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THE CREEDAL VIEWS OF PSEUDO-SALAFISM AND THEIR IDEOLOGICAL AFFINITY WITH HISTORICAL TASHBIH MOVEMENTS

Abstract. *This article conducts a comparative analysis of the creedal positions advanced by contemporary pseudo-Salafi movements and their ideological affinity with the historical mushabbiha and mujassima sects of Islamic intellectual history. Despite pseudo-Salafis' self-presentation as defenders of pure creed, the article demonstrates that their doctrinal roots lead back to the deviant sects of earlier Islamic history. Five principal areas of ideological convergence are identified: the literal interpretation of mutashabih Qur'anic expressions; the attribution of direction and locality to Allah; the attribution of movement and change to Allah; the rejection of ta'wil combined with false attribution to the pious ancestors; and the use of takfir ideology. The article further identifies the Karramiya sect of Muhammad ibn Karram al-Sijistani (d. 255/868) as the historical movement most closely aligned with contemporary pseudo-Salafism. The study concludes that pseudo-Salafism represents not a continuation of the methodology of the genuine pious ancestors but a modern revival of the doctrinal positions of the historically deviant mushabbiha, mujassima, and Karramiya movements, and that the critiques formulated by Imam al-Maturidi and Imam Abu al-Mu'in al-Nasafi remain directly applicable to their contemporary positions.*

Keywords: *pseudo-Salafism; mushabbiha; mujassima; Karramiya; tajsim; tashbih; Islamic creed; ta'wil; tafwid; Maturidism; Ash'arism; takfir; Ibn Taymiya; Wahhabism; Uzbekistan.*

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Muslim world faces significant creedal challenges from movements that present themselves as defenders of “pure creed” while advancing doctrinal positions that classical Sunni scholarship systematically refuted centuries ago. Among these

movements, pseudo-Salafism occupies a particularly prominent position. Pseudo-Salafi movements interpret the *mutashabih* (figurative) expressions of the Qur'an and hadith only in their literal, apparent sense, and reject the established scholarly methodologies of *tafwid* (delegating knowledge of the attribute's modality to Allah) and *ta'wil* (figurative interpretation in conformity with the divine transcendence).

The Arabic term *mushabbiha* derives from the verb “*shabaha*” (to liken, to compare) and designates movements that liken Allah to His creation, especially to human beings. The term *mujassima* derives from “*jasad*” or “*jism*” (body) and designates movements that attribute corporeal form, organs, and similar created-being characteristics to Allah. Both terms were employed in classical Islamic theological literature to describe the same cluster of deviant creedal positions (al-Shahristani, 1993; al-Baghdadi, 1977).

The aim of this article is to conduct a systematic comparative analysis of the creedal positions of contemporary pseudo-Salafi movements and their historical predecessors in the *mushabbiha* and *mujassima* traditions, and to identify the principal areas of ideological convergence between them.

METHODS

The article employs comparative historical and source-critical methods. Classical Islamic heresiographical and theological sources are used to establish the creedal positions of the historical *mushabbiha*, *mujassima*, and *Karramiya* movements: principally al-Shahristani's “*al-Milal wa-l-Nihal*” (al-Shahristani, 1993), al-Baghdadi's “*al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*” (al-Baghdadi, 1977), Imam al-Maturidi's “*Kitab al-Tawhid*” (al-Maturidi, 2023), and al-Nasafi's “*Tabsirat al-Adilla*” (al-Nasafi, 1993). Contemporary pseudo-Salafi positions are documented on the basis of Ibn Taymiya's “*Majmu' al-Fatawa*” (Ibn Taymiya, 2005), Ahmad Zayni Dahlan's “*al-Durar al-Saniyya*” (Dahlan, 2010), and the modern Uzbek critical scholarship of Aminov (2021), Tojiboev (2021), and Zayriyev & Qudratulloh (2022).

RESULTS

Historical *mushabbiha* and *mujassima* positions. Imam al-Shahristani, in his “*al-Milal wa-l-Nihal*,” divides the *mushabbiha* movement into two principal branches (al-Shahristani, 1993:92). Imam Abu Mansur al-Baghdadi, in his “*al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*,” describes in detail the representatives of the *mujassima* movement and their erroneous

positions (al-Baghdadi, 1977:195). The principal creedal positions of the historical mushabbiha and mujassima are: attributing a body to Allah; attributing organs to Allah (hand, foot, face, eye); attributing locality to Allah (being seated on the Throne); attributing movement to Allah (ascending, descending); and attributing direction to Allah. Imam al-Maturidi stated in his “Kitab al-Tawhid”: “Attributing locality to Allah, holding that He is situated on the Throne and similar positions these imply that He is dependent on His own creation, that He is capable of transitioning from one state to another, and that He is bounded. All of this is contrary to the majesty and perfection of Allah the Exalted” (al-Maturidi, 2023:95).

Principal historical representatives. Muqatil ibn Sulayman al-Balkhi (d. 150/767) is recognized as one of the earliest representatives of the mushabbiha movement: he attributed human-like organs to Allah, holding that Allah is a creator resembling human beings, with organs that are larger and more majestic than those of created beings (Aminov, 2021:19). Dawud al-Jawaribi, another prominent representative of the mujassima, held that Allah “is a body consisting of flesh and blood, but His organs are genuine organs” (al-Shahristani, 1993:1:103). Hisham ibn al-Hakam (d. 179/795), a Shi‘i theologian who also adopted mujassima positions, held that Allah is in the form of a body of light with a specific dimension and locality (al-Baghdadi, 1977:199). Muhammad ibn Karram al-Sijistani (d. 255/868), the founder of the Karramiya sect, formulated the doctrine that “Allah is a body situated on the Throne, but His body is unlike the bodies of creation.” This formula was subsequently adopted in modified form by Ibn Taymiya and contemporary pseudo-Salafi movements (Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, 2002:7:35).

Contemporary pseudo-Salafi creedal positions. Contemporary pseudo-Salafi movements attribute the mutashabih Qur’anic expressions “yad” (hand), “wajh” (face), “ayn” (eye), and “saq” (shin) to Allah in their literal, apparent senses (Tojiboev, 2021:38). This constitutes one of the greatest points of disagreement between pseudo-Salafis and Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama‘a (Zayriyev & Quدراتulloh, 2022:92). In his “Majmu‘ al-Fatawa,” Ibn Taymiya claimed that Allah sits on the Throne and declared this position to be the “correct creed” (Ibn Taymiya, 2005:4:229; Aminov, 2021:6–7). The Mufti of Mecca, Sayyid Ahmad Zayni Dahlan (d. 1304/1886), in his “al-Durar al-Saniyya,” refuted these positions in detail and demonstrated their resemblance to the Karramiya sect (Dahlan, 2010:38).

Ibn Taymiya in “Majmu‘” (vol. 16) cites and declares “authentic” the narration: “The Throne and Kursi of Allah are wider than the heavens and the earth. He sits on them,

and no more than four fingers' width is left over." However, Imam al-Bukhari's teacher Imam Nu'aym ibn Hammad (d. 228/843) assessed this narration as weak; and even the pseudo-Salafi "muhaddith" Nasir al-Din al-Albani (d. 1420/1999) acknowledged it as "weak" and "mawdu'" (fabricated) (Aminov, 2021:9). Pseudo-Salafis also attribute to Allah the attributes of "nuzul" (descending), "su'ud" (ascending), and "maja'" (coming) derived from mutashabih hadith expressions (al-A'yidi, 2022:79). They reject the ta'wil of mutashabih expressions and designate this approach with the pejorative label "mu'attila'" (those who negate the attributes) (Tojiboev, 2021:42).

Five areas of ideological convergence. The comparative analysis reveals five principal areas of ideological convergence between pseudo-Salafism and the historical mushabbiha-mujassima tradition. First, the tendency to understand mutashabih expressions in the Qur'an and Sunnah in their apparent, literal sense: historical representatives including Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 150/767), Dawud al-Jawaribi, and Muhammad ibn Karram (d. 255/868) attributed attributes such as "yad," "wajh," and "saq" to Allah in their literal senses; pseudo-Salafis adopt precisely this approach and declare it "the path of the pious ancestors" (al-Maturidi, 2023:224–225). Second, attributing direction and locality to Allah: the historical Karramiya held that Allah is "above," "on the Throne," and "in the sky"; pseudo-Salafis adopt the same position, which contradicts the categorical ruling of the verse "There is nothing like unto Him" (al-Shura, 11) (Mansur, 2004:484). Third, attributing movement, ascension, and descending to Allah: mujassima representatives attributed movement and change to Allah; pseudo-Salafis follow the same path; Imam Abu al-Mu'in al-Nasafi categorically refuted this approach, stating: "Attributing movement and change to Allah implies that He is dependent on His creation and that He is capable of transitioning from one state to another. All of this is contrary to the majesty and perfection of Allah" (al-Nasafi, 1993:169). Fourth, rejection of ta'wil and false attribution to the pious ancestors: the historical Hashwiyya movement accepted the apparent meaning of every hadith and permitted no ta'wil; pseudo-Salafis adopt this approach and declare their path "the path of the pious ancestors" (Zayriyev & Qudratulloh, 2022:105). Fifth, the use of takfir ideology: the historical Khawarij and certain fanatical groups had a tendency to declare other Muslims unbelievers, polytheists, and innovators; pseudo-Salafis continue this path, declaring the Maturidi and Ash'ari creedal schools, Sufi paths, and even other Muslim governments to be "polytheist" and "apostate" (Aminov, 2021:14).

The Karramiya as the closest historical parallel. Among the historical movements, the Karramiya sect founded by Muhammad ibn Karram al-Sijistani (d. 255/868) possesses

the greatest ideological affinity with pseudo-Salafism. The creedal positions of the two movements are so similar that many researchers have characterized pseudo-Salafism as “a contemporary Karramiya” (Tojiboev, 2021:50). The principal convergences between the two movements are: both attribute bodily form to Allah; both hold that Allah is situated on the Throne; both attribute direction to Allah; both attribute movement and change to Allah; and both understand the mutashabih expressions of the Qur’an in their apparent, literal sense. Imam al-Maturidi, in his “Kitab al-Tawhid,” subjected the Karramiya sect to thoroughgoing critique and demonstrated that their positions contradict the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and reason (al-Maturidi, 2023:230–231). These critiques of Imam al-Maturidi are considered to apply directly to contemporary pseudo-Salafis as well.

DISCUSSION

The five areas of convergence identified above confirm the central thesis of this article: despite pseudo-Salafism’s self-presentation as a restoration of the “pure creed” of the pious ancestors, its creedal positions reproduce with high fidelity the positions of movements that classical Sunni scholarship systematically identified and refuted as deviant. The distinction that pseudo-Salafis draw between themselves and the historical mushabbiha claiming that they affirm the attributes “without asking how” (bila kayf) does not constitute a genuine methodological difference from the Karramiya formula that Allah is a body “unlike the bodies of creation,” since in both cases a modality is implicitly or explicitly affirmed while its anthropomorphic character is superficially disclaimed (Tojiboev, 2021:50; Dahlan, 2010:38).

Three distinctive features separate contemporary pseudo-Salafism from its historical predecessors: the use of modern mass media and the internet to disseminate its positions globally, rather than being confined to local circles; the presence within its ranks of the “jihadist Salafi” strand, manifested through organizations such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the Taliban; and the financial and political backing of powerful state and non-state structures that funded the global dissemination of this ideology (al-A’yidi, 2022:81; Mirziyoev, 2022:415). These features make contemporary pseudo-Salafism a qualitatively more dangerous phenomenon than any of its historical predecessors, despite the identical creedal content of their anthropomorphic positions.

In the context of Uzbekistan, which has for many centuries adhered to the teaching of Imam al-Maturidi and the Hanafi madhhab, pseudo-Salafi ideology entered from

foreign sources during the independence period. Significant scholarly and educational efforts are being undertaken to defend the country's traditional, moderate Sunni creedal school against this challenge (Karimov, 2020:102).

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis conducted in this article establishes the following conclusions. First, the contemporary pseudo-Salafi movement, in its creedal essence, represents an ideological tendency that has revived the positions of the historically deviant mushabbiha, mujassima, and Karramiya movements. Second, despite pseudo-Salafism's self-declaration as the continuation of the path of the genuine pious ancestors (al-salaf al-salih), it differs fundamentally from the cautious tafwid methodology that the genuine pious ancestors actually employed. Third, the Karramiya sect the historical movement most closely aligned with contemporary pseudo-Salafism was subjected to thorough refutation by Imam al-Maturidi in his "Kitab al-Tawhid," and these classical critiques remain directly applicable today. Fourth, three features distinguish contemporary pseudo-Salafism from its predecessors: global reach through digital media, the jihadist strand within its ranks, and financial backing from powerful structures all of which amplify the practical danger of its otherwise historically familiar creedal positions (al-Maturidi, 2023; Aminov, 2021; Tojiboev, 2021).

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