

# Islam Assembled

The Advent of the Muslim Congresses

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# ISLAM ASSEMBLED

*The Advent of the Muslim Congresses*

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## EIGHT

# NEW CALIPH IN ARABIA

*The Pilgrimage Congress,  
1924*

**I**N THE summer of 1916, with the outbreak of the Arab Revolt, Mecca finally passed from Ottoman hands to those of the Sharif of Mecca. For an interregnum of nearly a decade, the Sharif Husayn (1853–1931), and briefly his son ʿAli, were in possession of the holy premises. The Meccan sharifs had been urged to assert their claim to Muslim primacy for nearly four decades by visionaries like Blunt and Zohrab, radical Muslim reformers like Kawakibi, and finally British officials like Kitchener and Sykes. Once the war had ended in disaster for Ottoman forces, and Istanbul was overrun by Allied forces, word began to spread again of an impending Meccan congress.

A series of tentative initiatives spanned the years 1921 to 1924, none of which culminated in the anticipated congress. Then, immediately following the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in March 1924, Husayn's followers acclaimed him caliph, and in July 1924 there met in Mecca what his organizers entitled the Pilgrimage Congress. From this long-awaited gathering, perhaps consciously imitative of Kawakibi's *Umm al-qura*, Husayn attempted to extract some sort of sanction for his new caliphate. The effort failed in the face of opposition from a bloc of unsympathetic participants, but the congress decided to reconvene annually during the pilgrimage season, and resolved to establish a permanent secretariat. By the next pilgrimage season, however, the Ikhwan of Ibn Saʿud had overrun Mecca and opened their campaign of eradicating all traces of Hashimite rule. Husayn had fled the country.

The most important sources for the preliminary initiatives and the Pilgrimage Congress were the reports in *al-Qibla*, Mecca's official newspaper throughout the period. British and French consular reports from Jidda were also well-informed. The correspondence of Palestinian participants sheds further light on the role of Palestinian-Hijazi cooperation in the emergence of the Pilgrimage Congress.

In early 1921, a former Ottoman Şeyhülislam, Haydari-zâde İbrahim Efendi, received a letter in Turkish from Haifa:

In view of the fact that the congress called 'Din-i-Nahda-i-Islamiye' will be held at Mecca during this year's pilgrimage, distinguished and capable doctors of law (ulema) and philosophers from Egypt, Syria, Palestine and India have been invited, as well as those Moslem dignitaries who will assemble there in order to fulfil the sacred duty of the pilgrimage.<sup>3</sup>

Haydari-zâde İbrahim Efendi was asked to attend or send a capable substitute. The invitation was signed by a certain Muhammad Adib Ramadan al-Qudsi, an instructor at the Great Mosque in Haifa. At about the same time, the French High Commissariat in Syria learned through an informer that a number of Syrian notables had received similar invitations from the same source.<sup>2</sup> Field Marshal Lord Allenby, British High Commissioner in Egypt, was unable to learn anything about a Meccan congress from local Cairo sources,<sup>3</sup> but the British consul in Jidda did hear rumors that Husayn's son Faysal was arranging a congress of Arab leaders and important Muslims during the coming pilgrimage.<sup>4</sup>

It was difficult to determine whether this pointed to a Hashimite congress initiative. British authorities in Palestine thought Muhammad Adib Ramadan al-Qudsi no more than a self-important religious enthusiast, but the French in Syria considered him a Hashimite agent. Hashimite sponsorship for a congress proposed for Hashimite territory seemed not at all unlikely, and there was every reason for al-Qudsi to obscure this fact. For influential Muslims held Husayn to blame for dividing the ranks of Islam through his revolt, and for speeding the military humiliation of Ottoman armies. Even long-standing supporters withheld their sympathies. An important defection from his cause was that of Rashid Rida, whose journal *al-Manar* had first given currency to the idea of a Qurashi caliphate at Mecca, through the serialization of Kawakibi's *Umm al-qura*. In 1916, Rida performed the pilgrimage, and was much taken by the Sharif Husayn, who awarded him an annual subsidy and gave him a large gift.<sup>5</sup> But by 1924, Rida was writing of Husayn's movement that it was "vile and despicable."<sup>6</sup>

This disillusionment with Husayn was linked to the disappointment of those like Rashid Rida who had supported his act of rebellion as an act of liberation. Now that they apprehended the consequences of the war—the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, and the Anglo-French partition of the most populous Arabic-speaking provinces—old supporters vented their sense of betrayal and guilt through attacks on Husayn. Husayn invested his last years in the Hijaz in a futile attempt to convince Muslims of his concern for his faith, and so relieve his

political isolation. The French minister in Cairo thought that rumors about a Meccan Muslim congress had been launched by Husayn himself, to test Muslim opinion.<sup>7</sup> Husayn, then, must have realized that his own direct invitations would probably go unanswered, and it was for this reason that the invitation was given a formal Palestinian provenance.

This attempt to conceal the paternity of the proposal met with no success. Haydari-zâde İbrahim Efendi, perhaps suspecting Hashimite sponsorship, turned his invitation over to Ahmed Tevfik Paşa, the Ottoman Grand Vizier, who in turn passed on translations to the British High Commissioner in Istanbul. With this information, the British police in Palestine descended upon Muhammad Ramadan Adib al-Qudsi. He was discharged from his position in Haifa, and was put under police surveillance, while the police raided the Haifa printing firm which handled the invitations.<sup>8</sup> "The information which the Grand Vizier gave to [High Commissioner] Sir H. Rumbold has enabled the Palestine Gov[ernment] to arrest a man who might at any rate have been a nuisance as an aspiring Islamic propagandist."<sup>9</sup>

Husayn's supporters proceeded on a more modest scale the following year. In August 1922, Mecca was made the site of a Congress of the Arabian Peninsula (*mu'tamar jazirat al-ʿArab*). The intent was to gather only Arabic-speakers from the peninsula and the adjacent Fertile Crescent. It was even decided that, while other Muslims were permitted to attend, only Arabs had the right to speak and vote.<sup>10</sup> Husayn thus conceded the narrow base of his following beyond the Hijaz, and the exclusively Arab appeal of his movement. In August 1923, a second such gathering was held.<sup>11</sup> In both instances, participants came primarily from the Hijaz, Yemen, the Hadramawt, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq—Arabic-speaking territories in which Husayn could claim a following or a semblance of one.

But as the 1920s unfolded, Husayn increasingly began to cast himself not only as an Arab spokesman, but as a Muslim leader as well. For him, as for many Muslim Arab nationalists then and since, the two roles were not mutually exclusive. The Muslim idiom characterized his speeches and proclamations even during his rebellion against the Ottoman sultan-caliph.<sup>12</sup> But Husayn's Arabism was gradually sublimated when, besieged by critics, he fell back upon the vocabulary of Islam to preserve that loose confederation that had made the Arab Revolt. A new initiative for a Meccan Muslim congress was part of that transformation, which issued from political necessity.

Again, the initiative's precise origins were not clear, but once again the formal provenance was Palestinian. A fledgling alliance had been forged between Palestinian Arab nationalists and Husayn. The former urged Husayn not to sign a treaty regularizing relations with Great

Britain before securing guarantees on Palestine, and the latter, seeking to emerge from isolation, responded by actively promoting the Palestinian Arab cause.<sup>13</sup> In July 1922, a Palestinian "Islamic" delegation arrived in Mecca to garner support for Palestinian resistance both to Zionism and to the recently imposed League of Nations mandate for Palestine. There the delegation played a crucial role in the convening of the first Congress of the Arabian Peninsula, and 'Abd al-Qadir al-Muzaffar, the delegation's president, opened the first session.<sup>14</sup>

But the Palestinians were interested in reaching beyond the Arabs during their Meccan mission, for the delegation's activities represented the first Palestinian effort to mobilize specifically Muslim support for the Palestinian cause. Their delegation was self-avowedly Muslim, and their arrival reportedly set off demonstrations of support by Egyptian, Sudanese, Afghan, Indian, Kurdish, Turkish, Iranian, Javanese, and Arab pilgrims and residents in both Mecca and Jidda.<sup>15</sup> A few days later, the secretary of the delegation wrote to Jerusalem of wide Hijazi interest in a Muslim congress—a good thing indeed, "for we are in great need of a demonstration by all Muslims."<sup>16</sup>

This was emphasized when one member of the Palestinian delegation, at a banquet given by Husayn in their honor, rose to make a proposal. A society should be established called the Islamic Congress (*al-mu'tamar al-islami*), under Husayn's presidency, and this congress should collect a sizable sum to be kept in the Hijaz for various projects. Husayn, while expressing sympathy with these aims, demurred, but the idea was not abandoned.<sup>17</sup> A year later, during the pilgrimage, a meeting was held in Mina in support of the Islamic Congress, and *al-Qibla* promised to publish its program.<sup>18</sup> The new society initially struck the British consul in Jidda as Arab rather than Muslim in emphasis, but within six months, the ascent of a Muslim orientation in Hijazi foreign policy was indisputable.<sup>19</sup>

For in early March 1924, on the heels of the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate, Husayn was acclaimed as caliph by a group of ulama and notables assembled in Transjordan.<sup>20</sup> The reaction in the wider Muslim world was uncompromisingly hostile, giving plain evidence that the idea of the spiritual authority of the Meccan sharifs, promoted first by Birdwood, Zohrab, and Blunt, had no foundation in Muslim consensus. Husayn attempted to overcome the unpopularity of his elevation to the caliphate by a series of steps perhaps consciously drawn from Kawakibi's *Umm al-qura*. He established an advisory council to the caliphate (*majlis shura al-khilafa*), a body of thirty-one members from various Muslim lands, but "elected" by the leading ulama and notable foreign residents of Mecca and Madina. Among the members of this council were nine Meccan notables; seven other Hijazis; three Indians; three Sudanese;

two Bukharans; two Indonesians or Malayans (*Jawa*); and one member each from the Maghrib, Syria, Turkey, Daghistan, and Afghanistan. More than half of the members of the advisory council thus represented territories under Husayn's own direct control, while those who represented other lands were drawn principally from foreign communities in the Hijaz.<sup>21</sup> The various tasks of this advisory council and its subcommittees were then set out in detail, and the council began to meet each Tuesday to impart its advice.<sup>22</sup>

Husayn finally convened the Islamic Congress in July 1924 as the Pilgrimage Congress (*muṭamar al-hajj*), in sessions which were intended to gather prominent pilgrims from throughout the Muslim world. The method of their selection was haphazard, and the list of participants indicates that the great majority were local notables. Once assembled, they adopted a charter consisting of eight articles (see appendix 4). Few provisions were made for internal organization in this document, beyond the creation of administrative, financial, and "presidential" committees, and the call for the creation of local subcommittees (*lijan faʿiyya*). The annual congress was to devote itself to the promotion of mutual awareness among Muslims, but asserted that Arab unity was to be the nucleus (*nawah*) of Muslim unity. Article eight furthermore declared the commitment of the congress to the spread of Arabic in all Muslim countries, and made Arabic the only official language of the body.<sup>23</sup> The Pilgrimage Congress was therefore cast from the same mold as Kawakibi's *Umm al-qura*. The primacy of the Arabs in Islam was asserted without equivocation.

Missing from the charter, however, was all mention of the caliphate. According to a Jidda source, a bloc of congress participants resisted all means of persuasion brought to bear by Husayn to extract a categorical recognition of his caliphate, and he thus saw a serious check to his candidacy in his own country.<sup>24</sup> The resistance was the work of Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAziz al-Thaʿalibi (1874–1944), a journalist and activist of Tunisian birth who reappeared often in subsequent Muslim congresses. His dissent cannot have been motivated by a religious objection, for he himself was widely suspected of harboring heterodox beliefs. The ulama of Tunis once succeeded in having him imprisoned for utterances of grossly heterodox nature, and after his release, he co-wrote with his defense lawyer, a Gallicized Tunisian Jew, a controversial book entitled *L'esprit libéral du Coran*.<sup>25</sup> This unconventional past was later obscured by his political activism, and his major role in the creation of the Destour party. Thaʿalibi was prosecuted while in Tunisia by French authorities for his political activities, and finally left the country in 1923 for a



prolonged and self-imposed exile of fourteen years, which took him through the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia. These travels brought him also to Mecca, where Tha<sup>l</sup>alibi argued that the Pilgrimage Congress was not empowered by other Muslims to act on their behalf, and so enjoyed no contractual authority. The force of his personality made him much the dominant figure. His views prevailed, and the caliphate did not figure in the resolutions of the congress. The British consul in Jidda concluded that "the jejune nature of the results of the Pilgrimage Conference suggest complete failure."<sup>26</sup>

The council and congress therefore did little to relieve Husayn's isolation. Nor did they moderate the rapidity with which Husayn fell. Within weeks of these events, in late August 1924, his Arabian rival, <sup>l</sup>Abd al-<sup>l</sup>Aziz Ibn Sa<sup>u</sup>d, launched his final assault on the Hijaz, and the state built by Husayn crumbled. In October, faced with imminent Wahhabi conquest, the notables of Mecca and Jidda induced Husayn to abdicate in favor of his son <sup>l</sup>Ali, who renounced all Hashimite claims to the caliphate. Husayn himself fled to <sup>l</sup>Aqaba, and later settled in Cyprus.

The impending loss of the Hijaz prompted one last attempt by the family to convene a Muslim congress in Mecca, in the hope of precluding a Saudi conquest. In September, Husayn's son Faysal, by this time established in Iraq, proposed that <sup>l</sup>Ali replace Husayn, and "invite all principal Moslem countries to send deputations to Mecca and evolve [a] stable and efficient administrative council for the Hedjaz being provided for by volunteers furnished by the countries sending deputations."<sup>27</sup> This amounted to a Muslim internationalization of the holy city, an idea explicit in certain passages of Kawakibi's *Umm al-qura*.<sup>28</sup> After Husayn's abdication, Faysal pressed the idea even more desperately, with plans to appeal for the participation of King Fu<sup>l</sup>ad of Egypt, the Nawab of Rampur, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Amir of Afghanistan, the regent of Iran, Shaykh Ahmad al-Sanusi, and Egyptian, Indian, and Southeast Asian Muslim organizations.<sup>29</sup> This proposal offered no respite, for in mid-October 1924, Saudi forces entered Mecca. Husayn's son and successor, <sup>l</sup>Ali, had no greater ambition than survival. He even promised to an Egyptian mediation mission that he would recognize King Fu<sup>l</sup>ad of Egypt as caliph, if only the Egyptians would extend to him that aid which he thought necessary to beat back Ibn Sa<sup>u</sup>d.<sup>30</sup> The appeal failed, and in December 1925, Jidda fell to Ibn Sa<sup>u</sup>d's warriors, ending the fifty-year bid by the sharifs of Mecca for Muslim primacy.

## APPENDIX FOUR

# PROGRAM OF THE PILGRIMAGE CONGRESS

The aims of the Congress shall be:

1. To find means for promoting mutual understanding among Muslim peoples, through their ulama and thinkers.

2. To consider Arab unity the nucleus of Islamic unity, and a model which will stimulate other Muslim peoples to establish their unity, and so be linked with one another.

3. To create an executive committee to compose a program for the general congress, and to establish branch committees in the various Islamic lands which will be linked to the main committee of the Congress.

4. To create a financial committee whose task will be to consider devising the best instruments for raising funds for the purpose of effectively carrying out the resolutions of the Congress.

5. To find means for disseminating and defending the idea of the Congress among Muslim peoples, while noting that the fundamental aim of the Congress is strictly to deal with religious questions affecting the material and spiritual well-being of the Muslims.

6. To appeal to Muslim peoples to take an interest in the education and instruction of youth according to the true precepts of religion, so that in future there will be men who understand religious thought, as it relates to this world and the next, and who will work together to defend it; and to deter Muslims from sending their children to foreign schools, as these schools proselytize, promote atheism, and weaken the national spirit, under the pretext of diffusing science and civilization. The Muslims should replace such schools with their own indigenous, purely Islamic schools, and secure the best available teachers.

7. To use the most efficacious means to educate a group of young Muslims in each Islamic country in the technical and life sciences, such as industry, engineering, medicine, pharmacology, agriculture, chemistry, military technology, transportation and communications, in accordance with the divine prescription: "And ready against them what force you can."

SOURCE: *Al-Qibla*, July 7, 1924.

8. To disseminate the Arabic language and promote its instruction in all the Islamic countries, for this language is the one in which religion was revealed, and religion is the only bond which links the Muslims. Through this language, mutual understanding among them will be possible, despite differences of race and tongue, and Arabic must be the official language of the Congress.

another treatment, see Dankwart Rustow, "Politics and Islam in Turkey, 1920–1955," 70–79.

13. For the text of the first *Alem-i Islâma Beyanname*, of March 17, 1920, see Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, 549; *Atatürk'ün Tamim, Telegraf ve Beyannameleeri*, 258–59. For the May proclamation, see 319–26.

14. Sir Horace Rumbold (Constantinople), dispatch of February 7, 1921, in *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, ser. 1, 17: 48–49.

15. *Hakimiyet-i milliye*, March 11, 1921; translation in FO371/6470, E5714/1/44. See also Kutay, *Kurtuluşun*, 253–63, for the fullest Turkish discussion of the initiative.

16. See Fevziye Abdullah Tansel, *Mehmed Akif: Hayatı ve Eserleri*, especially 51–96.

17. Eastern Summary (SIS) no. 709, June 8, 1922, FO371/7883, E5949/27/44.

18. *Sebilürreşad*, April 13, 1922; Eastern Summary (SIS) no. 709, June 8, 1922, FO371/7883, E5949/27/44.

19. Ryan (Lausanne) to Nevile Henderson (Constantinople), November 28, 1922, Andrew Ryan Papers, FO800/240.

20. Interview with Abdul Hadi, Afghan minister in London, *Sunday Times*, November 12, 1922; also L/P&S/10/895, P.4618.

21. SIS report of January 10, 1923, FO371/8967, E520/85/16.

22. Unattributed draft dispatch (Alexandria), August 23, 1923, AFC, carton 18, file 6.

23. Appendix to a memorandum entitled "Pan-Islamism and the Caliphate, July 1923–March 1924," dated April 28, 1924, FO371/10110, E3657/2029/65.

24. *Tevhid-i efkâr*, November 9, 1923; *Akşam*, November 9, 1923; *Oriente Moderno* (1923), 3: 409.

25. Humphrys (Kabul), dispatch of May 5, 1923, FO371/9130, E4616/199/44.

26. C. A. Nallino, "La Fine del così detto califfato ottomano," and Sylvia G. Haim, "The Abolition of the Caliphate and its Aftermath."

## 8. NEW CALIPH IN ARABIA

1. Translation of letter dated Receb 27, 1339, FO371/6470, E6447/1/44. Identical information on this initiative appears in FO141/816, f. 13327. On Haydari-zâde İbrahim, see Altunsu, *Osmanlı Şeyhülislâmları*, 252–53.

2. "Renseignements d'un informateur," Beyrut, April 6, 1921, AFC, carton 131, file 26/3.

3. Allenby (Cairo), telegram of June 19, 1921, FO371/6471, E7001/1/44.

4. W. E. Marshall (Jidda), dispatch of June 10, 1921, L/P&S/10/926, P. 3281 (E7445/455/91).

5. Sharabasi, *Rashid Rida*, 47.

6. *Al-Manar* (July 1924), 25(5): 390.

7. H. Gaillard (Cairo), dispatch of September 9, 1921, AFC, carton 66, file 12/1.

8. W. H. Deedes, Civil Secretary (Jerusalem) to Sir Horace Rumbold, British High Commissioner (Constantinople), August 30, 1921, FO371/6475, E10577/1/44.

9. W. S. Edmonds, minute of September 22, 1921, to dispatch cited in previous note.

10. *Al-Muqattam*, August 23, 1922; *Oriente Moderno* (1922), 2: 291–92.

11. *Al-Qibla*, August 6, 1923.

12. See C. Ernest Dawn, "Ideological Influences in the Arab Revolt."

13. Yehoshua Porath, "The Palestinians and the Negotiations for the British-Hijazi Treaty, 1920–1925." For another view, see Suleiman Mousa, "A Matter of Principle: King Hussein of the Hijaz and the Arabs of Palestine."

14. A role acknowledged by Muhammad al-Sasi, secretary general of the Conference

of the Arabian Peninsula and editor of *al-Qibla*, in a letter to Jamal al-Husayni, secretary of the Arab Executive Committee (Jerusalem), October 11, 1922, *ISA*, division 65, file 15.

15. *Al-Qibla*, July 17, 1922.
16. Adib Abu al-Diba (Mecca) to Jamal al-Husayni (Jerusalem), July 18, 1922, *ISA*, division 65, file 7.
17. W. E. Marshall (Jidda), dispatch of August 30, 1922, L/P&S/10/926, P. 4048.
18. R. W. Bullard (Jidda), dispatch of August 29, 1923, L/P&S/10/926, P. 3841 (E9280/653/91).
19. R. W. Bullard (Jidda), dispatch of October 31, 1923, L/P&S/10/926, P. 4682 (E1151/653/91).
20. A hostile but well-documented account of the various pledges of allegiance offered to Husayn appears in *al-Manar* (July 1924), 25(5): 390–400. For a collection of similar materials, see *Oriente Moderno* (1924), 4: 226–39. The Meccan *al-Qibla* for March and April carried many professions of allegiance from widely scattered parts.
21. R. W. Bullard (Jidda), dispatch of April 30, 1924, L/P&S/10/1115, P. 2434 (E4379/424/91). One of the two “Javanese” members was a pilgrims’ guide. See R. W. Bullard, dispatch of May 29, 1924, L/P&S/10/1115, P. 2798 (E5217/424/91).
22. *Oriente Moderno* (1924), 4: 295–96; *al-Qibla*, April 3, 1924.
23. For the congress and its proceedings, see *Oriente Moderno* (1924), 4: 600–602; and *al-Qibla* for the month of July 1924. The text of the charter appears in *al-Qibla*, July 7, 1924. The insistence upon Arabic as the official language did not prevent the use of unofficial languages at the congress, and *al-Qibla*, July 17, 1924, reports that the proceedings were translated into Turkish, Persian, and Indonesian.
24. Kellar El Menouar, Algerian subject and Gérant du consulat de France (Jidda), dispatch of August 4, 1924, *AFC*, carton 71, file 13/4.
25. On these incidents, see Arnold Green, *The Tunisian Ulama, 1873–1915*, 185–87; and Nicola Ziadeh, *Origins of Nationalism in Tunisia*, 98–102. On the opinions current in Tunisia on wider Muslim affairs, just before Tha‘alibi’s departure, see Béchir Tlili, “Au seuil du nationalisme tunisien. Documents inédits sur le panislamisme au Maghreb (1919–1923).”
26. R. W. Bullard (Jidda), dispatch of August 30, 1924, L/P&S/10/1115, P. 3971 (E7907/424/91).
27. Sir Henry Dobbs, British High Commissioner (Baghdad), telegram to Secretary of State for Colonies, September 24, 1924, L/P&S/10/1124, P. 3884.
28. Kawakibi suggested that security in the Hijaz be provided by a mixed military force under the command of the caliph’s advisory council. Kawakibi, *Umm al-qura*, 211–12.
29. Sir Henry Dobbs (Baghdad), telegram to Secretary of State for Colonies, October 26, 1924, FO371/10015, E9441/7624/91. Wrote Dobbs of Faysal: “I consider that he will probably receive considerable number of rebuffs. These may enlighten (him?) more than any of my arguments can do as to the true attitude of Moslems in other countries toward the Hashimite family and the Hedjaz question. I trust therefore that I may be given early instructions to inform him that there is no objection to his proposals.”
30. On this episode, see Martin Kramer, “Shaykh Maraghī’s Mission to the Hijaz, 1925.”

## 9. THE CALIPHATE GRAIL

1. For the text of the proclamation, see *Majallat al-mu‘tamar al-islami al-‘amm i‘l-khilafa bi-Misir* (October 1924), no. 1, 20–23; Achille Sékaly, *Le Congrès du Khalifat et le Congrès du Monde Musulman*, 29–33; and Arnold J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1925*, 1: 576–78.
2. There exists in ‘Abdin Palace an exhaustive list, nearly sixty pages long, of the names