

**A “LIBERAL” DECISION BY A “CONSERVATIVE” SCHOLAR: THE EARLY
ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION DISCUSSION IN THE MUSLIM WORLD**

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In 1954, Dr. Josef Murry and Dr. David Hume from Brigham Hospital in Boston made history by performing the first successful organ transplantation surgery. Following that operation and with the advancement of medical technology, organ transplantation operations were performed more frequently than expected. The operations provoked discussion among Islamic scholars from different schools of thought from all over the Muslim world. The discussion in general yielded two views, one permitting the operation and another view prohibiting it. The current published literature dated the first response of Saudi Islamic scholar to 1967, when the Senior Scholars Council of Saudi Arabia permitted the corneal transplantation. Following that fatwa (non-binding religious decision) the Islamic scholars from other Muslim countries produced decisions mostly permitting, but sometimes prohibiting, organ transplantation.

The decision of the Saudi scholars, who are seen as conservative by many Muslim and non-Muslim observers, stood in contrast to the response of Islamic scholars from other more liberal countries such India, Pakistan, Malaysia and even Egypt. The paper takes a critical historical analysis into the factors contributing to the emergence of liberal bioethical decision-making in Saudi Arabia, in the area of organ transplantation. The paper argues that the origin of this could be traced more recently to the work of Abdurrahman Ibn Saadi (1889-1956). He pioneered the discussion about organ transplantation as an imaginary debate between two scholars one representing the permissible view and the other presenting the prohibiting view. This paper summarizes the debate and discusses how Ibn Saadi's presentation was spread through his students and colleagues to more conservative Saudi scholars whom could be influenced by its presentation to reach to the liberal decision about organ transplantation at earlier time than other Islamic scholars in the Muslim world. Ibn Saadi's treatment of this issue could be a source of inspiration to contemporary young Islamic scholars in Saudi Arabia.