



Painted Fragment of a Tiraz, Egypt, early 10th century. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Creative Commons License.

## BOOK REVIEWS

‘Abd al-Jawād Ḥamām. *Al-Tafarrud fī riwāyat al-ḥadīth wa-manhaj al-muḥaddithīn fī qubūliḥi aw raddih (dirāsah ta’ṣīliyah taṭbīqīyah)*. (Solitariness in the relation of hadith and the traditionists’ program of accepting or rejecting it [a foundational applied study].) Mashrū‘ mi’at risālah jāmi’iyah sūrīyah 13. Damascus: Dār al-Nawādir, 1429/2008. iii, 767 p.

This is an edition of Ḥamām’s doctoral dissertation under the direction of ‘Imād al-Dīn Rashīd, who contributes a short introduction, presumably at Kullīyat al-Sharī‘ah of the University of Damascus. However, I could not find any express indication of either place or date. *Tafarrud* is the phenomenon of the isolated

report, whereby a traditionist relates something that no one else does. Early collectors and critics applied it to tracing a report of the Prophet’s words back to a certain Companion that others traced back only to other Companions (example from al-Tirmidhī, 111; called a *shāhid* by modern critics, at least); alternatively, to relating a hadith report with extra explanatory words as no one else relates it (example from Abū Dāwūd, 113; also called *ziyādat al-thiqah*, since in this case the extra words are from Mālik ibn Anas); alternatively, among many other things, to relating a hadith report with a direct connection in the isnād that others relate with only an indirect (example from al-Bukhārī, 559, although here it is a commentator who

points to *tafarrud*, not the collector himself).

As often in studies of hadith from Muslims, Ḥamām’s account is sometimes normative; but when historical problems arise, he does treat them competently. For example, al-Ḥākim al-Nishābūrī, al-Bayhaqī, and later Shāfi‘ī writers quote al-Shāfi‘ī himself as restricting the *shādhdh* (aberrant) to what disagrees with what respectable people uphold, not just anything someone relates that no one else does. Ḥamām has not found *shādhdh* as a technical term in the works of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Abū Zur‘ah al-Rāzī, Abū Ḥātim, al-Dāraquṭnī, or other early critics. Neither, indeed, has he found it in the extant works of al-Shāfi‘ī, although al-Shāfi‘ī does quote Abū Yūsuf for something

similar in the *Umm*. Ḥamām supposes that al-Shāfi‘ī was not actually speaking as a hadith critic, rather in defense of *khobar al-wāḥid* (330-5). Going further than Ḥamām, I would interpret this as an example of how hadith criticism and jurisprudence developed in separate circles, the latter dominated for most of the ninth century by the Mu‘tazilī tradition. *Shādhah* would then have been a Mu‘tazilī term but not (yet) a Sunnī. He does admit at the end that, as many before him have found, early collectors and critics applied terms somewhat loosely. He proposes three stages in the development of terminology: before Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, from him to Ibn Ḥajar, and from Ibn Ḥajar to the present. He finds that medieval critics often dismissed particular hadith reports for *tafarrud* where modern (I suspect he means especially Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī and his school) accept anything if the narrator is identified as *thiqah* (610-11). Altogether, this is a respectable collection of quotations from early sources, usefully analyzed and arranged.

Christopher Melchert

Aḥmad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Maḥmūd, *Al-Amn fī ‘ahd al-rasūl wa-al-khulafā’ al-rāshidīn*, (Arbil: Maktab al-Tafsīr li-al-Nashr wa-al-‘Ilān, 2008). Pp. 384.

This study aims at exploring the political history of security in

early Islam. Undoubtedly, in the current context of international relations, any discussion of Muslim conceptions and practices of security would be interesting. The Kurdish-Iraqi author, who seems to have finished his book in 2002 (p. 8), explores domestic as well as external security issues devoting most of his attention to conflicts engaged by early Muslim authorities against their rivals. The scope of the work is limited to the period of 622-661. In this regard, this book attempts to fill the gap in the field of security concerns of early Islam. However, it is not likely to have a scientific impact since the book was written for a believing public.

The focus of the author’s interest is security issues (mostly primal security issues) oriented to protect the nascent Muslim state from the threats of its opponents. The antagonists identified by the author are, on an internal level, Jews and pagan Arab tribes, whereas the Persians and Byzantines represent the external pressure (p. 6). In the first chapter (pp. 9-93), the author departs from a larger concept of security, involving the integrity of the state and its people. But soon, he lays emphasis on the military aspects of security, narrating the major battles and campaigns of the Prophet. His analysis of security is overshadowed by the many biographical details about the life of Muḥammad that are not linked to the problem of security. He does not consider the role of other agents or processes in

shaping Muḥammad’s security policy. Furthermore, the author ignores the global as well as the regional context of the new Muslim community. Instead, he deals with the military events of the period that reflect the Prophet’s strategic genius. In the second chapter (pp. 95-131), the author studies security in the era of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, recounting, principally, the *ridda* wars. In the third chapter (pp. 133-234), which is the longest one, he glorifies the justice policy of the caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and the military campaigns launched in his time. In the fourth chapter (pp. 235-312), he draws an extended profile of the companion ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān focusing on his administration, defending his policies and giving a short narrative of his military campaigns. Finally, the fifth chapter (pp. 313-367) is dedicated to the fight of ‘Alī b. Ṭālib for justice and truth.

With regard to the approach of the book, it appears, in more than one aspect, closer to the classical *manāqib* literature which glorifies the virtues of certain persons or groups, than to historical studies. Consequently, the book does not respond to the expectations of a historian or that of a specialist of Muslim security studies. At most, the book is useful for Muslim readers who would welcome another glorifying study of major Muslim personalities with a special attention to their political and military achievements. Thus, the author adopts a style

comparable, though much less successful, to the famous style of ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād (d. 1964) in his *‘Abqariyyāt*, a series of biographical books on the genius of major personalities of Islam, under a heavy influence of Thomas Carlyle.

The author relies on mostly primary sources (105) of Muslim history. However, he reproduces events as related by Muslim historians, without any discussion, criticism or comparison. The language of the book is literary and is over-enriched of tropes. In general, the approach of the author is chronological, narrative and literary, making his text manifestly subjective and interpretative rather than historical. Much less, security is not the issue at stake in the book. Rather, the author attempts at showing how the Prophet and the early caliphs were able to protect Islam due to their exceptional just and perspicuous personalities. For one thing, the reader can easily follow the development of political-military history of early Islam. The author was consistent in this part of his work. That being the case, the book does not claim any new results or findings on the subject of political history of early Islam. The structure of the book lacks a methodological introduction. As a replacement, the reader has to be satisfied with a merely apologetic piece of prose praising the ability of early Muslims to develop efficient security strategies and practices. Consequently, the author did not

deem it necessary to bring about a conclusion or an index.

The author does not provide a clear definition of what the concept of security, *amn* meant for a decision-maker in early Islam and what it means in the current political terminology. As the term was used in different contexts, the reader would have appreciated a conceptual roadmap. Moreover, security is assured not only by the means of war, but often by keeping a balance between conflict (war, pressure, tensions) and cooperation (trade, negotiations). The landscape of security involves not only primal concerns of security, but also social, economic and political affairs. The reader is left without any deep insight in those security concerns of the early Muslim communities. More to the point, the question whether such concerns had any influence on the political-religious opinions is relevant to the subject matter of the book. Additionally, in a tribal society, security is, above all, a question of alliances, which makes inter-tribal relations and regional arrangements a primary issue of security for early Muslim communities. This aspect was also ignored in this book just like the institutions that are responsible for security. Besides, a reader interested in security issues of early Islam would expect a discussion of treaties, peace negotiations, or diplomacy. More importantly, domestic security questions, especially in the turbulent reigns of ‘Uthmān

b. ‘Affān and ‘Alī b. Ṭālib, are absent from the book. All these elements make this study a traditional chronological book of military history.

Abdessamad Belhaj

Khālid b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥamad al-Qāḍī, *Al-Ḥayāt al-‘ilmiyya fī Miṣr al-fāṭimiyya*, (Beirut: al-Dār al-‘Arabiyya li-l-Mawsū‘āt, 2008). Pp. 376.

This monograph is based on an MA thesis of the same title written at the history department of the King Saud University in 2002. As such, it is not expected to be an innovative work on “the scientific life in Fāṭimid Egypt”. Moreover, the large period covered by the study (466/1074-567/1171) runs a high risk of producing a work of general knowledge rather than a scrupulous academic study. At any rate, the author attempts at engaging in an intellectual history of the Fāṭimid Egypt. He divides his study into two major sections: learning centers (libraries, schools and mosques) and learning subjects: religious sciences (Qur’ānic studies, *ḥadīth* studies, *fiqh*), linguistic sciences, humanities (history, genealogy, geography and travel literature), and Greek sciences (philosophy and logic, astronomy, mathematics, geometry, medicine, pharmacology and chemistry). However, the core of his study seems to be, in particular, the situation of

traditional religious studies (pp. 171-263) and three of the four appendices are devoted to Qur’ānic and *ḥadīth* studies, relating detailed information on *ḥadīth* students and on the scholars of Qur’ānic recitation. If the study fills any gap, this should be in the traditional religious disciplines. Above all, what is interesting in the book is the large amount of details provided on Qur’ānic recitation in Fāṭimid Egypt. But even so, the author gives simply a summary of information already known on the subject. Consequently, the study is unlikely to have any impact as it adopts a very general approach of many issues, where each of them would deserve a volume in its own right.

With reference to methodology, the author embraces the classical approach of intellectual histories, underlining the political, economic and social contexts of scholars and students in the studied period (pp. 35-113). Unfortunately, with the long sections he dedicated to the context, the author repeats a general mistake of dissertations defended in Arab universities, which is to summarize in lengthy chapters the contextual information that is meant only to frame the study. As for the sources, the reader notices the importance assigned to secondary sources which again give this work the shape of a general study designed for students and not that of an academic work for scholars. For example, in the section devoted

to philosophy and logic, the author either relies on secondary sources or summarizes the biographies of some famous scholars who lived in the period, relying mostly on biographical dictionaries. Despite the importance of the philosophical-theological activity in Fāṭimid Egypt, the author did not produce a single paragraph that offers an insight in the history of ideas or that of debates that occur among Fāṭimid scholars. Seemingly, the author gave much attention to Qur’ānic studies probably because of the conservative character of the Saudi universities. Still, the author spent several pages on providing standard information for students on Qur’ānic recitation (pp. 171-207). The author lays out half of the space of this section, with defining the meaning of Qur’ānic recitation and *tafsīr*, the history of Qur’ānic studies prior to the studied period. Systematically, the author defines and tells the history of all sectors of knowledge he dealt with. As a result, it was impossible for him to focus on the subject and find connections between these sciences and their context. Additionally, the author fails to discuss his methodology in his introduction, which is a major drawback for a book on intellectual history. He provides neither conclusion nor an index of names and terms, a serious oversight for a largely biographical study.

The reader who is unfamiliar with the intellectual history of

the Fāṭimid Egypt is likely to benefit from the rich information provided by the author. Conversely, the scholar of the same subject is likely to be disappointed with regard to the absence of any new findings or results. Furthermore, the book suffers from the absence of a thesis and the personality of the author does not really come through the book. What is more, we cannot find in the bibliography any source written in European languages. The author relies only on a few translated European references (F. Daftari, I. Kratchkovski, A. Metz, G. Makdisi, H. Halm and P. Walker). A further weakness of the book is the complete absence of C. Brockelmann’s *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (available in Arabic as well), a must for an intellectual historian of Egypt.

To conclude, the book is a general work that provides a broad overview of mostly Sunni religious life in Fāṭimid Egypt. However, it does not advance our knowledge of the subject in any case. Taken as a book of intellectual history, the study is merely a traditional biographical/chronological history of the intellectuals and not of ideas. It contains little analysis of the intellectual production of the period. As a matter of fact, sectors of knowledge appear scattered and separated from each other as well as from their contexts. At most, the author offers a summary of biographies of scholars and students who lived

in Egypt in the eleventh/twelfth century.

Abdessamad Belhaj

‘Abdāllah Yūsuf ‘Azzām, *Dalālat al-kitāb wa-’l-sunna ‘alā ’l-aḥkām min ḥaythu al-bayān wa-’l-ijmāl aw al-zuhūr wa-’l-khafā*, (Jiddah: Dār al-Mujtama‘, 2001). Pp. 930.

The book under review reveals another side to the Palestinian radical activist ‘Abdāllah Yūsuf ‘Azzām (d. 1989) who was active in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Previously, the author completed the work as a PhD dissertation, *al-‘Ālimiyya*, at the faculty of *Sharī‘a* and *Qānūn* at the Azhar University in 1972. Some thirty years after defending his dissertation, and eleven years after his assassination, the PhD thesis was published as a book. For a start, the study belongs to the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and discusses, in particular, the legal-semantic aspects of indication (*dalāla*), clarification (*bayān*), compendiousness (*ijmāl*), clarity (*zuhūr*), and obscurity (*khafā*). The author divides his book into three major chapters (*abwāb*): In the first chapter (pp. 150-346), he discusses the issue of clear legal terms (*wāḍiḥ*) and other related terms such as the manifest (*ẓāhir*), explicit (*naṣṣ*), explained (*mufassar*), and the perspicuous (*muḥkam*). In the second chapter (pp. 347-583), he describes the positions of jurists and theologians on the terms of legal-semantic ambiguity such as

uncertain (*mubham*), obscure (*khafī*), difficult (*mushkil*), compendious (*mujmal*), and ambivalent (*mutashābih*). Finally, he devoted the third chapter (pp. 584-769) to the problem of interpretation, *ta’wīl*. In addition to his treatment of *ta’wīl* as a legal interpretative tool of juridical texts, the author enlarged the scope of his study to other disciplines, especially to Qur’ānic studies. For unknown reasons, the author engages in a long defense of *qiyās* (juristic analogy) against Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064). Instead of a necessary conclusion for a 769 pages, he chose to end his book with a conclusive chapter discussing *bayān*, another major problem of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. This term should figure along with the clear legal terms in the first chapter. Abruptly, the author stopped developing the content of *bayān* noting that the Muslim library is dumped with books on different subjects of *fiqh*. Therefore, he prefers to transform his words into action. We know that the author started a career as an activist before defending his dissertation and his words probably reflect this choice.

In relation to his procedure, the author adopts the medieval approach of *uṣūl al-fiqh* in a literal way: he frames the terms in their linguistic use and then gives the definition of various jurists and theologians. He then relates all possible divisions of the term and lastly, compares the opinions of the jurists and theologians, choosing the orthodox position

on the question. His approach is mostly descriptive and does not proceed to any analysis that is free from classical quotations. Abstraction made of the reputation of the author as an activist and outstanding preacher, his book does not bring any new element to the development of *uṣūl* studies for two reasons. First, the title of his book, which suggests a study of the semantic-legal signification of the Qur’ān and the *sunna* and the tools used by jurists to extract judgments, does not match with the content. Rather, the author focuses, generally, on the problem of ambiguity and clarity, in the legal context, but as a theoretical problem that interests only historians of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Moreover, he mostly describes juristic as well as theological views on ambiguity and clarity. The second reason is that the problem of ambiguity and clarity in itself goes beyond the theory of law and encompasses different hermeneutical aspects that should have compelled the author to limit his scope of study. In the first place, a serious research project should not approach the problem of legal ambiguity and clarity in a macro study. Regardless of the internal quality of a work, it would be much productive, both for the scholar and for the reader, to focus on an author or a legal term. For these reasons, the book does not succeed in distinguishing itself from dozens

of books in Arabic on the subject of legal terms.

Considering the size of this work on legal terms, the reader would expect a terminological index. The author did not provide it. Instead, he provides the names of jurists and theologians and a list of biographical entries of names mentioned in the book (pp. 818-861) and an index of names

(pp. 928-929). This does not help the reader to navigate the book. Probably, the table of contents, which is very detailed (893-815) and covers almost every page in the book, can be helpful. That being the case, only a knowledgeable reader in *uṣūl al-fiqh* is able to consult the book, knowing where to find what term. The bibliography is relatively important (pp.

862-891), but the number of books on *uṣūl al-fiqh* does not exceed 91 books including secondary sources. One interesting feature of this book is that it reproduces parts of the dissertation defense, including a series of questions and remarks of the jury and the author's own responses (pp. 10-13).

Abdessamad Belhaj