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Standard Works in the Age of Classical Theology of Sunnite Islam (7th/13th to 13th/19th Centuries)

Abstract

In the world of Sunnite Islam, from at least the 7th/13th to the 13th/19th centuries, teaching and studying of the theological disciplines (*al-ʿulūm al-dīniyyah/al-ʿulūm al-islāmīyah/al-ʿulūm al-sharʿīyah*) and other subjects has been taking its point of departure from an open set of books which have been used for this purpose over vast geographical areas and long periods of time. Therefore, their contents can be regarded as highly representative for the respective branches of science. On account of this feature, they are called here standard works. It will be shown how to identify such standard works, and that their contents can be utilized to learn about teachings of Sunnite theology which are in terms of intellectual history highly representative, and that standard works are not normative by themselves but are an important source for what has been deemed normative or valid.

Keywords: Intellectual history of Sunnite Islam; theology of Sunnite Islam; standard works for Sunnite theology; normativity in Sunnite theology; basic features of Sunnite theology; reason and revelation

1 The Aim of this Article

In order to provide a preliminary context for the subject of this article¹, we may have a look at a passage of a theological text which originated in the first century of the period in question: In the introduction to his commentary *Talkhīṣ al-muḥaṣṣal* on Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Rāzī’s (born 543/1149 in Rayy, died 606/1209)² *Muḥaṣṣal ‘afkār al-mutaqaddimīn wa-l-muta’akhhirīn* we find Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī (born 11 Jumādā I 597/17 February 1201 in Ṭūs, died 18 Dhū l-Ḥijjah 672/25 June 1274 in Baghdad)³ giving the following interesting statement:

The theological sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-dīnīyah*) are all built on the science of dogmatics (*‘ilm ṛuṣūl al-dīn*) whose propositions are required to be certain, and it is not possible to understand sciences like *ṛuṣūl al-fiqh* and *al-fiqh* without it, because one who occupies himself [p.61] with them, even if he assumes their principles without proof, needs to begin with it first that he may not be as one who erects a building without grounding, as one who is not able to produce an argument or a syllogism if he is asked about what he believes.

Indeed in this time in which no efforts are spent on the cognition of the truth by precise investigation, and the right path is lost, as there are no real researchers or people who honestly strive for virtue, as if the nature of the humans was made ignorant and debased, except a few who are shooting their arrows in the dark night and are straying around like blind camels, and in which the books on dogmatics that are used widely (*al-kutubu llatī yatadāwalūnahā min ‘ilmi l-ṛuṣūli*) are not useful and do not contain the formulation of the true principles, besides the book *al-Muḥaṣṣal* whose name⁴ does not match its content and whose exposition does not lead to what it promises, while they are thinking that it is sufficient for this science, and can heal the illnesses of ignorance (*al-jahl*) and belief on behalf of authority (*al-taqlīd*), however in fact it presents useful as well as useless discussions in great numbers, and who relies on it does not gain certainty at all, but it leaves those who search for truth by studying it as if they were thirsty people who reached a mirage so that the one who is wavering in its different paths is rendered hopeless of finding the truth.

Therefore, I decided to unveil its hidden new ideas, to explain the mistakes in its errors, to guide to its useless and its helpful discussions, and to show what has to be investigated in its skepticism and its certainty, even if some erudite people have spent efforts to elucidate [p. 62] and explain it, while others have tried to refute its propositions mostly not doing it justice by not being impartial [...] (al-Ṭūsī, 1440 A.H./1397 h.sh., 60–62)⁵

¹ The origin of this article is a paper delivered on 08 Oct. 2021 at the conference “Canon and Censorship in the Islamic Intellectual and Theological History” held in Berlin on behalf of the “Berliner Institut für Islamische Theologie” of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, the “Schweizerische Zentrum für Islam und Gesellschaft” of Université de Fribourg, and the “Akademie für Islam in Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft (AIWG)” of Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main. Many thanks to all the participants who gave their most valuable comments.

² For his biography see for example Anawati, 1965, 751b, 752b.

³ For him see Daiber, 2000, the dates of his birth and death are mentioned on p. 746a.

⁴ It seems that in this title the word *al-muḥaṣṣal* means something like “the fruit” or “the essence” if we assume that the title can be interpreted as denoting that the author Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī or some other person has meant it as pointing to the fact that it was al-Rāzī’s intention to include in it the most basic and important propositions of the science of dogmatics, as he mentions at the beginning of his work: “Some erudite scholars have asked me to write an epitome on dogmatics (*‘ilm al-kalām*) that contains the basic principles without the discussions which are inferred from them and without those which are of a more supplementary character, therefore I composed this book [...]”

أما بعد: فقد التمس مبي جمع من أفاضل العلماء وأمائل الحكماء أن أصيّف لهم مختصرًا في علم الكلام، مشتملاً على أحكام الأصول والقواعد، دون التفاريع والزوائد، فصنّفْتُ لهم هذا المختصر [...] (al-Ṭūsī, 1440 A.H./1397 h.sh., 63).

⁵ For comparison with the translation see the original text:

وبعد: فإنَّ أساس العلوم الدنيَّة على علم أصول الدين، الذي يحوم مسائلها حول اليقين، ولا ينمُّ بدونه الخوض في سائرها - كأصول الفقه وفروعه - فإنَّ الشروع في جميعها محتاج إلى تقديم شروعه، حتَّى لا يكون الخائض [ص ٦١] فيها - وإن كان مقلِّداً لأصولها - كيان على غير أساس، وإذا سُئل عمَّا هو عليه لم يقدر على إيراد حجَّة أو قياس. وفي هذا الزمان لما انصرفت الهمم عن تحصيل الحقِّ بالتحقيق، وزلَّت الأقدام

Besides his criticism of his contemporaries and possibly also near contemporaries with regard to their efforts and competence, even of the book on which he is going to write a commentary, which will not be discussed here, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī mentions four items that are of interest for the present investigation:

1. He says that there is a set of theological sciences of which he mentions three by name
2. These sciences are constituting a system because with regard to each other they are linked with each other in a certain way as he says that all the theological sciences are erected upon dogmatics
3. That the propositions of dogmatics are required to attain the epistemological status of certainty
4. That there are books for dogmatics that are widely used for the study of this discipline

An idea that can be inferred from the last item, namely that there are not only books for dogmatics that have been used widely for teaching and study, but for other theological and likely for profane disciplines as well, will be in the center of this article, and it will be shown that there are such books for all the disciplines of theology, and that they can be considered as sources for representative information about the kind of contents that are mentioned in the first three items in the preceding list, for example.

There can be found many scattered statements in publications in the field of Islamic studies and by those who have acquaintance with some kind of a more or less traditional institution of Islamic learning that there are certain textbooks for different branches of the sciences,⁶ but, according to the knowledge of the author of the present article, earlier researchers who have paid attention to that fact in a more systematic way are G.M.D. Sufi in his monograph *al-Minhāj Being the Evolution of the Curriculum in the Muslim Educational Institutions of Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*⁷ from 1941, Seyyed Hossein Nasr who is referring mainly to the Shiite context in *Chapter Ten: The Traditional Texts Used in the Persian Madrasahs* of his *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*,⁸ published first 1987, Maria Eva Subtelny and Anas B. Khalidov in their article “*The Curriculum of Islamic Higher Learning in Timurid Iran in the Light of the Sunni Revival under Shāh-Rukh*” from the year 1995, Francis Robinson in his article “*Ottomans – Safavids – Mughals: Shared Knowledge and Connective Systems*”, and Jamal Malik in his monograph *Islamische Gelehrtenkultur in Nordindien*, which were both published in 1997.

They all are referring to lists of books that have been or are taught in *madrasas*, but the character and genesis of these lists is not discussed in greater detail due to the lack of relevant sources regarding such information except the cases in the articles of Nasr as well as Subtelny and Khalidov.⁹ All these works,

عن سواء الطريق، بحيث لا يوجد راغب في العلم ولا خاطب للفضيلة، وصارت الطباع كأنها مجبولة على الجهل والرذيلة، اللهم إلا بقية يرمون فيما يرمونه رمية رام في ليلة ظلماء، ويخبطون فيما ينحون نحوه خبط عشواء، ولم يبق في الكتب التي يتداولونها من علم الأصول عياناً ولا خبر، ولا من تمهيد القواعد الحقيقية عينٌ ولا أثر، سوى كتاب «المحصل» الذي اسمه غير مطابق لمعناه، وبيانه غير موصل إلى دعواه، وهم يحسبون أنه في ذلك العلم كافٍ، وعن أمراض الجهل والتقليد شافٍ، والحق أن فيه من الغيب والسمين ما لا يحصى، والمعتمد عليه في إصابة اليقين بطائل لا يحظى، بل يجعل طالب الحق بنظره فيه كعطشان يصل إلى السراب، ويصير المتحيز في الطرق المختلفة أيساً عن الظفر بالصواب. رأيت أن أكشف القناع عن وجوه أبحار مخدراته، وأبين الخلل في مكامن شبهاته، وأدل على غيبه وسمينه، وأبين ما يجب أن يُبحث عنه في شكه ويقينه. وإن كان قد اجتهد قومٌ من الأفاضل في إيضاحه [ص ٦٢] وشرحه، وقومٌ في نقض قواعده وجرحه، ولم يجر أكثرهم على قاعدة الإنصاف، ولم تخل بياناتهم عن الميل والاعتساف [...]

⁶ Mohaghegh, 1978, 762b, end of first paragraph, for example, says, that a certain work on logic written in the 8th/14th century “is still in use as a text book in traditional Islamic schools”. This statement of Mohaghegh is referred to by Bakker, 2012a, 712.

⁷ The attention of the author of the present article has been drawn to this book by Malik, 1997, 522, footnote 1, and Robinson, 1997, 181.

⁸ The attention of the author of this article has been drawn to this text by Robinson, 1997, 177.

⁹ Nasr, 1994, 166, says that the annotated list he refers to has been written in the year 1938 by a scholar who has been studying and teaching in *madrasas*, and has been asked by another former student in this system to compile such a list. Nasr is of the opinion that this annotated list is “reflecting the practice of Persian *madrasahs* for the several centuries which preceded the composition of the treatise in 1938.”

according to their goals of study, look at these sets of textbooks as a whole to illustrate some developments, as Sufi, Malik, Robinson, and Subtelny and Khalidov, or to document the information as such, as Nasr, and do not use contents of the mentioned books.

Furthermore, John Voll says in his article from 1994 *“Islam as a Special World-System”* that there have been certain books on *Ḥadīth*, *al-fiqh*, and “the other major disciplines” which constituted “a canonical syllabus” for the scholars all over the Islamic world, and which he calls “a standard set of works”, and adduces this fact as further evidence for his thesis of the Islamic world as a very large discourse-based network (Voll, 1994, 223; see also Bakker, 2012a, 703–704).

The approach of using some sorts of book lists which are connected to the practice of studying and teaching the theological disciplines in order to identify books that have been used for longer periods and in larger areas seems to be confirmed by the statement of the famous South Asian scholar Shāh Walīy Allāh Ḥamad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Dihlawī (born on the 4 Shawwāl 1114 [21 Febr. 1702] in Phalit, a small town near to Delhi, died on the 29 al-Muḥarram 1176 [20 Aug. 1762] in Delhi, for his name and biographical data see Husain, 1912, 161, 167; Baljon, 1986, 1, 14; Bazmee Ansari, 1965, 254a–b; and Bakker, 2012a, 734),¹⁰ in his autobiographical piece *“al-Juz’ al-laṭīf fī tarjamat al-‘abd al-ḡa’īf”* which contains also a list of books which he had studied in the earlier years of his education and which he introduces with the words:

However, in my fifteenth year, I completed my studies in all the current subjects in accordance with the custom of this country. (Husain, 1912, 163)¹¹

In the following, Shāh Walīy Allāh al-Dihlawī mentions the disciplines he has studied, always naming the books for the disciplines which he has used for studying (Husain, 1912, 163–165: English translation, 172: Persian original).¹² This statement clearly indicates that there has been an established customary set of disciplines and books that had been studied, even if the time span of this custom is not mentioned by Shāh Walīy Allāh al-Dihlawī, and possibly not known to him.

Taking its point of departure from the mentioned publications and their idea of a certain set of texts that have been taught in *madrasas* over long periods of time and on a large geographical scale, the aim of the present article is

- To show a supplementary method to find out works that have been used on a wide scale in time and space for teaching and study of the theological sciences in the framework of Sunnite Islam
- To explain how these works achieved this status, and
- To outline their importance as sources for identifying concepts and ideas that have been widely accepted during a very long period of time and therefore can be considered normative for theology and religion in general.

To reach this threefold aim, there have been mostly summarized the results of earlier research, mainly published in German, and some new evidence and perspectives have been added.

¹⁰ Dates which are encircled by squared brackets are calculated according to the tables of Birashk, 1993, dates without squared brackets are taken from the mentioned source.

¹¹ The Persian original runs as follows (Husain, 1912, 172):

بالجمله از فنون متعارفه بحسب رسم این دیار بسال پانزدهم فراغ حاصل شد

See also Bakker, 2012a, 734.

¹² For a short discussion of this text see Bakker, 2012a, 734–735.

2 The Concept of “Standard Work” and the Function of Standard Works

The kind of books that have been in use as textbooks for long periods of time and in large areas of the Islamic world shall be called here “standard works” as has been done in earlier publications of the author of this article.¹³ The present exposition mainly summarizes earlier research of its author, adds some new evidence, and stresses some of his findings in a slightly different way.

The following propositions about the issue of standard works which are seen here as the outcome of the supplementary method alluded to above are summarizing some results of the exposition in the fourth part of the authors *Normative Grundstrukturen*. In that study there have been examined mainly historiographic compendia, in a closer way almost solely *‘Ajā’ib al-‘āthār fī l-tarājim wa-l-akhbār* of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan al-Jabartī¹⁴ (lived from 1167/1753–1241/1825 in Cairo).¹⁵ But if one looks into other works of this kind covering another or the same period he can observe similar phenomena.¹⁶

al-Jabartī includes in his work numerous biographical articles of scholars who have died in the 12th century A.H. and continues into the 13th century A.H. until the year 1233 A.H. where he provides the last biographical article on a scholar (al-Jabartī, 2013, IV: 294) which means that he covers with regard to scholarly activities a time reaching fairly back into the 11th century A.H., and stretching forth into the first third of the 13th century A.H. (Bakker, 2012a, 31–32).

These biographical articles on scholars display plenty of information about their activities, and with regard to theology and its teaching, as well as for the profane sciences, three categories of information can be detected:¹⁷

1. Names of teachers and their students (for example Bakker, 2012a, 356–357, 720, 732). This category can be easily observed by a superficial look into the many biographical articles on scholars in al-Jabartī’s work or similar compendia.

¹³ The designation “standard works” for this kind of books has been used by the author of this article for the first time 2012a, 18–19, 701, 723 f, 729 f, 735–737, 743, 747–749, see also the index of that work under “Standardwerk” on p. 1016. The term “standard work” in the sense in which it is used in this article has been employed before, as mentioned above, by Voll, and earlier, for example, by Haarmann, 1984, 328, where he says: “We learn about the library, i. e. about the literary and intellectual interests, not of a famous scholar or of a much envied and emulated bibliophile, but of an average ‘college teacher’ in a provincial town in the Burjī era. The number of copies of certain standard works can be used as a clue for a better knowledge of the reading lists and teaching programs in *madāris* and Šūfī convents in this period.” But Haarmann, due to the aim of his article, does not engage in establishing a list of standard works.

¹⁴ Edited by the late Shmuel Moreh. This critical edition has been published in 2013. The author had used this edition in his previous research before it had been published. There is also a complete English translation of the work by Philipp and Perlmann supplemented by a “Guide” volume. The other persons who have participated in this translation project are mentioned in the “Guide” volume on p. 11. If in the following it is referred to al-Jabartī’s Chronicle the volume and page numbers of the first Būlāq printing from the years 1879–80 AD are given which are provided continuously in the edition of Moreh as well as in the translation of Philipp and Perlmann (see Philipp & Perlmann, 1994, III: 1, 12, 387).

¹⁵ For al-Jabartī, his work, and the project of its critical edition see the article of Moreh, 2001; see also Bakker, 2012a, 20 with footnote 3.

¹⁶ For the importance of al-Jabartī’s chronicle for the investigation of the author of this article see Bakker, 2012a, 36, 704–705, 749. Bakker, 2012a, 704, some other such historiographic works dealing with the 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th centuries A.H. are mentioned. For the importance of al-Jabartī’s chronicle and the similarity with other historiographic works with regard to displaying the same categories of information see also Bakker; 2012a, 749.

¹⁷ The appearance of these three categories of information is demonstrated in the first section of part four of Bakker, 2012a, 701–750, see also 36–37. For the reference to some passages in al-Jabartī’s work which contain comparatively many details concerning the three categories see for example Bakker, 2012a, 732–734, 736–737, and also 36–37, 508, 840–841.

2. Names of books which have been taught (Bakker, 2012a, 705–707, 718, 719, 723, 729, 731, 748–749), studied (see for example Bakker, 2012a, 719, 728, 729–731, 734–735, 741, 748–749),¹⁸ memorized (see for example Bakker, 2012a, 731, 736–742, 748–749), commented upon (see for example Bakker, 2012a, 718, 719, 723, 726–728, 730, 731, 734–735, 737, 742–743, 748–749), or reworked¹⁹
3. Names of scientific disciplines (see for example Bakker, 2012a, 705–709, 715–716, 734–735)

Because there are no other categories of information about the framework within which theology is operated, it can be concluded that there are no other items besides teachers and students, widely used books, and generally acknowledged scientific disciplines, as for example a certain institution which is clearly defined in terms of persons and an institutional structure, which can be regarded as a most basic normative moment for Sunnite theology.²⁰ By a most basic normative moment is meant a phenomenon which cannot be summarized under a more general concept insofar it is considered as a moment which constitutes theology; for example, teachers and students are more specific than human beings, but “human being” is too general to be a normative moment for theology, so the most common concept with regard to constituting theology is the phenomenon of teacher and student.²¹ And because in the biographical material that has been examined by the author of this article there can be found no other properties of those who operate theology with regard to qualifying them to be theologians other than having been studying with teachers, it can be concluded that there are no other factors which narrow down the phenomenon of teacher and student to a less general one which in its turn would be the most general moment that is normative to constituting theology as for example being the member of a certain institution or hierarchy.²²

In many biographical articles in al-Jabartī’s work, the context of the mentioning of books which have been taught or studied is indicative of the existence of a certain more or less defined set of books that have been customarily in use for that purpose.²³ As an example for such a context may serve a very short passage from a biographical article on a scholar which has been understood also by Philipp and Perlmann as referring to standard works:

He taught *al-Manhaj* many times as well as most of the other books. One generation after the other benefited from him. (al-Jabartī, 2013, I: 286–287)²⁴

¹⁸ If here “study” is mentioned separately from “teaching” it is just meant that in the respective biographical article it is mentioned, that somebody has studied a certain text with a teacher which means that study implies also teaching. “Teaching” means that in a biographical article it is mentioned that somebody has taught a certain text without mentioning the names of students.

¹⁹ See for example Bakker, 2012a, 719, where a reference is given to al-Jabartī’s mentioning that a text on grammar has been versified, and p. 730 where is referred to the writing of a shorter version of a text. For a short discussion of this point see also Bakker, 2012a, 736, 748.

²⁰ That such a clear cut institution which plays a normative role for form or content of theology does not exist in Sunnite Islam has, of course, been observed before by many researchers in the field of Islamic studies; see for example Tamari, 1999, 94–95, who is referred to by Bakker, 2012a, 35, and Berkey, 1992, 18, 23–24, 33–36, 44, who is referred to by Bakker, 2012a, 353–355. With regard to this proposition as one of the main results of Bakker, 2012a, see 356–357, 749, 840–841, 844, 846, 849–853; and Bakker, 2013, 181 with footnote 9.

²¹ For the concept of a most basic normative moment for theology see Bakker, 2012a, 18, 33–35, 849, and the “Index ausgewählter Begriffe”, 1007, under “normative Grundstruktur” and “normative Grundstrukturen für die Theologie”.

²² To be more precise, there is an additional moment which consists in a kind of ritual acts which emulate ritually some aspects of the situation of the prophet teaching his people to authorize a pupil by his teacher in order that the pupil is entitled to authorize his pupils to authorize their pupils to authorize others and so forth. But the competence to perform these ritual acts is not bound to any institution but only rests in the fact that someone who has been authorized to authorize by someone has authorized someone other. For this ritual structure see Bakker, 2012a, 504–506, where the results of the second part of the study which deals with this phenomenon are summarized. Because there is no ample space in the framework of this article, this authorizational structure will not be discussed here.

²³ Some passages which convey this fact are cited, referred to, or commented by Bakker, 2012a, 705–720, 729–730, 736–743.

²⁴ The original runs as follows:

That a certain and well-known set of books is meant by the definite phrase “the other books” in the expression “most of the other books” seems to be obvious. Also, it seems to be likely that these well-known books are exactly what is meant here by standard works, i. e. well known and widely used books for teaching and study. Philipp and Perlmann indicating thereby that they have made the same observation and applying it to the interpretation of this passage translate it as following:

He gave lectures several times on *al-Manhaj*, as well as on most (standard) books. Class after class [I, 287] and generation after generation of students profited from his teaching.

As additional evidence for the existence of standard works and for certain books being standard works can be adduced the multiple occurrence of the same books in contexts significant for standard works as listed above, i. e. teaching, studying, that they have been memorized, commented upon or reworked.²⁵

If it comes to the question how a book achieves the status of a standard work the chronicle of al-Jabartī is also able to provide an answer: There can be found statements that certain texts became standard works because they were widely accepted by the community of teachers and students. This means that these books did not have a canonical status nor did they become standard works by some external factors but only because they proved suitable for teaching and studying of some contents that have been deemed worthy of study (see for example Bakker, 2012a, 735 (last line)–736, 749, 843), as can be seen from the following statement in the biographical article in al-Jabartī’s *‘Ajā’ib al-‘āthār* on the scholar ‘Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ b. Yūsuf al-Mallawī al-Shāfi‘ī al-‘Azharī (born 2 Ramaḍān 1088 [29 Oct. 1677], died 15 Rabī‘ I 1181 [11 Aug. 1767] in Kairo; for his biography see al-Jabartī, 2013, I: 286–287):

His [i. e. ‘Aḥmad al-Mallawī’s] works are well-known and widely accepted. The students are using them and the teachers are teaching them. (al-Jabartī, 2013, I: 287)²⁶

There can be found other statements by al-Jabartī which confirm that standard works are achieving their status by being accepted by teachers and students for being useful for learning certain contents that are deemed important (Bakker, 2012a, 723–725). For an example from a biographical compendium on the 11th century A.H. see Bakker, 2012a, 728, footnote 62.

From the fact that certain books have been standard works, i. e. that they have been taught, studied, memorized, commented upon and reworked because they were deemed useful for teaching and studying, it is evident that they are an important source for the modern researcher for what has been seen as normative or at least worthy of being discussed and taken seriously into consideration by those who occupied themselves with theology, at least for Sunnite Islam and in the dimensions of time and space in which these standard works were used (Bakker, 2012a, 748–749, 844). And it has become also obvious that the standard works are a normative moment for theology not by themselves or by an external factor to which one has to refer as a source for normativity, as it would be, for example, the case with a kind of holy book or a document issued by an institution which is qualified to determine what is normative, but are just a valued expression of what was seen as relevant and valid (Bakker, 2012a, 749, 844).

أقرأ المنهج مرارًا وكذا غالب الكتب وانتفع به الناس طبقة بعد [ص ٢٨٧] طبقة

This passage is cited in Bakker, 2012a, 709, and discussed in the mentioned respect 709 f.

²⁵ For the discussion of this point see for example Bakker, 2012a, 734–735, 748–749, and the list of standard works for the theological disciplines in the second section of part four (pp. 752–839) where for every standard work is given the evidence that substantiates the claim that it is a standard work.

²⁶ Another English version of this passage can be found in the translation of Philipp and Perlmann. The original text runs as follows:

ومؤلفاته مشهورة مقبولة متداولة بأيدي الطلبة ويدرسونها الأشياخ

A German translation of this sentence is given in Bakker, 2012a, 723.

3 Some Most Basic Features of Sunnite Theology Gathered from Standard Works

After the importance of standard works as a source to identify what has been relevant and valid in terms of theology has been established as such, some basic outlines of the theology represented by them shall be described to form a kind of idea of its overall features, and to provide some premises to gauge its extension in time. To achieve this goal, it is first necessary to explain briefly how the standard works which are the sources which have been used to gather such highly representative contents of theology have been identified.

As has been shown above, the chronicle of al-Jabartī provides plenty of information about standard works in different fields of the theological and profane sciences stretching from the 11th to the first third of the 13th centuries A.H. This information is not confined to a specific geographical space only, even if the focus of al-Jabartī is on Egypt, or even on Cairo, because many of the scholars of whom he has included biographical articles in his work are from abroad and came to Cairo, as for example from Syria, Palestine, North Africa or Yemen, or have been traveling abroad (Bakker 2012a, 751).²⁷

But to cover a wider geographical sphere, the lists of books given in the afore mentioned publications of Sufi,²⁸ Malik,²⁹ and Husain³⁰ which refer to South Asia, and the list provided by Robinson, 1997, 174–177, which refers to the Ottoman Empire have been used (Bakker, 2012a, 751 with footnotes 96 and 97, and 752), and a curriculum of standard works for all basic theological disciplines which, of course, does not include all standard works of the 12th/18th century was established by gathering and identifying the titles of books which are mentioned by al-Jabartī in contexts indicative for standard works as teaching and studying, commenting upon, memorizing, or reworking, and by checking if they also occur in the lists given by Shāh Walīy Allāh al-Dihlawī (Husain, 1912), Sufi, Malik, and Robinson (Bakker, 2012a, 749–752).³¹ The result of this process is presented in the second section of part four of Bakker, 2012a, 752–839, in form of an annotated list organized by theological disciplines where for every book a short identification and a detailed evidence for its being a standard work is given.

The use of the Chronicle of al-Jabartī, and, by analogy, of other sources of this kind for identifying standard works to reinforce the evidence given by lists of standard works is the supplementary method to find out standard works whose description has been promised in the introduction of this article as one of its goals. The benefit of this method is that it provides strong evidence that the books which have been identified in this way have in fact been standard works in the above-mentioned sense and therefore are most likely sources for highly representative ideas of theology of the respective period.³²

²⁷ Concerning evidence for information in al-Jabartī's work on scholarly activities outside Egypt see for example Bakker, 2012a, 706, 708, 742.

²⁸ By this is meant the curriculum of books which is called *dars-e nezāmī*, see Sufi, 1981, 71–75.

²⁹ The lists Malik, 1997, 522–529, and Robinson, 1997, 181–184, are providing are also the *dars-e nezāmī*. The three versions of this list are differing only in a very few points (Bakker, 2012a, 751, footnote 96).

³⁰ This is the list of the above-mentioned South-Asian scholar from the 12th/18th century, Shāh Walīy Allāh al-Dihlawī; see Husain, 1912, 163–165 (English translation), 172 (Persian original).

³¹ Finding and identifying these books in al-Jabartī's chronicle was made possible by the indices of personal names and books of the critical edition of Moreh which have been prepared by the author of this article (see for example Bakker, 2012a, 20–21, 841).

³² The main goal of identifying standard works through the chronicle of al-Jabartī in Bakker, 2012a, was to prove that the most basic structures of theology which first have been derived from systematic expositions of the whole system of sciences or of a main part of it and which stem from the end of the 5th/11th to the 10th/16th centuries (see pp. 507–626, the first section of part three) are congruent with the system which can be gleaned from standard works of the 12th/18th century, and that therefore these basic structures of the system of theology which stretch from the 5th/11th to the 10th/16th centuries have been the prevailing basic structures in the world of Sunnite theology of the 12th/18th century. This task has been accomplished in the second section of part three (pp. 626–696). For a summing up discussion of this method see pp. 624–625. Furthermore, from the result that

The set of standard works which has been gathered by this method has been used as a group of sources to identify basic notions which shape the theology which is represented by them in terms of form and content (part three of Bakker, 2012a, 625–696).³³ Some of these basic notions which, in a further step, will be helpful to estimate the extension in time of this highly representative form of theology shall be described here:

As a basic feature by which form and content of the theology³⁴ displayed by the standard works of the 12th/18th century can be characterized in a fundamental way is that it is to be classified as a scientific theology and perceives itself explicitly as such as can be gleaned from the following four points:³⁵

1. it integrates itself with the profane sciences into one paradigm of sciences (Bakker, 2012a, 521–522, 525–526, 569–582, 595–596, 628–636; 2013, 183)
2. applies the same epistemology as the profane sciences³⁶
3. applies the same theory of science as the profane sciences³⁷ and
4. proves the veracity of revelation only with rational arguments (Bakker, 2012a, 201–218; 2012b, 202–203; 2013, 188–189; 2015, 42–51; and the article Heer, 1993)

Also the names of the eight basic disciplines, their definitions, and the structure of theology as a system of disciplines with a certain relationship between each other can be determined on the basis of standard works.³⁸ Moreover, it can be shown that this paradigm of theology has been prevailing in the Sunnite world at least from the 7th/13th to the 13th/19th centuries, and that it has been extant at least from the 5th/11th century onwards.³⁹ This form of Sunnite theology has been termed “classical theology of Sunnite Islam” because of its being almost solely predominating for the yet longest period of the history of Sunnite theology and its character as an explicitly scientific theology (Bakker, 2021a, 624–625).

Because the framework of this article does not allow to deal with all these topics in any further detail, we will look only at some points which can be related to the passage from the book on dogmatics from the 7th/13th century which has been cited at the beginning of this article, and which will be pertinent to illustrate the claim of the extension in time of the prevailing of this kind of theology:

historiographic works which provide biographical information confirm the testimony of lists of standard works it seems to be appropriate to conclude that the method of systematically using this kind of biographic information to corroborate the evidence of different kinds of lists of standard works for being indeed indicative for works that have been standard works is a valid method. For another summary of this method and its general applicability see for example Bakker, 2012a, 840–843, 847.

³³ One of the basic disciplines of theology, the science of the principles of the science of *Ḥadīth* (*al-muṣṭalah*), is not dealt with in part three, but in part two (Bakker, 2012a, 77–99).

³⁴ The whole of theology is called by the sources which have been used for the investigation *al-ʿulūm al-dīniyah*, *al-ʿulūm al-ʾislāmīyah*, and *al-ʿulūm al-sharʿīyah*. For instances of these designations in standard works see the “Index ausgewählter Begriffe” under the respective keyword in Bakker, 2012a, 1020; see also Bakker, 2018, 263, footnote 8.

³⁵ For the four following points see also Bakker, 2018, 262–263.

³⁶ With regard to the epistemology which is applied by this form of Sunnite theology see Bakker, 2012a, 100–234 (§ 2.2.4.2), and with regard to the comparison with the epistemology of the profane sciences see especially 158–159, 628–636.

³⁷ Concerning the theory of science which is applied by this form of Sunnite theology see Bakker, 2012a, 516–519, 613–621, and the “Index ausgewählter Begriffe” sub “Wissenschaftstheorie” (p. 1026).

³⁸ For the system of theology which is represented in the standard works which have been investigated, see Bakker, 2012a, 77–99 (on the disciplines which are dealing with the *Ḥadīth*), 536–600, 626–699, summarized on pp. 696–699; a very brief overview of this system mentioning the names and definitions of the eight basic disciplines, and alluding to their functions and their relationship with each other which summarizes results of Bakker, 2012a, in English can be found in Bakker, 2012b, 188; a little more expanded summary of these points is given in Bakker, 2013, 183–188; see also Bakker, 2018, p. 263, footnote 8.

³⁹ With regard to the concept of “classical theology of Sunnite Islam” and its dimensions in time and space see Bakker, 2012a, § 3.3.4 (601–626), 695–696 (end of § 3.3.5.2), 765–767 (§ 4.2.3, no 2) and 847 (end of § 4.3); Bakker, 2012b, 188; Bakker, 2013, 179–192, 181, 182–183 with footnote 13; Bakker, 2018, 262, with footnote 1.

Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī says that the propositions of the science of dogmatics require to be certain, and the same is demanded in a standard work of the 12th/18th century on dogmatics, *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*, which has been written by Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd b. 'Umar al-Taftāzānī (born Ṣafar 722/Feb.–Mar. 1322 in Taftāzān in Khurāsān, died 22 al-Muḥarram 793/30 Dec. 1390 in Samarkand; for his life see Madelung, 2000):

Dogmatics (*al-kalām*) is the science of the theoretical propositions of religion [which proves them] by proofs that yield certainty. (al-Taftāzānī, 1409/1989, I:163)⁴⁰

That this book has been a standard work in the 12th/18th century is shown by Bakker, 2012a, 753–754.

Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī says also that all theological disciplines are erected on dogmatics. The same understanding is expressed by standard works of the 12th/18th century, for example in the epitome of Jamāl al-Dīn 'Abū 'Amr 'Uthmān b. 'Umar Ibn al-Ḥājjib (born after 570/1174–5 in Esna in Upper Egypt, died 26 Shawwāl 646/11 Febr. 1249 in Alexandria, for his life see Fleisch, 1971, and Brockelmann, 1943, 367–373 (margin 303–306), 1937, 531–539) on the theological discipline of *'uṣūl al-fiqh* which has been a standard work of the 12th/18th century as has been shown by Bakker, 2012a, 765–767, 777.

But before turning our attention to the remarks of Ibn al-Ḥājjib, we will have a look into another standard work of the 12th/18th century, the commentary of 'Aḍud al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Aḥmad al-'Ījī (born probably after 680/1281 in 'Īj which is sited not far away from Shīrāz, and died there in 756/1355; see for his biography van Ess, 1971) on this work of Ibn al-Ḥājjib;⁴¹ in his introduction, al-'Ījī characterizes the science of *'uṣūl al-fiqh* briefly and describes the work of Ibn al-Ḥājjib:

As a providence for his servants, God the exalted revealed to them the practical norms, let them know the permitted and the forbidden, that their life in this world may succeed, and that they will be saved in the next world. But because he [i. e. God] knew that the practical norms are very numerous and their [i. e. the humans] ability would not suffice to comprehend them and keep hold of them, he connected them [i. e. the norms] with proofs [that entail certainty], as well as with indicators [that yield supposition], and designated a group which should derive them [i. e. the practical norms from their proofs and indicators].

He let them succeed to reduce them [i. e. the practical norms] to writing after deriving them from their respective sources. [p. 5] And because this [deriving] is subject to general rules and rests upon premises, they dedicated to these [rules and premises] a science in its own right which they called 'principles of practical theology' (*'uṣūl al-fiqh*) which is an important science whose outcome is to praise, which joins reason with cognition from revelation, and gathers principles and results from different sciences.⁴²

And in this field [i. e. *'uṣūl al-fiqh*] there have been written remarkable short and more elaborate works, but the epitome (*mukhtaṣar*) of the example for those who thrive to argue precisely, the great scholar Jamāl al-Millāh wa-l-Dīn 'Abū 'Amr 'Uthmān Ibn al-Ḥājjib al-Mālikī, may good encompass him with his mercy, stands out among them as the blaze of a red brown horse, as the light spot on the forehead of a black horse, [p. 106] and as the jewel of a necklace, as it has become quite famous, and the intelligent people of all countries have occupied themselves with it intensely, because it is not voluminous but full of knowledge, and elegant in style, but very difficult to understand, and its difficult passages are not comprehensible to every well versed.

⁴⁰ The original text runs as follows:

الكلام هو العلم بالعقائد الدينية عن الأدلة اليقينية

This definition is cited in Bakker, 2012a, 646, where a German translation is provided. Bakker 2012a, 646–652, the elaborate explanation of this definition by al-Taftāzānī himself is given in a German translation. By “theoretical propositions” are meant propositions which do not refer to norms for actions; for this see Bakker, 2012a, 647 (last line)–648.

⁴¹ For the commentary of al-'Ījī being a standard work, see Bakker, 2012a, 765–767, 777.

⁴² These two paragraphs are cited according to Bakker, 2012b, 199.

Many outstanding scholars have engaged in elucidating it, thereby disclosing many of its important secrets, but some difficulties remained unsolved [...] ⁴³

The statement of al-ʿĪjī who lived in the first half of the 8th/14th century that the epitome (*mukhtaṣar*) of Ibn al-Ḥājjib was well known in “all countries”, and that there had been written many commentaries on it, is obviously characterizing it as a standard work. Ibn al-Ḥājjib lived in the first half of the 7th/13th century, so that it can be estimated roughly that his epitome had achieved the status of a standard work already in 7th/13th century, possibly even during his life time. ⁴⁴

In another commentary on the *mukhtaṣar* of Ibn al-Ḥājjib, *Majmaʿ al-durar fī sharḥ al-mukhtaṣar* of Badr al-Dīn ʿAbū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAsʿad al-Tustarī al-Shāfiʿī who is said to have died between 732 A.H. and 737 A.H. (al-Rasīnī, 1439/2018, 75), and therefore may have lived somewhat earlier than al-ʿĪjī a similar statement regarding its publicity is found:

[...] And the epitome of the learned Ibn al-Ḥājjib, may God have mercy with him, is a short epitome which is very famous, and contains many important discussions; it has excelled the works of the other experts [p. 113] with regard to its publicity, so that it became like the sun at noon, and it is widely read and the thoughts are engaging with it. (al-Tustarī, 1439/2018, I: 112–113) ⁴⁵

After the role of the epitome of Ibn al-Ḥājjib as a standard work used on a wide geographical scale from the 7th/13th century onwards until at least the 12th/18th century has become sufficiently convincing, we shall return to the dependence of all theological disciplines on dogmatics which has been formulated in the text on this science of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī which has been cited at the beginning of this article. The respective statement of Ibn al-Ḥājjib shall be read together with its commentary by al-ʿĪjī which has been, as just mentioned, also a standard work; with regard to the prerequisites of the science of *ʿuṣūl al-fiqh* which is, as we have seen above, the discipline which is concerned with the rules which have to be applied to derive the practical norms of revelation from its respective sources, we can read the following statement:

{Its prerequisites are taken from dogmatics (*al-kalām*), [the sciences of] the Arabic language, and from the normative predicates; from dogmatics, because the sources of cognition for revelation as a whole are dependent on [our] knowledge of the exalted creator, and on the veracity of the messenger [of God] which in its turn is dependent on the proof [of the messengers veracity which is provided] by the miracle, from [the sciences of] the Arabic language, because sources of cognition of revelation as the book [i. e. the Qurʾān] and

⁴³ The two last paragraphs are translated into German in Bakker, 2012a, 746. For the original text see al-ʿĪjī, 1437/2016, I: 105–106 (nearly at the beginning of the text of the book):

وبعد فإن من عناية الله تعالى بالعباد أن شرع الأحكام، وبين الحلال والحرام سبباً يصلحهم في المعاش، وينجيبهم في المعاد، ولما علم كونها متكررة، وأن قوتهم قاصرة عن ضبطها منتشرة، ناطها بدلائل، وربطها بأمارات ومخايل، ورشح طائفة ممن اصطفاهم لاستنباطها، ووقفهم لتدوينها بعد أخذها من مأخذها ومناطقها. وكان لذلك قواعد كلية بها يتوصل، ومقدمات جامعة منها يتوصل، أفردوا لذلك علماً سموه «أصول الفقه»، فجاء علماً عظيم الخطر، محمود الأثر، يجمع إلى المعقول مشروغاً، ويتضمن من علوم شتى أصولاً وفروعاً. وقد صنفت فيه كتب معتبرة، وألفت زير مطولة ومختصرة، وإن «المختصر» للإمام العلامة قدوة المحققين جمال الملة والدين أبي عمرو عثمان بن الحاجب المالكي - تغمده الله بغفرانه - يجري منها مجرى الغرة من الكمية، والقرحة من الدهم [ص ١٠٦] والواسطة من العقد. وقد رزق حظاً وافياً من الاشتهار، فاستهتر به الأنكباء في جميع الأمصار أي استهتار، وذلك لصغر حجمه، وكثرة علمه، ولطافة نظمه. ولكنه مستعص على الفهم، لا يذل صغابه، ولا تسمح فُرُونُهُ لكل ذي علم. وقد شرحه غير واحد من الفضلاء، واشتغل بجله جمٌّ غفير من فحول العلماء، فأبرزوا جلائل الأسرار من أستاره، وقد بقيت الدقائق [...]

⁴⁴ For the evidence for Ibn al-Ḥājjib's epitome and the commentary of al-ʿĪjī being standard works, and the estimation of the period when the *mukhtaṣar* of Ibn al-Ḥājjib achieved this status see Bakker, 2012a, 695, 746–747, 765–767, 777, 843, 847.

⁴⁵ The original text runs as follows:

[...] وكان المختصر المنتمي إلى الفاضل ابن الحاجب - رحمة الله عليه - مختصراً صغير الحجم، مشهور الاسم، مشتقاً على مباحث جمّة، ومنظوماً على مسائل مهمة، فاق مصنفات القوم [ص ١١٣] بالاشتهار؛ حتى صار كالشمس وسط النهار، تداولته أيدي النظار، وجال في ميادينه جياذ الأفكار،

the *Sunnah* are in Arabic, and with regard to the normative predicates [the cognition of] their definition is meant so that they can be predicated. If [all this is] not [known] there would be a circular argument.⁴⁶

I [i. e. al-²Ījī] say: The prerequisites of this science are taken from dogmatics, from [the sciences of] the Arabic language, and from the normative predicates; from dogmatics, because the sources of cognition of revelation as a whole, namely the fact that the book, the *Sunnah*, and the consensus (*al-ʿijmāʿ*) are sources of cognition for revelation is dependent on [our] knowledge of the exalted creator, so that the speech which makes us responsible [to act according to the revealed norms] can be attributed to him, and then it is known that it is normative, and this [i. e. our knowledge of the creator] is dependent on the proofs that the world exists only since a certain period of time.

And also, it [i. e. the attribution of the practical norms to God] is dependent on the veracity of the messenger which depends on the proof of the miracle which depends on [our knowledge of] the impossibility that anything other than the power of God can cause it which depends on [our knowledge of] the creation of the acts [of the humans by God], [p. 112] on the proof for the knowledge [of God, i. e. that God knows everything] and for the will [i. e. that God has a will]. With regard to these propositions, belief on behalf of authority is not sufficient, because the beliefs [of different authorities] are contradictory, so that knowledge of this cannot be obtained [from belief on behalf of authority, because the different authorities hold contradictory beliefs]. (al-²Ījī, 1437/2016, I: 111–112)⁴⁷

From the exposition of Ibn al-Ḥājjib and its explanation by al-²Ījī it becomes clear why the whole of the disciplines which occupy themselves with revelation are depending on dogmatics: because it is dogmatics which proves the veracity of the messenger of God. And it becomes also clear, that this can only be achieved by purely rational proofs, even if this is not stated explicitly here by the word “reason”, but is obvious, for example, from the mentioning of “the proofs that the world exists only since a certain period of time”, i. e. for the timely nature of the world, which is a purely rational one,⁴⁸ and from the juxtaposition to belief on behalf of authority (*taqlīd*).⁴⁹ This reminds us of the fourth point of the above-mentioned general features of the theology that can be gleaned from standard works, namely that the veracity of revelation has to be proved solely by rational arguments.

On account of the cited text-passages we can see the congruence of the mentioned points in a standard work of the 12th/18th century which has also been a standard work of the 7th/13th century with another text of the 7th/13th century. This congruence illustrates the representativity and the extension in time and space of the basic structures of the theology displayed in standard works: The standard work of the 12th/18th which has been written in the 7th/13th century has also been a standard work of the century of its origin, so that we may conclude that it is representative not only for the 7th/13th and the 12th/18th centuries but for the whole

⁴⁶ The words of Ibn al-Ḥājjib are encircled by curly brackets.

⁴⁷ The original text runs as follows:

{وأما استمداده فمن الكلام والعربية والأحكام. وأما الكلام: فلتوقف الأدلة الكلية على معرفة الباري تعالى، وصدق المبلغ، وهو يتوقف على دلالة المعجزة. وأما العربية: فلأن الأدلة من الكتاب والسنة عربية. وأما الأحكام: فالمراد تصورهما، ليمكن إثباتها ونفيها، وإلا جاء الدور.} أقول: هذا العلم يستمد من الكلام ومن العربية ومن الأحكام. أما الكلام، فلتوقف الأدلة الكلية، أي الإجمالية، ككون الكتاب والسنة والإجماع حجة على معرفة الباري تعالى، ليمكن إسناد خطاب التكليف إليه، ويعلم لزومه حينئذ، وتتوقف على أدلة حدوث العالم. وأيضا أنه يتوقف على صدق المبلغ، وهو يتوقف على دلالة المعجزة عليه، ودلالاتها تتوقف على امتناع تأثير غير القدرة القديمة فيها، ويتوقف على قاعدة خلق الأعمال، [ص 112] وعلى إثبات العلم والإرادة، ولا تقليد في ذلك، لاختلاف العقائد، فلا يحصل به علم.

A German translation of this text of al-²Ījī is given in Bakker, 2012a, 206–206; 2015, 47–48; and 2018, 265–266.

⁴⁸ For this proof in a standard work of the 12th/18th to the 15th/21st centuries, see Bakker, 2018, 278–279. For a discussion of this proof, without reference to the 12th/18th century, see for example Faris 1963, 59–67, and the articles of Craig, 2018, Doko, 2018, and Mihirig, 2022.

⁴⁹ For the whole context of the rational proof for the veracity of the messenger of God as it is expounded in standard works, see Bakker, 2012a, 53–54, 201–218; 2015, 45–51; 2018, 265–268.

period from the 7th/13th to the 12th/18th centuries, if we exclude a highly improbable discontinuity within this period.

On the other hand, the representativity of the contents of a standard work for the period in which it has been a standard work is shown by the fact that it is in agreement with another text which has been written the 7th/13th century. So, the evidence for being representative resulting from being a standard work is corroborated by this instance of congruence between a standard work and another work having been written in the same era.

4 Results and Conclusions

By supplementing the recourse to lists of books which are said that they have been taught in *madrasas* by the method of gathering information from chronicles, it has been shown that there have been in Sunnite Islam from at least the 7th/13th to the beginning of the 13th/19th centuries open sets of books which have been used on large scales of time and space for teaching and studying theology, and which are therefore highly representative for contents that had been deemed normative or valid. These books have been termed standard works.

And it has also become clear that standard works do not achieve their position because of some external factors as the status of the author or being declared as such by a certain institution, but because they proved useful for teaching and studying. From this fact, it can be concluded that they do not constitute a canon in the strict sense of the term, but are sources for concepts and propositions that can be regarded as canonical in the sense of representative and widely accepted.

Furthermore, it has been shown that from such standard works there can be gleaned some basic structures which shape form and content of theology, and these basic structures have been named “classical theology of Sunnite Islam” because of its being almost solely prevailing for the yet longest period of history of Sunnite theology and its character as an explicitly scientific theology. Therefore, it can be further concluded that the canon in the sense of a yardstick is classical theology itself, i. e. the most basic or general structure of this system of theology.

As aspects of this most basic structure have been mentioned the claim that it is necessary to establish the veracity of revelation solely by reason, the applied epistemology and theory of science, the definitions of the basic disciplines of theology and the epistemic structure of this system of disciplines which entails the relationship between the disciplines. From this result it becomes obvious that standard works can serve as a source to identify concepts that have, in terms of intellectual history, a high importance and factual representativity for theology.

Adding to what has been discussed in the article, it can be said that using standard works, central concepts of this form of historically long term predominant Sunnite theology which have often been wrongly interpreted in Western Islamic studies can be clearly expounded in their historically highly representative form, as for example the meaning of *sharī‘ah* as intersubjectively comprehensible revelation (Bakker, 2012b), as well as some systematic discourses about the toleration of non-Islamic religious communities in an Islamic state (Bakker, 2010), or fundamental teachings about the centrality of welfare in Islamic religion and theology (Bakker, 2020).

Moreover, it can be concluded that knowledge of classical Sunnite theology is necessary for the study of the history of Islamic theology in general, because it provides a highly representative form of theology that can be used to gain a first point of reference if it is necessary to make a more or less valid statement of what

Sunnite theology has to say with regard to a certain question, and because it provides an object of comparison for other forms of Islamic theology. As one can imagine, there may be found many other reasons which render it necessary to study classical Sunnite theology by resorting to standard works.

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