



Méthodes et débats

Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī—Still such a Polarizing Figure (Response to Itzchak Weismann)

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In early 2003 my book about Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī (d. 1909) was published.¹ Being aware that many scholars in Middle Eastern studies do not read German anymore, I published an English article in 2003 summarizing the bigger argument of my book.² In early 2003 I wrote an additional article, which was eventually published in 2005 in *Arabica*, expanding my research over the original scope of my book.³ This article was, among other things, critical of some aspects of Itzchak Weismann's book *Taste of Modernity*⁴ and thus inspired Weismann's response, published in *Arabica* in 2007.⁵ Given the tone of

¹ *Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī: eine Studie zur Instrumentalisierung sufischer Netzwerke und genealogischer Kontroversen im spätosmanischen Reich*, Berlin, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003. Reviews in *Arabica*, LI/4 (2004), pp. 512-514; *Die Welt des Islams*, 45/1 (2005), pp. 157-159 (both in English); *Der Islam*, 82 (2005), pp. 187-193; *ZDMG*, 157/1 (2007), pp. 220-222 (in German).

² "The forgotten *salafī*—Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī", *Die Welt des Islams*, 43 (2003), 61-84. See also my "Abū l-Hudā, the Rifā'iya and Shiism in Ḥamīdian Iraq", *Der Islam*, 80 (2003), 142-152. In the meantime extracts from later writings of Abū l-Hudā have been made accessible as "Nationalism, Ottomanism, Pluralism, Humanism: Extracts from the Sufi writings of Abū 'l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī, 1903", in B. Fortna, K. Amin and E. Frierson (eds.), *The Modern Middle East: A Source Book*, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 314-319.

³ "Questioning paradigms: A close reading of 'Abd ar-Razzāq al-Baiṭār's *Ḥilya* in order to gain some new insights into the Damascene *Salafiyya*", *Arabica*, 52 (2005), pp. 373-390.

⁴ *Taste of Modernity. Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus*, Leiden et al., 2001.

⁵ Itzchak Weismann, "Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī and the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism", *Arabica*, LIV/4 (2007), pp. 586-592.

this response, I consider it necessary to answer to some of its contents as quickly as possible. Therefore I will not go deeper into methodological questions of network analysis and its potentials as well as limitations, which will be dealt with in another article.

A Controversy?

Surprisingly, Weismann devotes only the lesser portion of his short paper to the arguments and questions that I had actually been raising in my book and my articles. Some of his few remarks, which refer to my actual work (exclusively the English articles, because Weismann did not want to “tire the reader”), can be dealt with quickly. That I do not quote Weismann’s articles published between late 2003 and 2005 (see his footnotes 9 and 10) can be explained by the continuum of space and time: I had finished my articles before the time his articles became available to me. Also, Weismann correctly observes that in my earlier article about Abū l-Hudā from 2003 the Ḥālidiyya was not dealt with and he apparently sees some sort of inconsistency in that. As I wrote, the difference between the two articles is that the earlier one is a summary of my book (as indicated in the article itself) and the second one an extension based on further research, in which I had largely engaged *after* the book and the earlier articles had been finished.

There are also some passages where Weismann refers to the actual contents of my articles. In my *Arabica* article I had challenged two “paradigms,” as I had termed them then (and I now agree with Weismann that most probably “paradigm” was really the wrong term, I rather challenged a thesis and an emplotment model in the sense of Hayden White, to whom Weismann also refers in his rebuttal). The first one is David Commins’ thesis that one circle of reformist thinkers in 19th century Damascus were the so-called *Middle Ulama*, who did not belong to either the highest or the lowest social strata of Damascene scholars. The second is the idea that in the late Ottoman Empire there existed *ṭuruq*, who were reformists such as the Naqšbandis, while others are commonly depicted as more conservative, such as the Rifā’iyya. These are usually understood to have been mutually exclusive. I was surprised to see how Weismann tries to refute my work.

Concerning my first challenge, he lectures me about the basic category of time, because I pointed to the fact that Maḥmūd al-Ḥamzāwī, Mufti of Damascus between 1864 and his death in 1887 and one of its richest ‘*ulamā*’, was part of the intellectual circle of reform-minded scholars of the city. In addition I presented many more arguments and materials—which Weismann