



The Intellectual Heritage of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī

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Abstract. This article examines the scholarly career of Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī (291/904–365/976), focusing on his education under the leading jurists of Baghdād, his pioneering contributions to uṣūl al-fiqh and the science of jadal (dialectics), and the breadth of his literary output. Drawing on mediaeval biographical works and modern scholarship, the study investigates the controversy surrounding his arrival in Baghdād and his relationship with Ibn Surayj, surveys his known works (including his commentary on al-Shāfiʿī's *al-Risāla* and his independent treatise *al-Jadal al-Ḥasan*), and assesses his place in the transmission of Shāfiʿī learning into Central Asia. Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī emerges as a pivotal figure whose work laid the methodological foundations for subsequent generations of Shāfiʿī jurists.

Keywords. Shāfiʿī jurisprudence, jadal, dialectics, *al-Risāla* commentary, Transoxiana, Baghdād, maqāṣid al-sharʿa, Islamic legal philosophy

Introduction. The question of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's intellectual formation has long occupied both mediaeval biographers and modern scholars. Central to this discussion are the identity of his teachers, the chronology of his travels, and the scope of his literary output. The sources reveal a scholar who studied under the most eminent figures of his age, produced works that shaped the Shāfiʿī tradition for centuries, and engaged boldly with disciplines that others approached with hesitation. This section examines these dimensions of his career in detail.

According to the sources, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's entry into Baghdād occurred before 306 AH, the year of Ibn Surayj's death. During his time in Iraq, Imam al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī studied not only under Ibn Surayj but also under such scholars as Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Baghawī, and Abū Bakr al-Ṣayrafī. Imām al-Nawawī in his *Tahdhīb*, al-Subkī in his *Ṭabaqāt*, and al-Dāwūdī in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssirīn* all affirm that he received instruction from these figures. Despite the fact that Ibn Surayj is regarded as the most significant jurist after Imām al-Shāfiʿī among the scholars of the Shāfiʿī school, not a single one of his works on substantive law (furūʾ) has survived. Nevertheless, the earliest books written on uṣūl al-fiqh are attributed to the pens of Ibn Surayj's students. One of the first commentaries on Imām al-Shāfiʿī's *al-Risāla* belongs Ibn Surayj's disciple al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's pen.

The Islamic scholar N. Muhamedov, in his monograph *Ḥaḍrat Imām: The History of Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī*, devotes serious attention to the question of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's life and



scholarly output, presenting information grounded in reliable evidence¹. Unlike the present study, Muhamedov provides detailed information on the jurist's life and activities, his scholarly works, and in particular his *Jawāmi' al-Kalim*. N. Muhamedov deserves recognition as the scholar who has produced the most substantial monographic study in Uzbek language among contemporary researchers.

A number of historical sources record that al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, in his pursuit of knowledge, visited the major intellectual centres of the Islamic world and studied there under the most prominent scholars of his age. This has been noted not only by Islamic historians but also by Western scholars in their own research. For example, the Russian orientalist S. Prozorov observes that al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī lived for a certain period in Nishapur and Bukhara, both centres of learning in his time, and received instruction from their scholars. Prozorov mentions the scholar as a major representative of the Shāfi'ī school in his era².

Most historians link al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's adherence to the Shāfi'ī school to his arrival in Baghdād and his acquisition of knowledge through contact with the circle of scholars led by Ibn Surayj.

The sources record that al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, as a leading representative of the Shāfi'ī school, was the first to compose a work on uṣūl al-fiqh within Shāfi'ī jurisprudence. On this point, the Islamic scholar N. Muhamedov, in his monograph *Ḥaḍrat Imām: Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī*, cites the opinion of 'Abd al-Wahhāb Khallāf: "Although Imām al-Shāfi'ī himself wrote the first work on uṣūl al-fiqh, that is, on the methodology of deriving legal rulings, the person who placed this discipline on a firm foundation and advanced its development was al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī"³. Alongside his own education under the great scholars of his time, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī also taught numerous students, which contributed to his renown as both a jurist and a traditionist.

Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī is recorded in historical sources as a scholar who left behind a vast intellectual legacy. According to researchers, nine works of the scholar are known to date, two of which are commentaries. The first is a commentary on Imām al-Shāfi'ī's *al-Risāla* on uṣūl al-fiqh, which enjoys great fame in the Islamic world. The second is a commentary on al-Ṭabarī's *al-Talkhīṣ fī al-Furū'*. The remaining seven books are independent works in various fields of learning. This is also noted separately in the historical sources. For instance, Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī writes: "Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī composed such works as no one else has yet authored." If al-Shīrāzī's words are accepted as reliable evidence, it follows that al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's works may number more than nine. This,

¹ Muhamedov, N. *Ḥaṣṭīmām — Abū Bakr Qaffāl Shoshīy Tārīkhī*. Tashkent: Yangi Asr Avlodi, 2017, p. 8.

² Prozorov, S. "al-Kaffāl." In *Islam na Territorii Byvshey Rossiyskoy Imperii: Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'*. Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2000, vol. 2, p. 45.

³ 'Abd al-Wahhab Khallaf. *'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. Translated from Arabic by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Muḥiddīn. Tashkent: Adolat, 1997, p. 3.



however, remains unknown to scholarship at present, and its determination awaits further investigation by specialists in the field. According to Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī also composed a work on legal philosophy entitled *al-Jadal al-Ḥasan* (The Good Debate)⁴.

According to Ḥājjī Khalīfa in his *Kashf al-Zunūn*, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī is one of three great jurists who wrote commentaries on Imām al-Shāfi'ī's *al-Risāla*. The other two are al-Naysābūrī and Abū al-Walīd Ḥassān. In Ḥājjī Khalīfa's view, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's commentary is distinguished by its completeness and its abundance of wisdom⁵. According to Imām al-Nawawī, although al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī authored many works, he was among the first in the Shāfi'ī school to compose a major treatise on the science of jadal, that is, dialectics in its modern interpretation⁶.

Interestingly, despite the fact that the majority of Islamic scholars of that period and later subjected the science of jadal to criticism, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī boldly wielded his pen in this field as well. Some Western researchers who have studied this phenomenon assess al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's engagement with jadal as a result of Greek and Jewish philosophical influence⁷. They cite as evidence the fact that the scholar translated the Torah from Hebrew into Arabic. Certain Western researchers even argue that al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī produced his methodological foundations for the concept of maqāṣid within the science of fiqh in a manner resembling the approach of the Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1138–1204)⁸.

Another work by al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī is entitled *Adab al-Qāḍī*. As the author of *Kashf al-Zunūn*, Ḥājjī Khalīfa, notes, al-Ṭabarī and al-Iṣṭakhrī also composed works under the same title. Among them, however, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's work is the most noteworthy⁹. Al-Sam'ānī, in his *al-Ansāb*, reports that al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī also composed the books *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* and *Maḥāsin al-Sharī'a*¹⁰.

The scholar's views on the foundations of Islamic law were utilised by Abū Muḥammad al-Juwaynī al-Kabīr in his commentary on the *Risāla* and by Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) in his *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. The emergence of jadal as a distinct discipline among the Islamic sciences in the 3rd–4th/9th–10th centuries is associated with the name of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī. Imām al-Nawawī's (d. 676/1277) *Tahdhīb* records that the scholar's *al-Jadal al-Ḥasan* is

⁴ Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī. *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*. Beirut: Fayṣal 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964, vol. III. P.152.; Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī. *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*. Edited by Akram Būshī. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1996, vol. XVI, p. 284

⁵ Ḥājjī Khalīfa. *Kashf al-Zunūn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1992, vol. II, p. 508.

⁶ Imām al-Nawawī. *Tahdhīb al-Asmā' wa-l-Lughāt*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2008, vol. II, p. 282.

⁷ Reinhart, Kevin. *Before Revelation*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 18.

⁸ Reinhart, Kevin. *Before Revelation*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 18.

⁹ Ḥājjī Khalīfa. *Kashf al-Zunūn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1992, vol. II, p. 47.

¹⁰ Abū Sa'd al-Sam'ānī. *al-Ansāb*. Edited by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Yamānī. Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 2016, vol. VIII, p. 14.



considered the first work on dialectics in Islamic history. Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's ability to demonstrate the positive aspects of debate culture from religious, legal, and spiritual perspectives is evidence of his vast learning.

In conclusion, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, as a polymath of his age, is regarded as a scholar of encyclopaedic knowledge who was able to write on all branches of the Islamic sciences. It is evident that al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī was recognised as a pre-eminent scholar by his contemporaries during his own lifetime. The personality and scholarly calibre of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī continue to be held in high esteem not only by the scholars of his own time but also by Western scholars to this day.

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