Old and new in Damascus
Figure 1. Entrance to Suq al-Hamidiyya. Photo by author.
Totah’s 2009 paper

- Focus is on the 2002 ‘historic restoration’ of the Suq al-Hamidiyya
- A ‘heritage’ revamping of the old city tourist zone
- Existing Suq al-Hamidiyya dated from Ottoman period
Issue of Modernity

• The pre-2002 Suq was too ‘modern’ to be acceptable in this heritage revamping.
• -- too many modern signs, goods
• The pre-2002 Suq merchants were too ‘chaotic’ and ‘unmodern’ (ie. Traditional middle-eastern)
• Revamp aimed to make the Suq more “traditional” and its merchants more “modern”.

Figure 3. The origin of Suq al-Hamidiyya. Photo by unknown.
The revamp

• The Suq is a relatively modern shopping arcade built with steel supporting columns
• Not really ‘authentic’ ancient Damascus
• Ottomans had built it in an earlier attempt to ‘modernize’ shopping in Damascus
• Revamp to strip back the décor, reduce the clutter and remodel
Figure 2. Revealing the “true face” of the Suq. Photo by author.
After the revamp

• The merchants quickly get back to business as usual
• -- garish electric signs, modern goods, clutter
• Some attempts at heritage marketing for tourists
• -- inauthentic
Figure 4. The new face of Syria. Photo by author.
Modernity

• The modernist mind seeks to create rational retail order out of the apparent ‘chaos’ of a Syrian Suq.
• But it provokes more chaos and disturbance.
• Modernity’s attempts to return to ‘heritage’ destroy the heritage of the suq
• The tourists of Modernity visit ‘historic’ and ‘exotic’ places to see a different heritage, but expect ‘modern’ facilities and standards.
• Heritage a creation of modernity