

THE ROLE AND WORKS OF MUHAMMAD SAID RAMADAN AL-BOUTI IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE

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Annotation

This academic article offers a critical analysis of Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Bouti's scholarly contributions, with a particular focus on his distinctive methodology in the classification of Islamic sciences.

Keywords

Butiy, knowledge, practice, fiqh, sira, aqidah, Islamic philosophy, debate

Shaykh Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti's academic journey began under the guidance of his father, Mulla Ramadan. His initial education took place at the elementary school in Ziqaq al-Qarnani, where he studied religion, the Arabic language, and mathematics. Later, his father sent him to study under Shaykh Hasan Habannaka al-Maydani at the Manjak Mosque, which was later transformed into the al-Tawjih al-Islami Institute. When bringing his son to the Shaykh, his father said to him:

"My son, had the path to God been through street-sweeping, I would have made you a street-sweeper. But I have seen that the path to God lies in learning about Him and His religion."

In 1953, Shaykh al-Buti completed his secondary studies in Islamic law at the al-Tawjih al-Islami Institute in Damascus. That same year, he was called for mandatory military service. The only way to postpone the service was to enroll in a high-level officially recognized academic institution. Consequently, he joined the Faculty of Sharia at al-Azhar University, as the Faculty of Sharia had not yet been established at the University of Damascus. Moreover, at that time, the law exempting only-children from compulsory military service had not yet been enacted.

In 1955, Shaykh Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti graduated from al-Azhar University with a Bachelor's degree in Islamic studies, thereby attaining higher

education credentials. In the same year, he also enrolled in the Faculty of Arabic Language at al-Azhar, where he obtained a diploma in pedagogy.

After returning to Damascus in 1957, Shaykh al-Buti continued his career in the field of education, joining the ranks of professional teachers. In 1958, inspired by the political unification between Egypt and Syria – particularly the ideals of unity promoted by President Gamal Abdel Nasser – he wrote a series of articles. These articles were later compiled and published as his first book, “Fi Sabil Allah wa-l-Haqq” (“In the Path of God and Truth”).

For nearly three years, he taught Islamic education in the city of Homs. In 1965, upon the recommendation of Dr. Mustafa Sibai, a leading figure at the Faculty of Sharia at the University of Damascus, he was appointed as an assistant lecturer (mua'id). Shortly thereafter, he was sent on an academic mission to the Faculty of Sharia at al-Azhar University, where he defended his doctoral dissertation titled *Ḍawabit al-Maslaha fi al-Shari'a al-Islamiyya* (“The Parameters of Public Interest in Islamic Law”). His dissertation received the distinction of highest honors, and the university recommended it for publication at its own expense.

In the same year, Shaykh al-Buti was appointed as a lecturer at the Faculty of Sharia, University of Damascus. He was promoted to the rank of associate professor in 1970 and full professor in 1975. That same year, he was also appointed as vice-dean of the faculty. In 1977, he became the dean of the Faculty of Sharia, a position he held until his retirement in 1993.

In 2002, Shaykh Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti served as the head of the Department of Creed and Comparative Religion (*Aqidah wa Adyan*) at the University of Damascus, under a contractual arrangement with the institution. It is worth emphasizing that his primary area of scholarly specialization was Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and its foundational principles (*usul al-fiqh*).

Shaykh al-Buti was widely recognized for his rich and multifaceted intellectual legacy, authoring works across a wide spectrum of Islamic sciences. His contributions are particularly distinguished in the fields of jurisprudence, legal theory, theology (*'aqidah*), as well as in areas of religious pedagogy, intellectual discourse, and dialectical engagement. He actively participated in theological and ideological debates with individuals who diverged from his methodological stance, contributing critical and principled perspectives to contemporary religious discourse.

In addition, Shaykh al-Buti authored deeply impactful works on ethics, spirituality, and moral instruction. Even when addressing complex and nuanced subjects, his writing style remained elegant, precise, and fluid. His refined literary expression did not compromise the academic rigor or depth of his scholarship.

Through a style characterized as “simple yet profound” he skillfully employed diverse rhetorical approaches – including exposition, description, debate, persuasion, defense, critique, and, at times, admonition – making his works accessible yet intellectually compelling. His tone could become markedly assertive and principled when addressing certain critical issues, setting him apart from preachers who preferred to avoid theological controversy.

Shaykh al-Buti’s intellectual development was initially shaped by his father, Mulla Ramadan, and his early teacher, Shaykh Hasan Habannaka, under whose tutelage he was nurtured. Over time, his thought was also profoundly influenced by the works of classical and modern thinkers such as Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi’i and Imam al-Ghazali. Furthermore, contemporary scholars like Ali al-Tantawi and others played a role in shaping his philosophical and theological outlook.

Shaykh Muhammad Sa’id Ramadan al-Buti began his career as a writer in 1949, during his student years in Damascus. His first attempt at writing was marked by an article titled “Amama al-Mar’ah” (“Before the Woman”), which he submitted to the widely circulated journal *At-Tamaddun al-Islami* (Islamic Civilization), published by Ahmad Mazhar Azmah. The editor warmly welcomed the piece and promised to publish it in the very first issue, a promise he fulfilled. When the article was published, al-Buti’s name was accompanied by the title “adib” (writer), a gesture that filled him with deep joy and pride.

In addition to his mastery of the Arabic language, Shaykh al-Buti was fluent in Turkish, Kurdish, and English, which further enriched his scholarly and literary capabilities.

The following is a selection of his most notable works:

1. المذهب الاقتصادي بين الشيوعية والإسلام “The Economic System Between Communism and Islam”

A comparative study that critiques communism while presenting the Islamic economic model as a balanced alternative.

2. تجربة التربية الإسلامية في ميزان البحث “The Experience of Islamic Education in the Balance of Research”

A critical assessment of Islamic educational practices in the modern context.

3. دفاع عن الإسلام والتاريخ “A Defense of Islam and History”

A response to ideological attacks against Islam and its historical legacy, using robust scholarly arguments.

4. حقائق عن نشأة القومية “Truths about the Rise of Nationalism”

This book explores the historical roots of nationalism and discusses its inconsistencies with Islamic teachings.

5. في سبيل الله والحق “In the Path of God and Truth”

A collection of early essays addressing religious and social issues, marking al-Buti's first published book.

6. من روائع القرآن الكريم : تأملات علمية وأدبية في كتاب الله "From the Wonders of the Noble Qur'an: Scientific and Literary Reflections on the Book of God"

A university-level textbook that examines the Qur'an through both analytical and literary lenses.

7. "Studies on the Qur'an and Sunnah in the Science of Legal Theory" مباحث الكتاب والسنة من علم الأصول

A comprehensive study in legal theory (usul al-fiqh), focusing on deriving rulings from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

8. "The Only Path Amidst the Current Events" السبيل الوحيد في زحمة الأحداث الجارية

Discusses contemporary socio-political issues from an Islamic perspective, emphasizing reform and ethical responses.

9. "Lectures in Comparative Jurisprudence" محاضرات في الفقه المقارن

A scholarly comparison of various Islamic legal schools, highlighting both shared foundations and doctrinal differences.

10. "Islamic Creed and Contemporary Thought" العقيدة الإسلامية والفكر المعاصر

This work explores the interaction between Islamic theology ('aqida) and modern ideologies. Al-Buti offers critical insights into how contemporary intellectual trends influence and challenge Islamic beliefs.

11. "Dialogue on Civilizational Problems" حوار حول مشكلات حضارية

A discourse on the relationship between Islamic civilization and modern culture. The author addresses inter-civilizational dialogue and the tensions between traditional Islamic values and global cultural shifts.

12. "On the Path of Returning to Islam: A Framework and Solutions to Challenges" على طريق العودة إلى الإسلام ، رسم لمنهاج، وحل المشكلات

A prescriptive work aiming to outline a methodical return to Islamic principles within society, identifying key obstacles and proposing solutions grounded in the Shari'a.

13. "The Issue of Birth Control" مسألة تحديد النسل

This treatise investigates family planning from a legal and ethical perspective, discussing its permissibility and implications under Islamic jurisprudence.

14. "Salafism: A Blessed Historical Phase, Not an Islamic School of Thought" السلفية مرحلة زمنية مباركة لا مذهب إسلامي

Al-Buti argues that Salafism should be viewed as a historical era rather than a formal legal school, engaging in a critical evaluation of contemporary Salafi movements.

15. "Contemporary Jurisprudential Issues" قضايا فقهية معاصرة

A collection of legal opinions on modern-day challenges, providing Islamic responses to emerging social, economic, and ethical dilemmas.

16. حرية الإنسان في ظل عبوديته الله "Human Freedom under the Shadow of His Servitude to God"

This philosophical work discusses the paradox of freedom in Islam, asserting that true liberty is achieved through servitude to God.

17. الجهاد في الإسلام كيف نفهمه؟ وكيف نمارسه؟ "Jihad in Islam: How Should We Understand and Practice It?"

A treatise explaining the Islamic concept of jihad, distinguishing between its spiritual and combative aspects, and emphasizing correct understanding and application.

18. زوابع وأصداء وراء كتاب الجهاد في الإسلام "Storms and Echoes Surrounding the Book 'Jihad in Islam'"

A reflective and polemical sequel that addresses the controversies generated by his previous work on jihad, defending his views against critics and clarifying common misconceptions.

19. الحوار سبيل التعايش مع التعدد والاختلاف "Dialogue as a Path to Coexistence Amid Diversity and Disagreement"

This work promotes intercultural and interfaith dialogue, emphasizing respectful engagement in the face of ideological, cultural, and religious differences.

20. الإنسان مخير أم مسير؟ "Man: Free Agent or Compelled Being?"

Al-Buti delves into the theological debate on free will versus divine predestination, analyzing the balance between human choice and God's decree.

21. الإسلام والعصر تحديات وآفاق "Islam and the Contemporary Era: Challenges and Horizons"

The book examines the contemporary relevance of Islamic teachings and addresses both opportunities and obstacles faced by Muslims in the modern age.

22. الله أم الإنسان أيهما أقدر على رعاية حقوق الإنسان؟ "God or Man: Who is More Capable of Safeguarding Human Rights?"

A philosophical and theological inquiry into the foundations of human rights and the extent to which divine versus secular systems uphold them.

23. سيامند ابن الأدغال: من روائع قصص الشعوب "Siyamand, Son of the Wild: Tales from the Peoples of the World"

A collection of moral stories inspired by global folklore, exploring spiritual, ethical, and cultural values through fictional narrative.

24. أوربة من التقنية إلى الروحانية: مشكلة الجسر المقطوع "Europe: From Technology to Spirituality - The Crisis of the Severed Bridge"

Al-Buti critiques the disconnection between Western technological advancement and spiritual depth, calling for a balanced integration.

25. شخصيات استوقفتني “Personalities That Captivated My Attention”

A reflective memoir on influential figures encountered by al-Buti in his intellectual and spiritual journey, highlighting their moral and scholarly impact.

26. من الفكر والقلب “From the Mind and the Heart”

This book explores the symbiosis between intellect and emotion, proposing a holistic vision of human development grounded in both reason and spirituality.

27. الحكم العطائية شرح وتحليل “Commentary and Analysis of the Hikam of Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah (in Five Parts)”

A deep spiritual commentary on the aphorisms of Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah al-Iskandari, tailored for contemporary application and inner purification.

28. هذا ما قلته أمام بعض الرؤساء والملوك “This is What I Said Before Some Presidents and Kings”

A candid compilation of speeches and conversations reflecting al-Buti’s views on politics, religion, and morality in high-level dialogues.

29. نقض أوهام المادية الجدلية “Refuting the Illusions of Dialectical Materialism”

A philosophical rebuttal of Marxist materialism, highlighting its epistemological and ethical weaknesses from an Islamic standpoint.

30. ضوابط المصلحة في الشريعة الإسلامية (أطروحة الدكتوراه) “The Principles of Maslaha (Public Interest) in Islamic Law”

Originally a doctoral dissertation, this work defines the concept of maslaha and its application in Islamic legal theory, emphasizing its role in contemporary jurisprudence.

The works of Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Buti constitute a comprehensive scholarly legacy encompassing various fields of Islamic sciences. His contributions in the areas of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), aqeedah (Islamic creed), seerah (Prophetic biography), and Islamic philosophy hold significant value not only from an academic perspective but also in terms of their religious and ethical dimensions. In his writings, al-Buti employs a deep and methodical analytical approach, which reflects his unique methodology in classifying and systematizing Islamic sciences. His scholarly activity and writings continue to serve as essential sources for contemporary researchers in Islamic studies. Al-Buti’s intellectual legacy has had a substantial impact on the development of modern Islamic thought and scholarship, and it remains relevant and influential for future generations.

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