Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī

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Muḥammad Naṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī

Emad Hamdeh

Introduction

Muḥammad Naṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (1914–1999) was one of the most influential Salafī of ḥadīth in the 20th century. He sought to reform Islam by requiring Muslims to return a puritanical and literalist approach toward scripture. Albānī moved from Albania to Damascus with his family as a child, and his father became a leading Ḥanafī scholar in the Albanian Muslim community in Syria. From a young age, al-Albānī disagreed with his father and the Albanian Ḥanafī community. He rejected their allegiance to the Ḥanafī school of law and instead advocated a strict adherence to the Qurʾān and Sunna. His scholarly career was full of tug-of-war battles with traditional jurists over the validity of following a madhhab and particular principles of Islamic legal theory. His legal scholarship contains many unconventional opinions and he was therefore taken most seriously in the field of ḥadīth, not fiqh. A distinctive aspect of Albānī’s legacy is his constant effort to reevaluate the authenticity of ḥadīth. He sifted through thousands of ḥadīth and reevaluated them using traditional ḥadīth methodology.

General Overviews

Most works on the topics of Salafism and ḥadīth make some mention of Albānī. However, despite his importance in Islamic studies, there are relatively few academic works in English that focus primarily on Albānī’s life and methodology. A general overview of his life and impact is found in Hamdeh 2016 and Lacroix 2009. Hamdeh 2017 provides, Brown 2014, and Haykel 2009 provide a detailed analysis of his stance toward Islamic legal tradition. A presentation of Albānī’s ḥadīth methodology is given in Amin 2004 and Brown 2009. Shaybānī 1986 and ʿAwda 2001 contain detailed biographies of Albānī and a list of his many works.

An examination of Albānī’s methodology in determining the authenticity of ḥadīths. It also analyzes the ḥadīths declared weak by Albānī from the perspective of traditional ḥadīth scholarship as well as non-Muslim methods of dating ḥadīths.


A detailed biography of Albānī. It provides an excellent contextualization of the books he wrote. It also contains a list of unpublished books.


An excellent introduction to the science of ḥadīth. This provides a good overview of Albānī’s ḥadīth methodology.


This article broadly covers the stance of Sunni scholars toward weak ḥadīth. It highlights Albānī’s role as one of the strongest opponents to the use of weak ḥadīth.


Explores the role of the ʿulamā’ in Salafi circles. It also contains an excellent discussion on the Salafi rhetoric against traditional institutions. Albānī is mentioned among the other anti-tradition scholars.


The status of Bukhārī and Muslim has been a contentious issue in modern Islam. This excellent work contains a detailed discussion of Albānī’s views on the authenticity and status of these two canonical works.


ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda was one of Albānī’s main critics. This article is a comparative study of the two Muslim reformers and their approach toward Islamic scholarship. Their positions are examined in light of the different status they both give to the Muslim scholarly tradition.

Hamdeh, Emad. “Qur’ān and Sunna or the Madhhabs?: A Salafi Polemic Against Islamic Legal Tradition,” *Islamic Law and Society* 24:3 (June 2017): 1-43.
An annotated translation of Albānī’s lecture titled Misconceptions Surrounding Salafism (Shubuh Ḥawl al-Salafiyya). In this lecture Albānī attempted to defend Salafism against its anti-madhhab image. The introduction includes a detailed discussion on Albānī’s polemics and rhetorical strategies Albānī uses to discredit Islamic legal tradition.

Hamdeh, Emad. “The Formative Years of an Iconoclastic Salafi Scholar,” The Muslim World 106, no. 3, (2016): 411-432. This article provides a translation of one of Albānī’s autobiographical interviews. It sheds light on the biographical details of Albānī’s formative years, namely his sour relationship with his father, quarrels with the Albanian community in Syria, and his controversial professorship at the University of Medina. This is the only academic article to date that provides a detailed analysis of Albānī’s formative years.

Haykel, Bernard. “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” in Global Salafism, ed. Roel Meijer. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. This great is an introductory chapter for anyone looking to understand the attempts to provide an overview of the nature of modern Salafi thought and action. Haykel works to provide a definition of Salafism in both the pre-modern and modern contexts. This chapter does not focus on Albānī, but he is mentioned several times.


Shaybānī, Muhammad. Hayāt al-Albānī wa-āthāru-hu wa-thanā‘ al-‘ilm ālai-hi. Cairo: Maktabat al-Sarrāwī, 1986. A good biography of Albānī written in Arabic. This was written during Albānī’s lifetime and therefore does not contain all of the information one might be looking. It is nevertheless one of the more comprehensive books on Albānī’s life.

Muhammad Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Albānī's Legal Works

Albānī was a prolific author who wrote 217 books on various topics such as ḥadīth, fiqh, and creed. Although he was self-taught, many considered him to be a master of the science of ḥadīth. He was a reformer who sought to purify Islam of weak and fabricated ḥadīth, cultural interpretations of Islam, and the opinions of scholars that were not grounded in scripture. His works are primarily an effort to “clean up” a previous ḥadīth compilation or present a particular legal topic using only authentic texts.


This is a book on the etiquette of marriage and weddings. It contains various rulings provided by Albānī on weddings and marriage. These include his opinions on the use of musical instruments, jewelry, sexuality, and marriage customs.


A book on the prohibition of musical instruments.


This is one of Albānī’s most famous works. He attempts to provide the reader with a method of praying only based on authentic ḥadīth. He aims to bypass scholarly opinion and weak ḥadīth and bring the reader in direct contact with the prayer of the Prophet.


A short treatise on the need to purify Islam, especially Islamic law and ḥadīth, from foreign teachings.


Albānī discusses dress of women according to Islamic scripture. He argues that the face veil is optional, but not mandatory. This book sparked controversy when he wrote it in Saudi Arabia where most women covered their faces.

Albānī comments on the famous *Sahih al-Nabawi* and *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*. He authenticates its hadiths and includes a rather long discussion in his introduction. This introduction often consisted of him attacking his critics.


This book speaks of the virtues of Ramadan and the night prayers. It also contains some of Albānī’s controversial opinions such as his prohibition of the use of the *tawāṣṣūl* in any mosque besides the three holy mosques. He also argues that the *tārīf* prayer must not exceed eleven cycles. This stands in contrast to the prayers of many Muslims who pray twenty cycles of *tārīf*.


Throughout Islamic history scholars have differed concerning the permissibility of seeking intercession with God through saints and the righteous (*tawāṣṣūl*). This book consists of Albānī arguing against the permissibility of *tawāṣṣūl*.


This is one of Albānī’s earliest works. He prohibits building mosques that contain graves in them or praying in a mosque that contains a grave out of fear that it will result in associating partners with God.


This book is a response to Muḥammad Ramadān al-Baṭrī’s (d. 2013) work *Fiqh al-Strām*.


One of Albānī’s strongest critics was ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (d. 1997). The two disagreed on ḥadith and Islamic law, but their differences were very personal. In this book, Albānī attempts to refute Abū Ghudda. The language is coarse, and the tone is very harsh.

A commentary on Sayyid Sabiq’s famous book *Fiqh al-Sunna*.

**Albānī’s ḥadith Works**

Most Sunni scholars were lenient the narrations of weak ḥadīth related to topics of virtues of deeds. However, Albānī rejected the use of weak ḥadīth in all areas. Many of Albānī’s ḥadith works are attempts to purge or “clean-up” the works of previous scholars. He often republishes them with only their authentic ḥadīth. This has sparked controversy because others have accused him of trying to do away with the works of great ḥadīth scholars and replacing them with his own judgements on ḥadīth.


This book attempts to establish ḥadīth as one of the main sources of legislation and evidence in belief in law. It is an important work because it situates Albānī’s stance on ḥadīth, the madhāḥabs, and taqlīd.


As the title suggests, this work is a summary of Sahih al-Bukhari. However, Albānī does not summarize it by removing its ḥadīths. Rather, he removes the isnād’s leaving only the name of the narrator in most cases. Hence, he makes it easier for the layperson to read the book without the long chains of narrations.


Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī compiled a book titled *Al-ṣâḥīḥ al-ṣāhīr wa ziyyādatih*. Albānī sifted through this book and republished it with only its authentic ḥadīths.


This is a republication of Zakī al-Dīn al-Mundhirī’s (d. 656/1259) collection of ḥadīths on the encouraging and discouraging certain actions. Albānī republished this work with only its authentic ḥadīth.

This book is a compilation of thousands of weak and fabricated hadith. The introduction contains a discussion on the negative societal and spiritual impacts these hadith have on the Muslim community.

Albâni (al-), Muḥammad Naṣīr al-Dīn. *Silsilat al-ḥadīth al-ṣaḥīh a.* Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1995. This book contains thousands of hadiths that are authentic. Albâni addresses the šarāʾ of each hadith in a relatively concise manner. It also contains many of Albâni’s legal rulings based on his understanding of these authentic hadiths.

**Albâni’s Critics**

Albâni was perhaps the twentieth century’s most controversial scholar. He remained uncompromising throughout his life and always presented his interpretation of scripture as being synonymous with scripture itself. His attempts to purge Islam was not viewed positively by many scholars. The large number of book-length responses to Albâni by Traditionalists throughout the Muslim world. These books are important because Albâni’s works cannot be understood outside the many battles he was fighting.


A response to Albâni’s accusations in his Kashf al-niqāb ʾ ammā fī kalimāt Abī Ḥudda min al-ābāṭīl wa l-ʾifrāʿ āt.


A refutation of Albâni’s prohibition of circular gold for women.


A refutation of Albâni’s prohibition of praying twenty cycles during the taḥrīr prayers.


This book is about scholarly etiquette but contains a refutation and discussion on Albâni and Salafīs.

A zamâl attempt to highlight Albâni’s self-learning, mistakes, and contradictions. The work was originally published under the pseudonym Arshad Salafi.


The most important critique of Albâni’s stance toward the Muslim schools of law.


A critique of the concept of Salafism as a school or method of thinking.


A polemical work against Albâni and Salafis. The book critiques several leading Salafi scholars and is ordered alphabetically.


Criticism of Albâni’s weakening some ḥadîths in ʾaḥîf Muslim.


A response Albâni’s prohibition of using prayer beads.


Refutation against Albâni’s critique of the practicality of consensus.


Saqqâf tries to record and compile all the instances in which Albâni disrespected or spoke ill of other scholars.

Highlights Albâni’s ‘clear’ contradictions. He highlights instances in which Albâni would authenticate a hadith and then later weaken it.