

GOING AFTER THE DEAD

The hard earned freedom of the Libyan people has been sullied by a band of zealots. In the last few months they've desecrated countless graves, bulldozed mausoleums and even exhumed and discarded bodies that have been interred for centuries.

Attacking the dead is sacrilege in every faith tradition and in every culture of the world except perhaps in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. While the majority of Libyans and indeed the global Muslim community have condemned these heinous acts and are insisting that the ignorant be punished, some senior Saudi religious scholars advocate the opposite opinion.



The grave of Sidi Ahmad Zarruq before its desecration.

Courtesy: Fareena and Abdur-Rehman Malik.

The recent destruction of the grave of Sidi Ahmad Zarruq came as wake-up call to all civilized people, that something is seriously wrong in Libya.

Thanks to the commentaries of Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, Muslim students in the West have come to appreciate the scholarship Sidi Ahmad Zarruq, the 15th century scholar who was born in the city of Fez. His grave in Misrata is now an empty hole, his body unceremoniously removed and allegedly discarded.

When news that a band of extremists in Derna were plotting to destroy the grave of the *sahabi* Zuhayr Ibn Qais Al-Balawi رضي الله عنه, buried at the Sahaba Mosque in Derna, Libya's Mufti Sadiq

Al-Ghariani delivered a lecture on the permissibility of offering *salah* at mosques where the dead are buried. He even issued a formal fatwa condemning the destruction of mausoleums.

That did little to stop someone from placing a bomb on the tomb of Al-Balawi. The explosion caused irreparable damage to the mausoleum that housed the grave. Fortunately, the body of Al-Balawi was not harmed. Al-Balawi arrived in north Africa with 'Uqbah bin Nafi and when the latter died at age 63, Al-Balawi succeeded him as head of the army and eventually defeated Kaseelah, king of the Berbers.

A group of fanatics in Zliten attacked the mausoleum of Sidi Abdul-Salam Al-Asmar Al-Fituri and amidst shouts of "Allahu Akbar," other groups, in what appears to be a well-coordinated rampages of evil, destroyed the mausoleums of Sidi 'Ubayd in Benghazi, Sidi Al-Nu'aymi in Sluq and some even exhumed the body of Sidi Al-Mahdi Al-Sanusi.

If the intention is to eradicate '*shirk*' one has to wonder what motivated a bunch of hooligans in Benghazi to desecrate the grave of Flying Officer Martin Northmore, a 21-year-old from Toronto, the city in which I reside. Northmore was killed fighting in North

Africa in 1943 and for 70 years his grave and those of World War II soldiers who fought with Allied forces in the North African campaigns remained undisturbed.

In a video posted on *YouTube* more than 30 armed men can be seen kicking over headstones and using sledgehammers to smash a cross at the cemetery where Northmore is buried. One man is heard shouting “these are dogs.”

It’s true what Ibn Al-Marzuban said in his “*Fadl Al-Kilab*” - “indeed some dogs are far superior to many of those who wear clothes.”

The Saudi architect Sami Angawi knows all too well the ideology that inspires such despicable behavior. In the many private lectures Angawi used to give at his home in the Kingdom he would display three photos: the 2002 dynamiting of a minaret in Madina; the bombing of the Buddhas in Bamiyan; and the smoldering towers of 9/11. The timeline and the dateline varies, but the mind-set is unmistakably the same.

In July 2010 three young men exploded themselves at the mausoleum of Imam Ali bin Uthman Al-Hujwiri in Lahore. Imam Hujwiri is the author of the famous *Kashf Al-Mahjub* and is known as Data Ganj Baksh or “*Giver of Treasures*.” I’ve visited Imam Hujwiri on a Thursday night, the start of the day of Jumu’ah, when large numbers leave the social realm to converse with the sacred. But on this night, the architects of death were seeking the maximum head count; 42 people lost their lives and hundreds were seriously injured.

The 1994 destruction of the cemetery built around the mausoleum of Shaykh Abu Bakr ibn Abdallah Al-Aydarus in Aden is often remembered for the scale and sheer planning that went behind it. Hundreds of men carried out the attack. A bulldozer was brought in to level the graves. Even the centuries old legendary wooden doors were seriously damaged.

But if the miserable miscreants would carry out these types of attacks in Islam’s outposts - Mali, like Libya, has had its share of desecration - then what would one say about the demolition of graves in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? The government sanctioned the 1998 destruction of the grave of Amina Bint Wahb, the mother of the Messenger of God ﷺ in al-Abwa village. In 2002, the government approved the use of dynamite to flatten the mosque and tomb of Imam Ali Uraidh Ibn Ja’far al-Sadiq in Madina.

In “*Mecca for the rich: Islam’s holiest site ‘turning into Vegas,’*” (Sept. 24, 2011) the Independent’s Jerome Taylor reported on Saudis who are forced to look aghast as “*the nation’s archaeological heritage is trampled under a construction mania backed by hardline clerics who preach against the preservation of their own heritage.*” Reflecting the view of Saudis who spoke to him, Taylor wrote that Mecca “*has become a playground for the rich...where naked capitalism has usurped spirituality as the city’s raison d’être.*”

The royal family’s “*insatiable appetite for architectural bling*” has led to the erection of the 1,972 ft. Royal Clock tower forcing the demolition of centuries old mountains to

create space for this bizarre monstrosity - an alien plague invading sacred space. Of the three sites the Saudis have allowed the U.N. to designate as World Heritage Sites, it's a shame that none are related to Islam.

There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Islamic Affairs has attempted to obtain royal permission to demolish the splendid green dome of Masjid An-Nabawi. And that was just for starters. They even sought royal approval to level the graves of the best of God's creation ﷺ and his two companions ﷺ.



The Radiant Green Dome. Indescribable beauty. Untouchable. Aug. 2005

In a pamphlet published in 2007 by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, endorsed by Abdulaziz Al Sheikh, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, stated that “the green dome shall be demolished and the three graves flattened in the Prophet's Masjid.”

In their well researched essay titled “*From Visiting Graves to Their Destruction: The Question of Ziyara through the eyes of Salafis*,” Ondrej Beranek and Pavel Pupek (Brandeis University) explained that “the groundwork for these odious plans was prepared by the Permanent Committee (*al-lajna al-da'ima*), a body composed of Ibn Baz and other prominent senior ‘ulama of Saudi Arabia.” Beranek and Pupek explained that the Committee based their ruling on their religious opinion that a mausoleum is a disagreeable heresy (*bid'a*) which in turn leads to polytheism (*shirk*) and “that it is incumbent (*wajib*) upon the ruler of Muslims or his deputy to remove what is over graves and level them to the ground.”

I enjoy visiting mausoleums. I've felt spiritually connected to something beyond reason at the graves of Baba Farid Ganj Shakar in Pakpattan, Pakistan, at Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya in Delhi, and with Data Ganj Baksh (Imam Al-Hujwiri) in Lahore. The same can be said of the many *mazars* I've visited in the ancient city of Multan.

I've taken the train ride from Delhi to Ajmer in the Indian state of Rajasthan enduring the intense heat of May to visit the *mazar* of *Sultan Al-Hind*, Hazrat Khawaja Moinuddin Chisti, may his light continue to shine. I prayed *Fajr* at the mosque built by Akbar ‘The Great’ attached to the mausoleum of *Gharib Nawaz*, as he is affectionately called. Birds chirped in trees as the Qawwali singers chanted praises in honour of the Noble Prophet ﷺ.

Mausoleums satisfy the human thirst for spiritual experiences. By keeping alive the memory of a saint, they provide us with a sacred space from which we can begin to



At the mausoleum of Al-Habib ‘Abdur-Rahman Al-Habashi in Singapore. With a pillar of inspiration in my life, Shaykh Ahmad Babikr of the U.K. Aug. 2008

negotiate our own place in time and allow our soul to acknowledge the inevitable demise of the body that encases it.

Museums in the West used to be much like mausoleums in the East, but as both Adam Gopnik and Chris Hedges have observed, that trend ended in the 1950’s when museums began to take the shape of machines. Most museums in the West, writes Gopnik, are no longer interested in providing visitors with an opportunity to commune with the

past, but rather, they want to educate visitors about the past and in turn teach them how to become modern.

Stockholm is a city of museums. Its more than 70 museums attract well over nine million visitors annually. I was fortunate to have visited the Vasa museum to see King Gustav Adolf’s mighty ship which sank on her maiden voyage in 1628. It was designed to play a major role in the Swedish Navy, but another destiny awaited it minutes after it was launched. It spent 333 years at the bottom of Stockholm’s Ström and was only recently salvaged. Today, 380 years later, the Vasa with its 700 carved sculptures, is a treasury of art and a popular museum.

As I walked through the museum, a guide pointed out the exact spot where the Vasa was built, docked, sank and eventually resurrected. The story of the Vasa is a reflection of our own human journey. A tourist asked the guide why the Vasa sank. He explained that its Captain, Söfring Hansson, was asked the same question by a special council of inquiry. “And before God Almighty,” he replied, I swear that no one on board was intoxicated.” He blamed it on a small gust of wind, “a mere breeze.” The council questioned the ship-builders since many had speculated that the Vasa might have been too top-heavy. But the design was confirmed by the King himself, and because the King was deemed infallible, the builders told their interrogators “only God knows” why it sank.

Mausoleums and museums like the Vasa, carves out a moment in time when our troubled souls with all our modern angst can reconcile the anxiety we experience when the subject of our demise confronts us.

Mausoleums are alive with a spiritual energy vibrating deep in our souls and that nourishes a spiritual light present in the human hearts that requires careful attention ever so often. The sacred rhythm of mausoleums links the present to the past and reminds us that righteousness is alive even as our bodies are interred.

Libya's government must use its moral capital, and it has a lot in reserves having just been elected, to stop these spiritually deranged men from going after the dead, because next in line comes the living.