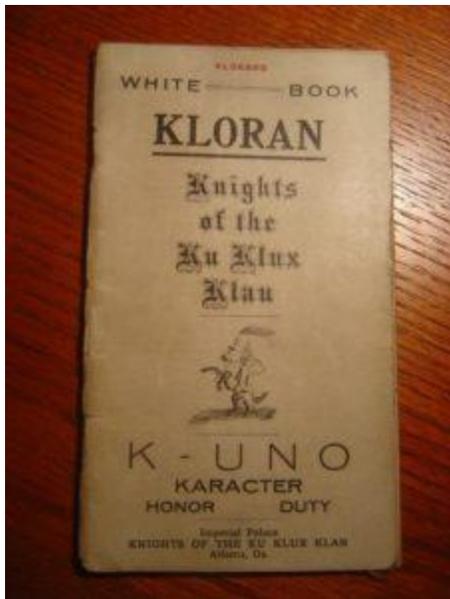


Islam and the Rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan

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The original Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was founded on December 24, 1865 in Pulaski, Tennessee by some former officers of the Confederate Army. Its name came from the Greek word for circle: *kuklos*. But by the early 1870's, the KKK had largely faded away.

The rebirth of the KKK happened in 1915 at the hands of William J. Simmons. Simmons had been born in 1880 and grew up on his father's farm in Central Alabama. He later said that his father "was an officer of the old Klan in Alabama back in the 60's"; Simmons also said that he "was always fascinated by Klan stories."^[1]

William Simmons enlisted in the United States Army and fought in the 1898 Spanish-American war. He returned to civilian life and became a circuit minister for the Methodist Church South. In 1912, the Alabama Methodist Conference denied him a pulpit and he returned to the secular world. He soon began a successful career with the Woodmen of

the World, a fraternal organization that sold life insurance, annuities, and other investment products. This career led him to Atlanta, Georgia.

In 1915, while recovering from an automobile accident, Simmons completed the formulation for the rebirth of the KKK. On the night of November 25, 1915, Simmons and a group of men climbed to the top of Stone Mountain, located outside Atlanta. They took with them a large wooden cross that had been soaked in kerosene. Simmons lit the cross and became the Imperial Wizard of the new KKK.

One of those present that night provided this description of the event:

The ceremony began around an altar made of stones brought by each clansman [sic]. On this altar was erected the fiery cross in the halo of whose light the men with uncovered heads assumed the oath of the klan and upon bended knees were dedicated with pure water to the service of country, homes and humanity. On the altar were placed a silk flag of the United States that was carried in the Battle of Buena Vista in the Mexican war, a copy of the Bible, the Constitution of the United States, the Declaration of Independence and the constitution and laws of the clan [sic].^[2]

Simmons would later have this to say about that night:

The angels that have anxiously watched the reformation from its beginnings...must have hovered about Stone Mountain and shouted hosannas to the highest heavens.”^[3]

The KKK was not only reborn under Simmons, but there were some interesting aspects of this new KKK that seem to indicate that Simmons had been influenced to varying degrees by Islam.

Both are led by a Prophet

Islam considers Muhammad to be the final prophet of Allah, whose status as a prophet began in 610 AD when he claimed he had received his first “revelation” from Allah while he was in the Cave of *Hira* outside of Mecca.

Simmons made a similar claim in terms of receiving a revelation. Here is how he briefly explained his revelation:

On horseback in their white robes they rode across the wall in front of me. As the picture faded out I got down on my knees and swore that I would found a fraternal organization that would be a memorial to the Ku Klux Klan.^[4]

It was later written that:

In discussing his life with his friends, and when in a reminiscent mood, Colonel Simmons expresses his belief that it may be possible that a higher power took him from the four distinct phases of activity into which he had previously entered, and finally forced him into his present work as head of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan... [5]

And at one time Simmons had even described himself as

He who traversed the Realm of the Unknown, wrested the solemn secret from the grasp of night and became Sovereign Master of the great lost mystery. [6]

And in explaining his position as Imperial Wizard, he wrote that in this position he was

The Emperor of the Invisible Empire; a wise man; a wonder-worker, having power to charm and control... [7]

In a 1925 article, in a section titled “The Preacher Becomes Prophet,” Frank Bohn provided this assessment of Simmons:

Rev. Simmons must be placed with that prophetic group of American religionists which has probably given our country, during the past century, more ardent exponents of new and startling religious ideas... [8]

And later in that same article, Bohn referred to Simmons as “our prophet” and presented a more colorful description of Simmons’ “revelation”:

One day, about ten years ago, our prophet was seated on a bench outside the door of his cottage. Without premonition of any sort he suddenly beheld a vision. What he saw on that occasion was not to be quickly forgotten. The sky was overhung with light mackerel clouds, showing the deep blue beyond. Suddenly, to the eye of the seer, the clouds reshaped themselves and moved rapidly across the sky. Their aspect now presented the form of a vast army of warriors, superbly mounted and robed and hooded in white. Their steeds were garmented in similar fashion. It was the Ku Klux Klan, reborn and re-animated by a high and holy purpose, returning to save America from “un-American elements”; to save the white man’s civilization around the whole world from being undermined and finally dominated by the various colored and heathen races. [9]

Both have Sacred Books: Koran/Kloran

It is widely understood that the sacred book of Islam is the Koran (this is the spelling of that book that was especially common in the 19th Century [10]). Simmons created a “sacred book” for the KKK that he named the Kloran. In his “Imperial Decree” at the front of the Kloran, Simmons wrote:

The Kloran is “THE book” of the Invisible Empire, and is therefore a sacred book with our citizens and its contents MUST be rigidly safeguarded and its teachings honestly respected. The book or any part of it MUST not be kept or carried where any person of the “alien” world may chance to become acquainted with its sacred contents as such.^[11]

So Simmons ordered that the Kloran must be protected from allowing any person who was not a member of the KKK to learn about its contents.

We find a similar order from Muhammad:

It has been narrated on the authority of ‘Abdullah b. ‘Umar that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) used to forbid that one who travels to the land of the enemy taking the Qur’an (with him) lest it should fall into the hands of the enemy.^[12]

There is an irony in Simmons’ Imperial Decree. In 1916-1917 Simmons applied for copyright protection of the Kloran and sent two copies of the Kloran to the United States Registrar of Copyrights. As a result, the Kloran became available to anyone in the public reading room of the Library of Congress, and newspaper reporters eventually started writing about the contents of the Kloran.

Both have pilgrimages

In Islam there are two different pilgrimages made to Mecca. The first is the *Hajj*, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and is required for Muslims to make at least once in a lifetime. The other pilgrimage is the *Umrah*, which is recommended, but not obligatory.

Simmons established a pilgrimage for Klan members, and even likened it to the *Hajj* or *Umrah*. He wrote that once a year Klan members from all over the country make “a pilgrimage to Stone Mountain”:^[13]

To this mountain boulder of solid granite the Klan resorts for comradeship and consecration. The pilgrimage is not unlike that conjectured by a noble and worthy order which takes it initiates to the far East, travels them through the unmarked desert, over blistering sands, and under a sky of brass, while the breath of the winds is like that of a furnace, scorching the weary pilgrims as step by step they fight on to the Mecca.^[14]

Why is the pilgrimage to Stone Mountain similar to travelling over “blistering sands” and enduring “winds like that of a furnace”? Simmons gave this description of the mountain:

It is a huge boulder compacted into solid granite and thrown up, ages ago, by some terrific convulsion. The stone is three miles in circumference and something more than a

mile in altitude by the trail leading to its summit. Its frowning and forbidding front is scant of foliage. Soil which the winds have brought and deposited in its crevices and on its craggy sides has no deepness. Adventurous shrubs and trees that have sprung up from time to time have been beaten back by sun and storm because they had no anchorage in the earth. To this mountain boulder of solid granite the Klan resorts for comradeship and consecration.^[15]

Both have unique calendars

The Muslim calendar is lunar-based. The first year of the Muslim calendar began in 622 AD, the year the small Muslim community emigrated from Mecca to Medina; this emigration was known as the *Hijrah*. Instead of using “AD,” the Muslim calendar in English uses “AH” which stands for the Latin term *Anno Hegirae* (Year of the *Hijrah*).

Simmons took a similar approach to creating a specific KKK calendar using the term “Anno Klan” or “AK,” the “year of the clan.”^[16] The first year of this Klan calendar started with the founding of the KKK in 1865. For example, Simmons’ *Imperial Decree* in 1916 ended with:

...this the 26th day of June, Anno Domini Nineteen Hundred and Sixteen, Anno Klan L.^[17]

This dating system was also used by Simmons later in a 1922 edition of the *Constitution and Bylaws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*:

This the 29th day of November, Anno Domini, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-two, Anno Klan LVI.^[18]

Both have successors to the leader: Caliph/Klaliff

Caliph comes from the Arabic word *Khaliffah*, and it means successor; in Islam it originally referred to the first four successors to Muhammad: Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, and Ali.

Simmons wrote that in the KKK the Klaliff is a “vice-president” and considered a “successor in office.”^[19] The “Imperial Klaliff” would temporarily take over as leader of the entire KKK should the Imperial Wizard die or step down.^[20]

Both prohibit innovation

In his 1916 *Imperial Decree* Simmons wrote, with regard to the Kloran, that “No innovation will be tolerated.”^[21]

Similarly, Muhammad had also prohibited innovation; he said:

The most truthful speech is Allah's Speech, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. The worst matters are the newly invented (in religion), every newly invented matter is an innovation, and every innovation is a heresy, and every heresy is in the Fire.[\[22\]](#)

And

Narrated 'Aishah: Allah's Messenger said, "If somebody innovates something which is not present in our religion (of Islamic Monotheism), then that thing will be rejected.[\[23\]](#)

The Star and Crescent

The star and crescent symbol has been used by different cultures over many thousand years. This symbol first became affiliated with Islam during the Ottoman Empire. There are conflicting reports about why and when this symbol was adopted by the Ottomans, with some claiming that it was a symbol used by the Turks long before converting to Islam (largely in the 10th and 11th Centuries), and others claiming that it was adopted by the Ottomans shortly before or at the time of the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 AD.[\[24\]](#)

The star and crescent symbol appeared to play a role in both the original KKK and in the rebirth of the KKK.

For example, in 1866 Klansman J. Brunson posed for a photograph in which he was wearing a red and white robe and hood; on the left front of his robe was a crescent above a five-pointed star.[\[25\]](#)

With the rebirth of the KKK, Simmons talked about the "Ku Klux Spirit" which he claimed had fostered freedom and fought tyranny. He talked about an organization that "was one of the first recorded manifestations of the 'Ku Klux Spirit':

Before the great Persian Empire was created there was an organization formed for the purpose of enforcing justice. It worked secretly, and it was impelled by the intolerable conditions surrounding conduct of the courts to reverse numerous decisions in which there was open and brazen miscarriage of justice. Its emblem was the star and crescent —symbolic of the sovereignty of justice.[\[26\]](#)

Given the vagueness of Simmons' description of this "organization," and the somewhat ubiquitous historical occurrence of the star and crescent symbol, it is hard to determine

to which organization Simmons was referring. But given the other similarities mentioned above, it should not be surprising that Simmons spoke highly of the star and crescent.

Conclusion

The Ku Klux Klan is often considered to be the quintessential white supremacist organization. It is somewhat ironic then that such an organization has some interesting connections to the “noble and worthy order” of Islam.

Dr. Stephen M. Kirby is the author of five books about Islam. His latest book is *The Lure of Fantasy Islam: Exposing the Myths and Myth Makers*.

[1] David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, 3rd Edition (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 28.

[2] “Ku Klux Klan seen in Georgia,” *Natchez News-Democrat*, November 30, 1915, p. 1. The Battle of Buena Vista was fought in February 1847 when an American force under the command of General Zachary Taylor was surrounded by a Mexican force three times its size; the Mexicans were led by General Santa Ana. Relying heavily on artillery support, the Americans were able to drive off the Mexican force.

[3] [DeNeen L. Brown](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/04/08/the-preacher-who-used-christianity-to-revive-the-ku-klux-klan/?utm_term=.11ea97a6c2f7), “The preacher who used Christianity to revive the Ku Klux Klan,” *The Washington Post*, April 8, 2018; accessible at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/04/08/the-preacher-who-used-christianity-to-revive-the-ku-klux-klan/?utm_term=.11ea97a6c2f7.

[4] *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, p. 28.

[5] Winfield Jones, *Story of the Ku Klux Klan* (American Newspaper Syndicate: Washington DC, 1921), p. 61.

[6] Charles O. Jackson, “William J. Simmons: A Career In Ku Kluxism,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (December, 1966), pp. 363-364.

[7] *Kloran*, p. 53. Copies of the *Kloran* can be purchased at various online sites. A copy is also available at <http://images.library.wisc.edu/WI/EFacs/WiscKKK/RiverFalls/KlanEphem/reference/wi.klanephem.i0004.pdf>.

[8] Frank Bohn, “The Ku Klux Klan Interpreted,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 30, No. 4, January 1925, p. 393.

- [9] "The Ku Klux Klan Interpreted," pp. 394-395.
- [10] In the 19th Century the transliteration of Islam's sacred book was spelled Koran; see Mohammed Amin, *Koran, Qur'an or Quran and Moslem or Muslim?*, October 24, 2017; accessible at https://www.mohammedamin.com/Community_issues/Koran-or-Quran.html.
- [11] *Kloran*, p. 5.
- [12] Abu'l Hussain 'Asakir-ud-Din Muslim bin Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naisaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, trans. 'Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (New Delhi, India: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 2008), Vol. 6, No. 1869R1, p. 270.
- [13] William Joseph Simmons, *The Klan Unmasked*, (Atlanta: Wm. E. Thompson Publishing Company, 1923), p. 97.
- [14] *The Klan Unmasked*, p. 98.
- [15] *The Klan Unmasked*, pp. 97-98.
- [16] *Kloran*, p. 53.
- [17] *Kloran*, p. 6. The original KKK was founded on December 24, 1865, so Simmons was writing in the 50th year of the Klan's existence and used the Roman Numeral "L," meaning 50: AK L.
- [18] *Constitution and Bylaws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*, p. 6, accessible at <https://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/AmRad/constitutionlawsknights.pdf>.
- [19] *Kloran*, pp. 4 and 53.
- [20] *Constitution and Bylaws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*, p. 25.
- [21] *Kloran*, p. 5.
- [22] Abu al-Fida' 'Imad Ad-Din Isma'il bin 'Umar bin Kathir al-Qurashi Al-Busrawi, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Abridged), abr. Shaykh Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, trans. Jalal Abualrub, et al. (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2000), Vol. 2, p. 588.

[23] Muhammad bin Ismail bin Al-Mughirah al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 1997), Vol. 3, Book 53, No. 2697, p. 505.

[24] E.g.: 1) *Origin of the Star and Crescent!*, July 8, 2016, accessible at <http://www.ascertainthetruth.com/att/index.php/al-islam/answering-the-critics/1521-origin-of-the-star-and-crescent>; 2) *History of the Star and Crescent*, June 22, 2017, accessible at <https://steemit.com/history/@mand/history-of-the-star-and-crescent>; 3) *A History of the Crescent Moon in Islam*, September 12, 2018, accessible at <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-crescent-moon-a-symbol-of-islam-2004351>; and 4) *History of Jihad against the Turks (650 – 1050)*, accessible at <http://www.historyofjihad.org/turkey.html>.

[25] *Rare Ku Klux Klan KKK Original Robe Postcard*; accessible at

https://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/51542744_rare-ku-klux-klan-kkk-original-robe-postcard. This picture can also be found at *Old Post Cards Ku Klux Klan of Giles County* (<https://gilestn.genealogyvillage.com/postcard/kkk01.htm#robe>), and The University of Tennessee Knoxville Libraries, *Original Ku Klux Costume* (<https://digital.lib.utk.edu/collections/islandora/object/volvoices%3A3866>).

[26] *Story of the Ku Klux Klan*, p. 65.