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The Genocide of the Muṭarrifiyya: A Study of the Apparent and Hidden Causes

Mutarrifiyye Soykırımı: Görünürdeki ve Gizli Nedenler Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Ahmed Mohammed Hussein Al-DAGHAISHI

Prof. Dr. İğdır Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi, Felsefe ve Din Bölümü, Din Eğitimi Bilim Dalı
Professor at the Faculty of Theology, Department of Philosophy and Religion, Division of Religious Education, Iğdır University
Iğdır/TÜRKİYE
addaghashi@yahoo.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2091-2931>
<https://ror.org/05jstgx72>

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the extermination of the Muṭarrifiyya by investigating its apparent and hidden causes. It seeks to identify the real motive behind their extermination and to explain their position on certain contentious issues that contributed to it. The author employs a critical, analytical historical method, supplemented by an inductive approach. Among the study's findings is the confirmation that Imam 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza exterminated the Muṭarrifiyya comprehensively: adults and children were killed, and property, mosques, and intellectual heritage were destroyed, leaving no trace of them. Examination of Ibn Ḥamza's actual motives for his actions against the Muṭarrifiyya confirms that these actions stemmed from their independence from his authority or their disagreement with him on certain subsidiary questions, especially those concerning government. They insisted that a ruler possess all the required qualifications, that words and deeds be consistent, and that a ruler be held accountable if he erred or departed from what they understood to be true Islam and the path of the school of al-Hādī. All this amounted to applying the principle of commanding right and forbidding wrong, one of the five principles of the Hādawī Zaydī school. The author recommends rereading the tragedy of the Muṭarrifiyya in light of the group's available original sources and, in particular, those of the opposing side (the writings of 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza).

Keywords: İslamic Educational Thought Muṭarrifiyya, Genocide, Tragedy, Zaydism, Causes.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Muṭarrifiyya'nın uğradığı soykırımı görünür ve gizli nedenlerini inceleyerek ele almakta; soykırımın gerçek nedenini ortaya koymayı ve yok edilmelerinde etkili olan bazı tartışmalı meselelerdeki tutumlarını açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmacı, tümevarım yönteminden de yararlanarak tarihsel, çözümleyici ve eleştirel yöntemi kullanmıştır. Araştırmanın bulguları arasında, İmam Abdullah b. Hamza'nın Muṭarrifiyya'yı büyük küçük demeden insanlarıyla birlikte mallarını, camilerini ve düşünsel mirasını kapsayacak, geride onlardan hiçbir iz bırakmayacak biçimde topyekûn yok ettiği tespiti yer almaktadır. Ayrıca İmam Abdullah b. Hamza'nın Muṭarrifiyya'ya karşı giriştiği eylemlerin gerçek nedenleri incelendiğinde, bunların Muṭarrifiyya'nın onu taklit etmekten bağımsız davranmasına veya özellikle yönetimle ilgili bazı fer'î meselelerde onunla aynı görüşü paylaşmamasına dayandığı anlaşılmaktadır. Muṭarrifiyya, yöneticinin gerekli niteliklerin tümünü taşımasında ve söz ile eylemin birbirine uygun olmasında ısrar ediyor; yönetici hata yaptığında, kendilerince doğru İslam'dan saptığında veya Hādī ekolünün çizgisinden ayrıldığında hesap vermesini istiyordu. Bütün bunlar, Hâdevî Zeydî mezhebinin beş temel ilkesinden biri olan iyiliği emretme ve kötülükten sakındırma ilkesinin uygulanması kapsamındaydı. Araştırmacı, Muṭarrifiyya trajedisinin, grubun günümüze ulaşan özgün kaynakları ve özellikle karşı tarafın kaynakları (Abdullah b. Hamza'nın eserleri) ışığında yeniden okunmasını önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslam Eğitim Düşüncesi Muṭarrifiyya, Soykırım, Trajedi, Zeydilik, Nedenler.

INTRODUCTION

The extermination of the Muṭarrifiyya is a historical event that has provoked extensive debate in the doctrinal and political history of the Arabian Peninsula. Its intellectual complexities and overlapping contexts extended beyond the visible conflict to deeper questions concerning the use of religion, the interpretation of doctrinal dissent, and changes in power and influence. A number of historical sources have generally approached the event from a single perspective, focusing on its stated justifications without adequately examining the hidden impulses and undeclared motives that shaped its emergence, course, and consequences. Therefore there is a need for an analytical scholarly study that moves beyond descriptive narration and reads this extermination in its broader intellectual, social, and political setting, distinguishing what was declared from what remained implicit in the discourse of justification and historical writing.

Research Problem and Questions:

It is now accepted in scholarship that the Muṭarrifiyya suffered a major massacre at the hands of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza (d. 614 AH), known as Imam al-Manṣūr bi-llāh. It encompassed their thought and its bearers and did not spare even women, children, or property: it was a comprehensive war of extermination, albeit one conducted within a single community. Disagreement, both in the past and today, has instead centered on whether the Muṭarrifiyya deserved that “punishment,” while some have disputed only the scale of the catastrophe and estimates of the number of victims. The present study examines the tragedy from its different aspects, probing its roots and its underlying and hidden causes.

In light of the foregoing, the research problem lies in the absence of a searching, in-depth examination of the issue from its roots that could make a balanced scholarly treatment possible. Many studies and historical accounts have concentrated on apparent causes associated with overt or alleged doctrinal disagreement while overlooking or marginalizing hidden factors that may have contributed to the decision to exterminate the group and to its execution. These include considerations of authority, struggles for influence, the intertwining of religion and politics, and mechanisms of exclusion carried out in the name of doctrinal correction. This shortcoming has produced a one-sided historical picture, leading to an inaccurate reading of the event and entrenching a simplified understanding of complex circumstances. Therefore the study seeks to unpack this problem by rereading the event, exposing the interaction of apparent and hidden causes, and analyzing them in their wider historical and intellectual setting. Accordingly, its central question is:

What were the apparent and hidden causes of the extermination of the Muṭarrifiyya?

This central question gives rise to the following subsidiary questions:

1. How have contemporary studies and writings presented the tragedy of the Muṭarrifiyya?
2. What is the dialectical relationship between pretext and reality in the extermination of the Muṭarrifiyya?
3. How can the real motive behind the extermination of the Muṭarrifiyya be established?
4. What was the Muṭarrifiyya’s position on the lineage requirement for rule, and how was it related to their extermination?
5. Did declaring people unbelievers on the basis of interpretation and necessary implication lie at the roots of the tragedy?

Research Method:

The study uses a critical, analytical historical method, supplemented by an inductive approach. It traces historical accounts concerning the extermination of the Muṭarrifiyya in their sources, analyzes and critiques them, and identifies the event’s apparent and hidden causes in their intellectual, political, and social context.

Previous Studies:

Because previous studies are connected to the subject and to the ways they have presented the extermination of the Muṭarrifiyya, they will be discussed in detail in the context of the second section.

1. Zayd, Ḥasan. “Hāmish ‘an al-Muṭarrifiyya: Radd lam Yunshar ‘an al-Muṭarrifiyya” (A Note on the Muṭarrifiyya: An Unpublished Response). Ḥasan Zayd’s blog, 24 December 2007. http://zaiday0.blogspot.com/2009/07/blog-post_522.html. The original article appeared in *al-Masār* as “Ta’qīb Ḥasan Zayd ‘alā Miḥnat al-Muṭarrifiyya wa-Shaykh al-Islām al-‘Umarī,” nos. 11-12, 12 September 2003.
2. Wajīh, Muḥammad Qā’id Ḥasan. “*al-Zaydiyya* al-Muṭarrifiyya fī al-Yaman: Zuhūrahā fī al-Qarn al-Khāmis al-Hijrī, Mu’taqadātuhā wa-Qaḍā’ al-Imām ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza ‘Alayhā” (The Muṭarrifiyya in Yemen: Their Emergence in the Fifth Century AH, Their Beliefs, and Imam ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza’s Elimination of Them). *al-Mu’arrikh al-‘Arabī* 18 (March 2010), 141-189.

Research Limitations:

As this study focuses on identifying the visible and hidden causes behind the annihilation of the Muṭarrifiyya, it excludes its connection with other Zaydi factions. It also does not explore the Muṭarrifiyya’s link to Imam Zayd himself, or how close or distant it was from his historical school of thought. Additionally, the research does not delve into the period following the demise of the Muṭarrifiyya.

Preliminary Discussion: The Muṭarrifiyya: An Introduction and Definition

Scholars of Islamic groups and schools know that Zaydism is one of the branches of Shī‘ism and that Zaydism itself divided into several schools, one of which was the Muṭarrifiyya. Yet despite their declared adherence to the Hādawī Zaydī school, the Muṭarrifiyya were subjected to persecution, indeed comprehensive extermination, at the hands of some imams of that same Hādawī school. Here lies the paradox whose circumstances this study seeks to clarify.

The Muṭarrifiyya take their name from Muṭarrif ibn Shihāb al-‘Abbādī al-Shihābī, who lived between the late fourth and mid-fifth centuries AH, according to one researcher’s assessment¹. He lived in the village of Bayt Ḥanbaṣ and its environs², in the Banī Maṭar district, now part of Ṣan‘ā’ Governorate.

‘Abd al-Ghanī Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-‘Āṭī, a researcher of the Hādawī heritage and, in particular, the heritage of the Muṭarrifiyya and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza, and author of *al-Ṣirā’ al-Fikrī fī al-Yaman bayna al-Zaydiyya wa-l-Muṭarrifiyya*, cites certain Hādawī Jārūdī scholars, including ‘Abd Allāh ibn Zayd al-‘Ansī (d. 667 AH). In the manuscript of his book *al-Tamyīz bayna al-Islām wa-l-Muṭarrifiyya al-Ṭughām*, al-‘Ansī claims that the founder of the Muṭarrifiyya was a leading Bāṭinī in the al-Ahnūm region who feigned conversion to Zaydism and, through his skillful stratagems, influenced ordinary people and persuaded them of his views and beliefs³. He then relates what may be described as the steps by which he lured his Zaydī followers into “his Bāṭinī school, alien to Zaydism,” in al-‘Ansī’s words⁴.

Ismā‘īl al-Akwa’ (d. 1429 AH/2008 CE), for his part, describes the Muṭarrifiyya as “a group named after Muṭarrif ibn Shihāb, a prominent figure of the fourth and early fifth centuries AH. They were adherents of Imam al-Hādī Yahyā ibn al-Ḥusayn and followers of his school in subsidiary legal matters, from which they did not consider departure permissible. They held that, in matters of independent reasoning, the correct position

¹ ‘Alī Muḥammad Zayd, *Tayārāt Mu’tazilat al-Yaman fī al-Qarn al-Sādis al-Hijrī* (Ṣan‘ā’: French Centre for Yemeni Studies, 1997), 65.

² Zayd, *Tayārāt Mu’tazilat al-Yaman*, 67.

³ ‘Abd al-Ghanī Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-‘Āṭī, *al-Ṣirā’ al-Fikrī fī al-Yaman bayna al-Zaydiyya wa-l-Muṭarrifiyya: Dirāsa wa-Nuṣūṣ* (Cairo: ‘Ayn li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Buḥūth al-Insāniyya wa-l-Ijtimā’iyya, 2002), 10. See also Aḥmad al-Shāmī’s explanation of those beliefs, his defense of them, and his rejection of declaring their adherents unbelievers in Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Shāmī, *Tārīkh al-Yaman al-Fikrī fī al-‘Aṣr al-‘Abbāsī* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā’is, 1407/1987), 3/110-112.

⁴ See ‘Abd al-‘Āṭī, *al-Ṣirā’ al-Fikrī*, 10-11.

rests with one party [the principle concerning those who are right and those who are wrong], and therefore forbade departure from his school. When they saw that Imam al-Manşūr bi-llāh ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza had differed from al-Hādī on some subsidiary questions, they objected to him. This was one cause of the discord between them, even though he was the one who said, ‘We hold the texts of al-Hādī in awe just as we hold the texts of the Qur’ān in awe’⁵.

Regarding their complete adherence to Imam al-Hādī Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Rassī, Zayd ibn ‘Alī al-Wazīr maintains that, in what he calls the opinion of critical scholars, the Muṭarrifiyya were “followers of al-Hādī Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, who adhered to his school and clung to it to a degree unmatched by any of the Hādawīs of Yemen or elsewhere”⁶. In more than one article and study, al-Wazīr defended their particular affiliation with the Hādawī school and accused their opponents, the Mukhtari’a, of being the ones who departed from its teachings and positions⁷.

Although accounts of the origins of the Muṭarrifiyya differ, researchers on the subject affirm that Muṭarrif ibn Shihāb was the person who succeeded in giving the school its distinctive character and became its most prominent advocate. The school thus came to bear his name, which was applied to all its followers⁸.

Section One: The Tragedy of the Muṭarrifiyya in Contemporary Studies and Writings

The scholarly literature on the tragedy of the Muṭarrifiyya may be divided into two categories:

First: Academic writings from outside the Hādawī Zaydī school:

To the best of the present author’s knowledge and ability to investigate, he has found only three academic studies in the strict, direct scholarly sense recognized in academic research: one doctoral dissertation and two peer-reviewed articles. In chronological order, they are:

It should be briefly noted here that Zayd’s dissertation revealed aspects of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza’s attempt to exterminate the Muṭarrifiyya wherever they were found: he enslaved their women and children and imposed silence on them so that their recitation of the Qur’ān could not be heard and they could not study the religious sciences. Their houses were looted and then destroyed along with their mosques; their books were burned and their pens broken⁹. Zayd praises the group and its efforts to spread education in areas and families not historically known for their interest in or distinction in learning¹⁰. Ibn Ḥamza did not limit his confrontation with the group to intellectual argument. Rather, he followed “intellectual extermination with physical extermination, thereby laying the foundations of a despotic approach to the new and the different whose effects have not yet been erased”¹¹.

Second: The Muṭarrifiyya in Yemen between Scholarship and Politics, 1990

This peer-reviewed article by ‘Abd al-Ghanī ‘Abd al-‘Āṭī is 47 pages long and was published in the Journal of the Faculty of Arts at Mansoura University, Egypt, in May 1990¹². He also included it as the first chapter of

⁵ See Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Alī al-Akwa‘, *al-Zaydiyya: Nash’atuhā wa-Mu‘taqadātuhā* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu‘āṣir, 1413/1993), 55; Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Alī al-Akwa‘, *Hijar al-‘Ilm wa-Ma‘āqiluh fī al-Yaman* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu‘āṣir; Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1416/1995), 1/165-167. For a fuller discussion of the emergence, ideas, and beliefs of the Muṭarrifiyya, see Shāmī, *Tārīkh al-Yaman al-Fikrī*, 3/84-114.

⁶ Zayd ibn ‘Alī al-Wazīr, “al-Jāmi‘āt–al-Masājīd fī Shamāl al-Yaman: Şuwar min al-Jadal al-Fikrī”, *al-Masār* 1 (6 January 2000), 17.

⁷ See, for example, Zayd ibn ‘Alī al-Wazīr, “al-Muṭarrifiyya: al-Fikr wa-l-Ma’sāh”, *al-Masār* 2 (8 May 2000), 35-40.

⁸ ‘Abd al-‘Āṭī, *al-Şirā’ al-Fikrī*, 32.

⁹ Zayd, *Tayārāt Mu‘tazilat al-Yaman*, 11.

¹⁰ Zayd, *Tayārāt Mu‘tazilat al-Yaman*, 11.

¹¹ Zayd, *Tayārāt Mu‘tazilat al-Yaman*, 11.

¹² ‘Abd al-Ghanī Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-‘Āṭī, “al-Muṭarrifiyya bayna al-‘Ilm wa-l-Siyāsa”, *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Mansoura University* (May 1990).

his book mentioned above, *al-Şirā' al-Fikrī fī al-Yaman bayna al-Zaydiyya wa-l-Muṭarrifiyya*. Drawing primarily on Sulaymān ibn Muḥammad al-Maḥallī's *al-Burhān al-Rā'iq al-Mukhalliṣ min Waraṭ al-Maḍāyiq*, it discusses the emergence of the Muṭarrifiyya and the spread of their settlements, which served as educational centres as well as places of residence and of hospitality for visitors and guests. It also examines the Muṭarrifiyya's theological beliefs, especially the question of how God creates beings, and God's equal treatment of creatures in six matters: creation, provision, death, life, religious obligation, and recompense. The article further addresses the Muṭarrifiyya and the imamate, culminating in Imam 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza's attack on them, his declaration that they were unbelievers, and his motive for doing so¹³. This article will be relied upon extensively below when discussing Ibn Ḥamza's extermination of the Muṭarrifiyya and the true underlying reason for his decision to eradicate them.

Third: The Muṭarrifi Zaydīs in Yemen: Their Emergence in the Fifth Century AH, Their Beliefs, and Imam 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza's Elimination of Them, 2010:

This peer-reviewed study by Muḥammad Qā'id al-Wajīh is 50 pages long. It appeared in *al-Mu'arrikh al-'Arabī*, the journal of the Union of Arab Historians in Cairo, in March 2010, no. 18¹⁴. It addresses the emergence and name of the Muṭarrifiyya, their efforts to establish and spread settlements, their conflict with the Zaydīs known as the Mukhtari'a, their disagreement with Imam Aḥmad ibn Sulaymān, and their conflict with 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza and the use of violence to exterminate them.

The other category: Writings within the Hādawī Zaydī school:

There are many old and recent writings by Hādawī Zaydī scholars and intellectuals. Most of them are almost unanimous in disparaging the Muṭarrifiyya and judging them to be in error¹⁵. Their disagreement may concern only whether the Muṭarrifiyya's error amounted to unbelief on the basis of the necessary implication and interpretation of what they said, or remained within the bounds of deviation and misguidance, since a statement's alleged implications and interpretations need not be attributed to its speaker. On the other side, among those who defend the Muṭarrifiyya as victims and condemn Imam 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza's conduct toward them in our own time, very few voices within the Hādawī Zaydī school emerged at the start of the twenty-first century CE, apart from specialized research on the subject in all or some of its aspects. An earlier exception was the outcry of Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Shāmī (d. 1426 AH/2005 CE), a Zaydī historian and writer. In one volume of his encyclopedic *Tārīkh al-Yaman al-Fikrī fī al-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī*, he devoted substantial space to the Muṭarrifiyya, argued that they had been wronged, and expressed shock at the actions of 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza, of whom he had previously thought very highly¹⁶. He said that he felt ashamed and wondered why so many Hādawī historians and jurists had remained silent about what 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza had done to the Muṭarrifiyya. At most, a fair-minded writer would mention them without adding derogatory epithets such as "wretched" or "erring." Turning to Ibn Ḥamza's position toward his Muṭarrifi opponents and his decision to declare them unbelievers, exterminate them, and take them captive, al-Shāmī described it as "a horrifying, grievous affair." He recalled how 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib treated his Khārijī opponents with forbearance: he did not

¹³ See 'Abd al-'Āṭī, *al-Şirā' al-Fikrī*, 9-50 (containing the author's study "al-Muṭarrifiyya bayna al-'Ilm wa-l-Siyāsa" as its first part).

¹⁴ Muḥammad Qā'id Ḥasan al-Wajīh, "*al-Zaydiyya al-Muṭarrifiyya fī al-Yaman: Ḍuhūrahā fī al-Qarn al-Khāmis al-Hijrī*, Mu'ṭaqadātuhā wa-Qaḍā' al-Imām 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza 'Alayhā", *al-Mu'arrikh al-'Arabī* 18 (March 2010), 141-189.

¹⁵ See the titles of old and recent manuscripts and published books on the Muṭarrifiyya assembled by the editor in his introduction to 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza, *Majmū' Rasā'il al-Imām al-Manṣūr bi-llāh 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza*, Critical ed. 'Abd al-Salām al-Wajīh (Şan'a': Mu'assasat Zayd ibn 'Alī al-Thaqāfiyya, 1422/2002), 2/8-23.

¹⁶ See Shāmī, *Tārīkh al-Yaman al-Fikrī*, 3/84-114.

declare them unbelievers although they had declared him one, did not deem their blood licit, did not initiate fighting against them, and did not bar them from God's mosques¹⁷.

Section Two: The Genocide of the Muṭarrifiyya: Pretext and Reality

Although the Muṭarrifis clearly sought to convince their contemporaries that they had introduced no new innovation into their school and remained faithful to the teachings attributed to Imam al-Hādī, founder of the Hādawī state in Yemen¹⁸, their opponents continued to accuse them of grave unbelief and the most heinous offenses. This can be inferred from studies of the subject, including the aforementioned study by 'Abd al-Ghanī 'Abd al-'Āṭī, which in turn relied principally on al-Sīra al-Manṣūriyya by Abū Firās ibn Da'tham, a follower of Ibn Ḥamza. I shall briefly summarize 'Abd al-'Āṭī's account, beginning with what may be called the great paradox in the Muṭarrifiyya's relationship with the man chiefly responsible for destroying them and eradicating their school and heritage: 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza. Their relationship with him was initially good. The Muṭarrifis supported Ibn Ḥamza and pledged allegiance to him; he, in turn, drew them close and appointed some of them governors of regions in his state, apparently attempting to win them over. Their devotion to learning and its attendant debates, discussions, and scholarly gatherings, especially at their centre in the settlement of Waqash¹⁹, may, on the one hand, have distracted them from their administrative duties. On the other hand, their limited involvement in politics may have led them to fail, or perform poorly, in the tasks entrusted to them. A third possibility is that their reservations about Ibn Ḥamza's policies, particularly his treatment of dissenters, grew from their discovery of the extent to which he considered it permissible to shed opponents' blood and violate their honor and inviolability. This may have been a direct cause of the deterioration in relations between the two sides, especially given the Muṭarrifiyya's known insistence on stringent conditions and qualifications for the supreme ruler. In light of Ibn Ḥamza's life and the Muṭarrifiyya's position on government and politics, this last factor, relating to Ibn Ḥamza's character, may be the most likely. It may explain why his policy toward them began with their removal from office, followed by denial of a share of zakāt funds. Their circumstances became difficult. After deliberation, they agreed to appoint al-Muntaṣir bi-llāh Muḥammad ibn Mufaḍḍal (d. 600 AH), known as al-'Afīf, to act as a ruler who would defend them. Because of his good relationship with Ibn Ḥamza, the escalation of tensions between the imam and the Muṭarrifiyya ceased for a time. As soon as Ibn Mufaḍḍal died, however, the relationship again deteriorated into tension and war. A campaign to defame the Muṭarrifiyya began to spread. As a scholarly, peaceful, nonmilitary group, they could only rely on debate and learned discussion. Later they realized that such methods were futile against a ruler such as 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza, known for his violence, power, and unrivaled confidence in his own knowledge, especially once he had become their principal adversary, and they abandoned that course. It is said that the imam himself withdrew from a planned debate after ordering its location changed from Dhī Marmar²⁰ to Ṣa'da. This did not ease tensions between the parties; on the contrary, it made them worse. Each side understood the other's hesitation to debate as a sign of weakness and inability

¹⁷ See Shāmī, *Tārīkh al-Yaman al-Fikrī*, 3/78-80. This independent intellectual position by a Hādawī Zaydī figure of al-Shāmī's stature as a writer and historian shocked figures such as 'Abd al-Salām al-Wajīh, editor of the Collected Epistles of Imam al-Manṣūr bi-llāh 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza. Al-Wajīh could find no explanation for al-Shāmī's striking independence except to accuse him of ignorance on the subject and of proceeding blindly because he had not read Ibn Ḥamza's writings. He called on him to consult some of Ibn Ḥamza's epistles instead of posing his questions. See 'Abd al-Salām al-Wajīh, editor's introduction to 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza, *Majmū' Rasā'il*, 2/22. Although al-Wajīh urged researchers, especially those beginning to examine the Muṭarrifiyya's ordeal, to continue investigating Ibn Ḥamza's causes and motives in order to identify the true reason for what happened to them, he did not conceal his support for Ibn Ḥamza's account and those who followed it. He considered the Muṭarrifiyya the first to wage war against Ibn Ḥamza, leading him to declare them apostates and to permit their capture, which he then ordered. Al-Wajīh thus deemed all this permissible for him. See Wajīh, editor's introduction to Ibn Ḥamza, *Majmū' Rasā'il*, 2/12.

¹⁸ 'Abd al-'Āṭī, *al-Širā' al-Fikrī*, 13.

¹⁹ A village in the Banī Maṭar district, now part of Ṣan'ā' Governorate.

²⁰ A fortress above a village in Shibām al-Ghirās near Ṣan'ā'.

to sustain its argument. Ibn Ḥamza then found no better course than to begin using violence, repression, exile, and destruction against the Muṭarrifiyya. He had people spread outrageous claims about them, including one person's assertion that a Muṭarrifi, in a debate, had equated the Prophet with a Jew. Ibn Ḥamza used this as a pretext to summon that Muṭarrifi and behead him. The affair became still more grave for the Muṭarrifiyya. They called on one another to defend themselves, openly cursed Ibn Ḥamza, and competed in satirizing him and refuting his accusations. They then sought assistance from the Ayyubid authorities who ruled Ṣan'ā' at the time. Ibn Ḥamza, however, had already killed many of them, saying that "he wished to establish an enduring precedent to be followed by those of the Prophet's family who would rise and issue a summons thereafter"²¹. For their part, finding no way to stop what was being done to them, the Muṭarrifiyya appointed an imam of their own and pledged allegiance to him: al-Sharīf Yaḥyā ibn Maṣṣūr, a descendant of al-Hādī. They nevertheless continued to demand a debate with Ibn Ḥamza in Thulā, as he wished, challenging him to respond. They regarded his failure to appear on the appointed day as evidence of his weakness and unfitness for the imamate, and wrote to their supporters to assemble that day. Ibn Ḥamza's excuse for not attending on the appointed day was perhaps no accident. He had already prepared a campaign to incite public opinion against them through propaganda, psychological pressure, and scholarly argument in preparation for physically destroying them. He sent out a public letter and disseminated it widely, openly declaring the Muṭarrifiyya unbelievers and apostates. This weakened their social standing as people turned away from them and came to regard them as actual unbelievers and apostates. The result was to legitimize violence against their persons and the violation of their honor. Each Muṭarrifi began to seek a protector under an arrangement known as dhimma or jiwār. Ibn Ḥamza did not stop there, but pursued them everywhere they went. What he did not carry out in this campaign was undertaken by his brother, 'Imād al-Dīn Yaḥyā ibn Ḥamza, whom he assigned the task. The brother harassed the inhabitants of the settlement of Qā'a, forcing most of them to declare obedience to him and to announce verbally that they were returning to Islam from their particular beliefs, which, in Ibn Ḥamza's view, were apostasy and unbelief. They also pronounced curses on their leading Muṭarrifi scholars²². According to an account given by Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Qāsim (d. 1100 AH) in Ghāyat al-Amānī, killing and captivity became so widespread among them that terror seized the inhabitants of the region²³. After Yaḥyā had completed his assignment, or perhaps earlier, 'Abd Allāh ordered the demolition of the Muṭarrifi mosque in Sanā', one of the villages around Ṣan'ā', as well as the destruction of the settlement of Waqash, its houses, and its mosques. Its inhabitants fled to the land of Ānis and dispersed in every direction, as Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Qāsim also relates²⁴.

Section Three: The Real Motive Behind the Extermination

One question has puzzled researchers on this subject and provoked intense debate: what were Ibn Ḥamza's real motives for such inconceivable vengeance against members of his own school, whatever his disagreement with them? Did it truly relate to his allegation that they belonged to the Bāṭiniyya and that their doctrinal ideas were those of unbelieving heretics, or to the claim that their ideas were unknown in the Hādawī school? Even if the latter claim were true, would it warrant such vengeance? Is it true, as has been said, that this group differed from the Hādawī Mukhtari'a or the Jārūdī school to which Ibn Ḥamza adhered in fundamental or subsidiary matters? One such question is the alleged absence among them of a requirement that a ruler descend from the two lineages of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, contrary to the established Hādawī requirement.

The problem that researchers have faced, and continue to face, is the absence of original sources written by Muṭarrifi scholars and jurists, numerous though they were. Such sources would allow an objective understanding of their thought in its various aspects, but they were destroyed in Ibn Ḥamza's comprehensive

²¹ 'Abd al-'Āṭī, *al-Şirā' al-Fikrī*, 38.

²² 'Abd al-'Āṭī, *al-Şirā' al-Fikrī*, 37-41.

²³ 'Abd al-'Āṭī, *al-Şirā' al-Fikrī*, 43.

²⁴ 'Abd al-'Āṭī, *al-Şirā' al-Fikrī*, 43.

campaign to eradicate the Muṭarrifiyya, both as people and as a body of ideas. As noted at the beginning of this study, only one direct and substantially complete Muṭarrifi source has so far been found that can be used to assess their ideas, although even this leaves aspects of the problem imperfectly understood. It is al-Burhān al-Rā'iq al-Mukhalliṣ min Waraṭ al-Maḍāyiq by Sulaymān ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Maḥallī. It contains, in particular, their doctrinal and political thought and shows remarkable skill in theological, rational, and scriptural argument within a distinctly Hādawī Zaydī framework from which it scarcely departs. It reveals the Muṭarrifiyya as a group with philosophical and theological ideas that were not wholly new to Hādawī Zaydī thought, although their elaborations and details gave them a distinctive character. Their most prominent and consequential position was that created things have three or four elements: water, air, wind, and, according to one view, fire. Al-Maḥallī states that the Muṭarrifiyya adopted this position, but also holds that it was the position of all the Prophet's family, in his description: "Know that the established position among the schools of the Prophet's family, peace be upon them, is that the world has fundamental elements: water, air, and wind; it is also said that fire is one of the three. The three are the basis of everything God Most High created, including fire and other things. It would have sufficed for us to say that the entire world was originated and created, and that God Most High is its creator, whether He created it all at once or gradually. But we have seen that much of it comes into being gradually: animals from a humble fluid, trees from water and clay, and rain from clouds. We have seen much of it grow after having been small, including human beings and other inanimate and living things. We therefore know that some things are branches and others are roots"²⁵.

Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Qāsim (d. 1100 AH) maintains that the Muṭarrifiyya attributed their well-known beliefs to al-Hādī Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Rassī and "said that al-Hādī had set forth what implied them in his Majmū', on the authority of his teacher Abū al-Qāsim the Mu'tazilī"²⁶. Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn, however, adds that "nothing in al-Hādī's statements explicitly expressed what they said; there are only apparent meanings in some of his statements in the Majmū' that could bear what they claimed, and God knows best"²⁷. This means that the Muṭarrifiyya's ideas were not fundamentally alien to the school, even if they did not repeat al-Hādī's formulations word for word. Their general substance was present, in one form or another, in the founder's thought, although the Muṭarrifiyya's statements were magnified and interpreted in a way that enabled their opponents to exterminate them, most notably their chief adversary 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza and then his brother Yaḥyā. In reality such ideas did not contradict the essential, established teachings of the Hādawī school transmitted from al-Hādī himself. This is the view of some researchers of the Muṭarrifi and Hādawī Zaydī heritage, especially that of Ibn Ḥamza, including 'Abd al-Ghanī 'Abd al-Āṭī. He affirms that the Muṭarrifi position on the elements of things "relies to a considerable degree on the thought of Imam al-Hādī, who was influenced by Greek philosophy and held that this world has material elements"²⁸. 'Abd al-Āṭī then quotes al-Hādī, as reported in the manuscript of Tārīkh Banī al-Wazīr by al-Hādī ibn Ibrāhīm ibn 'Alī al-Wazīr: "If you return to the three original, originated, created elements—the continuously moving wind, what He, exalted be He, created of water, and what He fashioned of wondrous air—then from these three He created all things that He brought into being and fashioned"²⁹.

In short, the Muṭarrifiyya's belief in four elements that interact with one another does not remove those elements from God's decree and command. He endowed them with the capacity for movement and interaction; their activity is not outside His will and knowledge. To construe their position otherwise is to interpret it and

²⁵ Sulaymān ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Maḥallī, *al-Burhān al-Rā'iq al-Mukhalliṣ min Waraṭ al-Maḍāyiq*, Critical ed. Jamāl al-Shāmī (Ṣan'ā': Markaz al-Turāth wa-l-Buḥūth al-Yamanī, 1445/2024), 217 (section on the Fundamental Elements and Substances).

²⁶ Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Qāsim, *al-Masālik fī Dhikr al-Nājī min al-Firaq wa-l-Hālik*, Critical ed. Ibrāhīm Yaḥyā Qays (Damascus - Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla Nāshirūn, 1433/2012), 352.

²⁷ Ibn al-Qāsim, *al-Masālik*, 354.

²⁸ 'Abd al-Āṭī, *al-Ṣirā' al-Fikrī*, 49.

²⁹ 'Abd al-Āṭī, *al-Ṣirā' al-Fikrī*, 49.

impose an implication that does not actually follow. Likewise, as already explained, the Mu'tazila's and others' affirmation of causes does not mean that a cause acts on its own alongside God. They continue to affirm that God, exalted and glorious, is the true agent. Such theological questions warrant no vilification of the Mu'tarrifiyya, the Mu'tazila, the Ash'arīs, or others—still less denunciation, declarations of unbelief, and physical violence culminating in the comprehensive war of extermination inflicted on the Mu'tarrifiyya on account of this proposition, or the group of propositions attributed to them and the interpretations and unwarranted implications attached to them.

In general, the Mu'tarrifiyya's intellectual sources derive primarily from al-Hādī's books, especially al-Mustarshid fī al-Tawhīd and al-Muntakhab³⁰.

This shows how misleading the oft-repeated claim is that the Mu'tarrifiyya's ordeal resulted from their moderation and their departure from the Hādawī school's essential beliefs and ideas. We have seen some of what they themselves said in the most reliable source that represents them directly.

Section Four: The Mu'tarrifiyya's Position on the Lineage Requirement for Rule and Its Relationship to Their Extermination

A number of writers on the Mu'tarrifiyya and their ordeal maintain that the principal cause of the tragedy was their departure from traditional Hādawism in not requiring an imam or caliph to have a particular lineage. According to this view, they held that any qualified person could rule, provided he possessed knowledge and piety. This displeased 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza, who declared them unbelievers on the basis of an alleged implication after giving the matter a doctrinal, theological, and philosophical cast. Strangely, even major scholars and historians such as the judge and historian Ismā'īl al-Akwa' (d. 1429 AH/2008 CE) repeat and endorse this claim that the Mu'tarrifiyya did not require lineage. He attributed Ibn Ḥamza's anger to it: the imam treated them as belligerent enemies, deemed their blood licit, destroyed their homes and mosques, described the latter as mosques built to cause harm, and called them Shī'ī Rāfiḍīs³¹.

The present author finds this surprising, because the available sources—above all Sulaymān ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Maḥallī's previously mentioned al-Burhān al-Rā'iq al-Mukhalliṣ min Waraṭ al-Maḍāyiq—do not support that conclusion, directly or indirectly. They point to the opposite, particularly once it is established that the Mu'tarrifiyya expressly confined eligibility to the two lineages of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn³².

If al-Burhān al-Rā'iq is the best expression of the Mu'tarrifiyya's doctrinal and political thought, we find in it an explicit Mu'tarrifi rejection of social contract, consultation, and choice as ways of establishing the imamate. Al-Maḥallī writes:

“The claim that the imamate can be established by agreement and election is likewise false, because God Most High says: ‘Your Lord creates what He wills and chooses; they have no choice. Glory be to God, and exalted is He above what they associate with Him’ (Qur’ān 28:68). He also says: ‘It is not for a believing man or woman, when God and His Messenger have decided a matter, to have a choice in it. Whoever disobeys God and His Messenger has clearly gone astray’ (Qur’ān 33:36)”³³.

Another possibility may seem to some more objective and more likely to have provoked Ibn Ḥamza's hostility and his vengeance against them: the Mu'tarrifi affirmation, found in some of their writings, of equality and of no superiority among created beings except through good deeds. Al-Maḥallī expressly states that people are

³⁰ Zayd, *Tayārāt Mu'tazilat al-Yaman*, 74.

³¹ See Akwa', *al-Zaydiyya*, 55; Akwa', *Hijar al-'Ilm*, 1/167-168; Ismā'īl ibn 'Alī al-Akwa', “al-Turāth al-Fikrī fī Ghābir al-Yaman wa-Hāḍirih”, *Majallat Majma' al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya al-Urdunī* (January-June 1981), 89.

³² Maḥallī, *al-Burhān al-Rā'iq*, 590; see also 591-598. Even the chapter titles themselves point to this restriction, let alone their contents.

³³ Al-Maḥallī, *al-Burhān*, 602.

equal in six matters: creation, provision, death, life, religious obligation, and recompense³⁴. He divides superiority into five kinds. The fifth and last, which concerns us here, relates to honor and elevation. On this, al-Maḥallī states that “this superiority is never attained except through righteous deeds, just as baseness results only from evil deeds. This is our position, contrary to the view of those who say that superiority in honor and rank comes from one’s creation and lineage, without any deed or effort on one’s part”³⁵. He supplies valuable details and useful theoretical foundations for this position³⁶. To some researchers, including ‘Alī Muḥammad Zayd, it appeared rare and unfamiliar in the Hādawī Zaydī school before and after the Muṭarrifiyya³⁷. Zayd went so far as to say: “It was natural that it would clash with the society in which it operated, for its theory of equality and its claim that people without exception, even prophets, attain honor through their deeds contradict every value and belief in its society. Perhaps it still contradicts them today, centuries after its emergence and disappearance ...”³⁸.

Zayd then draws attention to a point of the utmost importance that almost settles the debate at its roots. The Muṭarrifiyya, he notes, were “never accused in their own time of invalidating the Zaydī theory of the imamate. Rather, their greatest adversary, Imam ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza, accused them of making the imamate inoperative by setting such stringent conditions that it was impossible to choose an imam who was the most knowledgeable, most ascetic, most forbearing, strongest, and so on”³⁹. Zayd al-Wazīr endorsed the same point: “This confirms that the Muṭarrifiyya remained committed to imams from the Prophet’s family, but under ideal conditions set so high as to be nearly impossible to satisfy. These conditions caused al-Manṣūr’s anger toward them”⁴⁰. Given all this, the question remains: why does the principle of equality in Muṭarrifi thought appear to have been misunderstood even by a distinguished researcher such as ‘Alī Muḥammad Zayd?

Given the foregoing, any claim of a fundamental doctrinal disagreement between the Muṭarrifiyya and the Hādawīs lacks an objective basis. Nor does the available Muṭarrifi literature support a claim of any real difference in their overarching political theory.

What does appear to be an objective fact about Muṭarrifi conduct, and what may truly distinguish them from other groups within the school, is their pronounced scholarly orientation. Among other things, this means that they were advocates not of war, violence, or conquest but of learning and education crowned by sincerity. Sincerity entails that a ruler be subject to what today’s constitutional and legal literature calls accountability or political answerability if he deviates from or failed to meet the conditions qualifying him to rule—the social contract. This lies at the heart of what aroused ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza against them, although they were, in fact, simply giving effect to one of their school’s five principles: commanding right and forbidding wrong, which applies equally to ruler and ruled.

This is a confirmed objective fact, attested by the critical researcher⁴¹. Indeed, one may go further and say that the Muṭarrifiyya were originally without political ambition to rule, although in theory they were stringent about the ruler’s or imam’s qualifications, as explained above. This also clarifies their disagreement with al-Mutawakkil Aḥmad ibn Sulaymān, who came to power in 532 AH before ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza. They had strongly supported Aḥmad ibn Sulaymān’s rule in exceptional circumstances: a prominent member of their group, Muḥammad ibn ‘Alyān ibn Sa’d, had been killed by Ḥātim ibn Aḥmad al-Yāmī, ruler of Ṣan‘ā’. They allied with Ibn Sulaymān to obtain justice against the killer, a goal consistent with Ibn Sulaymān’s own desire

³⁴ Maḥallī, *al-Burhān al-Rā’iq*, 339; see 339-367.

³⁵ Maḥallī, *al-Burhān al-Rā’iq*, 504.

³⁶ Maḥallī, *al-Burhān al-Rā’iq*, 504-509.

³⁷ Zayd, *Tayārāt Mu’tazilat al-Yaman*, 87-88.

³⁸ Zayd, *Tayārāt Mu’tazilat al-Yaman*, 92.

³⁹ Zayd, *Tayārāt Mu’tazilat al-Yaman*, 94-95; see also 103.

⁴⁰ Wazīr, “al-Muṭarrifiyya: al-Fikr wa-l-Ma’sāh”, 56; see also 54-56.

⁴¹ See ‘Abd al-‘Āṭī, *al-Şirā’ al-Fikrī*, 16-18; Zayd, *Tayārāt Mu’tazilat al-Yaman*, 72.

to take revenge on al-Yāmī. The alliance did not last long. They soon withdrew their allegiance from the imam⁴². Their withdrawal appears to have stemmed from their insistence on the conditions that Imam Ibn Sulaymān ought to meet and their inclination to hold him accountable when they judged that he did not fully meet them, as the author of *Tārīkh Banī al-Wazīr* concluded⁴³. This brought Ibn Sulaymān's anger and threats upon them. Although they subsequently relented and asked his pardon, which he granted, this occurred only after he had entered their village of Waqash and installed Judge Ja'far ibn 'Abd al-Salām there⁴⁴. Ja'far himself had once been a Muṭarrifī, but became their bitter enemy. He issued a legal opinion that they differed from Muslims in seventy traits adopted from the worst elements of the schools of the Qadariyya, Dahriyya, Jabriyya, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians. He therefore held that it was impermissible to marry them, eat animals they had slaughtered, accept their testimony, pay them zakāt or any other dues owed to God, or bury them in Muslim cemeteries, according to the manuscript of his epistle entitled *Fī al-Radd 'alā al-Muṭarrifiyya*⁴⁵.

From the Muṭarrifiyya's rigorous scholarly orientation, their equally stringent conditions for a ruler, and their inclination to hold him accountable, we may infer that Ibn Ḥamza initially sought, before these positions became nearly firm and decisive, to win the group's unqualified support for his rule. As many rulers have done in the past and present, he wanted to adorn his rule and give it greater legitimacy by sharing power with them. Their devotion to scholarship, their understanding of the ruler's political qualifications, and their insistence on accountability prevailed. They chose these over Ibn Ḥamza's favor and the political benefits and positions they might have gained in his state. Perhaps Ibn Ḥamza saw this as an evasion that concealed weak or nonexistent enthusiasm for his rule, given their insistence on stringent qualifications and their demand for accountability. Although Ibn Ḥamza was qualified intellectually, his well-known, expansive legal approach to permitting the bloodshed of opponents, even members of his own school, led them to express disapproval of his conduct. He also differed from Imam al-Hādī on a number of questions. It was natural, then, for their enthusiasm for participating in his government to wane from the outset. When he initially tried but failed to persuade them through debate, he turned to excessive violence, like tyrannical rulers in every age. For his part, 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza saw nothing blameworthy in what he did, nor any departure from al-Hādī's way of dealing with opponents. He considered it a good deed of following al-Hādī's example precisely, one that brought him closer to God. He said: "When al-Hādī, peace be upon him, entered Wādī Amlaḥ in the territory of Wā'ila, he moved among their villages and houses, cutting their grapevines and date palms and demolishing their homes. They cried out to him, offering repentance and asking for safety, but he did not accept it because he knew their wicked character and evil. This is recorded in his biography, peace be upon him, and known to those who know his circumstances and statements. He did not accept their repentance because he knew their wickedness and evil. That is how his biographer, peace be upon him, related it"⁴⁶.

⁴² See 'Abd al-'Āṭī, *al-Şirā' al-Fikrī*, 34-35.

⁴³ See 'Abd al-'Āṭī, *al-Şirā' al-Fikrī*, 35.

⁴⁴ See 'Abd al-'Āṭī, *al-Şirā' al-Fikrī*, 35.

⁴⁵ See 'Abd al-'Āṭī, *al-Şirā' al-Fikrī*, 45.

⁴⁶ Ibn Ḥamza, *Majmū' Rasā'il*, 2/22. For the account by al-Hādī's biographer, see 'Alī ibn Muḥammad 'Ubayd Allāh al-'Abbāsī al-'Alawī, *Şirat al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn*, Critical ed. Suhayl Zakkār (s.l.: s.n., n.d.), 250-251 (chapter "The March of al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq, Peace Be upon Him, to Wā'ila When It Rebelled"); and the account of what al-Hādī did to Banū al-Hārith under the heading "The Hanging of Banū al-Hārith by Their Heels," 173-174. See also Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Qāsim, *Anbā' al-Zaman fī Akhbār al-Yaman: min 280-322 AH*, Critical ed. Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Mādī (s.l.: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, n.d.), 19-20. See also Ibn Ḥamza, *Majmū' Rasā'il*, 2/37-90 ("al-Risāla al-Hādīya bi-l-Adilla al-Bādiya fī Tabyīn Ahkām Ahl al-Ridda"), where Ibn Ḥamza expressly applies these rulings to the Muṭarrifiyya. See especially the heading "Grounds for Declaring the Muṭarrifiyya Unbelievers," where he accuses them of denying prophecy and the Qur'ān and of possessing the traits of Christians, Zoroastrians, and idolaters. Thus, "they are the most unbelieving of unbelievers, the most wicked of the wicked, and the worst of the people of a dark interregnum ..." (56). He threatens to shed their blood and take their children captive because they are unbelievers, even though they are closely related to him (76). See 52-88.

After all this, one may ask whether it is conceivable that so much violence was inflicted on them merely because they differed with Imam Ibn Ḥamza on scholarly, philosophical, or legal questions.

Section Five: The Roots of the Tragedy: Declaring People Unbelievers on the Basis of Interpretation and Necessary Implication

After all the foregoing, and so that the present is not severed from its temporal and historical context, we must frankly acknowledge that today's continual repetition of the tragedy of conflict and its reproduction in new forms reflects a failure to learn from events throughout history, among the most tragic of which is the Muṭarrifiyya's ordeal. This is not to condemn one party in advance and absolve another or others, whether within the many existing and extinct branches of Zaydism, Shī'ism generally, or Sunnī and wider Islamic traditions. But because this study centers on the Muṭarrifiyya as a Hādawī Zaydī group, it must be said that sectarian exclusion and ready declarations of unbelief on the slightest suspicion have turned against members of the school itself before outsiders. This tendency came to dominate Jārūdī Hādawī Zaydism in Yemen over its more than 1,160 years of history, beginning with the founding of the Hādawī school and its first state in the late third century AH. Foremost is what is called takfīr by interpretation: declaring an unbeliever "a Muslim who says or does something entailing sinfulness but does so on the basis of an interpretation and without deliberate intent"⁴⁷. Another form is takfīr by necessary implication or ultimate consequence: "imposing on someone, on the basis of what he says, a position he does not hold"⁴⁸. Although the person's words admit many interpretations, they are given the worst possible reading—unbelief—despite his having neither intended nor expressly adopted it⁴⁹. This approach became almost a characteristic of the entire school, past and present, according to a contemporary critical researcher who reached that conclusion after a study and near-comprehensive survey. He cites the express attribution of this practice to the school by one of its leading imams and pillars, Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Murtaḍā, known as al-Mahdī (d. 840 AH), as well as the statements of Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Wazīr (d. 840 AH), al-Ḥasan ibn Aḥmad al-Jalāl (d. 1084 AH)⁵⁰, and others.

Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Amīr al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 1182 AH) quotes al-Murtaḍā's explicit combination of takfīr by interpretation and by imposed implication: "The view that interpretation constitutes unbelief entails the permissibility of declaring someone an unbeliever on the basis of an implication even when the opponent does not accept it"⁵¹. He also attributes to al-Murtaḍā the statement that "most of those unanimously judged to be unbelievers are people who interpret"⁵². Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Shawkānī (d. 1250 AH), commenting on al-Murtaḍā's words "one who acts on an interpretation is like an apostate," wrote: "Here tears should be shed and Islam and its people mourned for what religious fanaticism has inflicted on most Muslims: hurling accusations of unbelief at one another, not on the basis of a Sunna, a Qur'ānic verse, an explanation from God, or a proof, but because the cauldrons of religious partisanship boiled over and the accursed Satan succeeded in dividing the Muslims. He taught them to impose supposed implications on one another as insubstantial as dust in the

⁴⁷ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Wazīr, *al-Muṣaffā fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir; Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1417/1996), 273.

⁴⁸ Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Wazīr, *Tārīkh Banī al-Wazīr*, fol. 207, quoted in Shāmī, *Tārīkh al-Yaman al-Fikrī*, 3/143.

⁴⁹ For further discussion of takfīr by interpretation and necessary implication, see Aḥmad 'Abd al-'Azīz Aḥmad al-Mulaykī, "al-Takfīr bi-l-Ta'wīl wa-l-Ilzām: Ḥaḳīqatuh wa-Marjī' al-Khilāf fih", *Majallat Buḥūth Jāmi'at Ta'izz* 32 (September 2022), 107-110; Aḥmad 'Abd al-'Azīz Aḥmad al-Mulaykī, "Mawqif al-Zaydiyya al-Hādawīyya min al-Takfīr bi-l-Ta'wīl wa-l-Ilzām", *Majallat Buḥūth Jāmi'at Ta'izz* 33 (December 2022), 77-160.

⁵⁰ See Mulaykī, "Mawqif al-Zaydiyya al-Hādawīyya", 96-97.

⁵¹ Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Amīr al-Ṣan'ānī, *Iqāmat al-Dalīl 'alā Da'f Adillat Takfīr al-Ta'wīl*, Critical ed. Abū Nūḥ 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Faqīh (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1430/2009), 191.

⁵² Ṣan'ānī, *Iqāmat al-Dalīl*, 218.

air or a mirage on a plain. God help Islam and the Muslims against this calamity, one of the gravest calamities to befall religion, a disaster unlike any the path of the believers has suffered ...”⁵³.

Despite these repeated assertions within Hādawī Zaydism rejecting takfīr based on interpretation or inferred implications, such accommodating stances remained largely isolated or, at best, confined to a minority. Consequently, they did little to disrupt the deeply entrenched authority of the school’s dominant, more exclusionary faction.

Among the most prominent Yemeni reformers to call for dismantling this reprehensible idea of takfīr by necessary implication was the great reformer Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Wazīr (d. 840 AH). He was followed by other eminent reformers: al-Ḥasan ibn Aḥmad al-Jalāl (d. 1084 AH), Ṣāliḥ ibn Maḥdī al-Maqbalī (d. 1108 AH), al-Amīr al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 1182 AH), and Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Shawkānī (d. 1250 AH)⁵⁴. These reformers moved beyond the school after applying its own rule that an independently qualified jurist may not engage in blind imitation⁵⁵.

The danger of takfīr by necessary implication or interpretation is that, in practical conduct, it often leads to an explicit declaration of unbelief and encourages various forms of verbal and physical violence to eliminate nearby dissenters, whether individuals or groups. At times this tendency does not even permit the killing, destruction of homes, and displacement of someone explicitly and originally regarded as an unbeliever merely on account of his religion, except within narrow limits. Yet it does so in the case of those declared unbelievers by interpretation or implication, as we have seen. This was the actual course Imam ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza (d. 614 AH) pursued against the Muṭarrifiyya when he exterminated them on the pretext of supposed implications of their statements and his own interpretation of them⁵⁶, although at root the matter belonged to scholarly, theological questions, or to their hypothetical implications, which an adherent of the other school might not accept⁵⁷. The established rule of legal theory is that an implication of a statement is not necessarily binding on its speaker, and an implication of a school’s doctrine is not itself that doctrine. Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Amīr al-Ṣan‘ānī writes: “Critical scholars have established that the implication of a statement does not amount to affirming it and that the implication of a school’s doctrine is not itself that doctrine”⁵⁸. Al-Ṣan‘ānī cites statements by a number of scholars affirming the rule⁵⁹. It is also the position of the majority of Sunnīs and their critical scholars, among them ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām (d. 660 AH), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 AH), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751 AH), Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī (d. 790 AH), Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 826 AH), and Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852 AH)⁶⁰, among others. This is unsurprising, since interpretation is one of the impediments to takfīr for the majority of Sunnīs. Statements outside that framework are no more than a particular intellectual distortion belonging to their proponents, however numerous they may seem. The Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Daqīq al-‘Īd (d. 702 AH), commenting on the tradition “Whoever calls another an unbeliever or an enemy of God when he is not so, the accusation returns upon the speaker,” transmitted by al-Bukhārī and

⁵³ Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Shawkānī, *al-Sayl al-Jarrār al-Mutadaffiq ‘alā Ḥadā’iq al-Azhār*, Critical ed. Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm Zāyid (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1405/1985), 4/584.

⁵⁴ Wazīr, *al-Muṣaffā fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, 397. For statements by these reformers, see Mulaykī, “Mawqif al-Zaydiyya al-Hādawiyya”, 140-145.

⁵⁵ See Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Daghshī, “al-Mujaddidūn fī al-Yaman: Mujtahidūn fī al-Madhab am Mutaḥawwilūn ‘Anhu?”, *al-Masār* 71 (August 2023), 132-188.

⁵⁶ Zayd, *Tayārāt Mu‘tazilat al-Yaman*, 86.

⁵⁷ For Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Wazīr’s discussion of this hasty approach to takfīr by interpretation and his willingness to excuse those who interpret, see Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Wazīr, *Īthār al-Ḥaqq ‘alā al-Khalq* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Hilāl, n.d.), 415-439.

⁵⁸ ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alī al-Wazīr, *Tārīkh Ṭabaq al-Ḥalwā wa-Ṣiḥāf al-Mann wa-l-Salwā*, *al-Musammā bi-Tārīkh al-Yaman khilāl al-Qarn al-Ḥādī ‘Ashar al-Hijrī (1045-1090 AH)*, Critical ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Jāzim (Ṣan‘ā’: Maktabat al-Jīl al-Jadīd, 1428-1429/2007-2008), 76.

⁵⁹ See Ṣan‘ānī, *Iqāmat al-Dalīl*, 187.

⁶⁰ See Mulaykī, “al-Takfīr bi-l-Ta’wīl wa-l-Ilzām”, 114.

Muslim, writes: “This is a grave predicament into which many theologians, and some who are associated with the Sunna and the scholars of tradition, have fallen. When they disagreed on beliefs, they spoke harshly of their opponents and judged them unbelievers. A group of crude literalists breached the restraint due in this matter, and this warning applies to them if their opponents are not as they allege”⁶¹. He then rejected takfır by implication and stated: “The truth is that no one among the people of the qibla is declared an unbeliever except for denying something transmitted without dispute from the Lawgiver. Such a person would then be denying the revealed law. Merely contradicting decisive rational proofs is not a basis for takfır; its basis is contradicting definitive, transmitted rules that are conclusive both in their transmission and their meaning”⁶².

⁶¹ Ibn Daqīq al-‘İd, *Iḥkām al-Aḥkām Sharḥ ‘Umdat al-Aḥkām*, Critical ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, 1418/1997), 612.

⁶² Ibn Daqīq al-‘İd, *Iḥkām al-Aḥkām*, 613.

Conclusion

Following this examination of the history of the Muṭarrifiyya and their tragedy, Imam ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza and what he did to them, Hādawī Zaydī readings of the tragedy, and the rule of takfīr by interpretation and necessary implication, the author reaches the following findings and recommendations:

First: Findings

1. The Muṭarrifiyya were a branch of Hādawī Zaydism named after Muṭarrif ibn Shihāb al-‘Abbādī, who lived between the late fourth and mid-fifth centuries AH.
2. Their most prominent theological view—or the view said to distinguish them—was that God Most High created the four elements: water, fire, air, and earth, while later created things arose through interactions among them. This view does not fall outside the range of theological opinions in the Hādawī Mu‘tazilī school or views close to it.
3. In general, the Muṭarrifiyya did not depart from the views of Imam al-Hādī Yahyā ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Rasī and his Mu‘tazilī theological ideas, or ideas close to them. Nor did they depart from Hādawī positions on subsidiary legal questions, including political views and the theory of government.
4. It is inaccurate to claim that, unlike the Hādawī Zaydīs, they did not require a ruler to descend from Fāṭima through al-Ḥasan or al-Ḥusayn. No reliable source representing the Muṭarrifiyya supports this claim. Nor is there evidence that ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza himself leveled that charge against them. Rather, they followed al-Hādī’s views even on the imamate and political theory.
5. On an impartial, objective assessment, Imam ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza’s extermination of the Muṭarrifiyya has been established as comprehensive and aimed at eradication. It encompassed adults and children, property, mosques, and intellectual heritage, leaving no trace of them.
6. Examination of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza’s real motives for what he did to the Muṭarrifiyya confirms that his actions arose from their independence from his authority or their disagreement with him on some subsidiary issues, especially those relating to rule. They insisted that a ruler meet all the requisite qualifications, that words and deeds be consistent, and that he be held accountable if he erred, departed from what they regarded as true Islam, or left the path of al-Hādī’s school. All this was an application of commanding right and forbidding wrong, one of the five principles of Hādawī Zaydism.
7. The Muṭarrifiyya’s call for equality and the absence of superiority among people in six matters—creation, provision, life, death, religious obligation, and recompense—had no real connection with their extermination. Nearly all Hādawī Zaydīs held this position, including the view that righteous deeds confer superiority.
8. The compound error underlying Hādawī Zaydī thought on this matter lies in the adoption by most of its scholars, past and present, of the rule of takfīr by interpretation and necessary implication. In practical conduct these often lead to an explicit declaration of unbelief and encourage verbal and physical violence toward nearby dissenters, both individuals and groups.

Second: Recommendations

1. Review the Hādawī Zaydī school’s heritage—as well as the heritage of all Sunnī and Shī‘ī schools—from within, with a courageous critical spirit, treating it as a human body of reasoned judgments rather than as a legacy possessing the revealed text’s immunity from error, permanence, continuity, and absolute authority.
2. Reread the tragedy of the Muṭarrifiyya in light of the group’s available original sources, scarce though they are, and particularly the sources of the opposing side: the writings of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza.
3. Abandon the rule of takfīr by interpretation and necessary implication wherever it is found and whoever advances it, given its serious harmful intellectual effects on the unity of a school, a group, and, most

importantly, the Muslim community. For the subject of this study in particular, the intellectual heritage connected with Hādawī Zaydism, both old and recent, should be reviewed with special attention to this issue.

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