

*Research article*

## Debating Holy Remains: a Discourse on Islamic Relics between the Sufi and Salafi Scholars

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**Abstract**

Relics of holy people have been attractive among Muslims of all generations due to their mundane and spiritual importance. Sufi scholars are, especially, notable for their particular interest in relics, which form an integral part of their beliefs and practices. They venerate relics through which they seek blessing (*tabārūk*) and intercession (*tawāṣul*), among others. Meanwhile, the modern Salafi scholars criticized the Sufis' perspective on relics, claiming that their actions constitute *bid'ah* (innovation), *kufr* (infidelity), and *syirk* (associating partners with Allah). This paper, therefore, examined the modern Salafis' criticism of the religious attitudes of the Sufis on relics. It adopted both historical and exegetical methods to achieve the set objectives. It has been discovered that relics have spiritual values, and Muslims of all generations, especially the companions (*ṣahābah*), have used them for different spiritual purposes. It is also clear that both the Salafis and Sufis venerate and seek blessing from the relics, though Sufis are more prominent in the practice. The paper identified excessiveness and arbitrariness in the disposition of the Sufis to the relics, which engendered deification of them as the yardstick for the Salafis' criticisms. Therefore, it concluded that advocacy for the desecration of relics on the part of modern Salafi scholars lacks merits. Instead, machinery to checkmate arbitrariness should be advocated for.

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**Keywords**

Arbitrariness; Deification; Relics; Salafi; Sufi.

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**Article history**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sufism refers to Islamic mysticism, which is built on the belief and practice that seeks to discover the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience by traversing the paths that obliterate human quality and lead to the attainment of divine felicitation (Schimmel, 2023, p.29). Allah desires to be known by man, and through Sufism, man realizes His knowledge and presence (Hanifiyah, 2021, p. 55).

*Salafiyyah*, or Salafism, on the other hand, refers to another bloc of Sunni Muslims who hold that Islamic text should be exoterically interpreted and applied, especially as explained by the companions of the Prophet (Hamdeh, 2016, p. 4). There are different *Salafiyyah* groups with different objectives, but the Puritans who focused on Islamic creeds are the critics of the Sufis. They are basically the Saudi-brand of *Salafiyyah*, sometimes called *Wahabiyyah* (Wiktorowicz, 2006, p. 217).

One of the cardinals of Sufism, which *Salafiyyah* scholars have condemned in their anti-Sufi outreach, is the Sufis' disposition to relics. Sufis of different ages are known for visitations and veneration of different relics, either of the Prophets or saints, with the objective of *tabārūk* (seeking for blessing) and *tawāṣul* (intercession) (Papas & Shams-ur-Rehman, 2020, p. 14). This is due to rare incidences or occurrences surrounding these relics' existence, which turned them into objects of attraction.

Among other clusters of Sunni Muslims, Sufis are particularly known for these practices. Different places in Hijaz, Egypt, Baghdad, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Morocco, and Algeria, among others, are visited and revered due to different prominent personalities that were either born, lived, died, or buried there. Also, the antiquities of noble and religious individuals like Prophets and saints, such as their clothes, shoes, caps, and other personal belongings, are held in high esteem by the Sufis. They believe (Sufis) that through these items, one can secure the blessings of Allah (*barakah*), get closer to Him (*qurbah*), seek intercession (*tawāṣul*), and hope for acceptance of prayer (*istijābah*) by Allah through them (Schimmel, 2007, p. 239).

The Sufi doctrines and practices *vis-a-vis* relics have been criticized by *Salafiyyah* scholars, especially in modern times. They declared them as constituting *syirk* (polytheism), *bid'ah* (innovation), and *kufr* (infidelity), which are detrimental to faith. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the practices and ascertain the declarations. This

will assist the readers and Muslims in guiding them against acts that are capable of evicting them from the fold of Islam.

## 2. METHODS

This paper adopts an interpretive research method to achieve its set objectives. The yardstick for considering this method appropriate is not unconnected to the nature of the title, which is geared towards appraising relics in Sufi circles and the submissions of the *Salafiyyah* scholars, both in classical and modern times. Also, the topic is related to *aqidah* (creedal matters), which can only be adequately understood from the Qur'an and *Hadīṣ*, the primary sources of Islam from which every Islamic rule is derived. Understanding the two, therefore, necessitates the adoption of the interpretive method of research. Relevant materials relating to both primary sources, especially books of *tafsir*, are consulted to elicit adequate information for proper analysis. The views and arguments of various scholars from both sides were carefully examined for sufficient details to propel and enhance an accurate analysis that could lead to objective conclusions.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. *Relics in Perspectives*

According to the Britannica Encyclopedia, relics, in religion, strictly refer to the mortal remains of holy people, prophets, and saints. It includes any place or object that has been in contact with them. This aligns with Alexandar's definition (Alexandar, 2010, p. 11), but he states further that relics can also be connected to living people who have acquired fame, recognition, and a popular following. He then divides relics between corporeal, which include the skulls, bones, blood, teeth, hair, fingernails, and assorted lumps of flesh that can be embalmed, and non-corporeal items that were possessed by or came into direct contact with the individual in question. These may be clothing, hats, girdles, caps, socks, shoes, and sandals, or pieces of personal property like cups, spectacles, handkerchiefs, weapons, staves, and bells. Relics can also be printed books, written texts, letters, and scraps of paper bearing an autograph signature or graphic inscription (Patrick, 2018, p. 195). Others are rocks or stones upon which the impression of a foot, hand, or limb has been left as an enduring testimony of the presence of a departed saint, martyr, deity, or secular hero (Smith, 2013, p. 144).

From the above, it is clear that objects or places associated with holy individuals are regarded as relics. Relics' importance includes symbolism for identification and historical significance for memories to understand better the present and future (Josef, 2015, p. 10). Relics also offer the unique opportunity to assess evidence, especially the conflicting ones, and understand the changes in humanity as time passes (Subhankar, 2022, p. 26). Over time, relics have ignited the spirit of veneration among those connected to them and served different spiritual purposes (Wortley, 2019, p. 173). Relics have many advantages to their credits, especially in religious senses, which can always be balanced (Wortley, 2015, p. 300).

It concerns the importance of relics that one of the instructions of the glorious Qur'an with direct bearing on relics and antiquities that Allah in about thirteen (13) places in the Qur'an (e.g., Q. 6:11) directs men or Muslims to travel across the earth to access and assess the previous occurrences as they affect early generations, both in good and the ugly senses. Observing this divine commandment, therefore, requires that one examine the relics of the early communities of humans that had lived before one. Al-Qurtubi (1964, p.337) and Ibn Kathir (1999, p.560) express the importance of taking a closer look at their remains, like houses and utensils, among others, for a better understanding of their population, lifestyles, language, and cultural differences and dispositions. It also allows one to comprehend the mighty nature of Allah's power over His creations. Therefore, this presupposes the essence of preserving those relics for generational transmission, accessibility, and assessment.

The importance of relics and artifacts could be better understood from the articles on the criteria for enlistment into the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites (WHS). The ten (10) items listed as essential criteria for enlistment bordered on outstanding values through cultural, religious, historical, environmental, economic, and aesthetic importance. On this basis, about one thousand, one hundred and twenty-one (1121) sites worldwide are listed. It should be noted that five (5) of these sites are in Saudi Arabia. They include the Hegra Archaeological Site (al-Hijr/Madā'in Šālih), At-Turaif District in ad-Dir'iyah, Historic Jeddah, the Gate to Makkah, Rock Art in the Hail Region of Saudi Arabia, Al-Ahsa Oasis, an Evolving Cultural Landscape and Ḥimā Cultural Area (Williams, 2021). Others spread across Muslim lands like Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Qatar, Yemen, Senegal, Morocco, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, Sudan, Spain, Oman, and Libya (Williams, 2021), among other Islamic and Muslim majority nations worldwide.

### 3.2. Relics in Islam

The Muslim world has much reverence for many mementos and artifacts that are connected to Islam or Islamic personalities. This is not unconnected to the importance of preserving some Islamic heritages. The glorious Qur'an makes references to many of such relics and their significance. An instance is a narration about the *Tābūt* (ark of the covenant), which was given to ʿĪlūt as a sign of his authority (Q.2:248). Qur'an states that the ark came with a load of assurances on security and contained the commandments given to Prophet Mūsā and Harūn. Another relic from the Qur'an is the casket of the mother of Prophet Mūsā, who was directed to lay the child inside it and cast it into the river (Q.20:39, 28:7). The Staff of Mūsā which he used for the performance of many miracles, such as hitting of the rock, changing to a snake, and rearing of animals among others, is another relic from the Qur'an. Also, the seal of Sulaimān, which he used to direct the Jinns (Ibn Kathir, 2008, p. 348). The stool of Bilqīs, which was forcefully taken over by Sulaiman, who brought it to his kingdom (Q.27:38-41), and the ark of Noah, which provides salvation to his people from the incidence of *Tufan* (Q.11:38-48). The cloak of Dawud (Q.21:80) and the garment of Yusuf, used to restore the sight of Yaquub (Q.12:93), are some relics that the Qur'an referenced. Al-Qurtubi (1964, p. 259) writes that the garment (of Yusuf) belongs to Ibrahim, and the same was given to him by Allah when he was thrown into the fire by the pagans as protection against the inferno. There are also different sites and places where significant events took place. Such include Mount Sinai, Sheba, Al-Aqsa, Madyan, and the body of Firawn, among others.

Furthermore, the glorious Qur'an regards some major spots or items as *Shā'āir Allah* (symbols of Allah), central to the Hajj operation. Some of them include *Safa'a* and *Marwah* (Q.2:158). Others are holy sites where the Prophet confirmed that prayers offered in those places get auto-acceptance. They have the *Maqam* of Ibrahim, Black Stone, Well of *Zamzam*, and Mount Arafat, among other sites. Explaining this, At-Tabari (2010, Vol.3, p.266) submits that Allah designates these symbols for the sole purpose of worship. Al-Qurtubi (Vol.6, p.37) adds that the worship at these spots entails standing, running, and slaughtering. Ibn Kathir (Vol.2, p.9) further posits that they are sanctuaries designated by Allah and must be respected by people. Each of these places is of great importance in Islam because apart from being the heritage and repository of Islamic history, they also have spiritual significance. Hence, Muslims are commanded not only to visit them but also for spiritual reasons (Amanat, 2012, p. 257).

There are many references to relics in many *ahādīs* of the Prophet, which depict how the companions disposed themselves of the belongings of the Prophet. They held in high esteem his hair, water bag, cloak, perspiration, ablution water, spittle, hand wash, Sandal, goblet, blanket, ring, nail, pulpit, staff, sword, shield, and mats, among other belongings of the Prophet when he was alive and after his demise. Many of these relics passed through generations before the Caliphate of the Ottoman (1299-1922) gathered some of them in the Topkapi Museum in Turkey. The Ottomans claimed possession of the Prophet's belongings, like his *Burdat us-Sharif* (holy mantel) and the seal of the Prophet, which he used to endorse letters. Other are his beard, hair, sword and armour, bowl, battle stand, letters, turban, and some of his clothes.

One fascinating discussion on relics vis-à-vis books of *hādīs* collection is the dedication of a specific chapter by both Imam Al-Bukhārī and Muslim to that effect with the titles that depict the permissibility of seeking blessing from Allah through belongings of the Prophet. The companions were reported to have jealously guarded and venerated the relics of the Prophet in their possessions. They used them for different purposes like curative, seeking blessing, and intercession. For instance, Uthman bin 'Abdullah bin Mauhab is reported to have narrated how they kept and used the hairs of the Prophet for medication (Al-Bukahri, 2010, No. 784). Also, Umm Sulaym was noted for keeping the sweat of the Prophet in her scent bag to rub the children's bodies and seek blessing through it (Muslim, 2005, No.5762). Umar was also reported to have put on the cloak of the Prophet when there was draught to supplicate to Allah for rain (As-Sayuti, 2015, p. 119). The same cloak was said to have a curative effect, which Aisyah used to wash and give water to whoever was battling sickness to drink and get cured (Muslim, No.2069). Thumāmah reports that Anas willed that the hair of the Prophet should be put into his coffin after his demise (Al-Bukhari, No.6281). Anas bin Malik was also reported to have kept two sandals of the Prophet (Al-Bukhari, No.5857 & 5858). It is also said that 'Umar bin 'Abd-ul-'Azīz requested that the goblet of the Prophet be handed over to him by Sahl as the *Khalīfah* (Muslim, No.2007 & Al-Bukhari, No.5637).

In a demonstration of how the companions guarded the belongings of the Prophet, Abū-Hurayrah reports that Ā'isha showed them the blanket of the Prophet, with which he had the last breath (Al-Bukhari, No.6281). Also, 'Abdullāh bin 'Umar narrated how the sliver ring of the Prophet, which was engraved with "Muḥammad Rasūllullahi," transited to Abū Bakr after the demise of the Prophet and from him to 'Umar, then to 'Uthmān as they succeeded one another as *Khalīfah* before it fell into a well at Arīs (Al-Bukhari, No.5866). Khālīd Ibn Al-Wālid reportedly lost his cap in the

battle of Yarmuk. As he was searching for it, he remarked that there were hairs of the Prophet he kept in it, which used to be a source of victory in any battle he fought (Ibn Kathir, 2008, Vol.7, p. 129). He (the Prophet) was equally reported to have barbed his hair while he commanded Abū-Ṭalḥa to distribute the hair among his colleagues. There are authentic reports that posit how the companions used the saliva of the Prophet for curative purposes and sought blessing through it (Al-Bukhari, No. No.1270, 3009,3909) and even struggled among themselves to take the remnant water from his ablution (Al-Bukhari, No.189) for blessing and sometimes for curative purposes (Al-Bukhari, No.190).

The books of *Sīrah*, *Ṭabaqāt*, *Tarājīm*, and *Shamāʾil* are replete with the relics of the companions of the Prophet and the early communities of Muslims. The history of the compilation of the Qur'an, up to the period of its standardization, is not without the relics of companions who kept some of the items on which Qur'anic verses and chapters were written for personal and other essential uses. The same goes for the documentation of traditions (*ḥādīṣ* or *sunnah*) of the Prophet. There was a *Ṣaḥīfah* era, which indicates how the companions kept the recorded statements of the Prophet and thus passed them to the coming generations. It is, however, essential to note that much cannot be written on the relics of the companions due to different reasons. Some of them include incessant battles and different rumbles among the companions, which caused many of them to get destroyed. Another factor was the destruction of some of those items by Uthmān to safeguard the Qur'an and forestall any form of interference or interpolation. The itinerant lifestyles of many companions also make it somewhat challenging to have a collection of their relics. History holds that after the demise of the Prophet, many of them scattered across the lands to spread the message of Islam. They, therefore, died in different places and provinces. Despite this, there are tombs of many companions in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Khurasan, among other sites, that are being venerated to the present. At the same time, some libraries and museums keep their relics in them.

### ***3.3. Sufis' Conception of Relics***

The Sufis are known for having particular regard and veneration for the remains of the early communities and the saints or prominent Sufi figures (Nicholson, 1995, p. 146). They hold their mementoes in high esteem and keep them for different purposes, similar to what has been mentioned in the introductory aspect of this paper. One of the cardinal principles that enshrined the concept of love (*ḥub*), visitation (*ziyārah*), and

reverence in Sufism is the availability of and accessibility to relics. It engendered intercession (*tawāṣul*), seeking blessing (*tabārūk*), and nearness (*taqarrub*) and enhanced acceptance of prayer (*istijābah*) among the core doctrines and practices of the Sufis (Rayees, 2022, p. 48). Relics have assisted the Sufis in preserving their symbols and cultures and spreading Sufism. Sufis kept the belongings of saints for the primary purpose of retaining their memoirs, celebrating and consulting them for spiritual reasons, and even for commercial purposes (Thorsten, 2023).

As Sufis expressed a deep love for their masters and saints that had lived before them, many of whom they only heard stories or read about, the passion became more robust when they had access to where and what they lived with, in terms of their houses, wears, utensils among others that constitute relics. Also, relics allow the Sufis to confirm the genuineness of Sufi tales, anecdotes, and their bearers. This is because most of them (relics) are connected to miraculous occurrences related to a particular saint. When stories are told and buttressed with concrete evidence regarding relics, it clears doubts and affirms the truth. For this reason, Sufis will travel across the land to confirm certain narratives about saints, dead or living, or uncommon occurrences. It provides the opportunity to interact with living saints, close relatives, or disciples of the dead ones, thereby providing first-hand information to the thirsty visitor who wishes to enquire more about a saint. Places like Iraq and, Morocco, even Senegal are visited by adherents of Qadiriyyah and Tijaniyyah orders to access the relics of Shaykh Abdul-Qadiri, Shaykh Ahmad Tijaniyyah, and Shaykh Ibrahim Niass Al-Kawlakhi. They can visit their relics and interact with their close disciples and relatives.

As could be inferred from An-Nabahani, Sufis also offer prayers to Allah through those relics because they are miraculous objects or connected to holy men who lived pious lives. It is, therefore, believed that since those devout men are blessed by Allah, whatever is attributed to them must have traces of that blessing (An-Nabahani, 1998, p. 57). This is premised on the concept of *Tawāṣul*, which presupposes the permissibility to pray to Allah through a means. This is commanded in Q.5:35 and 17:57. Sufis also relied on the *hadīṣ* of Aisha reported by Ad-Darimi (Ad-Darimi, 2000, p. No. 93), where she was contacted when there was a draught. She directed the people to the grave of the Prophet to offer supplication to Allah through the tomb. Another instance is that of Umar, cited above, among others. All these are the evidence that An-Nabahani cited as what the Sufis relied upon in their prayers to Allah through the relics, hence their visitation and veneration of items connected to holy people.

The belief and dispositions of the Sufis to relics stem from various Qur'anic passages and *hadīṣ* narrations, which depict the possibility of spiritual connections and



inference between the relics of prophets or saints and individual pious Muslims. This is because it is established that death is not the end of the journey of the believers, but they continue to exist and can be spiritually influential, just as they were when they were alive. Sufis base their arguments on provisions from both the Qur'an and authentic reports from the Prophet, which established the existence of life after death, especially the Prophet and pious individuals, like martyrs, among others. An instance is Q.3:169, which reads in English translation:

*Moreover, never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Instead, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision. Rejoicing in what Allah has bestowed upon them of His bounty, and they receive good tidings about those [to be martyred] after them who have not yet joined them – that there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve. They receive good tidings of favor from Allah and bounty and [of the fact] that Allah does not allow the reward of believers to be lost (Q.3:169)*

The above verse established the existence of some individuals after their demise. Just as many authentic narrations of the Prophet confirmed death is not the finality of existence. The Prophet is reported to have stated that he passed by the grave of Prophet Musa and discovered that he (Musa) was standing observing *Ṣalāt* in his grave (Muslim, No.2375). Another one is also reported concerning *Kuffār* of Makkah, who lost their lives at the battle of *Badr*. When the Prophet visited their grave site and called their names to address them, Umar called his (the Prophet's) attention, stating that they were dead and could not hear. The Prophet said they can listen to him better than you, Umar (Muslim, No. 2874). Therefore, part of what can be used to retain the memoirs of the deceased individuals and establish a connection with them is their relics.

The spiritual effects of establishing a connection with the deceased are premised on the submission of Al-Qurtubi in his *Tafsīr*. He has a lengthy discussion on the story of Thamūd as narrated in Q.15:80. He dwelt too well on their abode, citing the report of Al-Bukhārī which states that on the day of *Tabūk*, when the companions got to the place, of people of Thamūd, the Prophet warned them not to drink from their wells, except the only well that the camel of Ṣāliḥ drank from. Al-Qurtubi then writes:

*The instruction of the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessing be upon him, to the companions to drink water from the only well that the camel (of Ṣāliḥ) drank from is evidence of permissibility to seek blessing with the relics of the Prophets and the pious people, if they had lived in the past generations and their remains were preserved (Al-Qurtubi Vol.10, p.47).*

The view of Al-Qurtubi, as quoted above, is not different from those of Ibn Hajar (2010, Vol.1, p. 569), Imam An-Nawawī (2012, Vol.1, p.244), As-Sayuti (2015, Vol.1, p.105) and As-Shawkani (2015, Vol.1, p.40) among others, including Az-Zuhayli (1441AH, vol. 14, p. 65) and Goma, (2020) among the modern scholars. They extended the permissibility of seeking blessing with the relics of the Prophet, the saints, and pious individuals.

Furthermore, Ibn Kathir (Vol.1, p.667) justifies seeking blessings through relics while explaining the story of Talut, as cited above. He identifies shoes, cloth, slate, and staff, among others, as some of those things left behind for the children of Israel, which were used for spirituality due to those who used them in the first place. Al-Ashaykh quotes Ibn Kathir when he writes, “they got assistance with its (relics of Musa) blessing and with Allah’s tranquillity in it” (As-Shaykh, 2015, p. 76). This is imperative because whatever comes from Allah to His messenger as a miracle or left behind by the prophets or saints is not as ordinary as those from others; people take it spiritually.

In the same token, Imam Nawawi, in his commentary on *Sahih Muslim*, while commenting on the above *hadīṣ* of Aisha and the clock of the Prophet cited above, referenced the report of Itban ibn Malik, who was blind and could not go to the mosque. Therefore, he sent for the Prophet to demarcate where he could observe his *Salat* at home (An-Nawawi, Vol.1, p.244). Others include the report on *Tahnīk* for the newborn, which must be done by a pious person (An-Nawawi, 2012, p. Vol.14, 124), the *hadīṣ* on the ring (An-Nawawi, 2012, Vol. 14, p. 67) and the hairs of the Prophet (An-Nawawi, 2012, Vol.9, 57) among others. In each of these instances, Imam Nawawi states the permissibility of seeking blessing from Allah through the relics of saints and pious people. He specifically mentioned their clothes, shoes, utensils, leftover foods and drinks, spots of their supplication, items of supplication, hair, rings, and footwear (An-Nawawi, Vol.1, p.244), among others.

Relics are one of the fundamental reasons for the prominence of visitations in Sufism. It is of two kinds—visitation to a living saint or the grave of the dead (*Ziyāratu-Qubūr*). A living saint is being visited to access items connected to him from the past, preserved either by him or his disciples. The exact purpose spurred them to see the graves of the dead saints and Sufi masters. The tomb of Shaykh Abdul-Qadiri in Baghdad is said to be the most visited and venerated after that of the Prophet in Madinah (Martins, 2010, p. 120). Their remains are venerated and used for different spiritual purposes. Sufis walk around tombs, worship there, supplicate, and use other objects for the same purposes. Grave sites are sacred places where Allah accepts prayers readily and fast (An-Nabahani, p.111). For this reason, people visit different

cities and countries to access the relics of a saint who lived there. Houses were later built in some of these places for the visitors' accommodation, while some graves were decorated.

Meanwhile, the availability and accessibility to relics of the saints have engendered celebrations of different sorts among the Sufis. As visitors came far and near for celebration, relics of a particular saint were made available to them during the period. For instance, during celebrations like *Maulīdu An-Nabī*, people display different relics of saints for sight, sometimes commercialized (Rukhsana, 2016, p.61). There is evidence of the purchase of some relics, while in some instances, charges are collected before accessing some of them. Some custodians and admirers made their earnings by selling relic materials, especially pictures of *Shuyūkh*.

There are many Sufis relics and artifacts that spread across the Islamic world, including the rosary, pictures, writings, letters, cloaks, books, utensils, prayer mats, the tomb of saints, *bandiris*, places and objects of miracles, among others. Sufis hold the belief that death does not alienate the connection between these items and their owners, who are the saints of Allah. Quadri (1995, p. 115) identifies how different miraculous occurrences have been attributed to relics of saints, especially that of Shaykh Ibrahim Niass (d.1975). He pointed out further that it is not uncommon to see many Sufis and non-Sufis hanging the pictures of Shaykh Ibrahim Niass at different places, homes, and necks; some even paste it on busses, among others. They believe those pictures have spiritual effects and potency (Quadri, p.115).

### **3.4. Salafi Discussion on Relics**

The modern *Salafiyyah* scholars' general submissions on relics, as presented by Ibn Baz (2010, Vol.2, 161), are not different from that of the generality of Muslims, which permits the preservation and veneration of relics of the Prophet; however, with limitations to those with evidence that established them, like Quba's mosque and Mount of Uhud, the two places where the Prophet offered prayers. They equally endorsed the act of seeking blessing through the relics of the Prophet as practiced by the companions but argued that it should be done within the ambit of *Syari'ah*. In other words, it is restricted to what transpired between the Prophet and his companions when he was alive (As-Shatibi, 2010, p. 482). They maintained that it (seeking blessing) ended with the death of the Prophet, hence the absence of reports to establish that the companions did it among themselves after the demise of the Prophet (Ibn Baz, 2010, Vol.4, p. 353). They believe that keeping relics aids the perpetration of *Bid'ah*, *Syirk*, and

syncretism (Al-Uthaymin, 2009, Vol.2, p.249). This is because relics enable veneration of different sorts and subsequently enable spiritual affinity, whereas relics lack spiritual importance. They rejected the view that *tabāruk* and *tawāṣul* can be sought from relics (Al-Uthaymin, p. 246). Shaykh Ibrahim Al-As-Shaykh, 2005, p.12) identified the spiritual importance of the relics as a means to enable *Syirk*. They, therefore, argue that it allows for excessive love, glorification, veneration, and unapproved visitations to the graveyards.

The *Salafiyyah* relied essentially on many references from the tradition of the Prophet. Some of them include:

*On the authority of A'isha, may Allah be pleased with her, who reports that the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him said, while he was on the last sick bed (to his death): Allah cursed the Jews and the Christians for taking the graves of their Prophets as the place of worship (Al-Bukhārī, 1330).*

Another one is the *hadīṣ* of Umar where he kissed the black stone which reads:

*On the authority of Umar, may Allah be pleased with him who came to the black stone and kissed it. He said, " I know you are a mere stone without harm or benefit. Had it not been that I saw the Prophet kissing you, I would not have kissed you (Al-Bukhārī, 1597).*

The *Salafiyyah* scholars, in the light of the above narrations, condemned the veneration of relics, mainly attributing spiritual importance to them. They (*Salafiyyah*) understand the first narration as the basis for their rejection and repudiation of grave visitation, which is central to relics. They also consider the second narration as lending credence to the ordinariness of the relics without any spiritual effect or importance.

The *Salafiyyah* also holds that relics beget the belief in continuing existence after death. Hence, it has engendered many pronouncements establishing a connection between the dead and the living. It should not be forgotten that one of the fundamental beliefs of the *Salafiyyah* is the absolute termination of life after death. They reject the Sufi concept of *Al-Ḥaqīqatu Al-Muḥammadiyyah* (The Reality of Muhammad's Personality). This mystical concept depicts the transcendence of Prophet Muhammad beyond the sphere of an ordinary human being (Al-Ghazali, 2008, p.25). It explains the eternity of his being as the first creature of Allah who will equally continue to live even after his physical departure from the world (Mawsu'at, 2013, Vol.39, p.193). The concept is well entrenched among the Sufis; they established a connection with him after his demise.

Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhab was reported to have cut down many trees that people believed to have spiritual potency in his days and issued *fatawa* (legal opinions) to that effect in his *Kitābut-Tauhīd* where he dedicated a chapter to the discussion on seeking blessing from grave, tree, rock, and stone among others. His views were built upon by many scholars who came after him, including Ibn Bāz, Al-Uthaymīn, Al-Fawzān, and others, especially of Saudi enclave, to condemn relics and gave opinions against their veneration, seeking blessing or associating spiritual importance to them. They blame the act of seeking approval from the relics and limit its permissibility to the Prophet alone, and such opportunity stops with his demise. (Al-Fawzan, 2019) quotes Ibn Taymiyyah, who writes:

*One of the innovations is to seek blessing from the creatures... The act of seeking approval from places, relics, and personalities, dead or living, is not permissible. This is because it may be a Shirk if it is done to earn a blessing from that place or a means that can lead to it (Shirk) if it is believed that... in its courtesy, one can be blessed by Allah. What is recorded about the companions seeking blessing through the hair of the Prophet or his saliva, or what comes out of his body (like faeces, sweat, urine), as mentioned before, are peculiar to him. May Allah's peace and blessing be upon him, and they took place when he was alive amid the companions. They never sought blessing from his room or grave after his demise. Just as they never thought of doing the same from the place where he observed Salat or sat. The same goes for seeking blessings from the saints, which is very important here. The companions never sought blessing from prominent individuals like Abu Bakar and Umar, among other prominent companions, not when they were alive or after their demise. They (companions) did not go to the cave of Hira for Salat or prayer, neither did they go to Mount Tur, where Allah spoke to Musa for rituals, nor to any mountain connected to some Prophets, among others....Also, the places where the Prophet observed Salat in Madinah were never taken by any Salaf as an object of veneration nor kissed by them. The same goes for the spots of his Salat in Makkah and elsewhere.*

The above excerpt captures the various submissions of most of the *Salafiyyah* scholars and their standpoint on relics. It declares the practice of seeking blessing through the relics of *Bid'ah* and *Syirk*. It also condemns the practice regardless of whether or not it is done through a dead or living. It submits that blessing can only be sought through the Prophet, and his demise has ended it. Each of these could be better understood from the companions' lives; therefore, whoever does it after them has fallen into the abyss of *Syirk*.

What, however, appears strange from the passage above is the forbiddance of seeking blessing from the relics of a living person. The *Salafiyyah* made this simply

because the companions did not do it among themselves after the demise of the Prophet, despite the presence of Abu Bakar and Umar, among other prominent companions of the Prophet. In other words, they would have done it if it was allowed. They buttress this with the submission of As-Shatibi (Vol.1., p.483) in his *Al-Itiṣām*, where he itemized reasons for such prohibition to include distortion of the belief system of Islam and excessive veneration, which will engender expression of spiritual importance and diversion of attention to them. These will thereby turn them into objects of worship. As-Shatibi, therefore, argued for invoking the doctrine of necessity (*Syaddu Ad-ḍarrā'i*) to block the evils that may emanate from such practices. He identifies one of those evils as adding to religious traditions that will engender transgression of different sorts. He explains further that it is for the preservation of the correct type of belief that Umar cut down the tree under which the Prophet and the companion took *Bai'ah* when he discovered that people had taken it as a place of worship and did all sorts of strange things there (As-Shatibi, p.483). Rejecting the veneration or seeking blessing from living individuals or their relics will safeguard the sanctity of Islamic tenets.

Furthermore, it is for intense veneration and arbitrariness on the part of the visitors to the grave of the Prophet in Madinah that Al-Bani called for demarcation between the tomb of the Prophet. His mosque will place the grave outside before the expansion works on the mosque engulfed it (Al-Bani, 2017, p.68). This was later expounded further by (Muqbil, 2005), who gave a legal opinion (*fatwa*) advocating for the destruction of the green dome (*Qubat*) inside his mosque in Madinah, which houses the grave of the Prophet Abu Bakar and Umar. According to Al-Alawi (Johnson, 2020), this may include the exhumation of the Prophet and the companions from the present location to an unknown destination. Before this, many historical sites and heritages had been desecrated across the Muslim land, especially by the *Wahābiyyah* in Saudi Arabia and other places of influence. (Salah, 2020) and Carla (2020) listed many of these sites that the Saudi government had destroyed under the pretense of expansion of both holy Mosques, including, among others, the mosque of Al-Manaratain, the mosque, house, and tomb of Ja'far al-Sadiq, and mosques at the site of the battle of the trench in Madina. Others are the mosque of Salman al-Farsi in Madina, Jannat al-Baqi in Madina, Jannat al-Mu'alla in Makkah, Tombs of Hamza, and other casualties of the Battle of Uhud were destroyed, including Mount Uhud and the grave of the father of the Prophet. Others are the house of *Maulid*, where the Prophet was born; the place of Khadija, the house of Abu Bakr, Dar Al-Arqam, the first Islamic school where the Prophet, Qubbat' al-Thanaya, secretly taught the companions Islam; the burial site of

Muhammad's incisor that got removed in the Battle of Uhud, Mashrubat Umm Ibrahim where Ibrahim, son of the Prophet was born, the dome which served as a canopy over the Well of Zamzam, bayt al-Ahzan of Sayyida Fatima in Medina, house of Ali where Hasan and Husayn were born, among other prominent historical places and sites.

### 3.5. Comparative Analysis on Relics

*Bid'ah* is one of the driving themes in this discourse. It connotes a religious practice without credence from Islamic sources, whether primary or secondary. *Salafiyyah* scholars considered Sufis' disposition to relics as heresy; they declared it as *Bid'ah*, which has engendered *Syirk* because people turned to relics for spirituality, especially prayer, instead of Allah, and it constitutes syncretism because it rubbed off Islam of its purity. However, Sufis do not consider relics or their dispositions innovative. This is because they have evidence, as demonstrated in the analysis above. The position of *Salafiyyah* scholars is unsubstantiated because, by default, they accept the presence and availability of relics in Islam. They also acknowledge and accept those *ahādīṣ* related to the Prophet's relics and how the companions used them for spirituality. The main points of disagreement between them include the continuity of the spiritual importance of relics after the Prophet's death and the spiritual significance of relics of saints and pious individuals.

Ordinarily, *tabāruk* and *tawāṣul* can be carried out with the relics of the Prophets and saints. There are clear instances, as could be inferred from above, which depict how the companions sought blessing through the relics of the Prophet after his demise, hence the reports of Khalid ibn Al-Walid, Umm Sulaym, Anas ibn Malik, and Umar the second *Khalīfah*, among other companions as quoted above. The submission of *Salafiyyah* scholars that *tabāruk* and *tawāṣul* should not be sought through the relics after the demise of the Prophet, therefore, is without direct evidence to support it. The claim that the Prophet did not instruct it and that none of the companions did it after his demise lacks credence because the evidence is bound to depict how *tabāruk* was sought from some companions after the demise of the Prophet. Al-Ifriqi (2004, p. Vol.7, 70) reported that Thābit would always kiss the hands, face, and legs of Anas, stating that he (Anas) had used them to touch, sight and walk with the Prophet when he was alive. Also, Imam Ahmad asked about someone who sought blessing by touching and kissing the pulpit and the grave of the Prophet. He affirmed, stating nothing was

wrong with that (Ahmad, 2009, No.492). Imam Shafi'i was also said to have sought blessing from the grave of Imam Abu Hanifah (Al-Baghdadi, 2012, Vol.1, 445).

Veneration is undoubtedly one of the embedded principles in Islam. The glorious Qur'an in chapter 22, verses 30 and 32, describes veneration of *Sya'āir* as the best of actions and a demonstration of righteousness on the part of the Muslims. It is the same veneration that the Sufis accord to relics of the prophets and extend to the saints and pious people. Therefore, the condemnation of the *Salafiyyah* could not hold water because the Qur'an acknowledges the transcendence and replication of holiness from the Prophet to pious individuals and its subsistence after their demise. Allah says: *Moreover, whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger – those will be with the ones upon whom Allah has bestowed favour of the prophets, the steadfast affirmers of truth, the martyrs, and the righteous. Moreover, those as companions are excellent* (Q.4:69).

For the glorious Book to have captured the righteous or pious individuals among those upon whom Allah has bestowed His favor means they enjoyed the special blessings of Allah, which qualified them to be counted among the best creatures with a high sense of obedience to Allah, hence their relics need to be venerated, even after their demise for different purposes. So, veneration cannot be limited to the prophets but extended to the pious people whom the Sufis called saints, either dead or alive (As-Siba'i, 2015, p.231). Al-Buti (2019, p. 227) relies on the position of An-Nawawī to credit the veneration of scholars and saints as part of *Syari'ah* legislation. Hence, the Prophet instructed the Ansar to respect Sa'd ibn Muadh, just as he stood for Talha and Fatimah on different occasions. He explains further that the *hadis* that prohibits standing in awe for an individual only commands humility, respect, calmness, and reciprocity on the part of the revered individual.

Indeed, there is over-veneration and the belief in the deification of an individual through the remains left behind. This is not limited to the Sufis. There are instances of such practices among the *Salafiyyūn*. Ibn Kathir (Vol.14, p.156) narrates how *tabāruk* was done by the Muslims who attended the burial of Ibn Taymiyyah after his demise through his relics. Also, it should be stated that the importance of veneration and spirituality makes the *Salafiyyah* of Wahābiyyah enclave, who stood against the preservation of relics, venerate and celebrate Ibn Abdul-Wahhāb under the Tag: *Usbu'u Al-Syaikh* (The Shaykh's week). It was a whole week of celebration in remembrance of Shaykh Abdul-Wahhāb. Shaykh Ibn Baz (Vol.1. p.382) acknowledges the acquisition of rewards from such acts because, through it, one gets acquainted with the teachings of the *Salaf*, which the Shaykh (Ibn Abdul-Wahhab) is one of them. This, therefore, makes the veneration of Shaykh Abdul-Wahhab a spiritually embedded one.



The expansion of both holy mosques as the reason for the demolition of some sites, including the houses of the companions, is shrouded in doubt. This is because places that are not a mosque or connected to it in any way were also demolished by the Saudi government. The list of desecrated places is given above, and it could be inferred from that place that the acts conform with the ideology of *Wahābiyyah* and not necessarily the mosque expansion as claimed by them.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the relics in light of *Salafiyyah* and Sufis' submissions. It is clear from every indication that relics and artifacts are central to Islam, and their importance can never be over-emphasized. The Sufis' veneration of relics is borne out of different spiritual and mundane purposes. Moreover, the *Salafiyyah's* derogation of them under the guise of excessiveness cannot evict the Sufis from Islam nor deny the centrality of relics in the religion. The desecration of some relics by the *Salafiyyah* is capable of distorting Islamic history and symbols as well as redefining Islamic spirituality and identity. Since there are reliable proofs, from primary sources, Qur'an and *Sunnah* and Islamic history on how the people of early communities disposed themselves to the relics of the Prophet and the companions, it follows that veneration, *tabāruk*, and *tawāṣul* through the relics do not only have credence in Islam but was also practiced by both the *Salafiyyūn* and the Sufis. What is necessary is to find common ground on areas of differences between the two groups on relics. This will go along with addressing the issue of excessiveness vis-à-vis relics among the Sufis and making the *Salafiyyūn* redefine their stand on relics.

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