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World War I and the Perspective of a Hashemite Order in Yemen.

Study of the Chronicle of Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad al-Waṣḥālī¹

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The weak military activity in Yemen during World War I and the maintenance of the *status quo* between the British in Aden - who first settled in Aden in 1839 - and the Ottomans - who re conquered the northern country in 1849 - has led historians to suggest that no important events occurred in the country at the time. The overall situation during the war, however, should not conceal what was a period of "high dispersion of powers"² and of deep political tension. The general context is one of imperial competition about Yemen and of continuous blockades of the Yemeni coast, by first the Italians, and then by the British. Just after the invasion of Tripolitania the 29 September 1911, the Italians began to organize the blockade to prevent the numerous Ottoman troops³ stationed on this side of the Red Sea to attack Eritrea.⁴ This measure promoted reconciliation between the Ottomans and their main opponent in Yemen, Imām Yaḥyā, who succeeded to his father at the head of the Zaydī population in 1904, and had kept leading a bloody war until then. The Da‘‘ān agreement, signed on 9 October, gave him legal control of the Zaydī region in Upper Yemen in return for the recognition of Ottoman sovereignty. Thereafter, Ottoman enemies more or less became Yaḥyā's one's. These included first the Italians and the British—whom the Imam identified as an infidel people occupying sacred Islamic land—, but also the Emir Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Idrīsī, who had issued a *da‘wa* (summons to follow his Islamic leadership) in northern ‘Asīr in 1909 and gained Italian support against the Ottomans at the beginning of the Libyan war in October 1911 and until the Peace agreement at Lausanne a year after.⁵ After the declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire in November 1914, the British, in turn, imposed a severe blockade on the Yemeni coasts to prevent dhows smuggling food, materials and arms into Turkish Arabia. On 30 April 1915, they succeeded in signing an alliance treaty in Aden with al-Idrīsī⁶ against the Ottomans—including the objective of avoiding direct conflict with Imam Yaḥyā.⁷ Thus, the conflict between the Ottomans and the British essentially consisted of a single major Ottoman attack on the British position at the gates of Aden in Lahj in May

¹ This paper was first presented under the title "Fighting With the Ottomans: The Islamic Cause in Yemen During World War I" at the International Conference of Istanbul, "Not All Quiet on the Ottoman Fronts: Neglected Perspectives on a Global War, 1914-18," held on April 9-12, 2014. It has been partly edited by Angela Krieger.

² See Blumi, 2003, p. 70.

³ See Kuehn 2011, 238-239, and Ingrams 1993, p. 637.

⁴ Zaccaria 2012, p. 22-23. I am grateful to Massimo Zaccaria for this information.

⁵ See Bang 1996; Baldry 1976-1977 and 1976a, p. 55, where Baldry reports that the 9 October 1912, a new Turkish-Yemeni agreement was concluded (p. 59), and that an Italian mission impressed upon al-Idrīsī the necessity of not coming to terms with the Ottomans (p. 62).

⁶ See Baldry 1978, p. 149 and Bang 1996, p. 104. Al-Idrīsī was the first Arab leader to ally with the British in their war against the Ottoman Empire.

⁷ Even in May 1917, the British administration in Aden would refuse to help undermine Yaḥyā's authority, choosing to wait to see who in Yemen would take control of the country: see Letter of the Resident in Aden to the Indian Office, 15 May 1917, and Note from the 28 Aug. 1917, in Ingrams 1993, vol. 6, p. 107 and 110, respectively.

1915⁸, skirmishes on the littoral of the Red Sea following Yemeni and Ottoman attempts to break the British blockade, and the bombing of al-Ḥudayda in June 1917 and of some Ottoman posts, namely in and around al-Luḥayya in 1918.⁹ As for Emir al-Idrīsī, he made progress toward southern Tihāma, primarily after 1917, but after the Ottoman withdrawal in 1919-1920 he lost power against Imam Yaḥyā, who led the first independent Arab state of the 20th century. The evolution of the balance of power in Yemen during the war invites to consider the political dispositions of the Shāfi'īs—and the traditional elite of ulemas and *sayyid*-s (normal plur. *Sādā'*: Hashemite people, i.e. descendants of the Prophet) among them in particular—either vs. the Ottomans or the local competing leaders. How did those who satisfied with the Ottoman occupation accommodate the growing power of Emir al-Idrīsī, and then Imam Yaḥyā's final control all over the country?

This article proposes to explore the idea of an extended social and political affirmation of the Yemeni local elite, namely the *sayyid*-s, on the ground of the local context of World War I, and from a perspective that goes beyond the sole empowerment of Imam Yaḥyā. It is based on the analysis of the now well known but still understudied chronicle of Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad al-Washālī (1867/1868 - 1937), a *sayyid* and Shāfi'ī scholar of the Tihāma. Al-Washālī's began to write this chronicle in 1911, under the title “Disseminating the Finest Praises about Yemen's Masters of Generosity and Goodness and Reporting the Events that Occurred During This Time” - which is now the most important Yemeni source on the wartime.¹⁰ The author, from his residence in al-Munīra, reveals a number of points on a multitude of small local conflicts between the Ottomans and the “British-Idrīsī side”, and on the effects of the blockade on the daily life of the region's inhabitants and its weakening of the Ottoman forces. Yet the most interesting aspect of this chronicle is not the insight it provides on the military situation and the end of Ottoman rule in Yemen, which are already well known.¹¹ Rather, it is how it deals with the instability of power, and with the status given to the ulemas and *sayyid*-s in an insecure context such as the World War. In the first part of this paper, I analyze how, as an ulema and a *sayyid*, al-Washālī delivers more than a simple chronicle of events. The context of writing, the tributes he pays to the different authorities and the selected events of the time he witnessed invite us to consider his chronicle as a political stand, or even a claim in favor of the social group he belongs to. The objective is not to determine the veracity of what al-Washālī writes. Rather, the argument defended here is that the chronicle can be seen—following Quentin Skinner's interpretation of historical writing as taking a political stand¹²—as a performative means for allowing the author to ensure his own shift away from Ottoman allegiance, in a way that could be both understood and perhaps emulated by the common people. Al-Washālī is, although without any weapon except his pen, an actor of the war, who defends the social order threatened by overwhelming development of modern liberalism. His arguments and justifications, which introduce the moral and ethical aspects of the shifting attitudes of some of the Tihāmīs, shall form the core of my analysis because they reveal his own authority to formulate them as a religious scholar. His chronicle makes it then possible to understand how he tried to provide a comprehensive account of the shifting attitudes of people in the Tihāma as the war progressed and as the Ottomans lost their authority. This can help explain how the Shāfi'ī elite participated in the handover of Ottoman power, first to Emir al-Idrīsī's state and then to the Zaydī Imām, Yaḥyā.

Writing the Ottoman History of the Tihāma: Asserting the *sayyid*-s' Authority

If we accept the idea that a chronicle can fall into the category of plot, it is important to take into account the project that motivated al-Washālī to engage in such a work in 1911. Of course, al-

⁸ See Gavin 1975.

⁹ See Baldry 1978, 148-197.

¹⁰ Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad al-Washālī al-Tihāmī al-Hasanī [from now onward al-Washālī], 1982. On the scarcity of local Arab chronicles in the Arab Peninsula, see Freitag, Pétriat and Strohmeier eds., 1916.

¹¹ The British archives of the Foreign Office have been duly used by Baldry and the French ones partly by Chevalier 2006, p. 73-92.

¹² Skinner 2012.

Washalī was a learned man and as such, it is not surprising that he engaged himself in such a traditional form of writing.¹³ But what has to be stressed, is also the particular political context of the Yemeni province at that time that could have incited him to this work. After many years of administrative attempts to control the country, what Thomas Kuehn has called a "politics of difference" was experimented in the Zaydī zones, that opened the way to a more radical conciliatory attitude towards Imām Yaḥyā, and then to the Da‘ān agreement.¹⁴

The historical analysis of this 1911 event should also consider that it took place in a more general context of political contest led by Islamic reformism from Cairo but also from Indonesia, against the traditional elites of the Muslim world and their privileges - who in turn may have been led to react by promoting their status. In Yemen, as early as 1905, some *sayyid* ulemas had tried to present themselves to the Ottoman authorities as "keys" to local society, and already in 1910, two *sayyids*, representatives for Sana'a in the Ottoman Parliament had made suggested to the imperial government that the *sayyids* and the ulemas be put in charge in the province judiciary and as district and sub-district governors.¹⁵ Beyond Yemen and all over the mega-region covering the Indian Ocean, the *sayyid*-s were challenged by new and modern educated people and were reacting by asserting their Hashemite genealogy and the value of their Yemeni or Hadramī origins - sometimes by developing the educational structures of their original region¹⁶. Then, the chronicle should be read as a conceivable means for its author - also a *sayyid* - of taking a stand, or even a political act tracing some of the positions he possibly defended aloud in public in support to the social group he was belonging.¹⁷ The monthly account of events—be they political, military, or linked to the death of individuals and to natural, climatic occurrences—lends the chronicle the status of a neutral document that could serve as evidence in the event that the episodes related were politically evaluated and judged. Yet, as with all historical testimonies, there were still specific pro-*sayyid* intentions behind its writing.¹⁸

Al-Washalī situated himself at the political center of the southern region of the Tihāma. To support this statement, one might stress the importance of his choice to link the chronicle to the previous three volumes of what the editor Ibrāhīm al-Maqḥafī describes as the “encyclopedia of the biographies and families of well-known scholars and *za‘ims* in the Tihāma.”¹⁹ Al-Washalī thus considers the chronicle as a “chapter [*faṣl*] on the amazing, unusual, and strange events” that occurred in the Tihāma and a continuation of the ‘encyclopedia’ on the pretext that “historical science [*‘ilm al-tārīkh*] could never be complete without an account of events [*dhikr al-ḥawādīth*].”²⁰ Indeed, both projects also complete each other through the “historical facts” that appear in the encyclopedia instead of appearing in the chronicle,²¹ and the biographical data provided in the chronicle on important

¹³ See Rosenthal 1969, on what he calls the "Annalistic form" made famous by ‘Alī Ṭabarī in the 9th Century, p. 71-86.

¹⁴ See Kuehn 2011. The so-called "Rule of Difference" refers to the political model the Ottomans tended to apply time to time in Yemen since the end of the 1870's, aiming to rule according to the "Customs and Dispositions" of the Yemenis, instead of the Ottoman imperial centralization principle. It came to demarcate the Province of Yemen as a subordinate and colonial space.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 222-224.

¹⁶ See Freitag and Clarence-Smith 1997, Freitag 2003, Boxberger 2002. We also refer to the case of a great Hadrami scholar from Zanzibar (under British protectorate since 1890), Bā Kāthir (1855-1925), who decided in 1911 (the year of the Treaty of Da‘ān) and on the advice of a *shaykh* of Hadramaut, to write the story of a trip he made fifteen years before between Egypt, the Hijaz and its region of origin. As was shown by Friedhelm Hartwig, the goal of the narrative was not to describe the trip in itself, but to highlight the social space in which the *Sayyid*-s of Hadramaut evolved, the faith that motivated them and the extent of their religious knowledge. See Hartwig 2001.

¹⁷ Indeed, the text is sometimes closer to “oral speech” than to a “written text,” the author addressing the reader with interjections like “look!”: see al-Washalī, p. 159.

¹⁸ Renaud Dulong has convincingly proposed this by distinguishing between historical “documents” and “monuments”—the latter being linked to “society’s capacity to testify about itself as well as its capacity to anticipate the memory of future generations”; see Dulong 2002.

¹⁹ Ibrāhīm Aḥmad al-Maqḥafī, introduction to *Nashr al-ṭhanā*, by al-Washalī 1982, vol. 1, part 1, p. 11. The book is composed of two parts, each divided into two volumes: genealogy and biographies of great scholars descending from al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (vol. 1); genealogy and biographies of great scholars descending from al-Hasan b. ‘Alī (vol. 2); biographies of other great scholars of the Tihāma (vol. 3); and the chronicle (*ḥawādīth al-waqt wa nawādīrihi*) (vol. 4).

²⁰ Al-Washalī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 5.

²¹ For example, see what occurred around the time of Abdallah b. Aḥmad Bawnī Pasha; al-Washalī, vol. 3, part 2, p. 92.

figures of the Tihāma.

The historical methodology that al-Washalī champions allows him to insert an autobiographical note in his work. In it, he details the high quality of the education he received from the famous Tihāmī ulemas in the town of al-Zaydiyya thanks to his maternal uncle and Shaykh al-Islām Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Zawwāk, a *sayyid* who cared for him as a child following his father’s death and who thereafter employed him as his *mulāzim* (secretary). After the death of the Shaykh in 1311/1893-1894, he worked as a *mulāzim* and a children’s tutor for two other famous ulemas and *sayyid*-s, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qudaymī, and Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Ahdal, in the town of al-Munīra, where he also worked on his historical project.²²

The objectives of the biographical encyclopedia also allowed al-Washalī to insert an entry on himself among the prestigious hierarchy of the Yemeni *sayyid* families. Al-Washalī’s *nasab* (genealogy) linked him to the large family of the Ḥasanī-s (descendants from al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī, the Prophet’s eldest grandson). It also linked him to the broader society of Yemeni *sayyid*-s—be they Shafi’is or Zaydis—who had disputed power in Yemen for centuries and who had been familiar to the intellectual overcoming of their doctrinal antagonism since Muḥammad b. Isma’īl al-Wazīr in the fifteenth century, and more accurately in the time of Muḥammad al-Shawkānī in the eighteenth century.²³

Obviously, the place al-Washalī attributes to his own status within the sociological framework of Yemen is a way for him to proclaim his intellectual authority to speak about the region and its current political situation by asserting the specific identity of the Tihāma at a time when different local political projects are emerging in the southern Arabian Peninsula to the detriment of the Ottoman Empire. When he began work on his chronicle at the end of 1911,²⁴ the Italians had weakened the Ottoman positions in Yemen, and al-Washalī seems to have been particularly aware of the growing authority of the local dissidents—and perhaps of a possible partition of the Ottoman province of Yemen into various small protectorates. In 1911—if not in 1909, when he probably began taking notes on the events he witnessed²⁵—he duly points out al-Idrīsī’s *da’wa* in northern ‘Asīr in 1909.²⁶ This led to a threatening situation for the Ottomans in the Tihāma in May 1911, when, as he reports, an Idrīsī attack on the Ottoman garrison of al-Ḥafāyir near Jāzān killed two thousand Ottomans and injured five hundred.²⁷

As for Imām Yaḥyā, al-Washalī also carefully reports how he threatened the Ottoman authorities with the support of important tribes (including the powerful ‘Alī al-Miqdād clan) as early as February 1911, in addition to how he himself was prey to local attacks.²⁸ What has to be highlighted however is that the mention of the Da’‘ān agreement in October does not give Imām Yaḥyā the advantage in the chronicle. Hereafter the latter will be referred to in the chronicle as “the Imām of Shahāra”, a

²² Al-Washalī, vol. 2, part 1, p. 186-191.

²³ ‘Abd al-Bārī Ṭāhir also highlights this in his preface: see al-Washalī, *Nashr al-ṭhanā*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 8. On this issue, see Bernard Haykel (2003). Al-Washalī, refers to and quotes Muḥammad al-Shawkānī in his chronicle: see al-Washalī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 23.

²⁴ The author seemingly began to write the biographical part of the book and the chronical simultaneously at the end of 1911: as underlines ‘Abd al-Bārī Ṭāhir it in the general introduction, al-Washalī indicates that someone who was born in 1296/1879 is 33 years old at the time when he writes his history, i.e. around 1330/1912 (p. 36); and he indicates the year when he is writing in the chronicle, 1329/1911, vol. 4, p. 10.

²⁵ The year 1327/1909 is the first year to be reported in detail in the chronicle. Just like the reports for the years that follow, it contains eleven pages, whereas those for the years prior to this rarely exceed two pages and only provide a summary of the most important events. After 1339/1920, events were observed in less detail, perhaps due to the author’s new administrative and religious responsibilities.

²⁶ Al-Washalī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 62-80.

²⁷ Ibid., vol. 4, part 2, p. 85. See also Anne Bang (1996), p. 90-94. Al-Washalī does not mention that al-Idrīsī signed a treaty with the Ottomans in al-Ḥafā’ir, which was ratified in Istanbul in January 1910. The Ottomans recognized al-Idrīsī as the *qā’im maqām* (representative of the Sultan) of ‘Asīr, provided that he acknowledged their right to collect taxes in the port cities and to maintain garrisons in the territory. Al-Washalī does mention, however, al-Idrīsī’s campaign against the Ottomans in 1910 and how, despite the support of Sharīf Ḥusayn from Mecca, the latter did not succeed in driving him back.

²⁸ Al-Washalī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 82-93.

reference to the town where he settled, but above all a title that had been negotiated by the Ottomans in Da‘ān in order to contain his ambitions as “Commander of the Faithful”, a title that he was claiming until then.²⁹ And according to the chronicle, the Ottoman *mushīr* (marshal) ‘Izzat Pasha who came to sign the agreement was only accompanied by fifteen “individuals,” whereas Yaḥyā had to prove his power with an entourage of ten thousand men. Al-Washālī then mentions that ‘Izzat Pasha not only gave to the Imam the *qadā’* (district) “of the Mountains”, but also a monthly salary of 30,000 riyals, as a way of underlining that the imam became the sultan’s *obligé*. Furthermore, he details the fact that Yaḥyā was in charge of collecting taxes on behalf of the Ottoman state, namely the dues on *mīrī* (“public”) lands and the *zakāt*, but also those related to camels and cows that were up until that point considered *matrūk* (“abandoned” or untaxed).³⁰ While these details were not in fact mentioned in the treaty,³¹ it must be stressed that they are part of the arguments of the chronicle that tend to present it as much more advantageous to the Ottomans. Yet by adding that, after the treaty, “security spread throughout the mountains, Islamic rules were applied [*qāmat al-aḥkām al-shar‘īyya*], and controversies came to an end [*sakinat al-fitan*],”³² al-Washālī shows how the alliance between the Ottomans and an educated *sayyid* could bring about peace and justice. Thus, al-Washālī is stressing how political stability of the Tihāmī region improved under a combined rule of the local *sayyid*-s and their Ottoman protector.

Ottoman legitimacy in Yemen is presented using a political argument that al-Washālī develops throughout his narrative, based on the idea—one that was rather classical and not specifically Islamic—³³ that social and moral chaos leads to the introduction of a political leader who can bring about stability. It is obviously not insignificant that the event chosen to open the chronicle takes place forty years before, in the year 1287/1871. Here, al-Washālī reports “a famous event,” which he claims is known as “the year of the ‘Asīr.”³⁴ Referring to previous historians’ accounts, he considers it one “of the most significant and the most terrible [events] that took place in Yemen.”³⁵ It concerns the attack on the Ottoman position in Ḥudayda led by Muḥammad b. ‘Āyid, the Emir of ‘Asīr, along with thirty-five thousand combatants, which provoked the fury of “the Sultan Lion” (*al-Sultan al-asad al-darghām*), Abdūlazīz³⁶. The Ottomans retaliated a few months later in 1872 by invading the Yemeni coasts, occupying what would become—at the time when al-Washālī is writing—the Ottoman province of Yemen.³⁷ The combatants of the aggressive emir of ‘Asīr’s are not justified in their attack, being only “brutish people” (*akhlāṭ*) from the Sirāt Mountains and Qahtān. Al-Washālī does not mention the Ottoman presence in Ḥudayda since 1849, presenting it instead as unquestioned and legitimate fact that was further bolstered by the authority of the Ottoman sultan—whom the unjust barbarians tried to defeat in Yemen for no justified reason in 1871. This historical account, in which local disorder obliged the Ottomans to re-assert their power in upper Yemen, lends real legitimacy to their presence in Yemen. Al-Washālī pursues his argument by showing how Turkish occupation was beneficial to a country that was undermined by conflict and *fitna* (the divisiveness among the Muslims condemned by the Koran).³⁸ The social order and civil peace the Ottomans imposed on the Muslim populations were their primary means of securing power and ensuring that it was effective. Whereas, according to the Zaydī historical accounts, the imams (al-Manṣūr Muḥammad, 1890-1904 and then Yaḥyā, 1904-1948) argued that the Ottomans’ inability to apply the sharia justified the *jihād*

²⁹ Kuehn, *op.cit.*, p. 243.

³⁰ Al-Washālī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 93.

³¹ For a complete account in English of the Revolt of 1911, see Baldry 1976b.

³² Al-Washālī, “*Ahdāth ‘ām 1330*,” vol. 4, part 2, p. 93.

³³ See Jocelyne Dakhlia 1998, p. 103.

³⁴ Al-Washālī, general introduction to *Nashr al-thanā*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 13. This was probably written after the biographical encyclopedia.

³⁵ Al-Washālī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 5.

³⁶ Abdūlazīz was the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1861 to 1908.

³⁷ Al-Washālī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 5-25.

³⁸ This is particularly apparent in Muḥammad ‘Abd Allah al-Zawwāq’s poem, which is quoted by al-Washālī and evokes a correlation between the arrival of Sa‘īd Pasha and the end of the *fitna*-s: *ibid.*, p. 15.

against them, and continued to do so after the Ottomans withdrew,³⁹ al-Washalī shows that the Ottomans provided the Yemenis with peace and order against the instability of the local political conflicting powers.

The argument of the internal stability provided by the Ottomans rests on the Islamic legitimacy of the empire. Whether al-Washalī aims at flattering them or at promoting them among the Yemenis, he also presents them as the most capable Islamic force when it came to challenging adversity in general and western hostility in particular. He praises this enduring empire and its leaders, who succeeded in both imposing their “superiority” over “impious countries” and respecting “the requirements of the high words of Islam”—leaders who “magnified Islamic rites,” were always ready to serve the Holy places, and “guaranteed the subsistence of all those who learned the Koran and the religious sciences.”⁴⁰ Abdülhamid is presented as “a vigorous, courageous, and enterprising ruler to whom men and countries, along with godless communities (*al-ṭawā’if al-kufriyya*), were subjugated.”⁴¹ In his text, al-Washalī prays that God ensures the Ottomans “victory, success and strength, [that He] helps them to triumph over enemies in a resounding victory.”⁴² He also shows a real interest in the technical innovations the Ottomans introduced in Yemen: the telegraph, printed books of *hadiths* (along with biographies of the Prophet and historical books in Turkish!), imported fruits thanks to the railroad they had built and which extended to Medina, and prepared the construction of a railroad between the Red Sea and Sana’a with the assistance of French experts.⁴³

The classical ideal of governance and justice embodied by the Ottomans meant that the liberal Young Turks—who instituted the consultative regime (*amr al-shūrā*) in 1908 and left the sultan with “only his name”—did not find a favorable position in al-Washalī’s work.⁴⁴ He denounces these supporters of liberty and equality (“horrible things,” or *umūr qabīḥa*) as profiteers, corrupt people, and traitors to the Islamic cause, finally excluding them—along with the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP)—from those he generally refers to as “the Ottomans” and who are led by Sultan Muḥammad Rashshād.⁴⁵ In his account, al-Washalī makes it understood that the Ottomans in Yemen were not influenced by the CUP’s political orientation in favor of centralization, but that they adapted to the local power.

Indeed, the third important idea emerging from al-Washalī’s text is that the Ottomans were ruling in accordance with the local elites. He was himself clearly involved in this, since he portrays himself as having direct contact with Ottoman administrative and military elites—saying, for example, that he received information for his chronicle from “reliable Turkish leaders” (*al-thiqqāt min ru’asā’ al-Turk*).⁴⁶ In addition, he makes evident that the moral objective of bringing peace and order to a country divided by conflicts between tribal clans and families and subject to the hostility of “brutish”⁴⁷ tribal people accustomed to violence and looting was widely supported thanks to the interventions of important local *sayyids* serving the Ottoman authority. Among them was Sayyid Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Ahdal, who had led a counter-offensive against Imam Yaḥyā around Sana’a in February 1911, meaning before he signed the Da‘‘ān agreement.⁴⁸ But the most influential *sayyid* on the Ottoman side was undoubtedly al-Washalī’s protector, Sayyid Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Ahdal,⁴⁹ who regularly intervened between conflicting clans as a mediator and whom al-Washalī accompanied

³⁹ See John Willis 2004, p. 128-29.

⁴⁰ Al-Washalī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 18.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 16.

⁴² Ibid, p. 5-6 and p. 16-18. Al-Washalī also quotes the poem that his uncle Muḥammad al-Zawwāk dedicated to the Ottoman victory against the tribes of Ḥāshid, Ibid., p. 15-17.

⁴³ On these four issues, see *ibid.*, p. 75, 79, 81 and 85, respectively. See also p. 166, on the telegraph.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 62 and p. 64-65.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 145.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

⁴⁸ Al-Washalī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 82.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 67-68, on August 1909; 71, on October-November 1909; p. 97, on March 1912; p. 145, on December 1915, etc. Al-Washalī also cites the actions of Sayyid ‘Abd al-Bārī b. Aḥmad al-Ahdal in Luḥayya in 1914, p. 119.

during a dangerous conflict.⁵⁰ Muḥammad al-Ahdal, presented as the “Master of al-Munīra” (*Ṣāhib al-Munīra*), was keen collaborator with the Ottoman administration throughout the Tihāma. More than that, he is presented as the *holy spirit* of the Ottoman sultan when al-Washalī mentions the dream of ‘Abd al-Qādir “Abū Sirrayn” (“He Who Has the Two Secrets”), a “just man” (*raḡul ṣāliḡ*) living in Mawr, in 1909:

Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd—who was deposed—and his brother Sultan Muḥammad Rashshād—his successor—were sitting, at the home of Sayyid al-‘Allāma Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Ahdal, Master of al-Munīra. The latter left them for a while, being called away by the Prophet—may God bless him—who then took the hand of Sultan Muḥammad Rashshād, and told the *Sayyid*: “Place this one (meaning Muḥammad Rashshād) under the authority of this other (meaning ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd) and be careful.”⁵¹

The idea presented here by al-Washalī is that not only did the *sayyid*-s help the Ottomans to bring peace to Yemen, but that they finally became the real protectors of the original Ottoman spirit distorted by the CUP's leaders in Istanbul. Then, if the political role al-Washalī attributes to the Ottoman power and the local *sayyid*-s is to be taken seriously, then his presentation of how power struggles evolved during World War I deserves particular attention.

World War I and the Shifting Balance of Power: A Historical Challenge

The favorable light al-Washalī shed on the growing power of Emir (and Sayyid) al-Idrīsī—who is already at war against the Ottomans when al-Washalī begins the chronicle—is quite intriguing. Instead of criticizing the emir's *da‘wa*, he appears to legitimize it, particularly when he declares that the *da‘wa* was accompanied by “wonderous facts and strange things” (*umūr ‘ajība wa ashyā’ gharība*), as if inexplicable (and perhaps divine) factors were involved.⁵² He explains that, just after Sultan Abdülhamid was deposed in April 1909, coalitions of tribes violently attacked different Tihāmī towns and their civilians because “the rumor had been spread that al-Idrīsī ordered assaults on the soldiers of the [Ottoman] state, who were present in the towns, and the besieging of the garrisons.”⁵³ Indeed, in August, “Idrīsī tribesmen” are reported to have occupied the towns of al-Qanāwīs, al-Zaydiyya and al-Luḡayya.⁵⁴ The author, who witnessed one of these attacks, corroborates the explanation given by al-Idrīsī in November 1909, in which he disclaims all responsibility for the uprising, and accuses the Turkish mal-administration.⁵⁵ Al-Washalī, who may have heard about this declaration, states that this order could never have been given by the Emir, whom he portrays as a learned man and an honorable *sayyid*. Furthermore, in order to clear al-Idrīsī's name, al-Washalī mentions that the Emir had connections with the Ottomans when he was in Cairo, some few years before.⁵⁶ Thus, in al-Washalī's view, al-Idrīsī could not have been an enemy of “the Turks”, and he accuses “the tribes,” who, “due to their ignorance and their iniquitous nature, believed that it was true. They fought the soldiers and then attacked the people in the cities, and what happened happened, and praise be to God for what He wanted and did, whether it was sweet or bitter.”⁵⁷ Al-Washalī finally explains that al-Idrīsī never wanted independence for the territory of ‘Asīr, but that, in fact, he simply wanted to “cooperate with the Ottoman state.”⁵⁸

Two years later, in December 1911 and particularly from January 1912 onwards, the beginning of the Italian blockade on the Tihāmī coast modifies al-Washalī's appreciation about the Ottomans and al-Idrīsī. In April he indicates, as a consequence of the blockade, a doubling of prices, and in July the

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 67-68. See also, for example, p. 169, 175, etc.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 91.

⁵² Ibid., p. 62. Another chronicler, Zaydi, also described Imam Yaḥyā's increasing power in 1908 (following the Young Turks Revolution) using similar vocabulary, in order to legitimize it on a religious level: see Honvault (2008).

⁵³ Al-Washalī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 69.

⁵⁴ Baldry 1976b, p. 182.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 184.

⁵⁶ Al-Washalī, p. 72. Al-Washalī states that Muḥammad Tawfīq, an Ottoman who had studied for eight years with al-Idrīsī in Egypt, was sent to mediate during the crisis with the Emir.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 70 and 72.

heavy toll paid by the poor fishermen who were not allowed to carry out their activity.⁵⁹ The situation was worrying for the Yemenis, as well as for the Ottomans, and may have required moral support from al-Washālī for the latter. But the Italian blockade appears to have been the first step of his disenchantment towards them. From then he expresses compassion for the poor people who were about to die of starvation, through expressions like *Lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā bil-Lāh* ("there is neither change nor power except by means of Allah").⁶⁰ He also reports assassinations outside the cities, and the fact that during a strong bombing attack of Ḥudayda in July, the civilians ran away from the town, and that they were robbed by the tribes on their way out.⁶¹ Al-Washālī's report coincides with the information given to the French Consul in Djeddah in May.⁶² For the Consul, who wrote also that insubordination was spreading all over the country and that the tribes were taken a full advantage of the blockade through smuggling activities, the balance of power was not any more in favour of the Ottomans.⁶³

Far from giving neutral information, al-Washālī in turn introduces for the first time the idea that the Ottomans could not protect the common people anymore. In opposition to this, he duly notes, during these events, the growing power of Emir al-Idrīsī, who led many attacks on the Ottomans, thanks to his ability to provide food, money, ammunitions and weapons to his supporters despite of the blockade. Al-Washālī avoids putting into question the agreement between the emir and the Italians, only reporting that it was difficult to know the identity of the emir's suppliers, since "the information provided by the people were confused".⁶⁴ The remark raises the question of how information, and also propaganda, was circulating from here and there to the people of Yemen, but still, it also suggests that al-Washālī was free to present things as he wanted. At the end of the year 1912, when the Italian blockade ended, he finally raised the question of why the blockade had been set. Relaying on "news" and "journals" (we do not know where they were published, but surely from an Arab editor outside Yemen) he denounces for the first time some of "the Ottoman leaders" (*umarā' al-dawla al-'uthmāniyya*) in Istanbul. He holds responsible those people who had "bought Tripoli to the Italians and who had made people believe that they did it with the authorization of the Ottoman Sultan, Mehmet Rashshād." He relates the war that followed in Libya between the Italians and the *sayyid* Muhammad al-Sanūsī, which lasted "almost a year" before Sultan Mehmet got aware of what was happening and reacted by prohibiting Italy from delivering food and products coming from the Ottoman provinces. This is what would have caused, following al-Washālī, the Italian blockade of the Yemeni coast. What we understand from this explication is that the "Ottoman leaders" who "bought Libya" to Italy were people from the CUP, whom al-Washālī denounces as traitors and impious people who gave their soul to the Europeans.⁶⁵ This denunciation did not undermine the idea, for al-Washālī, that the absolute enemies of Islam were the impious countries (that is to say the Europeans), and that the unique safeguard against them was the Ottoman Islamic State. But it suggests that the "liberals" who were at power in Istanbul were not representative of the Ottoman society, and especially of the Ottoman society in Yemen, which was still loyal to the old Islamic order of Sultan

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 91-97.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.100.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² The Administrator of the French consular agency in Hodeidah relates also that the police had no means of handling robberies in town, specially by night, and that local people were forced to organize their own collective defense, with guns and *jambya*-s (traditional Yemeni knives). He added that the tribes were encouraged by the Italians in order to incite them to join with al-Idrīsī, and that in these conditions, the Ottomans were forced to "distribute privileges" to their opponents, and to carry out a sort of "reconciliation policy" with them, with the result that the Ottoman troops and the civil servants were "demoralized": Note from to the French Consul in Djeddah, 3 May 1912, CADN, Djeddah, Consulat and Légation de France (1908-1912), vol. 59 (Hodeida 1908-1912), 2 MI 3253.

⁶³ This situation will last at least until 1914, when Sultan 'Alī in Laḥj relates that Governor Maḥmūd Nadīm "is serving the wishes of the Imam more than the provisions of the convention, so much so that he by his behaviour has incurred the displeasure of the Turkish officers"; see the Letter of Sultan 'Alī to Jacob, Resident in Aden, 19 August 1914, in *Records of Yemen, 1798-1960*, vol. 6, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Al-Washālī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 98.

⁶⁵ For al-Washālī, "religion got lost in the desert like in the first times of Islam", and "ignorance increased and knowledge reduced" with the liberals of the CUP: Ibid., p. 103.

Abdülhamid.⁶⁶ Al-Washālī then shows how, as early as 1913, and at a time when some Tihāmīs started expressing their disappointment at the Ottoman rule more or less openly,⁶⁷ the conflict shifted toward negotiations in order to implement an agreement similar to the one Yaḥyā had signed, but this ultimately failed in the summer of 1914.⁶⁸

The emir of ‘Asīr remains difficult to defend, mainly after it becomes apparent that he had allied with the British in the spring of 1915. Did al-Idrīsī manage to hide the agreement? Al-Washālī for his part ignores it. One of his justifications for this is to try to show that al-Idrīsī was not always on good terms with this “impious community.” He reports that, in June 1915, when the emir arrived in Mīdī from Jāzān in the night, cannons were fired against him from the boat, which had landed him.⁶⁹ Al-Washālī doesn't mention that, since the British controlled the Red Sea, the boat could only have been one of their own, but in case, he suggests that the Emir had left the British on bad terms. In the aftermath of these events, al-Idrīsī, suddenly determined to fight the Ottomans, is portrayed as just, loyal in battle, and respectful of the rules of war as well as Islam.⁷⁰

Al-Washālī's extremely accommodating attitude toward al-Idrīsī progressively increases as the Ottomans' situation deteriorated in both Yemen and the rest of the empire. The Arab revolt led by the Hashemite Sharif Ḥusayn in October 1916 marks an important step, and is presented as severely affecting the Ottomans. Al-Washālī describes this event in a very singular way when he records it in his chronicle on 10 November 1916, of course not mentioning the British initiative to which Sharif Ḥusayn had responded positively. Al-Washālī completely relies on the account that has been related to him by people from Hejaz and is careful to emphasize that “the responsibility (of the narrative) lies squarely with the person who has seen” the events. In his version of how the revolt broke out, he observes an initial error on the part of the Ottomans when they replaced Sharif Ḥusayn with Emir ‘Alī Ḥaydar Pasha - a *Sayyid* also, but originated from the Bosphorus. The argument, which targets the Ottoman government in Istanbul, follows Ḥusayn's proclamation diffused in the entire region⁷¹, carrying out the idea that the revolt was caused by the C.U.P. Government's betrayal of Islam and the Muslims⁷², instead of arguing with the idea of Arab independence, which success was limited to the northern Arab provinces of Syria and Iraq.

The second reason proposed by al-Washālī to explain the revolt allows him to justify what appears as a manipulated (and then acceptable) British support. He reports that Ḥusayn revolted also against the fact that the Ottomans had opened their ranks to a foreign and ungodly community, the Germans, by allying with them.⁷³ He writes that seven Germans had come to the *Sharīf* (from Sana'a) in order to propose that he leaves for Germany with them (why? - it is not explained), but that instead of following them, *Sharīf* Ḥusayn ordered their beheading, and that he eventually had the seven heads sent to the British.⁷⁴ According to al-Washālī, this wartime gift made the British indebted to the

⁶⁶ On the weak impact of the Young-Turk Revolution on Yemen in 1908-1909, see Juliette Honvault 2012.

⁶⁷ The French Vice-Consul in Ḥudayda to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs reports, in the end of 1912, a discussion with a local “notable” stressing what he presents as a shared opinion among the “Arabs”, that, “[at this point](#), the common life [with the Turks], although [religious brothers](#), is no longer possible.” The Vice-Consul argues that this is the second time in a few months that such an opinion is reported to him: Letter of the 11 december 1912, Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN), Hodeidah, Corr 1912-1914, Vol. 16.

⁶⁸ See also Anne Bang 1996, p. 102.

⁶⁹ Al-Washālī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 139.

⁷⁰ Al-Washālī explains that al-Idrīsī offered his Arab-Ottoman enemies an opportunity to surrender before his attack in July 1915, corresponding to the holy month of Ramadan. One of al-Idrīsī's commanders (a *sharīf* of the Ḥusaynī family) ordered his soldiers to fight only if they were attacked: his soldiers did not act until their Arab allies' opponents attacked them at the most unexpected time, during the first morning prayer: *Ibid.*, p. 140-41.

⁷¹ Until the French Somaliland and Abyssinia at the end of January 1917.

⁷² *Source Records of the Great War*, Vol. IV, ed. Charles F. Horne, National Alumni 1923, available at http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/arabindependence_hussein.htm

⁷³ On the German-Ottoman alliance in the Arab Peninsula during the war, see Da Riva and Biocca, 2016.

⁷⁴ This story should perhaps be linked to the tragic episode of six soldiers in the German navy and their lieutenant-commander von Moeller, who reached Sana'a in March 1916 and Jeddah in May: They “were barbarously murdered, and their bodies mutilated, by tribesmen south of Rābigh.” See the following guide for the use of British commanding officers produced by the Naval Intelligence Division during World War II: *Western Arabia & The Red Sea* (London: Kegan Paul,

authoritative and powerful Sharif of Mecca:

The English were grateful to him, and they began to attach value to him. They were in constant contact with him by telegraph, and they sent him gold so that he could wage war against the Turks settled in Mecca and Jeddah. The Sharif then gathered a large number of tribes and told them: "You know that you are the people of the Sacred House (the Holy Places). The Turks mixed with the Germans, so that they could take their railway to Medina and Rabīgh [South of Medina], with the ultimate goal of extending to Mecca. They forbade you to live on your camels. But should you live away from your religion and your sanctuary?"⁷⁵

The Germans' interference in the Ottoman Empire's internal affairs in 1916 - an idea, which had spread in popular milieus in the Hedjaz, as the French Consul in Jeddah noticed it,⁷⁶ offers a clue about al-Washālī's gradual criticism of Ottoman presence in Yemen. The denunciation is rather implicit—and may be linked to the observation of the severe punishment the Ottomans inflicted on those who turned against them.⁷⁷ It emerges in his presentation of how the Ottomans dealt with the British blockade, which intensified after the Arab Revolt.⁷⁸ Al-Washālī conscientiously highlights the terrible situation, which the people had to endure that year as a result of the "impious English State blockade," and how they were forced to live on wild berries, and sell their children—even noticing a man who had "sold his mother"⁷⁹ The shortage of food and arms seriously affected the military Ottoman positions. Since communications were cut, the Ottomans failed to pay the soldiers' salaries—a situation that, according to al-Washālī, forced the central administration to send two officers from Istanbul to Sana'a by land transport and even foot, with pockets full of money for the Ottoman army in Yemen in 1917.⁸⁰ The author highlights that many tribes who were allied with the Ottomans and Imam Yaḥyā ended up turning away from them, while for his part, al-Idrīsī made a series of new alliances: he succeeded in bringing 10,000 combatants over to his side in the fall of 1917, paying and feeding them well. He distributed weapons, flour, and money to those around him.⁸¹ As far as the British were concerned, they could rely on the Zarānīqs. They also managed to buy the support of people in northern "Yemeni ports" like Jeddah (*sic*) in July 1916 and in Salīf in April 1917.⁸² According to al-Washālī, the application of additional taxes, notably affecting the merchants of the Tihāma, was another result of the blockade. Although the taxes were increasingly unbearable, the Ottomans did not hesitate to brutally punish those who refused to pay them. Women fell victim to repression, a growing number of freed slaves were sold,⁸³ and the town of Zabīd was bombed, killing seventeen people, after merchants refused to lend the Ottomans 16,000 rials.⁸⁴ Rural areas were also affected by the Ottoman reaction to the situation. Al-Washālī mentions small details to demonstrate how they also terrorized the people of the Tihāma by burning the villages of al-Idrīsī's supporters,⁸⁵ seizing their goods,⁸⁶ or plundering the local merchants (namely the wealthier Indians).⁸⁷

London, 2005), 293-94. I am grateful to Martin Strohmeier, who informed me of the existence of several films on the adventure from the Coco Islands to the Hijaz of fifty men from the German battleship *Emden* (the last one being *Die Männer der Emden*, directed by Berengar Pfahl in 2012), which led me to the unfortunate episode of these six soldiers.

⁷⁵ Al-Washālī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 152-53.

⁷⁶ In Hedjaz the Turks were called "Germans" by the Bedouins: see Letter of Col. Brémond to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Briand, 17 October 1916, CADN, Le Caire Ambassade, 528.

⁷⁷ Al-Washālī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 167.

⁷⁸ John Baldry notes that the British patrols were quite ineffective until 1917 - although in January of that year, "the Danakil were able to smuggle arms from Yaman into Eritrea", see Baldry 1978, p. 194. The blockade is scarcely mentioned in the British archives assembled in the *Records of Yemen*, but Bury's report dated the 22 Nov. 1917, and sent in 1918, raises the issue, in *Records of Yemen 1798-1960*, vol. 6, p. 137. A note on al-Idrīsī of the 20 October 1917 mentions the blockade without directly quoting him: al-Idrīsī asks for more food, and requests that pearl-fishing be allowed once more, *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁷⁹ Al-Washālī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 150. Al-Washālī declares that he writes these events a day of the month of Muharram 1335, i.e. September 1917.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 167 and p. 172.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 152, 155, and 162.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156. On Zabīd, see also p. 176.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168, 169, 170, 173, 174, and p. 176.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 172 and p. 176.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Al-Washālī also relates a serious situation concerning division among the Ottomans, when he attributes the British attack on the town of Salīf in June 1917 to the complicity “of some officers of the [Ottoman] State in Salīf. They apparently corresponded with them [the British] secretly and have received a lot of gold coins, selling their religion, seeking to rely on the impious Muslim countries.”⁸⁸ Whereas, in al-Washālī's presentation, Sharif Ḥusayn had shown his political and personal force by heading seven Germans, so that he could submit the British to his authority, these Ottoman officers had no means, in al-Washālī's narrative, to be presented differently but as traitors. What could be expected then from a state which was plagued by division and which adopted forms of violence usually associated with tribes, when its legitimacy was based precisely on its ability to establish order and harmony? Unlike Sharif Ḥusayn, the Ottomans certainly offered no further evidence of their honor, and their defeat seemed more and more inevitable - if not desirable. Al-Washālī notices that they left the city of Luḥayya, taking the “*diwan*’s notebooks” with them (a sign of their escape),⁸⁹ and that they were also unable to hit and damage the British planes flying over their positions.⁹⁰

As for al-Idrīsī, it no longer matters that he was supported by the British, for it is as if his growing Islamic leadership justifies the means. From this period onward, al-Washālī calls his combatants “the Army” (*al-jaysh*)—lending his supporters a form of legality. Thereafter, “*al-jaysh*” alone suffices to designate al-Idrīsī's army.

In al-Washālī's chronicle, the end of the war in October 1918 is marked by the British bombing and occupation of the city of Hudayda, from then on occupied like the Kamarān Island (June 1915) and Luḥayya (June 1918).⁹¹ For him, this is a huge event that affected Islam and all Yemeni Muslims.⁹² Associated with “one of those impious communities called *Amīrīkān* [Americans],” the British imposed “forty conditions” on the Ottoman State, one of which was “the sale of Yemen, Syria, and Iraq”.⁹³ probably referring to the armistice of Mudros (30 September 1918),⁹⁴ al-Washālī provides an interpretation that condemns both the British and the Ottoman attitudes toward these previous Ottoman provinces. Following the agreement, the Ottoman army was to surrender in Yemen without leaving any regrets.

Al-Washālī fails to mention that the fall of Luḥayya was the result of an Anglo-Idrīsī cooperation but instead, underlines that the Ottomans in ‘Asīr handed over all their weapons to al-Idrīsī, now referred to as *Mawlanā al-Imām* (Our Lord the Imam) or as Imam *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (Commander of the Faithful)—a title that had hitherto been reserved for the Ottoman sultan. As for Imām Yaḥyā, al-Washālī does not mention that he had already taken possession of Sana'a, and that he was also handed over many weapons from the Ottomans.⁹⁵ Obviously, the chronicler had definitively chosen his side. This is confirmed by the way he refers to Yaḥyā's title, which shifts from *Imam of Shahāra* to the slightly more restrictive *Sayyid al-'Allāma* (“Very Learned *Sayyid*”). Yaḥyā, who was believed to have lost the war at the same time as the Ottomans, ends up simply considered as an important religious scholar expected to pledge allegiance to the new leader, al-Idrīsī, along with al-Washālī, who would be placed in charge of the district (*Qaḍā*) of al-Ḥudayda in 1921.⁹⁶ After the emir's death in 1923 and the deterioration of his emirate, however, al-Washālī will defect to the new

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 161.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 171.

⁹¹ See also Baldry, 1978, p. 162 for the occupation of Kamarān, which remained under British administration until 1967, and p. 182 for Luḥayya.

⁹² Al-Washālī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 177. Perhaps al-Washālī was unable to fathom how much the Ottomans' departure would be fatal to the trade that had considerably contributed to the city's development, the population sharply falling to 2,000 inhabitants (versus 42,000 before the war): see Patrice Chevalier (2008). The British eventually left Luḥayya, Hudayda, and Kamarān Island permanently in 1919, 1921, and 1967, respectively.

⁹³ Al-Washālī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 178.

⁹⁴ Although the Mudros Agreement contains only 25 articles. Cf. "Art. VXi: Surrender of all garrisons in Hedjaz, Assir, Yemen, Syria, and Mesopotamia to the nearest Allied Commander", in Sir Frederick Maurice (1943), p. 85-87.

⁹⁵ Al-Washālī, vol. 4, part 2, p. 180.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 205.

authority of Imam Yaḥyā, becoming the town mufti in addition to the head of the district.⁹⁷ Following his previous allegiance to the Ottomans, one can imagine that he had little difficulty dealing with the numerous “ex-Ottomans” who stayed on in Yemen and now served Imam Yaḥyā’s new State.⁹⁸

Conclusion

The years of World War war, following the Young Turks Revolution (1908) and sultan Abdülhamid's dismissal (1909), were years of profound upheaval for the Yemenis—particularly for those who, like al-Washālī, had sworn allegiance to the Ottomans. The “Rule of Difference” carried out by the latter had enhanced the local powers of the *sayyid*-s, and al-Washālī shows how the pan Islamic ideology developed by Sultan Abdülhamid contributed to the recognition of their social and political ascendancy and, finally, to their alliance with the Empire.

But like so many sources examined by historians, al-Washālī’s chronicle is far from being neutral. The author was obviously captivated by the leadership of Emir al-Idrīsī as soon as 1909, and was aware of the growing power of Imam Yaḥyā after the treaty of Da‘ān in 1911. Time had come to try to assert the unity of the Tihāma behind its noble and educated leaders, the *sayyid*-s, the group he belonged to, and to secure their future. The chronicle was certainly the sole tool to achieve this goal, and al-Washālī made it a document claiming the recognition—implicit or explicit—of all forms of sovereignty—*sunni* or *zaydi*—, provided that they were framed as an Islamic power that was strong enough to ensure security and bolster the social authority of the local elite. The Ottoman administrators’ fears that the Shafi‘is’ loyalty was not secure because of the Zaydi rebels’ capacity to diffuse their rebelliousness⁹⁹ may have been totally unfounded. Al-Washālī’s defection to al-Idrīsī was not a repudiation of the Ottomans’ former authority. Rather, he validated the idea of a natural continuity between two opposing Muslim sides that were not actually enemies: al-Idrīsī was simply able to support the Islamic values of peace and security that the Ottomans could no longer honor and uphold because of their defeat in World War I, and his ties with the “impious” British deserved to be ignored. Al-Washālī’s chronicle can be seen as means of revealing the qualities of a new Yemeni state, the contours of which while still variable are nonetheless characterized by peace and justice thanks to its educated elite, and by a rejection of all forms of Christian and occidental influence. In this sense, al-Washālī took a stand as a *sayyid* in the debates of his time in order to define and elaborate the nature and structures of the future government of Yemen. In these, his chronicle emphasized and demonstrated how the ulemas could—or even, should—play an essential role in the application of justice, and it also provided a template for structuring the political sphere, in which *sayyid*-s were expected to dominate society. After all, the author illustrated and continuously underscored the crucial part he was playing as a *sayyid* and scholar in guiding the people to accept the authority of their leaders. By doing so, he is also, maybe, one of the Shāfi‘i actors of the model's revival articulated around the alliance of ulemas and rulers that the Qāsimī dynasty had developed from the beginning of the eighteenth century, and that Imam Yaḥyā will reassert while creating the first modern State of Yemen after the 1920's.

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⁹⁷ Ibrāhīm al-Maqḥafī, introductory note to *Nashr al-ṭhanā*, by al-Washālī, p. 5.

⁹⁸ Unfortunately, al-Washālī became much less expansive in his chronicle after 1920.

⁹⁹ Kuehn 2011, p. 231.

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