

8-18-2017

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Scholarly Commons Citation

Hamdeh, E. (2017). The Role of the ‘Ulamā’ in the Thoughts of ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda. *The Muslim World*, 107(3). <http://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12199>

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The Role of the 'Ulamā' in the Thoughts of 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda

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Despite his influence and contribution to scholarship in the modern Muslim world, the life and works of 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda are underrepresented in Western academic literature. This article is a first initiative at a broader assessment and contextualization of Abū Ghudda's life and thoughts. I present a picture of a scholar who sought to represent traditional Islam in its most unpopular moments. In particular, I examine Abū Ghudda's prevailing thoughts and opinions concerning "proper" scholarship and demonstrate how the role of the 'ulamā' in the thoughts of Abu Ghudda is primarily a continuation of a scholarly tradition rather than starting anew. I analyze Abū Ghudda's understanding of the role of the 'ulamā' in light of his disagreements with his strongest detractor, the Salafī Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī.

Whoever says, "The previous 'ulamā' were men just like we are men" is mistaken and ignorant of who they were. - 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda

Introduction

One scarcely encounters a book on the science of ḥadīth without coming across the name of 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (d. 1997). Abū Ghudda was one of the most prolific ḥadīth scholars of the twentieth century. He considered the role of the 'ulamā' to be essential in understanding and interpreting Islam. His works impacted many scholars during their formative years who would also propagate an understanding of Islam in which the 'ulamā' play a decisive role.¹ This article will shed light on the life and works of 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda and his perception of the role of the 'ulamā'.

Abū Ghudda's Life

On February 16, 1997, the Muslim world went into mourning with news of the death of one its most respected scholars, 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda. His passing was widely mourned

¹ His most famous students include Muḥammad 'Awwāma, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh Āl Rashīd, Salmān al-'Awda, and others.

by scholars, activists, and politicians.² He was born in 1917 in Aleppo, Syria and was raised in a religious household. He traced his family lineage to the Prophet's Companion, Khālīd b. Walīd, who had the designated title of God's sword on earth.³ His father and grandfather were leading fabric businessmen in Aleppo and both exerted themselves to provide Abū Ghudda with a well-rounded education.

His grandfather enrolled him in *Al-Madrasa al-'Arabiyya al-Islāmīya*, an exorbitant elite private elementary school. There he learned how to read and write, and developed a fixation for detail. Abū Ghudda stood out among his peers for his excellent reading skills and was summoned to read religious texts in the weekly classes of local scholars. By age ten, he repeatedly found himself in the company of *'ulamā'*. After completing elementary school, he enrolled in a school that primarily concentrated on the study of *fiqh*, Qur'ān, and handwriting. The deliberation on excellent penmanship instilled a sense of meticulousness in Abū Ghudda's personality which later became evident in his editing of books and publications.⁴

From 1936-42 he studied in a secondary Islamic school. Subsequently, he enrolled in Al-Azhar University where he studied from 1944-48. Following his commencement from Al-Azhar's sharia college, he enrolled in the Arabic language college of Al-Azhar where he studied for two years prior to returning to Aleppo.⁵ While residing in Cairo, Abū Ghudda met Ḥasan al-Banna (d. 1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood and he joined the movement. In 1961, he ran for parliamentary elections and was appointed as the mufti of Aleppo. His candidacy seems to have been based on his reputation as a leader in the scholarly community. Abū Ghudda was appointed as the superintendent of the Muslim Brotherhood on three different occasions (1955, 1973, 1986), but always during periods of internal crisis where his moral authority was

² Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh Āl Rāshīd, *Imdād al-Fattāḥ bi-Asānīd wa-Marwīyāt al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Fattāḥ* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī, 1999), 166.

³ M. Āl Rashīd, *Imdād*, 141.

⁴ His students noted that he was obsessively concerned with the appearance of his penmanship. See "Ḥadīth Dr. Salmān Al-'Awda 'an al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda," video clip, accessed November 9, 2013, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXJYhgb0ldE>.

⁵ M. Āl Rashīd, *Imdād*, 147-148.

called for to strengthen one faction against another. He apparently assumed these positions with reluctance, since he only completed the last of his three terms.⁶

After returning to Syria, Abū Ghudda joined the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and rose to prominence within religious circles in Aleppo. In 1966 Abū Ghudda criticized the coup that brought Ṣalāḥ Jadīd (d. 1993), Baath party strongman to power. Abū Ghudda mobilized local 'ulamā' and called for a boycott of the government to protest Jadīd's dictatorship. He preached and wrote extensively summoning for Jadīd's removal from power. Consequently, Abū Ghudda was imprisoned for eleven months. In 1967, Jadīd released all political prisoners and Abū Ghudda was exiled to Saudi Arabia. Afterwards, Abū Ghudda avoided politics and devoted himself to education. He moved on to teach at Imam Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd University in Riyadh for more than two decades and served as a visiting lecturer in Umm Durmān Institute in Sudan. In 1995, Bashar al-Asad welcomed Abū Ghudda back to Syria under the condition that he refrain from political activity.⁷ In 1996, he returned to Riyadh where he passed away and was buried in the Baqī' cemetery in Medina.

Initially, Abu Ghudda attempted to generate positive change through political involvement, but after that proved ineffective he consigned his life to education and scholarship. He sought to popularize traditional scholarship and revive its ideals in an atmosphere of religious confusion in the Muslim world. He was not exclusively a ḥadīth scholar, but also an expert in Ḥanafī jurisprudence, comparative *fiqh*, as well as Arabic language. Concurrently, his spiritual devotions and notable mannerisms garnered him great reverence among his students and associates. His reverence of scholarly heritage left an ample impression on his pupils, and he designated his life to the restoration of a scholarly tradition that had become marginalized by the political situation in the Muslim world. While several Western works highlight Abū Ghudda's political career, few pay heed to his status as a religious scholar. His prominence in the Muslim world was almost entirely due to his scholarly input. In honor of his scholarly achievements, Abū Ghudda was nominated for the Prize of Sultan Brunei for Islamic Studies in 1995 which was awarded to him by the Oxford Centre for Islamic studies.

⁶ Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 169.

⁷ Sami Moubayed, *Steel & Silk: Men and Women Who Shaped Syria 1900-2000* (Seattle: Cune Press, 2006), 130.

The Disenfranchisement of the *'Ulamā'*

Prior to the fall of the Ottoman empire the scholarly class held prestigious positions in government because their legal expertise was needed. When secular law replaced Islamic law, the *'ulamā'* found themselves out of work and sidelined. This rendered them irrelevant and they lost their monopoly over educational institutions and as spokespersons for Islam. Since the *'ulamā'* were supported by the Ottoman Empire, their institutions lost support with the Empire's decline. Essentially, traditional scholarship and instruction weakened when the state stopped supporting them.⁸ Abū Ghudda was the student of Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī (d. 1954), the last Shaykh al-Islam of the Ottoman Empire, and Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (d. 1951), Ṣabrī's ex-deputy. Therefore, he experienced first-hand the frustration of decline of the authority of traditional *'ulamā'*.

With the world quickly changing, from technological and scientific perspectives, many in the Muslim world aspired to catch up with the West and abandoned the study of Islam because it did not provide financial results. Having a prestigious career in government was a motivating factor for many young people to become experts in Islamic law. However, today, sharia sciences are considered the domain of the underachiever. A degree in sharia, generally speaking, does not lead to a well-paid career. The state, which was the major funder of education and employer, no longer needed experts in Islamic law because the entire legal system was revamped and founded on Western substantive law.⁹ Colonial governments control of education further marginalized traditional Islamic education. Along with a shift in education, Muslim legal systems were largely replaced by the introduction of European codes. David Waines notes that "In both cases it meant that those trained in traditional Islamic knowledge, the *'ulama'*, were disenfranchised and replaced socially by a new secularized Muslim elite."¹⁰

New educational systems paralyzed the institutions of the *'ulamā'*. Scholars and students who studied in the traditional system for years were out of work and not recognized by the state. Most students entering college sought to become doctors, engineers, teachers, or lawyers. It was

⁸ See Rudolph Peters, "Religious Attitudes towards Modernization in the Ottoman Empire. A Nineteenth Century Pious Text on Steamships, Factories and the Telegraph," *Die Welt des Islams* 1:4 (1986).

⁹ Cardinal Monique, "Islamic Legal Theory Curriculum: Are the Classics Taught Today?," *Islamic Law and Society* 12:2 (2005), 268-269.

¹⁰ David Waines, "Islam," in *Religion in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, ed. Linda Woodhead (New York: Routledge, 2002), 194.

students who could not get into any of these schools due to poor grades that would study Islamic sciences. The state and public accepted them as religious authorities because they had degrees from modern universities. However, this outraged scholars like Abū Ghudda, who went through a more rigorous curriculum and educational system, and now had little authority outside of study traditional circles.¹¹ Abū Ghudda laments that in the past the brightest children were expected to dedicate themselves to Islamic studies and religious leadership. However, in modern times, intelligent children are expected to dedicate themselves to medicine, engineering, or physics. Those who are not as intellectually inclined are expected to become shaykhs, religious figures, and so-called jurists. Abū Ghudda considers this problematic because the unqualified now speak for Islam. The basis for the decline in Islamic education was that most young people chose higher paying fields. Mediocre students who were not accepted in engineering or medical colleges ultimately entered the only field that is left, which was *fiqh*.¹² The new educational system and loss of governmental positions paralyzed the institutional authority of the ‘*ulamā*’.

The implementation of the European educational system in place of traditional education assisted in diminishing the authority of the ‘*ulamā*’. It also paved the way for those who studied outside the traditional system to become religious authorities. Dale Eickelman explains that the introduction of mass higher education in the Muslim world eroded the positions of the ‘*ulamā*’. He writes, “Religious authority in earlier generations derived from the mastery of authoritative texts studied under recognized scholars. Mass education fosters a direct, albeit selective, access to the printed word and a break with earlier traditions of authority.”¹³

Eickelman contends that the style of religious education through university system represents a substantial break with the previous emphasis on the written word, mediated by an oral tradition and geared to a mastery of recognized religious texts obtained through studying with accepted religious scholars. The university structure delineates subjects and approved texts are taught by a changing array of teachers, and competence is measured by examination.¹⁴ Even

¹¹ ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, Lecture in Turkey <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dobft16fNe8>, 2008. (accessed February 19, 2017).

¹² ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda “Ḥājat al-Umma ilā al-fuqahā’ 2,” video clip, accessed December 5, 2013, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X31bsm3kFQ.

¹³ Dale Eickelman, “Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies,” *American Ethnologist* 19:4 (1992), 646.

¹⁴ D. Eickelman, *Mass Higher Education*, 650.

the prestigious Al-Azhar university was forced to abandon its age-old policy of requiring complete memorization of the Qur'ān as a pre-requisite for admission.¹⁵

Abū Ghudda's scholarship must be understood in light of the challenges traditional 'ulamā' were facing. Traditional 'ulamā' were also challenged by the rise and growth of Salafism. In this regard, Abū Ghudda's strongest detractor was the Salafi ḥadīth scholar Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999).¹⁶ A watch-repairer by profession, Albānī was a self-made ḥadīth expert who attempted to reexamine the canonical ḥadīth corpus. Albānī attempted to reform Islam by purging Islam of what he considered to be foreign teachings. Although Salafis consider Albānī to be a reviver of authentic Islam, traditional 'ulamā' like Abū Ghudda consider him to be misled due to his bypassing of the Islamic legal schools and dismissing centuries of scholarly tradition. Albānī's primary purpose was to establish the "authentic" and "pure" Islam according to the Qur'ān and Sunna. His understanding of what was "authentic" often stood in stark contrast to traditional scholars like Abū Ghudda.

What distinguishes traditional 'ulamā' from Salafis is not necessarily the content of what it means to be an observant Muslim, but the proper modes by which religious knowledge is acquired. For traditional 'ulamā' it is not sufficient for one to hold the correct beliefs and practice the rituals of Islam. One must also acquire knowledge from a teacher who is well-grounded in the tradition through an established chain of teachers going all the way back to the

¹⁵ Göran Larsson, *Muslims and the New Media: Historical and Contemporary Debates* (Vermont: Ashgate, 2011) 37. On New Media's impact on Islamic education see Jon Anderson, "The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters," in *New Media in the Muslim World*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999); Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press 2009); Idem Charles Hirschkind, "Media and the Qur'ān," in *The Encyclopedia of the Quran* ed. Jane McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Jan Scholz, Are Selge, Max Stille, and Johannes Zimmermann, "Listening Communities? Some Remarks on the Construction of Religious Authority in Islamic Podcasts" *Die Welt Des Islams*, 3/4 (2008); Reinhard Schulze, "The Birth of Tradition and Modernity in the 18th and 19th Century Islamic Culture-The Case of Printing," *Culture and History* 16 (1997); Vit Sisler, "The Internet and the Construction of Islamic Knowledge in Europe" *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology* 1:2 (2007); Gary Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); Idem, *Virtually Islamic: Computer-Mediated Communication and Cyber Islamic Environments* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000).

¹⁶ On Albānī see Emad Hamdeh, "The Formative Years of an Iconoclastic Salafi Scholar," *The Muslim World* 106, no. 3, (2016): 411-432.

Prophet.¹⁷ Muhammad Fadel explains that there is a process of acculturation that traditional ‘*ulamā*’ consider essential. Fadel writes:

Mastery of religious values emerges through a process of acculturation that enables novices to embody those values. This process of acculturation is distinct from, and transcends intellectual cognition (*‘ilm*) of, religious truth. While religious truth may be a proper subject of instruction (*ta’līm*), mere instruction, without reliable teachers who properly embody Islamic teachings, cannot produce properly acculturated religious subjects.¹⁸

Reverence or Blind Imitation?

During his formative years Abū Ghudda met several scholars and teachers that impacted his view of scholarship. These scholars mostly belonged to a tradition that accentuated the teacher-student relationship, and thus Abū Ghudda held scholars in high regard. He belonged to a current within Islam that adhered to what is considered authentically rooted in revelation, has crystallized under the banners of scholarly consensus (*ijmā’*) and been passed on as Islamic knowledge (*‘ilm naqlī*) in chains of scholarly authority (*isnād*). It is a current that is didactic and instructional, which stands in opposition to Salafism and autodidactic “do it yourself” Islam.¹⁹ He believed that students were indebted to their teachers more than their parents, this deference for one’s religious educators is evident in his following statement:

If one looks at his teachers, he will discover that they are the cause of his existence. One’s father is the cause of his existence at the biological level, but the teacher to the student and seeker of knowledge is the means of his advancement, elevation and high status in the sight of God and then people. Hence, the right of the scholar over his student is preferred over the right of his father. Abū Yūsuf al-Qāḍī used to supplicate daily for Abū Ḥanīfa before his father, because Abū Ḥanīfa is the one who chose him and made him a leader.²⁰

Abū Ghudda belonged to a tradition that demanded reverence and respect for the ‘*ulamā*’. Before becoming experts, students had to study through the traditional system and obtain *ijāzas*

¹⁷ Mohammad Fadel, “Islamic Law and Constitution-Making: The Authoritarian Temptation and the Arab Spring,” *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 53/2 (2016), 474-75.

¹⁸ M. Fadel, *Islamic Law*, 474-75.

¹⁹ Kasper Mathiesen, “Anglo-American ‘Traditional Islam’ and its Discourse of Orthodoxy.” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 13, (2013), 191-219.

²⁰ Abū Yūsuf al-Qāḍī (d.182/798) he student of Abū Ḥanīfa and one of the founders of the Ḥanafī school. See J. Schacht, *Encyclopedia of Islam Second Edition*, art. *Abū Yūsuf*. Also, see Muḥammad Akram Nadwi, *Abu Hanifa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 41-44. Also, see M. Āl Rashīd, *Imdād*, 149.

from numerous scholars. In traditional Islamic education, the teacher served as a supervisor to ensure that students understood texts properly. A teacher was also a mentor who played the role of a spiritual guide for his students. In this regard, Sufism was very important to the study of Islam in traditional learning circles. It was not strictly an academic study of religion, but one that expected students to adhere to the etiquette of a student of knowledge.

The etiquette of knowledge not only required students to have respect for the ‘*ulamā*’ class, but also ensured that knowledge was passed down with this etiquette. This reverence was not only due to their scholarly achievements, but to their piety as well. Among his earliest teachers was ‘Isā al-Bayānūnī (d. 1943), who lived in the same neighborhood as Abū Ghudda.²¹ Abū Ghudda remembers him as one who had an immense amount of love for the Prophet Muhammad. Abū Ghudda states: “He used to teach us etiquette, but teaching it is different than giving a taste of it. Teaching concerns the hearing of the ear, but tasting is the gratification of the heart.”²²

In tradition educational settings, learning directly from a teacher is essential because one “tastes” knowledge. It is not solely an academic endeavor, but it is more akin to the mentoring relationship a master has with his student. This is evident from how Abū Ghudda describes his teachers. For instance, he describes another one of his teachers was Ibrāhīm al-Salqīnī (d. 2011), as being a friend of God (*walī*), who although taught grammar, used to regularly weep out of fear of God. Abū Ghudda notes that he prospered more from his state of being than his admonishments.²³ Kasper Mathiesen explains that being a student in traditional learning circles “implies *suḥba*, studying with and being in the presence of *ijāza*-holding scholars in order to absorb their spiritual *ḥāl* (state of heart and being).”²⁴

The process of acculturation that is part of traditional educational is an essential precondition for the proper understanding of Islam. Albānī considers this process of acculturation to often manifest itself in excessive reverence for scholars and uncritical acceptance of the legal schools. This resulted in strict *madhhabism* and the adherents of each *madhhab* viewed the other

²¹ He died in the city of Medina and was buried in Al-Baqī‘ cemetery, his student Abū Ghudda would die more than 50 years later and be buried in the same cemetery.

²² M. Āl Rashīd, *Imdād*, 150.

²³ M. Āl Rashīd, *Imdād*, 150.

²⁴ K. Mathiesen, *Anglo-American*, 204.

madhhabs as almost belonging to different religions. He proposed to solve this division by returning to the Prophet's true and pure teachings. Albānī's project to purge Islam from impure teachings often resulted in him holding unconventional views which contradicted the positions of the majority of 'ulamā'.

Abū Ghudda was a staunch proponent of understanding Islam through the 'ulamā and the schools of law. Albānī, a towering figure in Salafī circles, attempted to bypass scholars and go directly to the Qur'ān and Sunna. Their differences stem from their opposing attitudes toward the place of the 'ulamā' in understanding Islam. The reverence of scholars was a point of contention between Abū Ghudda and Albānī. Albānī often accused Abū Ghudda of revering scholars to the extent that he blindly followed them. Albānī views this reverence as blind following and Abū Ghudda considers Albānī's reexamination of well-established scholarly opinions to be arrogant and irreverent. Abū Ghudda notes that unlike some Muslims who belittle the scholarly achievements of the 'ulamā', even some Orientalists, despite their apparent aversion for Islam, have reverence for scholars due to their scholarly feats.²⁵ For Abū Ghudda, Salafism was problematic because it bypassed previous scholarship and approached to the texts anew.

The crux of Abū Ghudda's protest against Albānī's reexamination and bypassing the *madhhabs* was that it causes common Muslims to doubt the accomplishments of the 'ulamā'. Furthermore, Abū Ghudda did not deem Albānī to be adequately qualified to disapprove previous scholars. However, Albānī believed Abū Ghudda to be blinding following the 'ulamā' and intentionally ignoring their mistakes. Albānī states:

The *umma* should not be deceived by what some of the agitators write against us, from among the ignorant *muqallids* and *madhhabists* who babble about that which they do not know. They say that which they do not know, and purposely make themselves ignorant about what they know. Examples of these individuals are the biased Abū Ghudda from Aleppo, the junior Kawtharī, and his like that Egyptian loser Maḥmūd Sa'īd and those who are like them.²⁶

Albānī castigated Abū Ghudda for being a blind follower (*muqallid*) of his teacher Kawtharī and the Ḥanafī school.²⁷ Albānī portrayed Abū Ghudda as an unbending and blind

²⁵ A.F. Abū Ghudda, *Lecture in Turkey*

²⁶ Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 2002), 2:8.

²⁷ For Abū Ghudda's perspective on how the differences between himself and Albānī see 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, *Kalimāt fī Kashf Abā'īl wa Iftirā'āt* (Aleppo: Maktabat al-Maṭbū'āt al-Islāmiyya, 1990), 1-5.

loyalist to his teachers or *madhhab*, preferring them over the ḥadīth of the Prophet. Abū Ghudda repudiated this allegation, he stated:

I am the student of Kawtharī, may God have mercy on him, just as I am a student of many scholars other than him, may God have mercy on them. I acquired knowledge from approximately one hundred scholars in my home town of Aleppo and other countries in Greater Syria, as well as the holy city of Mecca, Medina, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Morocco and more, all praise is due to God. I have nearly one hundred teachers who I acquired and learned knowledge from, each had his unique methodology. I never adhered to the sayings of any one of them simply because he was my shaykh and teacher. Instead, I adhere to what I consider to be correct and believe to be true or preponderant. I may make mistakes or be correct just like every student of knowledge. So, the claim that I adhere to everything that Kawtharī says is false.²⁸

Abu Ghudda lists his teachers as an implicit criticism of Albānī who is an autodidact.²⁹ He uses his considerable number of teachers, colleagues, and students from throughout the Muslim world to explicate that he was exposed to many ideas and methodologies, which he uses to refute Albānī's allegations against him. Through his teachers and wide exposure Abū Ghudda was acquainted with the most current ideas and trends in the Muslim world. For knowledge to be authentic, Abū Ghudda believes it must come through a link of continuation of scholarship.

When this link is absent, individuals who claim scholarship lose the true meaning of scripture and adopt harsh manners. When individuals bypass scholars they not only misunderstand texts, but they also become harsh and lose the *adab* of knowledge. Abū Ghudda writes:

²⁸ A.F. Abū Ghudda, *Kalimāt*, 38. Abū Ghudda had a special relationship with scholars of the Indian Subcontinent and frequented the region numerous times, traveling once by sea from Iraq. There he met many respected scholars of the region such as Muḥammad Zakarīyā al-Kāndahlawī, 'Atīq al-Raḥmān, Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Kāndahlawī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nadwī, the mufti of Pakistan Muḥammad Shafī', and others. Abū Ghudda maintained close relations with the scholars of the Indian Subcontinent throughout his life because of their convergence on the adherence to the Ḥanafī *madhhab*, a spirituality rooted in scripture, and most importantly due to their similar approach toward Islamic sciences. Additionally, Abū Ghudda played an instrumental role in the publication of works by several scholars from the Indian subcontinent and introducing them to the Arab world. These works would have otherwise remained unfamiliar to many in the Arab world. Of his approximately 70 works, Abū Ghudda published more than 10 edited works of scholars from the Indian Subcontinent. See M. Āl Rashīd, *Imdād*, 155-158. Also, see Shāh, Anwar Muḥammad, *Al-Taṣrīḥ Bimā Tawātara fī Nuzūl al-Masīḥ* ed. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Aleppo: Maktab al-Maṭbū'āt al-Islāmiyya 1992), 4-5.

²⁹ 'Abd Allāh al-Shamrānī, *Thabat Mu' alifāt al-Muḥadith al-Kabīr al-Imam Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī* www.dorar.net 17.

Rarely do you find a group that is astray, or an individual who goes against the Sunna, except that he has abandoned this characteristic [of learning from scholars]. On this point, Ibn Ḥazm al-Zāhirī has been accused of callousness, because he did not follow the path of acquiring knowledge from scholars, and he did not implement their mannerisms. The great scholars, such as the four Imams and their likes, were the opposite of that.³⁰

Like Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456H/1064), Albānī was often taken to task for his sharp tongue and few of his opponents were spared from his verbal attacks. In 1975 Albānī wrote a book titled *Kashf al-Niqāb ‘Ammā fī Kalimāt Abī Ghudda Min al-Abāṭil wa l-Iftirā’āt* (*Removing the Veil from the Falsehood and Fabrications in Abū Ghudda’s Words*), in which he accused Abū Ghudda of attacking him and Salafis. Albānī chastises Abū Ghudda for being an unbending follower of the Ḥanafī *madhhab* and called Abū Ghudda ignorant, an intentional liar, transgressor, and fabricator, an enemy to Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), Ibn Qayyim (751/1350), Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792). Albānī’s disparagements against Abū Ghudda were not only academic, but very personal. To manifest how much he eschews and antagonizes Abū Ghudda, Albānī made the supplication: *Ashal Allāhu yada-ka wa qaṭa ‘a lisāna-ka* “May God paralyze your hand and cut off your tongue!”³¹ Additionally, while addressing a group of students, Albānī said:

In my view, students of knowledge like yourselves know very well that Abū Ghudda is in relation to knowledge like the gland of a camel. You know that he does not have a sound creed, neither does he have knowledge of the Qur’ān and Sunna.³²

Abū Ghudda’s views on the *adab* of scholarship prevented him from reciprocating in a similar fashion. The idiosyncrasies of scholarly character were important to Abū Ghudda, therefore he would often criticize Albānī without mentioning his name. Despite Albānī’s open criticism, Abū Ghudda did not immediately respond by publishing a work directly reciprocating

³⁰ ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, *Ṣafḥa Mushriqa Min Tarīkh Samā’ al-Ḥadīth ‘Ind al-Muḥadithīn* (Aleppo: Maktabat al-Maṭbū‘āt al-Islāmiyya, 1996), 152-153.

³¹ Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Kashf al-Niqāb ‘Ammā fī Kalimāt Abī Ghudda Min al-Abāṭil wa l-Iftirā’āt* (Damascus: [n.p.], 1978), 103.

³² “*Ṭāmāt wa Munkirāt al-Jahūl al-Albānī al-Wahhābī Mudda ‘ī al-Salafīyya Raḥima-hu Allāh.*” 2008. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRpKoWWUECU&feature=player_embedded#! (accessed December 12, 2011).

against Albānī. He states that he was forced to publicize a book explicitly mentioning Albānī by name because of Albānī's many accusations. Abū Ghudda wrote a book titled *Kalimāt fī Kashf Abāṭīl wa Iftirā'āt* (*Thoughts that Expose Falsehood and Fabrications*). This work was written in 1974 and did not mention Albānī or anyone else by name in compliance with what Abū Ghudda believed to be proper etiquette in refutation.³³ Abū Ghudda initially only disseminated the book to those who requested it to make them aware of his perspective. However, Abū Ghudda published the second edition in 1991 and mentioned Albānī and his ex-friend Zuhayr al-Shawīsh by name. Abū Ghudda noted that his students encouraged him to publish it in order that people not trust Albānī's denunciations.

The Necessity of Following 'Ulamā'

Albānī attempted to purge Islam of differences and division and unite the Muslims on what he considered authentic Islam. He ridiculed the idea that two contradicting opinions could be equally valid. He criticized Abū Ghudda for holding this opinion. Albānī states:

Abū Ghudda considers that two contradicting opinions, and there are so many in his *madhhab*, can all be part of the sharia and that it is permissible to act upon any of them...is the religion according to you [Abū Ghudda], two religions; one of them easy and the other difficult?³⁴

Albānī sought to review all *fiqh* opinions in light of the Qur'ān and Sunna. He did not consider any opinion valid unless it was supported by scripture. In other words, a scholar could give a fatwa based on a *madhhab* or previous scholarly opinion under the condition that it is supported by Qur'ān and Sunna, not based on the opinion of his *madhhab* alone, thus returning

³³ See A.F. Abū Ghudda, *Jawāb*; Idem *Kalimāt*. Abū Ghudda wrote another book where he directly addresses Albānī *Khuṭbat al-Ḥāja Laysat Sunna fī Mustahal al-Kutub wa l-Mu'allafāt* This work was written in response to Albānī's book titled *Khuṭbat al-Ḥāja* in which he had argued that all books should begin with the sermon of need, which is usually recited in the beginning of a sermon or lecture. By arguing this, Albānī was correcting hundreds of scholars, early and late, who did not begin their books with the sermon of need. Abū Ghudda's book compiles the long list of scholars who did not use this sermon of need, and refutes Albānī's claims while refraining from insults. See 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, *Khuṭbat al-Ḥāja Laysat Sunna fī Mustahal al-Kutub wa l-Mu'allafāt*. (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya, 2008). Abū Ghudda also edited a work of the Pakistani scholar Muḥammad al-Nu'mānī (d. 1999) that refutes Albānī's consideration of Abū Ḥanīfa as weak in the science of *ḥadīth*. It is likely that Abū Ghudda chose to edit this book to introduce Nu'mānī's criticisms of Albānī to the Arab world. See Muḥammad al-Nu'mānī, *Makānat al-Imām Abī Ḥanīfa fī l-Ḥadīth* ed. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Beirut: Maktabat al-Maṭbū'āt al-Islāmiyya, 2007).

³⁴ M. Albānī, *Kashf*, 100-01.

authority to scripture itself rather than the scholar.³⁵ Conversely, Abū Ghudda believed that if a group of traditional scholars hold an opinion it has the possibility of being valid and therefore cannot be disregarded as falsehood. In this regard, the teacher-student relationship was critical because it was understood to be uninterruptedly linked back to the Prophet. When understood in this light, Abū Ghudda's respect for teachers reflected reverence for the Prophet. Since the teacher-student relationship meant that there was a process of "passing down" or "inheriting" that originated with the Prophet, all those in the chain must be revered for being heirs of the Prophet. Abū Ghudda's stance on the importance of the teacher-student relationship reflects his concern with the preservation of Islamic knowledge.

In Abū Ghudda's view, Albānī and Salafis are an example of how the departure from the traditional educational model to a more autodidactic mode of education results in disrespect and division. In his *Risālat al-Ulfa Bayn al-Muslimīn* (Epistle on Unity Among Muslims), Abū Ghudda notes that instead of trying to create unity, some groups have risen who "View themselves as the people of truth in everything. They perceive those who disagree with them as being on falsehood."³⁶ In this book, Abū Ghudda uses a long excerpt from Ibn Taymiyya which addresses the differences among the scholars of *madhhabs* and concurred that unity must always be adhered to despite differences. While we will never know what Abū Ghudda's intention of selecting Ibn Taymiyya to deliver this message, we can speculate that he did so to address Salafis like Albānī who hold Ibn Taymiyya in high esteem.

Abū Ghudda's style of writing was such that he often referred to people or groups implicitly, without mentioning names. This work addresses the religious divides that were taking place at the time. He follows this by a commentary on another epistle written by Ibn Ḥazm in response to a question from Mālikī scholar on the ruling concerning praying behind someone of a different *madhhab*. Abū Ghudda notes that Ibn Ḥazm was known for his bitter attitude toward those who disagree with him. Like Albānī, Ibn Ḥazm often accused his opponents of going against the ḥadīth. Abū Ghudda notes that in this case, even Ibn Ḥazm defends the legitimacy of their differences of opinion. Abū Ghudda explains that perhaps the Mālikī questioner asked Ibn

³⁵ Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, "Al-Taqlīd wa l-ittibā", lecture from www.alalbany.net, last accessed 4/5/2012.

³⁶ 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, *Risālat al-Ulfa Bayn al-Muslimīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya, 1996), 5.

Ḥazm, who was known for his strictness, expecting he would get the response that it is not permissible to pray behind someone of a different *madhhab*.³⁷ Abū Ghudda was addressing Salafis as well as uncompromising *madhhabists* to the extent that they would not want to pray behind someone of a different *madhhab*. Abū Ghudda chose two iconoclastic scholars Albānī admired, Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Taymiyya, to illustrate that even they had a tolerant approach toward differences of opinion on secondary issues. He was attempting to bridge the gap between uncompromising Salafism and strict *madhhabism*. For Abū Ghudda, proper scholarship fell between these two extremes of following only literal decontextualized texts and uncompromising adherence to previous scholars.

Reformists like Albānī responded to strict *madhhabism* by insisting on a ḥadīth based *fiqh* or *fiqh al-ḥadīth*. This posed a threat the traditional system because it often resulted in shallow, but appealing scholarship that presented itself as “authentic” Islam. Abū Ghudda recognized the potential threat and criticized Salafis and autodidacts who considered *ijtihād* to be easy. Abū Ghudda points out that not everyone who narrates or memorizes a ḥadīth immediately becomes an expert in extracting its rulings. He appears to address Albānī when he wrote:

If the likes of Yaḥyā al-Qaṭṭān (d. 198/813), Wakī’ b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 196/811), ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/826), Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn (d. 233/847), and those of their stature did not dare indulge in *ijtihād* and *fiqh*, then how imprudent are the fake *mujtahids* of our time?! On top of it, they call the pious predecessors ignorant without the least shame nor modesty! God is our refuge from deception.³⁸

Abū Ghudda notes that some people think they can surpass previous scholars using only books, the Qur‘ān, Sunna, and their reason. He depicts the phenomenon of interpreting religion without proper qualifications as “the affliction of modern times” (*muṣībat al-‘aṣr*).³⁹ Reformers like Albānī justify their reexamining the opinions of previous scholars by explaining that today through print and technology we have access to sources that were not available to scholars in the past. Abū Ghudda argues that there are things beyond texts, such as the interpretation of the

³⁷ Muḥammad Ibn Ḥazm, *Risāla fī l-Imāma* ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 1996), 120.

³⁸ ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, *Al-Isnād Min al-Dīn* (Aleppo: Maktabat al-Maṭbū‘āt al-Islāmiyya, 1996), 68.

³⁹ A.F. Abū Ghudda, *Ḥājat*.

scholarly community, that are lost when one studies alone. Books in and of themselves do not provide “authentic” knowledge. One must approach those books with context, deep understanding, as well as an accurate and consistent methodology. In his view, anyone who learns only from books is bound to misunderstand them. When an opinion comes through a *madhhab* it has already been put through a rigorous process of verification and reexamination.⁴⁰

Put differently, for Abū Ghudda understanding Islam is not as easy as Albānī makes it appear because not all scripture is self-evident.⁴¹ Abū Ghudda and traditional ‘*ulamā*’ distinguish between the law and its sources and this distinction assumes that the law, which is a collection of divinely ordained rules, is not entirely self-evident from the sacred texts. If it were, the scripture would not be the source of law, but the law itself. Law is the result of juristic interpretation and therefore stands at the end of the interpretive process, not the beginning. What a jurist says is not authoritative because he says it, but his authority rests in the validity of what he declares. The question is whether the jurist has properly or validly performed *ijtihād*.⁴²

Studying Islam using only books results in untrained scholars giving religious verdicts through methodologies unestablished and unrecognized by the schools of law. Abū Ghudda mockingly refers to the computer as *ḥāfīz al-‘aṣr* (the greatest scholar of modern times), where people leave real-life teachers and resort to a machine for information.⁴³ This undermines traditional institutions because autodidacts use texts found on the internet to overshadow thousands of scholars trained within the traditional system.

He notes that *ijtihād* cannot be accomplished by only reading texts. It is a challenging endeavor for which most people are unqualified. Abū Ghudda responds to autodidacts who bypass scholarly institutions in an effort to follow only scripture, “So does that mean that Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, Aḥmad, and Shāfi‘ī follow the Bible?! Some people think if they read a few books on ḥadīth they become *muḥaddiths*!”⁴⁴ In other words, by claiming to use only their reason and scripture autodidacts insinuate that ‘*ulamā*’ followed scholarly institutions rather than

⁴⁰ A.F. Abū Ghudda, *Lecture in Turkey*.

⁴¹ See Jonathan Brown, “Is Islam Easy to Understand or Not?: Salafis, the Democratization of Interpretation and the Need for the Ulema,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, (2014), 1-28.

⁴² Bernard Weiss, “Interpretation in Islamic Law: The Theory of Ijtihād,” *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 2:26 (1978), 199-200.

⁴³ A.F. Abū Ghudda, *Lecture in Turkey*.

⁴⁴ A.F. Abū Ghudda, *Lecture in Turkey*.

texts.⁴⁵ Abū Ghudda considered such a charge arrogant and profane because it was the very ‘*ulamā*’ who preserved scripture.

Continuation of Scholarship

Over the last century the ‘*ulamā*’ faced unprecedented challenges. The religious authority and support of the state they enjoyed before the fall of the Ottoman empire disappeared. Additionally, they lost authority due to the change in the religious educational system, emergence of the printing press, as well as the rise of secular governments and other competing Islamic movements. Abū Ghudda attempted to revive traditional Islamic education through the teacher-student relationship and highlighting the achievements of traditional ‘*ulamā*’. He did not write books in a vacuum, but his works reflect his own actions and concerns. He believed that there was a lack of awareness and appreciation of the knowledge and contributions of traditional ‘*ulamā*’ and Islamic sciences. At the time, there was a general disinterest in Islamic sciences and many regarded the science of ḥadīth with wariness. Thus, Abū Ghudda devoted much of his scholarly energy to revive the science of ḥadīth.

In this regard, Abū Ghudda’s books were written with the intention of reviving interest in these sciences and demonstrating their importance. For instance, he published two books in one volume due to there being closely related. The first is *Al-Isnād Min al-Dīn (The Chain of Narration is Part of the Religion)* highlights the importance of the *isnād* in the preservation of knowledge, and how it is unique to the Muslim community. It was also a refutation of those who criticize the *isnād* as being a fabrication of later Muslim generations as was claimed by some Orientalists. He also wrote *Ṣafḥa Mushriqa min Tarīkh Samā’ al-Ḥadīth ‘Ind al-Muḥadithīn (An Illuminating Narrative of the History of Oral Transmission According to the Scholars of Ḥadīth)*. In this work, Abū Ghudda accentuates the importance of the teacher-student relationship. This was a reaction to those who had autodidactic tendencies and tried to bypass scholars and learn directly from books.

Abū Ghudda not only considered it important to learn from scholars, but even his contributions to Islamic sciences were mainly commentaries and elucidations on previous scholarship. Some might consider Abū Ghudda to have been more of an editor rather than an author. However, his additions to books could have rightfully been published as separate books

⁴⁵ See Emad Hamdeh, “Qur’ān and Sunna or the Madhhabs?: A Salafī Polemic Against Islamic Legal Tradition,” *Islamic Law and Society* 24:3 (June 2017): 1-43.

due the excess of commentaries, corrections, and cross references between variant manuscripts. At times a work would be about 20-30 pages in length, but it would amount to over 100 pages after Abū Ghudda edits, comments, and builds on it.⁴⁶ For example, when Abū Ghudda finished editing Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknāwī’s *Al-Raf‘ wa l-Takmīl*, some scholars recommended that he publish his commentaries as an independent and separate book because they were much longer than the original book, and that he attribute the book to himself instead of it being an editing book of an earlier scholar’s work. He responded: “Completing the building of fathers is a hundred times better than children initiating their own building. Furthermore, this is part of the right and fulfillment the ‘*ulamā*’ have upon us.”⁴⁷

One notices that, unlike Salafis, the scholarship of traditional ‘*ulamā*’ like Abū Ghudda is primarily a commentary tradition. It is less common to write independent works, hence Abū Ghudda’s discourse is mainly done through explaining, commenting, and editing classical works. For instance, approximately 55 of Abū Ghudda’s 73 publications are commentaries on the works of previous scholars.⁴⁸ Even his few independent works gravitate toward articulating the great works or accomplishments of previous scholars. Similarly, Abū Ghudda would not produce his own lectures, but insisted that his teaching be directly from books. His classes comprised of his students reading a book, to which he would add his comments, corrections, reflections, and insights.⁴⁹ This is in contrast with Albānī who mostly wrote independent books. Albānī wrote over 200 books, and approximately 30 are commentaries on previous books.⁵⁰ In his *Ṣīfat Ṣalat al-Nabī* Albānī explains that his works dispense of the need to refer to any other *madhhab* since his work is only based on authentic and pure Sunna.⁵¹ Abū Ghudda considered this to be problematic because Albānī dismissed previous scholarship and sought to make himself the final authority on what was considered authentic Islam.

⁴⁶ M. Āl Rashīd, *Imdād*, 179.

⁴⁷ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknāwī (d. 1304/1886–7), *Al-Raf‘ wa l-Takmīl fī l-Jarḥ wa l-Ta’dīl* ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda. (Beirut: Maktab al-Maṭbū‘āt al-Islāmiyya, 2004), 6.

⁴⁸ See M. Āl Rashīd, *Imdād*, 180-215.

⁴⁹ See “Samā’ al-Dhākira: Al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda 1,” [n/d/], video clip, accessed November 9, 2013, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qBTIidtc8>. Also, see *Ḥadīth Dr. Salmān*.

⁵⁰ ‘Aṭīyya ‘Awda, *Ṣafahāt Bayḍā’ Min Ḥayāt al-Imām Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī* (Al-Sana‘a: Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, 2001), 63-92.

⁵¹ Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Aṣl Ṣīfat Ṣalāt al-Nabī Salla Allāhu ‘Alay-hi wa Sallam Min al-Takbūr ilā al-Taslīm Ka’anaka Tarā-hā* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma’ārif, 2006), 15-18.

Abū Ghudda's reverence to the works of previous scholars extended to even how the physical copies of their books were treated. His student Salmān al-ʿAwda notes that Abū Ghudda refused to even allow students to fold the corner of pages in books out of respect for the knowledge they contained.⁵² This reverence is demonstrated in how he meticulously edited and commented on the works of previous *ʿulamāʾ*. He did this by introducing the author and his life, citing the ḥadīths in the work, commenting on important points, and providing appendixes, and a detailed index. He did this to revive the tradition of the *ʿulamāʾ*. Abū Ghudda notes that about sixty years ago, books published in the Arab world were in extremely disorganized compared to works published in the West. Many Muslims admired the works of Orientalists, particularly after the Muslims fell behind other civilizations, which they were once the leaders of when the Caliphate existed. Aḥmad Shākir wrote a book titled *Editing Books, Producing Indexes, How to Correct a Book, and the Muslims Superseding the Europeans in That*. Abū Ghudda decided to edit and comment on this book to demonstrate that Muslims surpassed Orientalists in this regard and that Muslims not be fond of the works of Orientalists.⁵³

In an attempt to make the achievements of the *ʿulamāʾ* more appealing, Abū Ghudda also authored several works which highlight the sacrifice scholars took upon themselves in order to seek knowledge. These books call attention to the importance of knowledge over everything else. They were geared toward the new and young students of Islamic scholarship who might have belittled Islamic scholarly heritage in the face of Western influence and technological advancements. The most famous of these compendia are: *Ṣafaḥāt Min Ṣabr al-ʿUlamāʾ* *ʿAlā Shadāʾid al-ʿIlm wa l-Taḥṣīl* (Narratives on the Steadfastness of Scholars in Face of Hardships in Education and Learning). *Qīmat al-Zaman ʿInda al-ʿUlamāʾ* (The Value of Time to the Scholars) and *Al-ʿUlamāʾ al-ʿUzzāb Alladhīn Ātharū al-ʿIlm ʿAlā al-Zawāj* (The Unmarried Scholars Who Preferred Knowledge over Marriage). In these works, Abū Ghudda highlights how the *ʿulamāʾ* walked hundreds of miles in search of knowledge, experienced poverty, thirst, hunger, and other hardships in search for knowledge. In Abū Ghudda's view, the efforts of knowledge of these

⁵² See *Ḥadīth Dr. Salmān*.

⁵³ Aḥmad Shākir, *Taḥṣīḥ al-Kutub wa Ṣunʿu al-Fahāris wa Kayfiyat Ḍabt al-Kitāb wa Sabq al-Muslimīn al-Afranji fī Dhālik* ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, 1994), 6-7.

'*ulamā*' cannot be equated to someone who learned Islam by merely reading books, attending a few classes, or doing some research on a computer.

Conclusion

Abū Ghudda was a scholar who was troubled with the negative religious, political, and social circumstances in the Muslim world. He initially attempted to save the diminishing authority and place of traditional '*ulamā*' by political involvement, but was unsuccessful. Abū Ghudda ultimately devoted his life to knowledge and reviving the tradition of the '*ulamā*'. Being the student of the last Shaykh al-Islam of the Ottoman Empire, he experienced first-hand the frustration and decline of the authority of the '*ulamā*'. In addition to being unable to keep up with the fast changes of modernity and technology, the '*ulamā*' failed in providing relevant solutions to the problems found in the Muslim world. Abū Ghudda responded to the challenges of modernity and other rivaling Islamic movements like Salafism, by attempting to revive a tradition that many felt was dying.