

The Sunni-Shia Antagonism

Vladimir Stefanov Chukov

*The University of Ruse “Angel Kanchev”, Ruse, BULGARIA
Faculty of Business and Management, European Studies Department*

Abstract

This study presents the doctrinal and dogmatic differences related to Sunni-Shia antagonism. The Sunni-Shia dispute is a historical religious dispute between the two largest Islamic denominations. To a very large extent, it is based on the understanding of the concept of “sect” used for centuries by Sunni theologians of the Shiite school of dogma. It was not until the 1960s that orthodox Islam was forced to recognize the existence of a minority with which it had doctrinal and legal differences. Jafarism was the first Islamic movement that the dominant Sunni theologians recognized as part of the Islamic religion. This is after accepting the existence of Iran as a real statist establishment and a functioning legal system as a *fait accompli*. The restoration of diplomatic relations between two of the symbols of Sunnism and Shiism, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran, after a seven-year break, is proof that Islam in the current 21st century is different from that of the Middle Ages.

Keywords: Sunni-Shia antagonism, doctrinal differences, dogmatic differences.

1. Introduction

The Sunni-Shia dispute is a historical religious dispute between the two largest Islamic denominations. To a large extent, it is based on the understanding of the concept of “sect”, used for centuries by Sunni theologians for the Shiite legal-dogmatic school. Only before the 1960s was orthodox Islam forced to recognize the existence of a minority with which there were doctrinal and legal differences.

Jafarism was the first Islamic movement that the dominant Sunni theologians recognized as part of the Islamic religion. This happened after they accepted the existence of Iran as a real statist establishment and a functioning legal system as a *fait accompli*. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, established in 1979, Jafarism was the dominant legal-dogmatic movement. Public recognition was realized through a special fatwa by the former Grand Imam of the most authoritative Sunni theological university “al-Azhar”, Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltut. In 1959, he recognized the Ja'fari school as the fifth legitimate Islamic jurisprudential doctrine, alongside the other four Sunni schools: Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali (Shaltut & Al-Mauswa Al-Islamiya, 2020).

Interestingly, the contemporary ideologist of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, Yusuf Qaradawi, expresses doubt about the existence of such a fatwa (Qaradawi, 2020). The position is probably more political since an individual normative act of such a religious authority as the rector of “al-Azhar” is a prerequisite for recognizing other non-Sunni movements by the Sunni majority.

2. The Sunni-Shia antagonism

The forum held on November 9, 2004 in the Jordanian capital of Amman played a key role in determining the status of individual Islamic schools and doctrines in selecting and defining them as denominations or sects. The so-called Amman Message, signed by over two hundred ulema, attempts to create a kind of Sharia-compliant (degree of religious legality) hierarchization of the many doctrinal currents in the vast sea of Islamic theology. The text, which plays the role of a kind of norm, was prepared by the religious authorities of the time in the Islamic world and was read by the Minister of Justice of the Hashemite Kingdom, Sheikh Izzedine al-Tamimi, in the presence of the Jordanian monarch Abdullah II. It introduces three peculiar categories of doctrines of “religious legality”, without, however, clearly explaining the criteria that separate them from each other. It is probably a question of the degree of prevalence, social influence, history, and traditions.

The first category, defined as *al-madhahib*, religious doctrines, is injected with the greatest dose of Sharia compliance, defining the respective doctrine as an Islamic legal school and part of Islamic theology. It includes the five Sunni schools (Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali, and Zahiri), the two Shi'ite schools (Ja'farism and Zaydi), and the Ibadī Kharijite.

The second category consists in prohibiting the followers of the following Islamic schools from being declared *murda'in*, apostates, namely Ash'a'irism, the true practices of *at-Tasawwuf*, Islamic mysticism, and *al-aqeed as-salafiyyah as-sahihah*, the true Salafi doctrines.

The third category remains extremely open and undefined, noting that “it is forbidden to declare *takfiriyyin*, infidels, other Muslims.” The sacred texts are defined as preconditions for issuing fatwas, and their use is intended to prevent the issuance of illegal ones” (Risalya Aman, 2020).

It is interesting that among the 27 leading Islamic scholars who supported the Amman Message, ten belong to the Jafari/Imamist school. All of its authoritative representatives issued fatwas in favor of the document. Their names encompass the diverse, nationally, Jafari/Imamist community. These include influential Iranian clerics – the Spiritual Leader of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Grand Ayatollahs Fazel Lankarani and Muhammad Ali at-Tashkhiri, Iraqi Grand Ayatollahs Ali al-Sistani, Muhammad Sayyed al-Hakim, Bashir Hussein Najafi, Hussein Ismail al-Sadr and Muhammad Ishaq al-Fayed, Lebanese Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah and Portuguese cleric Karim al-Husseini (a follower of a branch of the Nazari-Ismaili school, which is also related to the Jafaris, Risalya Amman, 25.10.2020). Their fatwas show the desire for equality of national groups within the numerous Jafari legal-dogmatic schools, but also, in parallel, the aspiration for a positively looking ecumenization within the even larger Islamic community. At the same time, this document fails to overcome the sectarian potential of the Sunni-Shiite clash, especially where the Shiites are relatively large communities. We are talking about countries such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Bahrain and Yemen. In some of them (Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain) even the Shiites, the majority of whom are Jafaris, represent the most numerous confessional group in the country (Chukov, 2021).

The dispute between Sunnis and Shiites takes place on several levels, the leading of which are doctrinal and legal dogmatic, including ritual. The root of the antagonism lies in the interpretation of the law as to who is the legitimate successor of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunnis believe that the successor to the Prophet should be Abu Bakr Sadiq (632-634), and after him Omar ibn al-Khattab (634-644), who set the beginning of the dynasty of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (632-660). In contrast, Shiites believe that the true successor is Ali bin Abi Talib (656-661), who is the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph. The latter was the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin. The culmination of the dispute reached in 680 when the Battle of Karbala took place. On the battlefield near this Iraqi historical city, the second Umayyad Caliph Yazid bin Mauwiyah (646-683), symbolizing the

Sunni direction, killed Ali's successor, Hussein bin Ali (626-680), who is the third Imam according to the Shiite classification.

Sunnis maintain that in 632, when the Prophet Muhammad died, he did not appoint a successor. Then his companions gathered in the Beni Saada mosque in Medina and elected Abu Bakr Sadiq, who was also the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, as his successor (caliph). The Shiites think that the Prophet Muhammad appointed his successor, and this was Ali bin Abi Talib. They refer to the hadiths of al-Ghadir, which find different interpretations among the jurists (jurists-theologians) of the two legal-dogmatic tendencies (Hadith al-Ghadir, 2023). An important place in the controversy is also played by the hadiths of the Jafari imams.

The quality of infallibility is the second major difference between the two denominations. The Shiites believe that Allah bestowed infallibility on the prophets and then on the imams, as they are the leaders and mentors of the Muslims. At the same time, the Sunnis believe that infallibility is inherent only to the prophets. The third contradiction lies in the attitude towards the as-sahaba, the companions (the followers of the Prophet Muhammad in the first three generations after him), and the umahat al-mu'minin, the mothers of the believers (Muslim women). Both denominations believe that the companions are human beings. The Shiites draw a wide range of assessments of the deeds of this privileged group in the history of Islam. They openly believed that the companions were both good and just, but some of them were just the opposite. They were hypocritical and immoral. The Sunnis perceive the companions only as just and the satisfaction of the Muslims with them is obligatory. They hold the view that the best Muslims after the prophets are Abu Bakr Sadiq, Omar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan (644-656), and Ali ibn Abi Talib. After them, that is, those of the second and third generations, are subject to a nuanced positive attitude, respectively, according to the preferences of the given source. The Shiites are categorical that the first three Righteous Caliphs were infidels and usurpers of power. The assessment is also different for women. According to the Shiites, the mothers of Muslims cannot be carriers of any moral vice. For this reason, in 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa against Salman Rushdie, who cast a shadow on the moral behavior of the mother of Muslims and the beloved wife of the Prophet Muhammad, Aisha. At the same time, her power aspirations are the subject of disapproval by the Shiites, while the Sunnis consider her a symbol of Sunnism, as she was the most revered wife of the Prophet (Al-Ashnawa ila Aisha, 2023).

The fourth contradiction lies in the reliance on the personality of Mahdi al-Montazar, the expected Messiah. Both denominations think that a righteous man will appear on earth who will bring justice to humanity and destroy the forces of corruption. His name is Mahdi. The Shiites believe that the messiah in question is called Muhammad bin Hassan. He is al-Imam al-Ghayb, the absent imam, who is the twelfth in line. He was born in 874. He is expected to appear at the appropriate time and when the conditions are created for this (Al-Mauswa al-Arika, 2023). The study "Israel between Evangelism and Jafarism" highlights the main signs of the emergence of al-Mahdi, the messiah, adapting to various conjunctural political events (Chukov, 2021; Schwartz & Galily, 2021).

At the same time, Sunni jurists maintain that the Mahdi is a man named Muhammad, who is a descendant of Fatima Zahra (605 or 612-615 – 632), daughter of the Prophet Muhammad and wife of the fourth Righteous Caliph Ali bin Abi Talib. When he is born, he will not know that he is the Savior. It is in this type of divergence of interpretation of the messiah that Sunnism and Shiites give birth to a different type of statehood. In the former, the leader (he will not know that he is the Savior when he is born caliph) is first among equals, especially during the first (Righteous) dynasty. In its original Sunni form, the first caliphs seem to create a regime that resembles the modern republican political system. The caliph was recommended by his predecessor but necessarily elected by the followers. Among the Shiites, the exclusivity of the imam elevates him to the rank of a demi-god. Thus, this denomination creates a state – an imamate, the features of which are similar to those of an absolute theocracy. This is probably due

to a peculiar religious mix, in which, in addition to authentic Islam, Zoroastrianism of the former Sasanian Persian state, the foundation of the Safavid state (1501-1736), and later of modern Iran, also seeps in.

The predictions of the famous Syrian billionaire businessman and cousin of the current Syrian president Bashar Assad, Rami Makhlouf, are interesting. It is as if he is “presenting” a kind of hybrid Shiite-Sunni messianic product. In January 2021, on his Facebook page, he noted that al-Mahdi would soon appear, and with him Jesus Christ. According to him, “the year in question will be decisive.” If there are devastating earthquakes, incinerating volcanoes, fiery meteorites, floods, constant financial collapses, and mass death in many places on Earth, then humanity will have entered the “period of Resurrection”, which suggests that if this happens, “the emergence of the Mahdi and Christ will be accelerated” (For more information: Rami Makhlouf yatanabaa khuruj al-mahdi wa zuhur al-masih, Rami Makhlouf predicts the emergence of the Mahdi and the appearance of Christ, al-Qabas, Kuwait, 01/08/2021, <https://www.alqabas.com/article/58308>). During the holy month of Ramadan 2023, he does not forget to remind us that “one of the good news of the upcoming period is the appearance of the Mahdi.” This would indeed happen when “the news about him becomes frequent and then the messiah would indeed appear publicly. Immediately after that, a war between truth and falsehood would begin in space (Rami Makhlouf yubashar zuhur al-mahdi kariban, 2023).

3. The main legal-dogmatic differences between the two denominations can be systematized as follows: Al-Khums, one-fifth. According to the Shiites, the payment of this tax is inherent in

Al-Khums, one-fifth. According to the Shiites, the payment of this tax is peculiar to the infidels. However, half of the booty captured by the Muslims during a battle with the infidels is added to it, which is given to the Imam, who represents the Prophet or the wali al-faqih, i.e. the Spiritual Guide. According to the Sunnis, this tax is paid only by the infidels (Al-Khums inda ash-Shia al-Imamiyah, 2023).

1. Zawāj al-mutā’, the marriage of pleasure. It is also called mu’aqād,

a temporary marriage and is for a certain period agreed upon between the two spouses. During its duration, the wife does not inherit, and separation occurs at the end of the period. Shiite jurisprudence accepts it. According to the Sunnis, as well as the Zaydi and Ibadī Kharijites, they believe that it was “forbidden by the Prophet.” Shiite jurists-theologians contradict them and defend the opinion that it was not the Prophet Muhammad who prohibited the marriage of pleasure, but the second Righteous Caliph – Omar ibn al-Khattab, whom they perceive as a usurper of power. For this reason, they qualify it as lawful and consider it to be “an act of intimacy through which a person draws closer to Almighty Allah, who preserves and establishes his religion” (Al-Baghdadi, 2023).

2. Performing the prayer on the sun-dried tomb of al-Husseiniya clay

taken from the land of the holy city of Karbala for the Shiites. The Shiites believe that it is not permissible to perform prayer except on soil made of sand, stone or earth. In addition, prayer performed on clothes, fabrics, mattresses, carpets and the like, as well as on metals such as copper, silver and gold, is not permissible (Maukaa maktab samaha al marjaa ad dini Ali al-Sistani, Istiftaat at turba al-husseiniya, 2023). According to the Sunnis, praying on the turba al-husseiniya is an innovation in the Islamic religion. According to their jurists, neither the Prophet Muhammad nor their companions, including Ali bin Abi Talib and Hussein bin Ali, performed it.

3. Call to prayer. Shiites believe that it is obligatory to call to prayer.

To “good deeds” and it is advisable to add “I bear witness that Ali is the guardian of Allah.” Sunnis maintain that during the call to dawn prayer one should say that “prayer is better than sleep.”

4. Tatbir or adma, bloodletting. This is a ritual that was adopted by

some followers of Jafarism. However, some of them reject it. It is a Shiite ritual that aims to remember the Battle of Karbala and the killed followers of Ali such as Hussein bin Ali and his brother Abbas. For this purpose, the followers of this religious act use swords, chains, and any sharp objects with which they hit their heads until they bleed. In addition, the participants during the religious act repeat the word “Haider”, which refers to Ali bin Abi Talib. The Fourth Righteous Caliph died from a blow to his head with a sword by the conspirator Abdul Rahman bin Maljam while he was praying. This ritual is forbidden among Sunnis (Al Kerbasi, S., *Ma maana at tatbir wa hokmu ash sharai*, 2023).

The prevailing view is that the roots of the Sunni-Shiite schism were the cause of the first and most serious fitna, a civil war in the history of the Islamic state, namely the rebellion that led to the assassination in 656 of the third Righteous Caliph, Uthman bin Affan. The already mentioned conflict and bloodshed between the governor of Damascus, Mauwiya bin Abi Safyan (governor of the province of Syria 639-661 and first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty 661-680), and Ali bin Abi Talib, whose capital was the Iraqi city of Kufa, is only a consequence of it. It is as if the aspirations and claims of the fourth Righteous Caliph, and subsequently the governor of Damascus, personify the ideological differences between the two huge regional communities of the expanding Islamic state. We are talking about the struggle for power between the Iraqi and Syrian Arabs.

The one that began in 661 The process of legal and political fragmentation in the Islamic world has not ended. At the same time, the institutionalization of new Islamic legal and dogmatic currents has long been suspended. For example, the ambition of the former imam of one of the largest mosques in Medina – Quba, Saleh al-Magmasi, to create a new madhhab, an Islamic dogmatic doctrine, has such a fate. The Saudi jurist states: “I hope that Allah will give a new Islamic doctrine into my hands.” According to him, the only complete thing is the Quran, and everything else can and must be revised, as the Prophet Muhammad did (Al-Magmasi is a new madhad jadid...hajama al-ikhwan wa imam majid Quba, 2023). The Saudi ulema in question does not present anything completely as an Islamic legal dogmatic philosophy but only limits itself to criticizing the doctrine of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Secretariat of the “Institution of the Great Ulema”, which is the official religious body in Saudi Arabia, stated that the idea of “creating a new school of Islamic jurisprudence is an expression of a lack of objectivity and realism.” The categorical refusal to recognize the legal innovation of Imam al-Magmasi is also based on the motive that “Islamic jurisprudence, with its established legal dogmatic schools and its various legal practices, meets all the requirements of modern life, harmonizing social needs with Islamic law and implementing the Sharia production of legal conciliations - an emanation of collective Islamic jurisprudence” (Awal taaliq saudi rasmi ala insha madhab jadid...wa hujum mustamir dida al-Magmasi, 2023).

In general, it can be summarized that the actions of the fourth Righteous Caliph Ali bin Abi Talib are one of the main reasons behind the fragmentation of the Muslims, as he moved the capital from Medina – the Arabian Peninsula to Kufa – Iraq. In this way, Ali bin Abi Talib favored the customs and traditions of the Islamic periphery, such as Iraq, which was strongly influenced by the newly Islamized former pagan empire – Sassanid Persia, and marginalized the established conservative elitism represented by the tribal society of the Arabian Peninsula. There lived al-Qabilah al-Ilahiya, the divine tribe of the Quraysh of the Prophet Muhammad. The main position of most of the companions was to try to put an end to the rebellions and take a neutral

position in the personal conflict. The most prominent representative of this trend was their companion Abdullah bin Omar, who repeatedly stated this position. The division in this period began as a political one, and the dominant thesis is that the theologian Abdullah bin Saba (a 7th-century Yemenite Jew from the Himar tribe who converted to Islam: Sean, A., *The Caliph, and the Heretic: Ibn Saba' and the Origins of Shi'ism*. BRILL. p. 71) played a major role in the rebellion. Bin Saba is seen as the creator of the first Shi'ite sect, al-Ghulat, because of his unwavering support for Ali bin Abi Talib at the expense of Ma'wiyya bin Abi Safyan. The personal antagonism had ideological roots, but it acquired a permanent ideological character with the emergence of the Safavid state.

The theological elite in the Sunni countries, which are the majority in the Islamic world, defend the thesis that it was the Safavid dynasty that generated the insurmountable ideological differences between the two largest Islamic denominations. A detailed and comprehensive study on the issue is made by the Iraqi historian Hassan al-Alawi in his monograph *The Blood of the Karkha River* (As Sudani, H., *Dama an nahar al-Karkha*, 1980). Authors such as Ali Nasser al-Tamimi, as a Shiite, former advisor and close associate of the dictator Saddam Hussein, accuse him of bias and even racism. Among the supporters of al-Allawi's views is Ali Shariati (1933-1977), described as the "ideologist of the Islamic revolution in Iran." Working in the field of sociology of religion, the influential Iranian allowed himself to criticize the populism of the Shiite clergy, in parallel with the dictatorial nature of the Iranian monarchy. Al-Allawi believes that Shariati fell victim to the secret services of the former Iranian Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi because of his opinion. (As Sudani, H., *Dama an nahar al-Karkha*, 1980, pp. 68-98).

In the history of Islam, there have been many verbal and physical clashes between Shiites and Sunnis, in which both sides have exchanged various accusations. Probably, the attacks of the Shiites take on a much more radical character, since often the issue for them is of existential importance. The fact is that they, as a minority, are much more threatened than the majority. They were often forced to make alliances with non-Muslims against their Sunni co-religionists to survive. For example, in the 12th century, they interacted with the Crusaders, with whom they entered into battle together against the powerful army of the Sunni Saladin al-Ayyubi (1138-1193) – the winner of the Crusaders. According to Shiite sources, Sunni repressions against their Shiite opponents were most uncompromising during the rule of the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman eras. The minority's reaction was the outbreak of several successive rebellions, the most famous of which were those of the Qarmites (a radical Ismaili group that established its state on the western coast of the Persian Gulf in the 9th–11th centuries) and of Fatima Zahra's descendant Muhammad Nafse Zakiya (762).

However, the aforementioned Hassan al-Alawi and Ali Shariati are probably right in claiming that the climax came when the Ottoman state fought against its Safavid counterpart. During this era, the split was already final. The Safavid state took advantage of the persecution of the Shiites by the Ottoman authorities and managed to attract influential legal theologians such as Ali al-Karaki (1461 or 1466-1534). Born in the Lebanese Bekaa Valley, which was at that time under Ottoman rule, he graduated from the local authoritative Shiite religious academy (hawza al-ilmia). Imam al-Karaki left his homeland and settled in Iraq. Later, however, he was invited by the Safavid ruler Ismail I Shah (1487-1524), to spread Shiite jurisprudence and dogmatics in the lands of ancient Sassanid Persia. During the reign of his son Tahmasab I Shah (1524-1576), the faqih became, de facto, the ruler of the Safavid state. The writing of his famous book "A Breath of Theology in the Rejection of Totems and Tyrant" marked the beginning of the doctrinal dispute between Sunnism and Shiites. However, Shiite theologians were not united in developing a common anti-Sunni position. For example, al-marja'a ad-dinni, a source of religious legislation by Imam Ibrahim al-Qatifi (?-1543) from the authoritative Shiite center of Najaf, who originated from the Qatif region (today a province in Saudi Arabia), rejected several al-Qaraki's ideas. Perhaps this was a matter of a fundamental difference in the interpretation of power and, in particular, in the

understanding of the theory of wilayat al-faqih, the guardianship of the jurist-theologian. The latter has been institutionalized since 1979 in the Islamic Republic of Iran by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Al-Qatifi seems to be the ideological predecessor of the current most authoritative Iraqi Shiite cleric, namely Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who is also a supporter of the theory of the guardianship of the jurist-theologian. At the same time, the Iraqi Shiite clergy, formed around the religious academy in Najaf, is a supporter of a more liberal model of the Shiite power-statist theory, even though both regional schools belong to the same legal school – the Jafari. To a large extent, the competition between the two leading Jafari schools, namely the one in Najaf (Iraq) and the one in Qom (Iran), resembles the eternal rivalry between the two leading British universities and world scientific centers: Oxford and Cambridge.

In parallel with the main radical layer of the inter-confessional Sunni-Shiite opposition, there is also a smaller group, advocating a more moderate position, which is represented in both religious trends. According to Hassan al-Alawi, one of the spiritual leaders of the Lebanese Hezbollah – Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah (1935-2010) falls into this group. The latter casts doubt on some of the hadiths that express a negative attitude towards the companions (Al-Mauswa al-ariqa, Khilaf Sunni-Shi'i, 2023). If such a thesis is not confirmed by clear written evidence, then the Iraqi Shiite scholar Muhammad Hussein al-Gita'a (1877-1964) does this by writing the treatise *The Origin of the Shiites*. The Iraqi Jafari theologian Abdel Hussein Sharaf al-Din (1872-1957) and the famous Lebanese historian of religion Hashim Maarouf al-Hasani (1919-1983) can also be attributed to the same more moderate community. The order of the Ministry of Education in Tehran not to print in the Islamic Republic three volumes of the multi-volume "Seas of Lights" by the authoritative Jafari theologian Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (1627-1699) has been interpreted as a gesture of tolerance towards the Sunnis by official Iran. They abound in sharp criticism and frank attacks on the companions revered by the Sunnis. The already mentioned Amman Message also played its role as a serious attempt at reconciliation between the two largest Islamic denominations. As a direct consequence of this, a group of Saudi Sunnis, led by theologian Sheikh Mikhlif al-Shamari, organized a prayer service in a Shiite mosque in the city of Qatif. The city is predominantly Shiite. It is entirely reasonable to doubt the sincerity of this act, since in January 2016, the Saudi authorities executed the most senior Saudi Shiite theologian, Ayatollah Nimr Nimr. He was hanged together with terrorists from the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, which Shiite theologians see as an attempt by the Saudi state – one of the poles of Sunnism – to equate Shiism with the radical Islam preached by the aforementioned jihadist groups. This ignited discontent throughout the Shiite world, leading to the storming of the kingdom's embassy in Tehran by angry Iranians. As a direct consequence, diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed for seven years.

If we are to seek the roots of the impossibility of final reconciliation between the ulema of the two Islamic denominations, we must turn to their specific legal and dogmatic basis. We are talking about the numerous fatwas (individual normative acts) issued by authoritative jurists on both sides against the opponent. Fatwas with an openly radical anti-Shiite orientation are characteristic of the Sunni ulema, who belong to the Salafi movement. In some of them, the jurists openly declare all Shiites to be infidels (kufar), while in others only some more prominent representatives of the denomination in question are defined as such. This applies especially to the Jafarite school, also called the Imamite school. Leading representatives of Sunnism categorically reject any form of ecumenization between the two branches of Islam, since, in their opinion, this is not possible with people who have a priori rejected Islam. This is where the derogatory and sarcastic name for the Shiite comes from, namely ar Rafid or ar Rawafid, plural, which comes from the Arabic verb rafada, meaning to deny, to reject. To the long list of anti-Shiite fatwas we can add that of one of the most authoritative Sunni jurists, author of one of the most reliable collections of prophetic hadiths, namely Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari (810-870). In his treatise *Prerequisites for the Actions of the Servants*, he says: "I do not care whether I pray behind a Jahmid (a member of a theological school also called mo'atala (corrupted – ed.) or murja'iyah

(seeking a reprieve – ed.), which emerged among Shiite theologians in Kufa, Iraq in the first half of the 9th century. They preach the so-called al-irja'a, a reprieve, the essence of which is a practical call for the dehumanization of Sunnism and Shiism, i.e., the return to Islam before the schism occurred. (Tariq al-Islam, *Ma aksam al-murja'iyah, ma'a dhikr aqwalihim fi masail al-iman*, 2023) and Rafid (Shiite – ed.) or I pray behind a Jew and a Christian. They should not be greeted, they are hostile, there should be no marriages with them, they have not pronounced the shahada (testimony of belonging to Islam – ed.), and their food is not eaten" (Al-Bukhari, M., *Khalaq afaal al-ibad*, 2023).

A similar fatwa was issued by one of the founders of the four leading Sunni schools of jurisprudence, Imam Malik ibn Anas (711-795). The famous historian, exegete, and interpreter of the Quran, Imad ad-Din Abu Fida Ibn Kathir (1301-1371), quoted the aforementioned authoritative jurist: "The Rafidites (Shiites – ed.) must be declared infidels because they anger the companions. Anyone who angers the companions is an infidel." (For more information, see: Tafsir ibn Kathir, *The Interpretation of Ibn Kathir*, Dar ibn Hazam, Beirut, 2009, Vol. 4, p. 219, <https://www.noor-book.com/%D/>).

A similar opinion was expressed by another founder of the Sunni legal dogmatic school. This is Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal (780-855), whose dogmatics most closely followed the customs and traditions of the conservative society of the Arabian Peninsula. His fatwa for the Shiites comes through a quote from the famous theologian Ahmed bin Muhammad al-Khilal (848-923). Ben Hanbal transmits the words of his companion Abdel Malik bin Abdul Hamid, who quotes the Prophet Muhammad, i.e. creates a prophetic hadith. Its content reads as follows: "Whoever insults the companions, falls away from the Islamic religion." Then Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal points out that "the Shiites insult the companions of the Messenger of Allah, therefore we are not sure about their religion" (Al-Khilal, A., *Sunnah al-Khilal*, Dar ar-Rawiyya, Riyadh, 1989).

They are no exception in their dislike of Shiites and Islamic mystics, even though they are generally perceived as more moderate than representatives of other Sunni trends, especially in comparison with the Salafis. Such is the famous Persian philosopher, theologian, and mystic Abu Hamad al-Ghazali (1058-1111). In his treatise *The Hospital* he claims: "Due to lack of understanding, al-Rawafid (Shiites – ed.) committed bid'a, (heresy – ed.). They said that Ali (ben Abi Talib - ed.) does not talk about the unseen." (Al-Ghazali, A., *Al-Mustasfa*, 1993). Abdul Qadir al-Jilani (1075-1166) is also included in the group of mystics. He is a jurist-theologian, ascetic, and follower of the school of Ahmed bin Hanbal. At the same time, he is also the founder of the Qaderite order within the framework of Islamic mysticism. He is known for his anti-Shiite treatise *Reply to al-Ruafida* (Shiites). During the era of the High Middle Ages, when the fiercest doctrinal clash between the two denominations took place, a dozen treatises with the same name were created. The authoritative Sunni theologian Abu Hasan al-Ashairi (874-936), who was a descendant of his companion Abu Musa al-Ashairi (602-665), wrote a similar theological work, expanding the objects of criticism. His treatise is called *Articles of the Islamists and the differences between the Worshipers*. Opposing the Shiites, Kharijites, Mu'tazilites, and other currents in Islam, which he calls sects, al-Ashairi created his doctrine, which bears his name. The goal of his doctrinal heuristic is the renewal of Sunni orthodoxy in the denial of all other dogmatic ideas that contradict its principles.

During the late Middle Ages, some Sunni ulema even went so far as to issue fatwas calling for the physical extermination of Shiites. One such example was the Arabized Turk Ahmed ben Suleiman ben Kamal (1468 -1545). He was a poet and historian born in Edirne to a military family. He was appointed Sheikh-ul-Islam by Sultan Selim I, known as the "killer of the Alevis" (a branch of Shiism). In his most authoritative treatise, *Five Epistles to the Groups and Doctrines*, Ibn Kamal claims that "Muslims may possess their (Shiites – ed.) money, women, and children, and their men (Shiites – ed.) are obligatory to kill unless they accept (Sunni – ed.) Islam" (Ibn Kamal, 2023; Cairo, 1918). A similar, but much more detailed anti-Shiite fatwa was issued by one

of the contemporary Saudi Salafi ulema, Abdullah bin Jabarain (1933-2009). In his doctrinal opinion No. 11092, he calls for the Shiites to be killed because in the descriptions of Ali bin Abi Talib and their imams, they attribute divine qualities to them, and slander the Quran and the companions. According to him, in this way, they become murtadun, apostates (Ibn Jabareen's website, 2023).

Conversion from Sunni to Shi'ism, especially to the Ja'fari school of jurisprudence, is also part of the eternal theme of the confrontation between the two major Islamic denominations. Islamic scholars have created a special term for such a category of converts, namely *mustabsir* or *mutashii*. If the second word can be translated as "accepted Shi'ism," then the first has multiple meanings specifically one about religion. In the Arabic interpretive dictionary, the word *mustabsir* can be interpreted as "clairvoyant", but also as "perceptive", "clairvoyant" (Dictionaries Kamus al-Arabi, 2023). It is obvious that the authors are closer to Sunni orthodoxy and are more inclined to convey a negative connotation to the term, as they are based on verse 38 of the Quranic Surah "The Spider". It says there: "And Satan made their deeds fair-seeming to them and prevented them from their path, and they were perceptive" (Holy Quran, Riyadh, 1980: 332). Probably the idea is to suggest that the category of Muslims in question who become "clairvoyant", "perceptive" and "perceptive" appears as a result of a satanic deed. Generally speaking, religious conversion is considered a diabolical act. The presumption is that Allah forbids not only the Sunni-Shiite transformation but in principle any conversion to Jafarism, regardless of which denomination is abandoned, including non-Muslims.

Probably, the reason for the existing conversion is still due to a prophetic hadith, which is not disputed by either the Sunnis or the Shiites. The point is in its different interpretation. A detailed analysis of this phenomenon is made in Hasun Ala's monograph entitled *Introduction to Conversion to Shiism*. At the center of the interpretation is the prophetic hadith, known as the "hadith of the two heavy things" (Ala, 2023). The Sharia text in question has a different form in Sunni and Shiite sources since the chain of narrators (exegetes) is different. In the Sunni version, the text is as follows: "I have taken it and left among you two weighty things, the Book of God and my house, and you will not go astray after them." In the Shiite version, the hadith reads as follows: "I am leaving behind you something that, if you hold on to it, you will not go astray. The Book of Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, has one end in the hands of Allah and one end in your hands. And my offspring are the people of my house, and they will not separate until they come to me" (Al-Husseini, 2023). The Shia thesis is that the Quran and the successors of the Prophet are identical in weight in Islam. At the same time, the Sunnis claim that such a statement is heresy since there is nothing greater than the word of God – the Quran. He is at-Tiqla al-Akbar, the greater weight, and the Ahl al-Bayt, the successors of the Prophet Muhammad, are at-Tiqla al-Asghar, the lesser weight. They should not be mixed.

The first and most authoritative convert is considered to be Sheikh Muhammad al-Antaki (1897-?). He was born in the city of Antakya, Syria, where, together with his brother Ahmed, he was appointed imam and qadi, a follower of the Sunni Shafaite school. In his famous treatise *Why I Chose the Doctrine of Shiism*, al-Antaki explains that he was disgusted by the evils, slander, and aggression that surrounded him during his judicial proceedings. His serious research into the teachings of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792), the creator of Wahhabism, probably also influenced the change in confessional affiliation. In his treatise *On My Path to Shiism*, his brother, Sheikh Ahmed al-Antaki, argues that there are insurmountable contradictions between the individual Sunni movements and that they cannot be attributed to one confessional community. The sheikh defends the thesis that Sunnism is not a compact dogmatic bloc. He presents mutually exclusive interpretations of the legal consequences of *az-zanah*, adultery, between the Shafi'is and the Hanafis. The convert advances the thesis that the truth is with the Shi'ites (Al-Antaki, 2023).

Among the more famous converted ulema is the Tunisian Muhammad al-Tijani, born in 1946, who graduated from the famous theological university of Az-Zaytuna in his homeland. He is a former follower of the Tijani order, which is why he is called al-Tijani. During his visit to Iraq, he met the influential ayatollahs Abu Qassem al-Khoi and Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr and entered into a dispute with them. It is obvious that they convinced him of the correctness of Jafarism, and al-Tijani adopted Shiism. It is noteworthy that the majority of famous Sunni theologians belong to peripheral regions to the epicenter of the Islamic religion, namely Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen, and fewer from Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Palestine (Schwartz & Galily, 2021). None of the countries of the Persian Gulf are there. Only the Yemeni theologian Dr. Issam Imad converted from Wahhabism to Jafarism. This transformation is not difficult to explain since Imad belongs to a family that professed Zaydiyyah, another trend within the Shiite family. He received his university degree from the Sanaa Institute of Science, the largest academic unit in the country studying Islam under the Wahhabi educational programs. Among the theological literature that played an important preaching role in convincing hesitant Sunnis are the treatises *Notes* by the Lebanese theologian Abdul Hussein Sharafuddin (1873-1957), *Then I Was Guided, To Be Honest, The Shiites Are Sunnis, Ask the Men* by Imam Muhammad al-Tijani, the study *And I Boarded the Ship* by the Jordanian Marwan Khleifat, the series of monographs by the Jordanian lawyer Ahmed Hussein Yaqub *Theory of the Justice of the Companions, The Political Regime in Islam, Summary of the Imamate and Birth, Political Plans* and others. The majority of converts decided on this step, probably impressed by the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

In recent years, Sunni-Shiite antagonism has been in a latent state. It has acquired the character of a “frozen conflict,” which bursts to the surface depending on the unstable situation in the Islamic world. As already noted, the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the institutionalization of the theory of wilayat al-faqih, the guardianship of the jurist-theologian in this country catalyzed direct armed clashes. Revolutionary Shiism went beyond the borders of Iran and invaded the Iraqi, Lebanese, Syrian, Bahraini, and Yemeni political-dogmatic space. The bloody attacks in Iraq, carried out by radical Salafis against the pilgrimages of Shiite worshipers in Iraq in the first decade of the 20th century, are nothing more than an outright sectarian confrontation. Shiites in Saudi Arabia protest religious discrimination, but Sunnis in Iran also complain about the same attitude of local authorities towards them.

The antagonism between the two denominations in the cultural sphere is permanent. Film productions with huge budgets are pitted against each other in interpreting the role of individual figures in the history of the Islamic state. Immediately after the Saudi television holding MBC announced in early 2023 that it had begun filming a series about the life of the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, Mauwiyah bin Abi Safyan, with a budget of over \$100 million, to show it to viewers in the month of Ramadan 2024, the Iraqi pro-Iranian satellite channel *Shaarat* surprised its viewers with its intention to begin filming a film glorifying the murderer of the second Righteous Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab. The production in question is entitled: “The Courage of Abu Lulua,” in which, according to the script, the Persian slave Abu Lulua showed courage and strength, ending the life of the real creator of the caliphate. What is interesting in this case is that Arab and Iranian actors have been engaged to participate in the film, but all of them are Shiites by religious affiliation. The claim of the creators of the future artistic product is that it will be the largest Islamic historical production (Al-Basumi, Sh., “Musalsal Mawiyya bin Abi Safyan” ...hal yushaal fitna suniya-shiyya, 2023).

In parallel, during the month of Ramadan 2023, the aforementioned Saudi channel MBC decided to broadcast an old series called “Mawiyah” with a similar script. The Iraqi media regulator banned the local branch of this Saudi media company from broadcasting the tape in question on Iraqi airwaves. The influential Iraqi politician and cleric Muqtada al-Sadr expressed his opinion on the matter by posting on Twitter, in which he stated: “I believe it is more appropriate, better and even necessary for the MBC channel to refuse to broadcast the series

(Mawiya – ed.), because it is the beginning of sectarian strife and the first to insult the companions, deviate from the imam of his time, splitting Islamic unity. He kills the companions. There is no need to hurt the feelings of your Muslim brothers in the East and the West” (Al-Basumi, Sh., 16.04.2023/).

The position of the television channel of the most authoritative Sunni university, Al-Azhar, on the case is interesting. It is he who reflects the debates on the topic in social media, but without expressing an official opinion. The council of authoritative Sunni scholars upholds the position that the companions, as well as the prophets, should not be filmed in film productions. At this stage, the opinion has not turned into a fatwa, but Al-Azhar nevertheless intervened and prevented the broadcast of the series “Mawiya” on the rated Egyptian satellite channels. The dominant opinion is that such controversial historical works cannot be stopped, due to the technical capabilities of modern media. The uncensored YouTube channel is particularly effective in this regard. Moreover, a fatwa by the former ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, with a similar meaning was issued in opposition to the position of the Al-Azhar scholars.

Sometimes the Sunni-Shiite opposition acquires a purely material dimension. It is expressed in attempts to change the ownership of waqf properties and, respectively, the donations received by mosques. Such is the example of the intention of the foundation that manages the properties of the Shiite religious complexes in the Iraqi city of Samarra, associated with the tenth and eleventh imams of the Jafarites, namely Ali al-Hadi (828-868) and al-Hasan al-Askari (846-874), father of al-Mahdi al-Montazar, the expected messiah Muhammad al-Mahdi. The institution in question has demonstrated ambition to take control of the Great Mosque, which is Sunni. We are talking about the historic Great Mosque in the city of Samarra, in the province of Salahaddin, whose population is predominantly Sunni. By changing the name of the religious temple, the institution in question intended to reorient the generous donations that the authoritative mosque receives from its worshipers. The reaction from local tribal leaders and clerics was very radical since the religious temple was built in the 9th century by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakil al-Allah (822-861). It was to him that Constantine – Cyril the philosopher was sent to discuss the principles of the Holy Trinity, the strengthening of ties between the Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire, as well as the exchange of prisoners from both sides. With its 50 meters high, the minaret was for a long time the tallest in the entire Islamic world. For centuries there has been a madrasa there, where Islamic sciences are taught by theologians of the Sunni Shafaite school. After the intervention of the chairman of the parliamentary committee on tribal affairs and endowments, Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, the process of Shiiteization of the historic Sunni mosque was stopped. The politician directly appealed to Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani for personal intervention. The influential MP noted that “it (the Great Mosque – ed.) will remain part of the Sunni waqfs, as its transfer to the Shiite waqfs is non-Shariah and contradicts the traditions of the donors’ wishes” (Al-Nashmi, 2023).

4. Conclusion

The differences between Sunnis and Shiites are eternal, and military-political, intra-state or inter-state clashes are cyclical. The seeds of opposition were planted in the Middle Ages and have permanently sprouted and penetrated the genesis of state formations that are the heirs of the Sunni Caliphate or the Shiite Imamate. The customs and traditions of local tribes are projected into the psyche and behavioral models of the modern Islamic political elite. The specificity and dynamics of the law-making process of individual nation-states are the most relevant signs of the current state of inter-confessional antagonism. External pressure, as well as borrowings from foreign (non-Islamic) legal heritage, are transformed into a force majeure factor towards reducing the original reproduction of a direct sectarian clash characteristic of past eras.

The restoration of diplomatic relations between two of the symbols of Sunnism and Shiism, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran after a seven-year hiatus, is proof that Islam in the current 21st century differs from that in the Middle Ages.

Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The author declares no competing interests.

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