once again in 1925 by Ibn Sa'ud, along with the graves of the holy personalities in Mecca. The splendor of the al-Baqi' cemetery in medieval times was documented, for example, by two famous Muslim travelers, Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217) and Ibn Battuta (b. 1304), who described the cemetery with its elevated domes and shrines. Yet, several centuries later, John Lewis Burckhardt wrote about the cemetery that "considering the sanctity of the persons whose bodies it contains, it is a very mean place, and perhaps the most dirty and miserable burial-ground in any eastern town of the size of Medina. It does not contain a single good tomb, nor even any large inscribed blocks of stone covering tombs, but instead, mere rude heaps of earth." Yet it is fair to add that Burckhardt himself acknowledged that although Wahhabis were accused of having defaced the tombs, they would not have annihilated every modest tomb built there. Instead, he concludes that the

miserable state of this cemetery must have existed previously, and attributes it “to the niggardly minds of the towns-people, who are little disposed to incur any expense in honouring the remains of their celebrated countrymen.”⁹²

Similar remarks about the miserable state of the cemetery were also made by Rutter, who visited it a century later. Rutter describes a sight resembling a town which had been razed to the ground or demolished by an earthquake. All over the cemetery nothing was to be seen except little indefinite mounds of soil and stones, along with broken rubble of bricks. All of the great white domes that had formerly marked the graves of Muhammad’s relatives and successors had been demolished. Completing the scene was a group of devastated Indian pilgrims, led by an old man with a vacant look and tears falling from his eyes in a ceaseless stream.⁹³

Visiting Graves and Its Implications for Islam: What Is the Connection?

Islamic history has seen many unsuccessful attempts by some religious authorities and scholars to eradicate all traces of a possible cult of the dead from Islamic rites. Their main goal with respect to certain funeral practices was to clearly differentiate Islamic rituals from those of other monotheistic religions. It is important to note that these attempts—if we are to believe in the authenticity of the Sunni tradition—were already being made in the early days of Islam. Muhammad himself feared that Muslims might imitate Christians and Jews in venerating the dead. As a result of traditionalist opposition to any religious practices that were not distinctly established by Muhammad, a wide gap soon arose between the traditionalists’ high ideals of “pure” morality and faith unaffected by other religious traditions, on the one hand, and the everyday practices of ordinary Muslims, on the other.

The majority of the *ulama* tried to adjust to the popularity of grave visits and condoned them, but a vocal minority of scholars have always claimed that such practices constitute unlawful religious innovation. These *ulama* soon realized that some of the behavior accompanying funerals resembled non-Muslim practice far too much, and that funerary style could help distinguish their religious community and define it in a new way, while deepening the already existing (and, they believed, desirable) boundaries between men and women. Yet, despite these efforts, many Muslims to this day flock on a regular basis to the graves of saints, asking for blessings and intercession. The cult of saints is in fact a widespread phenomenon throughout the Middle East, and grave

visitation, over time, has developed into a firmly established form of pilgrimage, complete with elaborated manuals of rituals, and become an integral part of popular Islam.

A benchmark for the fight against such practices has been clearly established by Ibn Taymiyya—but there has been a long tradition of misinterpreting his ideas. Ibn Taymiyya opposed the cultivation of graves not because it would be a display of superstition, as modern opponents allege. As Engseng Ho pertinently put it: “Superstition is the misunderstanding of true causality; it does not work. Grave visits are to be opposed because they do work. They create powerful dynamics of signification with the potential to create communities based not on revelation but on something autochthonous and incipient in the grave complex.”⁹⁴ Ibn Taymiyya was mainly concerned precisely by this possibility that new religions might originate from the veneration or visitation of graves. And it is important to note that his fear was not unknown to other monotheistic religions. Traditional Judaism, for example, did not encourage excessive grave visitation either. The rabbis were well aware of the possibility that frequent visitation to cemeteries could easily become a way of life rather than foster closure, and that the grave might be transformed to a sort of idol at which the visitor would pray to the dead rather than to God. And this would violate one of the cardinal principles of Judaism: that God is One, and that there are no intermediaries between a Jew and his God.⁹⁵

Nevertheless, the influence of Ibn Taymiyya on the Salafis was extensive. In his attack on the cult of saints, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab incorporated many of Ibn Taymiyya’s characteristic ideas, and by his own example he set a pattern for graves destruction by the Wahhabis across time and space. Yet the zeal with which his followers attacked the practice of grave visitation seems to have exceeded that of Ibn Taymiyya and expressed a far more simplistic view of the issues involved. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab was accused by his contemporaries of simplifying Ibn Taymiyya’s teachings on *tawhid al-uluhiya* and on the question of excommunication. It is well known that even Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s brother Sulayman criticized him for excommunicating Muslims who pray towards al-Ka’ba (*ahl al-qibla*) and compared his teachings—although indirectly in order not to accuse him of disbelief—to those of Kharijites.⁹⁶

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s followers monopolized the interpretation of history, suppressing any ideas or writings that deviated from their own views. On a more ambitious level, Salafi *ulama* strive to shape collective memory and construct an ideology of all-embracing and Islamicized praxis. In Yemen, Salafis have tried to eradicate monuments attesting to Yemeni religious, cultural, and popular history. By destroying the graves of legendary Yemeni

ancestors and saints, they attempt to establish their authority through a monopolized network of institutionalized mosques and Islamic institutes. Their dogma, firmly rooted in the textual traditions of prophetic Sunna and the way of the salaf, collides with the nondogmatic rituals and beliefs of popular Yemeni Islam, including the veneration of its own ancestors, also called salaf. This tendency, which deserves greater study, can be observed also in other parts of the Islamic world under growing Salafi influence. This is not the first case of destruction of memory in history: Consider the deliberate destruction of Jewish cemeteries, particularly in Eastern Europe during and after World War II, and similar measures taken by Communist regimes against historic or religious cemeteries.

In an effort to eradicate some forms of folk Islam, its opponents themselves do not hesitate to resort to the sphere of the supernatural. Thus we encounter a frequently recurring legend that buildings erected over graves would be destroyed by the saint from the grave soon after their completion. A similar legendary destruction was supposedly the fate, for example, of the mausoleum of Ahmad ibn Hanbal in Baghdad, or of the dome of the Algerian saint Ahmad al-Kabir, which became a ruin overnight.⁹⁷ It is noteworthy that the other side in this debate—the partisans of the saints—is usually not completely helpless, as they seek to prove that their tradition is at least equally deeply rooted and not about to be extirpated. After the aforementioned events in Yemen in 1994, for instance, the upholders of the saint, whose sanctuary was destroyed, claimed that the attackers tried to use explosives to smash the shrine, but the explosives had mysteriously failed to detonate. Other popular stories were that those who participated in exhuming the graves died in a subsequent gunfight with government troops, or that the mother of one of the vandals, who was injured and paralyzed, came herself to the saint seeking intercession on behalf of her son.⁹⁸

Contemporary Salafi clerics have turned the issue of grave visitation into a doctrinal question (*qadiya i'tiqadiya*) rather than a mere legal question (*qadiya fiqhiya*). They elaborated their doctrine based on their exclusionary teaching of *shirk* and *kufir*, and by reference to them justified the destruction of graves—and, even more importantly, created a system that made them, as religious experts, indispensable to the society. They also placed strong emphasis on a literal understanding of hadith and the Qur'an. Perhaps it is noteworthy in this context to point out the excessive production of hadith collections, the majority of them being published in Saudi Arabia, because many of the doctrinal teachings of the Salafis are based on them rather on the text of the Qur'an.

As El Fadl, a prominent expert on Islamic jurisprudence and a professor of law at the University of California in Los Angeles, together with many others puts it, contemporary Islam is plagued by a virulently puritan ideology.⁹⁹ Today Salafis, as we tried to show in the case of *ziyara*, unfortunately tend to advocate simplistic belief and to reduce most issues related to religion to an uncomplicated and single answer. Consequently, one of the most sorrowful aspects connected with the spread of their form of faith lies in its position toward, and treatment of, women, and of followers of alternative interpretations of Islam—along with their usurpation of the right to decide who is an upright Muslim and who is not. But as al-Sayyid Muhammad ‘Alawi al-Maliki (1944–2004), the late prominent Saudi scholar from Mecca, justifiably asked: “What is the connection between this question [that is, visiting graves] and idolatry, unbelief, and abandoning the circle of faith, anyway?”¹⁰⁰

Endnotes

- 1 Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes: The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West* (London: Reaktion, 2003), p. 18.
- 2 ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abdallah Ibn Baz, *al-Fatawa al-muhimma* (al-Qahira: Dar al-ghad al-jadid, 2006), p. 473.
- 3 Or, as Abou El Fadl, questioning the right of a monopoly of jurists to speak in God’s name, aptly put it, are Muslims going to need a jurist to go to the toilet? See Khaled M. Abou El Fadl, *And God Knows the Soldiers: The Authoritative and Authoritarian in Islamic Discourse* (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 2001), p. 105.
- 4 See Ibn Rajab, *al-Dhayl ‘ala tabaqat al-hanabila* (al-Riyad: Maktabat al-‘Ubaykan, 2005), vol. 4, p. 518.
- 5 *Salaf* are very rarely called *salafiyya*. See for example Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar‘ ta‘arud al-‘aql wa al-naql*, ed. Rashad Salim (al-Riyad, 1991), vol. 2, p. 8.
- 6 Daniel Howden, “Shame of the House of Saud: Shadows over Mecca,” *The Independent*, April 19, 2006.
- 7 For more details about the destruction, see Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 5–7.
- 8 See, for example, an article by one of the most vocal opponents of the destruction of historical sites: Irfan al-Alawi, “The Destruction of Holy Sites in Mecca and Medina,” *Islamica Magazine*, 15 (2006).
- 9 ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Baz et al., *Al-Bida‘ wa-al-muhdathat wa ma la asla lahu* (al-Riyad: Dar Ibn Jurayma, 1998), p. 294.
- 10 As David Cook aptly points out, the word *fitna* is a most vexatious word to translate. He refers to E. W. Lane’s *Arabic-English Lexicon*, where the word has all the following meanings: “a burning with fire, a melting of (metals) in order to separate or distinguish the bad from the good, a means whereby the condition of *aman* is evinced in respect of good or evil, punishment, chastisement, conflict among people, faction and sedition, discord, dissension, difference of opinions, a misleading, causing to err, seduction, temptation.” In this article the term occurs in several places and we prefer to translate it either “temptation”, or “riot” and “discord”. For apocalyptic meanings, such as “tribulations,” see David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2002).
- 11 Ibn Baz, *al-Fatawa al-muhimma*, p. 112.

- 12 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abdallah Ibn Baz, *al-Tahqiq wa al-idah li-kathir min masa'il al-hajj wa al-'umra wa al-ziyara 'ala daw' al-kitab wa al-sunna* (Makka: Mu'assasat Makka lil-tiba'a wa al-i'lam, 1974), p. 82.
- 13 Ibn 'Uthaymin, *al-Jami' li ahkam fiqh al-sunna* (al-Qahira: Dar al-ghad al-jadid, 2007), p. 50.
- 14 See 'Amr 'Abd al-Mun'im Salim, *Jami' masa'il al-nisa' min fatawa wa-masa'il Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani* (Tanta: Dar al-Diya', 2008), 114. It is also of interest in connection with the events in Yemen what al-Albani says in his book *Tahdhir al-sajid min ittikhadh al-qubur masjid* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1972): He quotes Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziya's opinion that places in which there is disobedience of God and his Prophet must be destroyed (*hadm*) and burnt (*tahriq*) by the imam—that is, the leader of the Muslim community.
- 15 For his opinions, based on his thesis, on the issue of building structures over the Prophet's grave, see Muqbil ibn Hadi al-Wadi'i, *Majmu' fatawa al-Wadi'i* (al-Riyad: S. M. al-Baydani, 2005), vol. 1, pp. 157–232.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 205, p. 217.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 18 Bernard Haykel, "A Zaydi Revival?" *Yemen Update* 36 (1995), pp. 20–21.
- 19 For vivid stories about the funeral practices of pre-Islamic Arabs based on literary sources, see Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* (Chicago: Aldine, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 209–38. For a discussion of the more general issue of the veneration of saints in Islam, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 255–341.
- 20 'Ali ibn 'Abdallah Samhudi, *Kitab wafa' al-wifa' bi akhbar dar al-Mustafa* (Misr: Matba'at al-adab, 1908–9), vol. 1, p. 484.
- 21 K. A. C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1979), vol. 1, p. III. It is important to mention, however, that even today the issue of the function of that *qubba* remains uncertain; it is unclear whether the domed building was constructed as a mausoleum for the caliph al-Muntasir or the imams al-'Askari and al-Hadi, or whether it was completely profane.
- 22 For an interesting debate on this topic, see Thomas Leisten, "Between Orthodoxy and Exegesis: Some Aspects of Attitudes in the Shari'a toward Funerary Architecture," *Muqarnas* 7 (1990), pp. 12–22.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 24 For more on the observance of these women's rituals in the Gulf, see Eleanor Abdella Doumato, *Getting God's Ear: Women, Islam, and Healing in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

- 25 For more details about the shaping of Kufan traditions and Kufan attitudes toward women's role in funerary rites, see Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 127–31.
- 26 For an outstanding study on *ziyara*, see Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyara and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999). See also the second volume of Marco Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), and Niels Henrik Olesen, *Culte des saints et pèlerinages chez Ibn Taymiyya* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1991). A key study on Ibn Taymiyya still remains Henri Laoust's *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taki-d-Din Ahmad b. Taimiya* (Cairo: l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1939).
- 27 In some Western traditions, "Orthodox" and "reformer" may be seen as at odds. But in the eyes of Salafis it goes hand in hand, as the Arabic word *tajdid* (renewal) implies a return to Islam as practiced and professed by the Prophet, sahaba, and other salaf. Ibn Taymiyya defines the Orthodoxy, the only Saved Sect, as follows: "Those who adhered to the pure Islam, not contaminated with admixtures, became Sunnites (sara al-mutamassikun bi'l-islam al-mahd al-khalis 'an al-shawb hum ahl al-sunna wa 'l-jama'a)," see Muhammad Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Sharh al-'aqida al-wasitiya* (al-Qahira: al-Maktaba al-tawfiqiya, n. d.), p. 675. These admixtures are all heresies (*bida'*) opposed to Sunna, and as such they are regarded as heresy.
- 28 See May al-Ibrashy, "Death, Life and the Barzakh in Cairo's Cemeteries: The Place of the Cemetery in the Sacred Geography of Late Medieval Cairo," *JUSUR, The UCLA Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*.* For the phenomenon of the al-Qarafa cemetery, see Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, pp. 15–61.
- 29 For the early generations of Hanbalites, see Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 126–30. For Ibn 'Aqil's opinions on grave visitation, see George Makdisi, *Ibn Aqil: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 209–13.
- 30 Ibn Qudama al-Maqdisi, *al-Mughni*, (al-Riyad, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 508.
- 31 Ibn Taymiyya understood the "*salaf*" to refer to the three generations comprising the Prophet's companions (*sahaba*), their followers (*tabi'un*), and followers of their followers (*tabi'u al-tabi'in*).
- 32 See Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ighathat al-lahfan min masayid al-Shaytan* (Misr: Matba'at Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1939), vol. 1, p. 208.
- 33 Thomas Headh, "The Cult of the Saints and Their Relics," *The ORB: On-line Reference Book for Medieval Studies*.*
- 34 See George Makdisi, "Ibn Taimiya: A Sufi of the Qadiriya Order," *American Journal of Arabic Studies* 1 (1973).

- 35 Pragmatism is a Hanbalite principle of public welfare (*maslaha*). For political utilitarianism in the context of the Islamic principle of “commanding right and forbidding wrong,” see the relevant chapter of a monumental study by Michael Cook: *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 36 See Ibn Rajab, *al-Dhayl*, vol. 4, p. 518; or Hasan Qasim Murad, “Ibn Taymiya on Trial: A Narrative Account of his Mihan,” *Islamic Studies*, 18 (1979), pp. 23–24.
- 37 For a study of this tradition and its interpretation, see M. J. Kister, “You Shall Only Set Out for Three Mosques,” *Le Muséon*, LXXXII (1969).
- 38 According to Ibn Taymiyya, this hadith does not prohibit “journeying” as such. *Safar* in order to seek education, do business, or visit relatives is quite legal.
- 39 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu‘at al-fatawa* (Mansura: Dar al-wafa’, 2005), vol. 27, p. 11.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 See *ibid.*, p. 134.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 45 See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ighathat al-lahfan*, p. 218.
- 46 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu‘at al-fatawa*, vol. 27, p. 44.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 44. In the translation of this passage in the article “Ziyara”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960-), (*EF*): “and God the Exalted has mercy upon the living who supplicate for the dead,” we see a misreading of Ibn Taymiyya’s position.
- 48 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu‘at al-fatawa*, vol. 27, p. 69. There are many versions of this hadith.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 50 See the article “Ibn Taymiyya” in *EP*.
- 51 In this context, we translate the word ‘*id*, which literally means “celebration” or “feast,” as “a visited and venerated place,” according to the interpretation of Ibn al-Qayyim in *Ighathat al-lahfan*, p. 190.
- 52 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu‘at al-fatawa*, vol. 27, p. 48.

- 53 Ibid., p. 107.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid., p. 130.
- 56 It is unnecessary to note that “*salat*” in this context denotes not a ritual prayer but rather a praise or blessing which is formally added in many instances, such as after pronouncing or writing Muhammad’s name.
- 57 See Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Wasila wa al-tawassul* (Beirut: Dar al-fikr al-islami, 1992), p. 15.
- 58 Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya argues that the graves of prophets are pure and therefore their flesh does not decompose.
- 59 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu’at al-fatawa*, vol. 27, p. 70.
- 60 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ighathat al-lahfan*, p. 210.
- 61 Ibid., p. 212.
- 62 Ibid., p. 196.
- 63 Shaun E. Marmon, “The Quality of Mercy: Intercession in Mamluk Society,” *Studia Islamica* vol. 87 (1998), p. 128.
- 64 Caterina Bori, “A New Source for the Biography of Ibn Taymiyya,” *Bulletin of SOAS*, vol. 67, iss. 3 (2004), p. 348. See also Ibn ‘Abd al-Hadi, *al-Uqud al-duriya min manaqib shaykh al-islam Ibn Taymiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-katib al-‘arabi, n. d.), p. 387.
- 65 Makdisi, “Ibn Taimiya: A Sufi of the Qadiriya Order,” p. 124.
- 66 For the current state of the tomb, see Yahya Michot, “Reflections on the Funeral, and the Present State of the Tomb, of Ibn Taymiyya in Damascus.”*
- 67 On this subject, see Rudolph Peters, “The Battered Dervishes of Bab Zuwayla: A Religious Riot in Eighteenth-Century Cairo,” in *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), pp. 93–115; and Barbara Flemming, “Die Vorwahhabitische Fitna im osmanischen Kairo 1711,” in *Ismail Hakki Uzuncarşılı’ya Armağan* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1976), pp. 55–65.
- 68 See, for example, a work by a nineteenth-century chronicler: ‘Uthman ibn ‘Abdallah ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-majd fi tarih Najd* (al-Riyad: Darat al-malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 27–34.

- 69 Muhammad ibn Qasim, *Al-durar al-saniya fi al-ajwiba al-najdiya: majmu'at rasa'il wa masa'il 'ulama' najd al-a'lam min 'asr al-shaykh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab ila 'asrina hadha* (Saudi Arabia, 1996), vol. II., p. 8.
- 70 'Uzayr is mentioned in the Qur'an, 9:30.
- 71 Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, "Al-Risala al-thalitha," in Ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh Najd* (al-Qahira: Dar al-shuruq, 1994), pp. 244–45.
- 72 All of the quotations that follow are extracted from Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, "Kitab al-tawhid," in *Al-Muntaqa min rasa'il a'immat al-da'wa*, ed. Muhammad ibn Riyad al-Ahmad (Sayda: al-Maktabah al-'Asriya, 2006), pp. 7–97. Because there are numerous editions of this work, we prefer to quote from it based on chapter names rather than page numbers.
- 73 See *Mu'allafat al-shaykh imam Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab*, ed. 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Zayd al-Rumi, Muhammad Bultaji, Sayyid Hijab (al-Riyad: s.n., 1981), vol. 5, pp. 11–12.
- 74 For this account, see John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia* (London: Henry Colburn, 1829), vol. 2, pp. 169–70, 172.
- 75 For a more detailed study of al-Shawkani's position toward the Wahhabis, see Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 14, 101, and elsewhere.
- 76 For a comparison between al-Shawkani and the Wahhabis, see *ibid.*, pp. 136–37. It is also noteworthy that although Yemeni scholars denounced Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab very soon given the similarity of his position to the question of excommunication (*takfir*) of other believers and that of extreme sect of Kharijites, the Wahhabis themselves have been frequently quoting poetry of Yemeni traditionalists Ibn al-Amir and al-Shawkani, see for example Ibn Ghannam's *Tarikh Najd*, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Hasan's famous commentary on Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's book *Kitab al-tawhid* called *Fath al-majid* and recently Salih ibn 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abbud, *Aqidat al-shaykh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab al-salafiya wa athruha fi al-'alam al-islami* (al-Riyad: Markaz al-bahth al-'ilmi wa ihya' al-turath wa 'l-islam, n.d.).
- 77 For an analysis of al-Shawkani's *fatwa*, see Haykel, *Revival and Reform*, pp. 130–33.
- 78 Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Shawkani, *Sharh al-sudur bi-tahrim raf al-qubur* (al-Qahira: Matba'at ansar al-sunna al-muhammadiyya, 1947), p. 7.
- 79 Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, vol. 2, p. 179.
- 80 *Ibid.*, pp. 228–29.
- 81 *Ibid.*, pp. 195–96.

- 82 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 312.
- 83 Richard F. Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El Medinah and Meccah* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1857), p. 293.
- 84 Ibid., p. 305.
- 85 Eldon Rutter, *The Holy Cities of Arabia* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), p. 196.
- 86 Ibid., p. 197.
- 87 Ibid., p. 235.
- 88 For its history, see, for example, *Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325–54*, transl. H. A. R. Gibb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [published for the Hakluyt Society], 1958), vol. 1, pp. 178–80; Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, ed. William Wright (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1907), pp. 195–97; Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, vol. 2, pp. 222–26; and Rutter, *The Holy Cities of Arabia*, pp. 256–58.
- 89 Samhudi, *Kitab wafa' al-wifa'*, vol. 2, pp. 78–79.
- 90 Although his body was first buried at the Jewish cemetery in Medina and only later, during the reign of Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, transferred to the al-Baqi' cemetery.
- 91 Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, vol. 2, pp. 225.
- 92 Ibid., pp. 222–23.
- 93 Rutter, *The Holy Cities of Arabia*, pp. 256–58.
- 94 Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, p. 11.
- 95 Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (New York: Jonathan David, 2000), 193.
- 96 See Sulayman's treatise, latter named *al-Sawa'iq al-ilahiya fi al-radd 'ala al-wahhabiya* (al-Dar al-Bayda': al-Multaqa, 2005).
- 97 Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, p. 233.
- 98 Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, p. 11.
- 99 El Fadl, *And God Knows the Soldiers*, vol. 28, n. 14.
- 100 Muhammad 'Alawi al-Maliki, *Shifa' al-fu'ad bi-ziyarat khayr al-'ibad* (al-Dar al-Bayda': Dar al-rashad al-haditha, 2002), p. 23.

* Weblinks are available in the PDF version found at www.brandeis.edu/crown

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