

# WHO FIRST USED THE TERM, “WAHHABI”?<sup>1</sup>

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It appears that **the British** were among the first Westerners to take interest in calling this Da’wah “**Wahhabism**”, the reason being that this Da’wah reached the most prized colony under British control: **India**. Many scholars in India embraced and supported the Da’wah of Imam Ibn Abdul Wahhab. Also, the British witnessed the Da’wah flourish as its followers included an impressive group of scholars throughout the Muslim World. **During that time, Britain was also nurturing the Qadiani sect, to replace the mainstream Islamic ideals.**<sup>2</sup> **They wanted to extend their control over India relying on a sect of its own creation, the Qadianis, which was British created, British nurtured and British protected, a sect that did not call for Jihad against British colonial presence in India.** Hence, when the Da’wah of Imam Ibn Abdul Wahhab started spreading in India, and with it came the slogans of Jihad against foreign occupiers, Britain became especially worried. They branded the Da’wah and its supporters as Wahhabis to discourage Muslims in India from joining it, in the hope that

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<sup>1</sup>From Jalal Abualrub, Alaa Mencke (ed.) *Biography and Mission of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab* (Orlando, Florida: Madinah Publishers, 1424 AH/2003 CE), pp.677-681. The edition of this paper also contains extra footnotes from salafimanhaj.com and such additional notes will be demarcated by ‘Editor’s Note’ in bold type.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Muhammad Ibn Sa’d ash-Shuwai’ir, *Tas-heeh Khata’ Tareekhi Hawl’al-Wahhaabiyah* [Correcting a Historical Mistake About the Wahhabis], (Riyadh: Daar ul-Habeeb, 2000 CE), p.55.

resistance to British occupation of India would not intensify.<sup>3</sup> Many scholars who supported the Da’wah were oppressed, some were killed and others were jailed.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that in the letters and reports that he submitted to his step-father and the Ottomans, Ibraheem Pasha, adopted-son of, Muhammad Ali Pasha, also used the terms, ‘Wahhabis, Khawarij, Heretics’, to describe the Da’wah of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab and the Saudi State<sup>5</sup>. This, of course, occurred before Ibraheem Pasha rebelled against and attacked the Ottoman Caliphate and almost destroyed it in the process. Dr. Nasir Tuwaim said:

**Earlier Orientalists used the terms, ‘Wahhabiyyah, Wahhabi, Wahhabis’, in their articles and books to refer to the movement and followers of Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab.** Some of them went to the extent of inserting this term into the titles of their books, such as **Burckhardt, Brydges and Cooper**, or in their articles, such as **Wilfrid Blunt, Margoliouth, Samuel Zwemer, Thomas Patrick Hughes, Samalley and George Rentz.** They did this even though some of them admitted that the enemies of the Da’wah used this term to describe it and that followers of Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab do not refer to themselves by this term.

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<sup>3</sup> **Editor’s Note:** W.W. Hunter in his book *The Indian Musalmans* noted that during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 CE the British feared uprising from the “Wahhabi” Muslims who were revolting against the British. Hunter stated in his book that: **“There is no fear to the British in India except from the Wahhabis, for they are causing disturbances against them, and agitating the people under the name of jihaad to throw away the yoke of disobedience to the British and their authority.”**

See W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, first published in London: Trübner and Co., 1871; Calcutta: Comrade Publishers, 1945, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn.; Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1999, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn.; New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2002 Reprint.

<sup>4</sup> **Editor’s Note:** In Bengal during this time many Muslims, including the old, the young and women, were all called “Wahhabis” and deemed as “revolters” against the British empire and were hanged from 1863-1865<sup>4</sup> Those who were imprisoned in the Andaman Islands and tortured were scholars of the Salafi-Ahl ul-Hadeeth community such as Shaykh Ja’far Thanasary, Shaykh Yahyaa ’Alee (1828–1868 CE), Shaykh Ahmad ’Abdullaah (1808-1881 CE), Shaykh Nadheer Husayn ad-Dehlawee and many others. For further reading see:

- ✓ Muin ud-Din Ahmed Khan, *A History of the Fara’idi Movement in Bengal* (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1965)
- ✓ Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp.276-77
- ✓ Qeyamuddin Ahmad (Professor of History at Patna University), *The Wahhabi Movement in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Particularly chapter seven *“The British Campaigns Against the Wahhabis on the North-Western Frontier”* and chapter eight *“State Trials of Wahhabi Leaders, 1863-65.”*
- ✓ Mohamed Jafar, *Taareekh ul-’Aajeeb and Taareekh-i-Aajeeb – History of Port Blair* (Nawalkshore Press, 1892, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

- **Margoliouth**<sup>6</sup>, for instance, admits that the term, ‘Wahhabiyyah’, was used by opponents of the Da'wah during the ‘founder’s’ lifetime, and then was used freely by Europeans. However, he stated, this term was not used by the Da'wah’s followers in the Arabian Peninsula. **Instead, they called themselves, ‘Muwahhidun’.**
- **Thomas Patrick Hughes**<sup>7</sup> described ‘Wahhabiyyah’, as an Islamic reformist movement founded by Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, saying that their opponents did not want to call them, ‘**Muhammadans**’, so instead, they called them ‘Wahhabis’, after the Shaikh’s father’s name...
- **George Rentz**<sup>8</sup> said that the term, ‘Wahhabi’, was used to describe followers of Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab by their Muslim opponents, to insinuate that the Shaikh founded a new sect that must be stopped and its creed resisted. Those who were called as Wahhabis only thought of Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab as a follower of Sunnah, and hence, rejected this term and instead insisted that his Da'wah be called, ‘**Ad-Da’wah ila at-Tawheed**’ (**Call to the belief and practice in the Oneness of Allaah**), wherein the precise term to describe its followers is, ‘**Muwahhidun**’... Rentz also said that Western writers used the term, ‘Wahhabi’, in a derogatory manner, stating that he used it for clarification.<sup>9</sup>

Yet whoever used this term from then, until the present time, has committed several errors.

- ✓ They called the Da'wah of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, “Wahhabiyyah”, even though **it was not started by Abdul Wahhab** but by Muhammad, his son.

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<sup>6</sup> D.S. Margoliouth, *Wahabiya*, pp. 618, 1086.

**Editor’s Note:** this article by Margoliouth on the so-called “Wahhabis” is found in M.T. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann, A.J. Wensinck, H.A.R. Gibb, W. Heffening, and E. Lévi-Provençal (eds.) *The First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-1936*, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1987 Reprint) vol.8, p.1087 and also in H.A.R. Gibb, J.H. Kramers and E. Levi-Provençal (eds.) *The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden and London: E.J. Brill & Luzac and Co., 1960), p.619. This was also reprinted in:

- ✓ Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1974
- ✓ Leiden: Brill, 1997
- ✓ And the first prints, Leiden and London: E.J. Brill & Luzac and Co., and New York: Cornell University Press, 1953.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Patrick Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, p. 659.

<sup>8</sup> George Rentz and A.J. Arberry, ‘The Wahhabis’ in *Religion in the Middle East: Three Religions in Concord and Conflict*, Vol.2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p.270.

<sup>9</sup> Nasir ibn Ibrahim ibn ‘Abdullah Tuwaim, *ash-Shaykh Muhammad ibn ‘AbdulWahhaab: Hayatuhu wadawatuhu fi’r-Ruyah al-Istishraqiya: Dirasah Naqdiyyah* [Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab: His Biography and Mission From Orientalist Perspectives: A Critical Study], (Riyadh: The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Centre of Islamic Research and Studies, 1423 AH/2003 CE) pp. 86-87.

**Editor’s Note:** The book can be referred to Online in Arabic here: <http://islamport.com/d/3/amm/1/100/2213.html>

- ✓ Initially, Abdul Wahhab did not agree to the Da’wah of his son and argued against some of his teachings. However, apparently, he agreed with his son before he died, may Allaah grant him His Mercy.

Enemies of the Da’wah did not refer to it by the name, **“Muhammadiyah”** -especially since Muhammad, not his father, Abdul Wahhab, started this call- because by mentioning the word, **“Muhammad”**, they might invoke sympathy with and for the Da’wah, rather than enmity and rejection.

The term, “Wahhabi”, was meant to be derogatory and to convince Muslims against gaining knowledge in or accepting the Da’wah of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, who was branded as an innovator in the religion who does not love the Messenger, sallallahu 'alahi wa-sallam. However, using this term has become synonymous with the call to adhering by the Quran and Sunnah and an indication of having profound respect for the Salaf, calling to the Oneness of Allaah and ordaining obedience to His Messenger (sallallahu alayhe wasalam). This is the opposite of what the enemies of the Da’wah have intended<sup>10</sup>. **Many opponents of the Da’wah of Imam Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab later came to admire the Da’wah and understand its true essence, upon reading its books and publications. They learned that it is the pure, plain call of Islam that Allaah sent down to all of His Prophets, peace be upon them.**

Using this term, “Wahhabiyyah”, did not stop the spread of the Da’wah all over the world. In fact, even in the midst of the West, Many Muslims practice the pure form of Islaam that Imaam Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab passionately called to in his Da’wah mission. This is because no one can defeat the Quran and Sunnah, no matter how strong and powerful one thinks he is, or is perceived to be.

It should be noted that among the characteristics of those who call to Tawheed is their great respect for the Quran and Prophetic Tradition. They are known for calling to firm adherence to Islaamic Law, purifying and dedicating the worship only to Allaah and respecting the Prophet's Companions and the scholars of Islaam. They are well known for being more knowledgeable in the details of Islamic knowledge than most others. It has become common knowledge that wherever a Salafi resides, classes that teach knowledge of the Sunnah flourish. If anything, the term, “Wahhabi”, has served followers of the Da’wah, even when it was meant to discourage people from accepting their call. It was, and still is, a mistake to call this Da’wah, “Wahhabiyyah”. Imam Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab called to the way of the Prophet, peace

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<sup>10</sup>Judge Ahmad Ibn Hajar al-Butami, *Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhab: His Salafi Creed and Reformist Movement*, p. 66.

be upon him, and his Companions; **he did not call on Muslims to become his followers.** His Da’wah was **not a new sect**, but a continuation of the legacy started by the early generations of Islaam and those who followed their righteous lead.<sup>11</sup>

**For more see on this subject refer to:**

[http://www.salafimanhaj.com/pdf/SalafiManhaj\\_Saudi.pdf](http://www.salafimanhaj.com/pdf/SalafiManhaj_Saudi.pdf)

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<sup>11</sup> **Editor’s Note:** Dr Natana DeLong-Bas superbly states in chapter six of her book *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*:

**“The global jihad espoused by Osama bin Laden and other contemporary extremists is clearly rooted in contemporary issues and interpretations of Islam. It owes little to the Wahhabi tradition, outside of the nineteenth-century incorporation of the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya and the Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah into the Wahhabi worldview as Wahhabism moved beyond the confines of Najd and into the broader Muslim world. The differences between the worldviews of bin Laden and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab are numerous. Bin Laden preaches jihad; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab preached monotheism. Bin Laden preaches a global jihad of cosmic importance that recognizes no compromise; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's jihad was narrow in geographic focus, of localized importance, and had engagement in a treaty relationship between the fighting parties as a goal. Bin Laden preaches war against Christians and Jews; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab called for treaty relationships with them. Bin Laden's jihad proclaims an ideology of the necessity of war in the face of unbelief; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab preached the benefits of peaceful coexistence, social order, and business relationships. Bin Laden calls for the killing of all infidels and the destruction of their money and property; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab restricted killing and the destruction of property... The militant Islam of Osama bin Laden does not have its origins in the teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and is not representative of Wahhabi Islam as it is practiced in contemporary Saudi Arabia, yet for the media it has come to define Wahabbi Islam in the contemporary era. However, "unrepresentative" bin Laden's global jihad of Islam in general and Wahhabi Islam in particular, its prominence in headline news has taken Wahhabi Islam across the spectrum from revival and reform to global jihad.”**

Natana DeLong Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.278-279.