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AN ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE OF SA‘D AL-DIN AL-TAFTAZANI’S “SHARH AL-MAQASID” AND OF THE CLASSIFICATION OF DOCTRINAL ISSUES

Abstract. *This article analyses the structural composition of “Sharh al-Maqasid,” the largest work on the science of kalam (theology) by Sa‘d al-Din al-Taftazani (722–792/1322–1390), the most renowned scholar of the Hanafi-Maturidi school of the Timurid period, and his approach to the classification of doctrinal (aqida) issues. It shows that, in classifying purely doctrinal matters, al-Taftazani arranged them into six “aims” (maqsad) al-mabadi (the principles), al-umur al-amma (the general matters), al-a‘rad (accidents), al-jawahir (substances), al-ilahiyyat (theology) and al-sam‘iyyat (the revealed matters) and compares this with the modern four-fold division of kalam. The article further examines how al-Taftazani distinguished doctrinal from juridical (fiqhi) issues, and demonstrates that the work is an important source not only for kalam and the history of the deviant sects but also for the exact and natural sciences.*

Keywords: *Sa‘d al-Din al-Taftazani, Sharh al-Maqasid, kalam, aqida, Hanafi-Maturidi school, classification, al-umur al-amma, a‘rad, jawhar, ilahiyyat, sam‘iyyat, the Timurids.*

INTRODUCTION

Sa‘d al-Din al-Taftazani (722–792/1322–1390) is recognised as the most renowned scholar of the Hanafi-Maturidi school of the Timurid period. His full name is Mas‘ud ibn al-Qadi Fakhr al-Din Umar ibn al-Mawla al-Azim Burhan al-Din Abdullah ibn al-Imam al-Rabbani Shams al-Haqq wa-l-Din al-Qari al-Samarqandi al-Haravi al-Taftazani al-Khurasani al-Hanafi, and he is considered a major scholar in the fields of grammar (nahw), morphology (sarf), rhetoric (ma‘ani and bayan), the principles and branches of

jurisprudence (usul al-fiqh and furu' al-fiqh, in both the Hanafi and the Shafi'i schools), logic, doctrine (aqida), Qur'anic exegesis and other fields of learning. The scholar also worked at the court of Amir Timur, taking direct part in the scholarly assemblies held there; Amir Timur held him in high esteem and honour (Tashkupruzada, 1975a, vol. 1, p. 190; al-Tamimi al-Ghazzi, 1989, vol. 1, pp. 325–326).

Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani's works spread widely to various regions of the world even during his lifetime and were used to good effect. It has been established that today the scholar has more than fifty works in various fields of learning. One of them is "Sharh al-Maqasid," a commentary that the scholar himself completed in Samarkand in 786/1384 upon his own work "Maqasid al-talibin fi ilm usul al-din." This book is not only the largest of the scholar's works on the science of kalam in terms of volume, but is also recognised as one of the most important sources within the framework of the Hanafi-Maturidi school; indeed, no comparable work was written either in the period before him or after him. When the classification of doctrinal issues is studied, two problems become evident (Tashkupruzada, 1975b, p. 54; al-Faruqi, n.d.):

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- 1) the division of purely doctrinal issues by particular themes;
- 2) the separation of doctrinal issues from juridical (fiqhi) ones.

Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani dwelt specially on these two problems in his works and expounded them in detail. In this book the scholar took a distinctive approach to the classification of doctrinal issues, stressing that they consist of five chapters named "al-umur al-amma" (the general matters), "a'rad" (accidents), "jawhar" (substance), "sam'iyat" (the revealed matters) and "ilahiyat" (theology). He presented the issues raised in the work in precisely this order, and alongside them introduced an additional chapter named "al-mabadi" (the principles), calling each of them a "maqsad" (aim). It is for this reason that the book is entitled "al-Maqasid." (The word "maqsad" denotes "intention" or "aspiration"; here it is applied to the aim pursued in the discussion of the doctrinal issues across the six sections, and is the name given to them.) (al-Taftazani, 1998, vol. 1, p. 159)

In the modern literature, the issues of the science of kalam are mainly divided into four themes, named "ilahiyat" (theology), "nubuwwat" (prophethood), "kawniyyat" (cosmology) and "sam'iyat" (the revealed matters). If Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani's

method of dividing purely doctrinal issues by particular themes is compared with this modern approach, the following difference between them may be observed (Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf, 2005):

The distinctive feature of the scholar's classification of doctrinal issues is that he expounded the theme of "nubuwwat" given in the modern classification within the "sam'iyat" section, and placed part of the issues of the "kawniyyat" theme within the "al-umur al-amma" section and the remainder within the "al-jawahir" section. The structural composition of the work is given in the following order:

The first chapter (maqsad), "al-mabadi" (the principles), concerns the science of kalam and consists of three sections (fasl) and nine articles (maqala). It discusses the definition of this science, its issues, its aim and its merits. Al-Taftazani, for instance, defined the science of kalam as follows: "The science of kalam is the science of knowing the religious doctrines by reliable proofs" (al-Taftazani, 1998, vol. 1, p. 163).

The second chapter (maqsad), "al-umur al-amma" (the general matters), concerns the general issues of the science of kalam and consists of three chapters and thirty-three articles.

The third chapter (maqsad), "a'rad" (accidents), consists of five sections and fifteen articles. In it, refutations are given on a logical and scientific basis to the views of the Mu'tazila sect and the philosophers concerning the "accidents," and the pure Islamic creed is defended. The first section contains five articles, which speak of the concept of existence and of "accident," its types and its states; here the scholar refutes the views of the Mu'tazila and the philosophers about the eternity of "substance" and "accident," proving by logical argument that these two are created (hadith), and specially stressing that the eternal attributes of God Most High are free of them. The second section contains three articles discussing the concept and types of "al-kamm" (quantity, motion, extension), and the differences between the views of the theologians (mutakallimun) and the philosophers concerning the concepts of time its existence or non-existence and of place, its types and the void. The third section contains four articles on the concept of "al-kayf" (quality), its types and states; thus there are four kinds of quality, the first of which is the "sensory" that is, what is perceived through the human sense organs, such as touching, seeing, hearing, tasting and smelling, which is one type of the theory of knowledge by which learning is acquired. The fourth section contains two articles

on the concept of “al-ayn” (place, location), its types and states, discussing in particular motion and rest in bodies. In expounding the issues of this chapter, the scholar cited only verse 1 of Surah al-An‘am and verse 4 of Surah Yunus; most of the issues are illuminated mainly by logical and rational proofs on a scientific basis.

The fourth chapter (maqsad), “jawhar” (substance), consists of two parts, four sections and twenty-four articles. In this chapter the cosmological matters mainly existence, the laws of causation, and in part the questions of angels, jinn, plants and animals are reflected. Here too, refutations are given to the views of the Mu‘tazila and the philosophers concerning “substance,” on the basis of scriptural texts (the Noble Qur’an and hadith) and of logical and rational proofs; in expounding the issues, 23 verses from 18 surahs and 5 hadiths are cited. The first section of the first part contains five articles expounding the properties and characteristics of “body” and the universe. The second section contains ten articles discussing the expanse, boundary and void of space matters studied today within the science of astronomy and proving the eclipses of the moon and sun and their causes; such information is regarded as a scientific discovery of the twenty-first century, yet the scholar had proved it on a scientific basis six centuries earlier. The principal issue of this part is the refutation, on a logical and scientific basis, of the philosophers’ views about the eternity (uncreatedness) of the world. The second part of the chapter consists of two sections: the first, of six articles discussing the soul (nafs); the second, of three articles on the intellect, the angels, the jinn and Satan.

The fifth chapter (maqsad), “ilahiyyat” (theology), consists of seven sections and thirty-one articles, and is the chapter that encompasses the principal doctrinal issues; in expounding its issues, 230 verses from 69 surahs and 30 hadiths are cited. The first section contains four articles on the Essence (dhat) of God Most High; the second, four articles on “tanzihat” (His being free of the imperfections that do not befit Him); the third, seven articles on the attributes of God Most High; the fourth, two articles on whether the servants may or may not see God Most High; the fifth, five articles on the acts (deeds) of the servant; the sixth, six articles on guidance (hidaya); and the seventh, three articles on the names of God Most High.

The sixth chapter (maqsad), “sam‘iyyat” (the revealed matters), consists of four sections and thirty-nine articles. It discusses the doctrines that are confirmed only by “scriptural proof” (the Qur’an and hadith); since these relate mainly to the unseen

world, this chapter is also called “ghaybiyyat.” The first section consists of nine articles discussing prophethood, the prophet (nabi) and the messenger (rasul), humanity’s need of a prophet and a divine law, the mission of Muhammad (peace be upon him), the sinlessness (isma) of all the prophets, miracles, the angels, the saints (awliya) and magic. The second section consists of fifteen articles discussing the return of existing things to non-existence, the perishability of the body, the resurrection (hashr), Paradise, Hell, the questioning and torment of the grave, the barzakh and the hereafter, felicity and wretchedness, reward and punishment, the sinful believer and his pardon, intercession (shafaa), repentance, and the enjoining of good and forbidding of evil. The third section consists of eight articles discussing faith (iman), Islam, unbelief (kufr), the believer, the unbeliever and the transgressor (fasiq). The fourth section consists of six articles discussing the imam, the imamate and the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (al-Taftazani, 1998, vol. 2, pp. 149, 221–222).

It must be stressed here that, although each of the scholars of the field followed his own preferred path in dividing the doctrinal issues by themes, these approaches gave rise to no contradiction or problem whatsoever.

The question of separating doctrinal issues from juridical (fiqhi) ones, however, gave rise to serious debates and mutual contradictions, a state of affairs that may be observed even today. In expounding the issues within a particular theme in his works on the science of kalam, Sa’d al-Din al-Taftazani used mainly the “question-and-answer” method. Accordingly, the scholar spoke as follows about the reason for the inclusion of certain juridical issues among the doctrinal sources:

“If it be said: these cited issues (such as praying behind a sinful person as imam, or wiping over leather socks) belong to the branches of jurisprudence (furu‘ al-fiqh), and there is no ground for citing them in the principles of kalam (usul al-kalam); and if it be meant that belief in their correctness is here held to be obligatory, then, on that basis, must not all the issues of usul al-fiqh likewise be included in the science of kalam?”

“We answer thus: certain issues of the branches of jurisprudence and in part issues connected with doctrine that distinguish the People of the Sunna and the Community (Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama‘a) from the people of innovation and caprice, namely the Mu‘tazila, the Shia, the philosophers, the unbelievers and the others who have gone astray, have been cited within the doctrinal works by way of warning” (al-Taftazani, 1998, vol. 3, pp. 157–161).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it may be said that, in “Sharh al-Maqasid,” Sa‘d al-Din al-Taftazani divided the doctrinal issues into six chapters “al-mabadi,” “al-umur al-amma,” “a‘rad,” “jawhar,” “ilahiyyat” and “sam‘iyyat” and called them “aims” (maqсад). These chapters are in turn divided into sections and articles, in which the issues relating to each theme are studied on the basis of scriptural text (the Noble Qur’an and hadith) and rational reflection, and appropriate conclusions are drawn. The book is also recognised as one of the most important sources within the framework of the Hanafi-Maturidi school. In truth, the precise method and guidance the scholar applied in distinguishing doctrinal from juridical issues alone suffices to provide, on a scientific basis, a refutation of the false claims of certain deviant sects that exist even today.

Moreover, when “Sharh al-Maqasid” is studied, one becomes a witness that it is an important source not only on the science of kalam, the history of the various deviant sects and their false views, but also in such exact and natural sciences as mathematics, geometry, physics, chemistry and astronomy. That the issues it raises in the field of these sciences are today recognised as scientific discoveries is the second important aspect of the subject for the scholar had affirmed, on the basis of transmitted (the Noble Qur’an and hadith) and rational proofs six centuries ago, the very knowledge that is now being re-confirmed by experiment.

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