

ADDITIONS, INTEGRATIONS, CORRECTIONS AND SUPPLEMENTS
TO THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ARNOLD JOSEPH TOYNBEE*

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No. 42
(December 2nd, 2021)

Addition to Part I,
Works by Arnold J. Toynbee

1925

ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE, *The Wahabis. Origins and Aims of the Movement. Is the World Confronted with a New Danger?*, in «The Manchester Guardian», Wednesday, 30 December 1925, p. 10.

* *A Bibliography of Arnold J. Toynbee*, compiled by S. Fiona Morton, with a Foreword by Veronica M. Toynbee, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980.

THE WAHABIS.
ORIGINS AND AIMS OF THE MOVEMENT.
IS THE WORLD CONFRONTED WITH A NEW DANGER?

by Arnold J. Toynbee

The Wahabi movement, which has swept over the greater part of Arabia and established itself in the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina, is named after its religious founder, Muhammad 'Abd'ul-Wahab, who lived in Nejd (Central Arabia) in the middle of the eighteenth Christian century. But the decisive fact in 'Abd'ul-Wahab's career as a prophet was his conversion of a hereditary local ruler, Sa'ud, from whom the reigning Sultan, 'Abd'ul-Aziz Bin Sa'ud of Nejd, is descended. If Sa'ud made 'Abd'ul-Wahab's fortune as a prophet, Wahabism made Sa'ud's as a prince, for, under the stimulus of this new religion, the principality which had adopted it rapidly extended its dominion over the whole Arabian peninsulas except the south-western and south-eastern corners. By A.D. 1811 Sa'ud's son 'Abd'ul-Aziz ruled an empire as wide as that which his descendant and namesake has put together again between the years 1913 and 1925 (after the religion and the principality had both lain under an eclipse for nearly a century).

It is evident that the religious and political aspects of Wahabism are bound up with one another, and, in practice, this is a normal phenomenon. A common religious enthusiasm is the only flame hot enough to fuse oasis with oasis and nomad tribe with nomad tribe. The prophet Muhammad himself founded kingdoms in this world and the other world simultaneously (in consequence of which it has not yet proved possible to disentangle Church and State in Islamic society – not, that is, unless the experiments initiated in Turkey since 1922 are destined to succeed).

In Muhammad's own lifetime there was a rival prophet, Maslameh, in Nejd, who came from almost the same spot as 'Abd'ul-Wahab twelve centuries later. The contest between

Muhammad and Maslameh decided which religion and which principality should become dominant, first throughout Arabia, and then over the greater part of the then civilized world. This expansive, aggressive tendency characteristic of the Arabian religious principality displayed itself most signally in the spread of primitive Islam; but the same tendency is inherent, and it is this, rather than its dominance in the no-man's-land of Arabia, which lends Wahabism its present importance as a factor in international affairs. Will Sultan 'Abd'ul-Aziz Bin Sa'ud and his followers burst the bounds of Arabia, and, if they do, in what name will they go forth conquering and to conquest?

Militant Puritans

Wahabism, like primitive Islam, is militantly puritanical. As the prophet Muhammad preached, by tongue and sword, against Arabian idolatry and Jewish and Christian corruption, so 'Abd'ul-Wahab preached against the corruption which, in his eyes, was creeping over the Islam of the Ottoman Empire, and this is what the Wahabi creed still stands for to-day. It is a "Protestant" attempt to go back to primitive Islam, but here everything depends on interpretation, and particularly on the light in which the interpreters see the relation between primitive Islam and modern Western civilisation. The other day a learned professor was dismissed from the great Islamic ecclesiastical University of Al-Azhar at Cairo for arguing that the incompatibilities between Islam and Western civilization were due to the accretions by which Islam had been overlaid, and that if by the removal of these accretions primitive Islam were restored these incompatibilities might disappear. The dismissed professor has local public opinion behind him, and in Egypt his is no doubt a winning cause. The Egyptian Moslems, like those of Turkey and the Riff, are determined to adjust Islam and Western civilization to one another, and if the Wahabis adopt the view of the Al-Azhar professor they will be ranging themselves in time with the progressive elements in the modern Islamic world and will bring them a potent reinforcement in a new quarter. In that event their expansion in neighbouring Arab lands, though awkward for mandatory Powers, might not be detrimental to the best interests either of Islam or of humanity.

Unknown Attitude Towards the West

On the other hand, if the Wahabis were to identify the corruption which it is their mission to purge away with the elements of Western civilization which have been penetrating Islamic society for the last 150 years, then their further expansion would be a catastrophe. At present we do not know which line they are going to take towards the West. We only know that they will have to make up their minds on the question in the near future, since their frontiers now march with the mandates territories of Palestine (*i.e.*, Transjordan) and Iraq, while their conquest of the Holy Cities will force them to take up a definite attitude towards the pilgrims, a majority of whom are British or French subjects.

In regard to frontiers, the borders of Transjordan and Iraq have been raided by Bin Sa'ud followers, as the borders of the Roman and Persian empires were raided by the first Moslems immediately before the great eruption. In consequence of these raids, Great Britain brought the Arab Governments of Iraq, Transjordan, and Nejd together and induced them to agree as to which of the nomad tribes should be regarded as dependent on one principality and which on the other. This demarcation – not of boundaries, which do not exist under nomadic conditions, but of tribal allegiances – has been supplemented by an agreement concluded on November 1 last between Nejd and Iraq, under the auspices of Sir Gilbert Clayton, for preventing tribal migration, while facilitating legitimate seasonal migrations in search of pasture. If this agreement works, it will eliminate the most fruitful source of international strife in Arabia.

The Climatic Factor

But this brings up the economic aspect, which Wahabism also shares with all previous politico-religious movements of Arabian origin. The Ikhwan, or brethren, who are the backbone of Ibn Sa'ud's power, as they are of the Sanusiya principality in North Africa (and as Muhammad's "refugees" and "helpers" were of the primitive Islamic State), are not merely

a religious order. While vowed to the propagation of Puritanism in the Islamic world, they are also vowed to the propagation of agriculture in the oases of Arabia.

The fact seems to be that the climate of the world oscillates between maxima of relative humidity and aridity, and that these oscillations, while little felt in regions where even the minimum water supply is abundant, make all the difference to the nomadic inhabitants of regions where the water supply is always near the lower limit of the margin of habitability. In such regions, when the maxima of aridity come round in their cycle, a portion of the population must either perish or break bounds; and the economic impetus behind politico-religious movements like Islam or Wahabism lies in the fact that these provide the organization and motive force by which the bounds can be broken victoriously. The lifetimes of Muhammad and of 'Abd'ul-Wahab both seem to have coincided chronologically with maxima of aridity, and both were followed by eruptions of population from Arabia into neighbouring lands. Is the climate of the world now oscillating towards relative humidity again, or is the maximum of aridity, which drove Arabian nomads into Syria and Mesopotamia in the 6th-7th and 18th-19th Christian centuries, still unabated? In the latter case, economic necessity will reinforce religious zeal and political ambition in launching the Wahabis on a career of conquest beyond the limits of Arabia, and a new danger will confront the world.