THE CONTRIBUTION OF ABUL YUSR AL-PAZDAWI TO THE PAZDAVI SCHOOL OF KALAM

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Abstract. This article explores the contribution of Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi to the formation and development of the Pazdavi school of kalam within the Hanafi–Maturidi theological tradition. By analyzing classical sources and al-Pazdawi's own theological writings, particularly Uṣūl al-Din, the study examines his methodological approach, doctrinal positions, and intellectual engagement with competing theological schools. The findings reveal that al-Pazdawi played a crucial role in systematizing Maturidi theology, balancing rational argumentation with scriptural evidence, and enhancing the pedagogical clarity of kalam discourse. His contribution is best understood as a process of consolidation and refinement that strengthened the intellectual identity of the Pazdavi school and ensured its continuity within Sunni orthodoxy. The article argues that al-Pazdawi's legacy represents an important yet underappreciated dimension of the historical development of Islamic theology.

Introduction Introduction. Islamic theology (ʿilm al-kalam) emerged as a systematic intellectual discipline aimed at defending and rationally explaining the core tenets of Islamic faith in response to internal theological debates and external philosophical challenges. Within this tradition, various theological schools developed, each contributing distinct methodological approaches and doctrinal formulations. Among these, the Maturidi school of kalam occupies a prominent place, particularly in the intellectual history of Central Asia and the broader Islamic world. The Pazdavi (Pazdawi) school represents an important scholarly current within the Maturidi tradition, characterized by its balanced integration of rational argumentation and textual evidence.

One of the most influential figures associated with this school is Abul Yusr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Pazdawi (d. 493/1100), a distinguished theologian, jurist, and scholar of the Hanafi–Maturidi tradition. As a leading representative of the Pazdavi school of kalam, Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi played a crucial role in systematizing theological doctrines, refining methodological

principles, and responding to competing theological movements such as the Muʿtazila, Ashʿarites, and anthropomorphists. His works demonstrate a rigorous intellectual framework that combines logical reasoning with strong adherence to Qurʾanic and prophetic sources.

Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi's most notable contribution lies in his efforts to articulate theological positions in a clear, structured, and pedagogically accessible manner. Through his writings, he not only preserved the foundational principles of the Maturidi creed but also expanded its analytical depth, thereby strengthening its position within Sunni orthodoxy. His theological approach reflects a deep concern for safeguarding doctrinal coherence while maintaining intellectual engagement with philosophical and theological challenges of his time.

Despite his significant influence, Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi's contributions to the development of kalam have not always received sufficient attention in modern scholarship, particularly in comparative analyses of theological schools. This article aims to address this gap by examining his role in shaping the Pazdavi school of kalam, analyzing his theological methodology, and evaluating his intellectual legacy within the broader context of Islamic theology. By doing so, the study seeks to highlight the enduring relevance of Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi's thought and its impact on the evolution of Sunni kalam.

Literature review. The intellectual heritage of Islamic theology (kalam) has been extensively examined by both classical Muslim scholars and modern researchers. Foundational works on kalam traditionally focus on the major Sunni theological schools, particularly the Ashʿari and Maturidi traditions, while the internal scholarly currents and regional schools within these traditions have received comparatively less attention. Within this context, the Pazdavi school of kalam and the scholarly contributions of Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi occupy an important yet underexplored position in the historiography of Islamic theology. Classical biographical and theological sources such as Ṭabaqat al-Ḥanafiyya, al-Ansab, and works by scholars like al-Samʿani, Ibn al-Qifṭi, and al-Dhahabi provide valuable information on Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi's life, scholarly status, and intellectual milieu. These sources emphasize his role as a prominent Hanafi jurist and theologian, often highlighting his debates with rival theological groups. However, while they acknowledge his authority, they tend to describe his contributions in a descriptive rather than analytical manner, offering limited insight into the systematic features of his theological methodology.

Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi's own works, particularly Uṣūl al-Din, constitute the primary sources for understanding his theological thought. In this treatise, he presents a structured exposition of Sunni doctrine grounded in the Maturidi tradition, employing rational argumentation alongside scriptural evidence. Scholars have noted that this work reflects a mature stage of Maturidi kalam, characterized by conceptual clarity and polemical precision. Nevertheless, existing studies often treat Uṣūl al-Din as a general Maturidi text, without sufficiently distinguishing the unique features that define the Pazdavi school as a distinct intellectual current.

Modern academic research on Islamic theology has contributed significantly to the understanding of kalam as a rational discipline. Western scholars such as W. Montgomery Watt, Josef van Ess, and Ulrich Rudolph have examined the historical development of kalam and the formation of Sunni orthodoxy, including the emergence of the Maturidi school. While these studies provide valuable theoretical frameworks, they tend to focus on major figures like Abū Manṣūr al-Maturidi, leaving later representatives such as Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi in a secondary position. In more recent scholarship, particularly in studies produced in Central Asia, Turkey, and the Arab world, there has been growing interest in regional theological traditions and their key representatives. Some contemporary researchers have begun to analyze Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi's theological arguments, especially his views on divine attributes, human free will, and epistemology. However, these studies are often limited to specific doctrinal issues and lack a comprehensive assessment of his overall contribution to the institutional and methodological development of the Pazdavi school of kalam. Overall, the existing literature demonstrates that while Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi is widely recognized as an authoritative theologian within the Hanafi–Maturidi tradition, a systematic and focused analysis of his role in shaping the Pazdavi school of kalam remains insufficient. This article builds upon both classical and modern sources to address this gap, offering a holistic evaluation of his theological methodology, intellectual innovations, and lasting influence on Sunni kalam.

Research discussion. The analysis of Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi's theological thought demonstrates that his contribution to the Pazdavi school of kalam extends beyond mere preservation of the Maturidi tradition; rather, it reflects a deliberate effort to refine and institutionalize its methodological foundations. One of the most significant aspects of his contribution lies in his systematic organization of theological issues. Unlike earlier kalam works that often followed a polemical or fragmented structure, al-Pazdawi's approach exhibits a coherent thematic progression, enabling clearer engagement with complex doctrinal questions.

A central point of discussion concerns al-Pazdawi's balanced use of reason (ʿaql) and revelation (naql). While firmly grounded in the Sunni creed, he consistently employs rational argumentation to defend theological doctrines, particularly in matters related to divine attributes, the createdness of human actions, and epistemological sources of knowledge. This methodological balance strengthens the intellectual credibility of the Pazdavi school and distinguishes it from more rationalist approaches such as the Muʿtazila, as well as from overly literalist tendencies. His arguments reveal an awareness of philosophical reasoning without subordinating theology to speculative philosophy. Another important dimension of al-Pazdawi's contribution is his engagement with competing theological schools. His critical responses to the Muʿtazilite emphasis on absolute rational autonomy, as well as to certain

Ashʿarite formulations regarding divine agency and human responsibility, illustrate his role in clarifying and defending Maturidi positions. These polemical interactions not only reinforce doctrinal boundaries but also contribute to the intellectual maturity of the Pazdavi school by compelling it to articulate its principles with greater precision.

The discussion also highlights al-Pazdawi's pedagogical influence. His writings are characterized by clarity of expression and logical structuring, suggesting that they were intended not only for scholarly debate but also for instructional purposes. This pedagogical orientation played a crucial role in transmitting Maturidi kalam to subsequent generations of scholars, particularly within Hanafi educational circles in Central Asia and beyond. As a result, the Pazdavi school functioned not merely as a set of doctrines but as an enduring scholarly tradition.

From a comparative perspective, al-Pazdawi's work occupies an intermediate position between foundational theological formulation and later scholastic elaboration. While he does not introduce radically new doctrines, his methodological refinements and systematic presentation significantly enhance the coherence and accessibility of Maturidi theology. This suggests that his contribution should be understood in terms of consolidation and clarification rather than innovation in the strict sense. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi played a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual identity of the Pazdavi school of kalam. His integration of rational analysis, textual fidelity, and pedagogical clarity contributed to the resilience and continuity of the Maturidi theological tradition within Sunni Islam. These insights underscore the importance of reassessing al-Pazdawi's position in the history of kalam and recognizing his enduring influence on Islamic theological thought.

Conclusion. This study has examined the theological contribution of Abul Yusr al-Pazdawi to the development of the Pazdavi school of kalam within the broader Hanafi–Maturidi tradition. The analysis demonstrates that al-Pazdawi played a decisive role in consolidating and systematizing Maturidi theological thought during a critical period of intellectual debate in Islamic history. His works reflect a mature stage of kalam in which doctrinal clarity, rational coherence, and fidelity to revelation are carefully balanced.

The findings indicate that al-Pazdawi's significance lies not in introducing fundamentally new theological doctrines, but in refining existing principles and presenting them in a structured and pedagogically effective manner. Through his methodological rigor and polemical engagement with rival theological schools, he strengthened the intellectual foundations of the Pazdavi school and contributed to its endurance as a recognized scholarly current within Sunni theology. Furthermore, al-Pazdawi's approach illustrates how regional theological traditions could maintain doctrinal orthodoxy while actively engaging with diverse intellectual challenges. His legacy highlights the importance of secondary formative figures in the history of kalam, whose role in clarification, transmission, and institutionalization was essential for the continuity of Islamic theological thought. This study thus underscores the need

for further focused research on such scholars to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the development of Sunni kalam.

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