Al-Baghdādī's Usul al-Dīn: Analyzing Epistemological Themes

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Abstrak

Al-Baghdādī holds a significant position within the early Ash'ari epistemological tradition. His work, *Usul al-Dīn*, offers a systematic explanation of the foundational principles of Sunni belief, integrating an epistemological framework that draws from both the Ash'ari intellectual tradition and the broader Islamic intellectual heritage. This study employs qualitative textual analysis of *Usul al-Dīn*, focusing primarily on how Al-Baghdādī articulates various epistemological concepts. Several themes are explored within the text, including the definition, classification, and sources of knowledge. The analysis reveals that Al-Baghdādī places knowledge as the foundational principle in his theological discussions. Through his structured and profound approach, Al-Baghdādī views epistemology as an essential tool for resolving theological issues, providing a rational foundation for understanding Islamic faith. This focus on epistemology not only lays the groundwork for the further development of Ash'ari thought but also solidifies the position of *Ilm al-Kalam* as a rational and systematic discipline. By critically engaging with various foreign epistemologies, Al-Baghdādī not only strengthens Islamic theological arguments but also expands the intellectual horizons of Islamic theology itself.

Keywords: Al-Baghdādī, *Usul al-Dīn*, Islamic epistemology, *kalam*, Ash'arī theology

Abstrak

Al-Baghdādī menempati posisi penting dalam tradisi epistemologi awal Asy'ariyah. Karya beliau, *Usul al-Dīn,* menyajikan penjelasan sistematis tentang prinsip-prinsip dasar kepercayaan Sunni, dengan mengintegrasikan kerangka epistemologi yang bersumber dari tradisi intelektual Asy'ariyah dan warisan intelektual Islam secara lebih luas. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis tekstual kualitatif terhadap *Usul al-Dīn,* dengan fokus utama pada bagaimana Al-Baghdādī menjelaskan berbagai konsep epistemologi. Beberapa tema yang dibahas dalam teks ini meliputi definisi, klasifikasi, dan sumber pengetahuan. Analisis ini mengungkapkan bahwa Al-Baghdādī menempatkan pengetahuan sebagai prinsip dasar dalam diskusi teologisnya. Melalui pendekatan yang terstruktur dan mendalam, Al-Baghdādī memandang epistemologi sebagai alat penting untuk menyelesaikan persoalan teologi, sekaligus memberikan landasan rasional dalam memahami akidah Islam. Fokus pada epistemologi ini tidak hanya menjadi fondasi bagi perkembangan pemikiran Asy'ariyah selanjutnya, tetapi juga memperkuat posisi Ilmu Kalam sebagai disiplin ilmu yang rasional dan sistematis. Dengan secara kritis mengkaji berbagai epistemologi asing, Al-Baghdādī tidak hanya memperkuat argumen teologi Islam tetapi juga memperluas cakrawala intelektual teologi Islam itu sendiri.

Kata Kunci: Al-Baghdādī, Ushul al-Din, epistemologi Islam, ilmu kalam, teologi Asy'ariyah.

Introduction

Usul al-Dīn, authored by 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), is one of the most significant theological works of early Ash'ari kalām. The text plays a pivotal role in outlining the foundational principles of Sunni Islam, addressing key aspects of faith such as the nature of God, prophecy, and the afterlife. However, it is more than just a systematic exposition of theological doctrines. *Usul al-Dīn* also serves as a vigorous defense of Sunni orthodoxy against the growing influence of heretical and heterodox movements of the time. Al-Baghdādī integrates rational reasoning with traditional Islamic sources, aiming to preserve the purity of the Sunni creed while engaging critically with contemporary intellectual currents. As such, *Usul al-Dīn* occupies a crucial place in the intellectual history of Islam, particularly within the Ash'ari school, where it reflects both the development and consolidation of Ash'ari thought in its early stages.[1]

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[1] Abū Mansūr Al-Bagdādī, *Kitāb Usul al-Dīn* , 1st ed. (Istanbul: Matba'ah al-Daulah, 1928).

Al-Baghdādī holds a prominent position within the early Ash'ari epistemological tradition. His work in *Usul al-Dīn* offers a systematic account of the principles of Sunni belief, while also incorporating a sophisticated epistemological framework that draws from both Ash'ari and broader Islamic intellectual traditions. Notably, al-Baghdādī introduced a more nuanced understanding of how knowledge and certainty interact, especially in the context of defending Sunni orthodoxy against philosophical and theological challenges posed by rival groups. His contributions sought to strengthen the Ash'ari position by explicitly addressing epistemological concerns, such as the nature of certainty and the role of human reason in comprehending divine truths. In this sense, al-Baghdādī's work represents both a continuation and an expansion of the epistemological ideas developed by earlier Ash'ari thinkers, such as al-Ash'ari (d.324/936) and al-Baqillānī (d.403/1013).[2]

Despite the prominence of *Usul al-Dīn* in shaping Sunni theological discourse, its epistemological dimensions have received relatively little attention. While some scholars have explored various aspects of al-Baghdādī's thought, a comprehensive examination of his epistemological contributions remains underexplored. Several studies have provided valuable insights into specific areas of his thought: Nik Kamal has examined his conception of God[3], Hadi and 'Isam have analyzed his method of reasoning regarding divine attributes[4], Rippin has explored his views on *nāsikh* and *mansūkh* in the Qur'an[5], Mu'ti has investigated his work on divine names and attributes in *Tafsīr al-asmā' wa as-sifāt*,[6] and A. Saidan has contributed to understanding

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[2] See Introduction to Kawsari in the book: Abu Bakr al-Baqillani, *al-Insāf fima Yajib I'tqduhu wa la Yajuz al-Jahl bihi,* Ed. Muhammad Zahid al-Hasan al-Kausari, (al-Maktabah al-Azhariah li al-Turats, Cet. 2, 2000),. 10-12

[3] Nik bin Wan Muhammad Kamal, "Konsep Uluhiyyah Menurut Abu Manshur Abd Al-Qahir Al-Baghdadi" (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1999).

[4] Hadi 'Abdi Hasan and 'Isam Mahmud Jasim al-Muhammadi, "Al-Manhaj Al-Istidlali 'inda Al-Imam 'Abdul Qahir Al-Bagdadi (429 H) Fi Kitabihi Usuluddin," *Majallah Buhus Kulliah Al-Adab* 30, no. 116 (2019).

[5] Andrew Rippin, "Abd Al-Qahir Al-Ba Ghdadi (d. 429/1037) and the Study of the Qur'an" 10 (June 1, 2012): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-90000030.

[6] Muhammad 'Abd Mu'ti, "'Abdul Al-Qahir Al-Bagdadi (w. 429 H) Wa Kitabuhu "Tafsir Al-Asma Wa Al-Sifat," *Al-Azhar Min a'lam Al-Fikr Al-Ismaliy*, n.d.

his mathematical treatise *At-Takmila fil Hisāb*.[7] However, it is Basri bin Husin's study that specifically addresses al-Baghdādī's epistemological thought. While Basri's work provides a comparative analysis of the epistemologies of al-Baghdādī and al-Baqillānī, it ultimately finds minor technical differences between them, concluding that both thinkers largely align within the Ash'ari framework.[8] This comparative focus, however, limits a deeper exploration of al-Baghdādī's independent epistemological contributions, particularly those embedded within the context of *Usul al-Dīn*.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing a focused examination of al-Baghdādī's epistemological insights in *Usul al-Dīn*. It will explore how al-Baghdādī navigates the relationship between reason, revelation, and divine knowledge, and how these epistemological concerns inform his broader theological agenda. Through a qualitative textual analysis of *Usul al-Dīn*, this study will analyze key themes such as the concept, classification, and sources of knowledge.

Al-Baghdādī's Usul al-Dīn

Biography of al-Bagdadi

His full name is 'Abdul Qahir bin Tahir bin Muhammad bin 'Abdullah al-Baghdadi at-Tamimi al-Isfarayni as-Syafi'i, Abu Mansur. He is commonly known as 'Abdul Qahir, and more popularly as al-Ustaz Abu Mansur. The title at-Tamimi signifies his descent from the Bani Tamim, a respected tribe from ancient Arabia, while as-Syafi'i indicates his affiliation with the *Shafi'i* school of Islamic jurisprudence, one of the four Sunni schools of law, founded by Abu 'Abdullah al-Shafi'i (d. 204/820).[9]

Al-Baghdadi was a student of the renowned Ash'ari scholar and Shafi'i jurist, Abu Ishaq al-Isfarayni (d. 418/1028). It is known that Abu Ishaq himself studied under Abul Hasan al-Bahili (d. 370/985), who

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[7] Ahmed Saidan, "The Takmila Fi' l-Hisab of Al-Baghdadi," in *From Deferent to Equant: A Volume of Studies in the History of Science and Medieval Near East in Honor of E.S. Kennedy*, ed. David A King and George Saliba (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1987).

[8] Basri bin Husin, "Perbahasan Epistemologi Dalam Wacana Kalam Al-Asha'irah: Analisis Terhadap Pemikiran Al-Baqillani (m. 403H) Dan Al-Baghdadi (m. 429H)" (Univeriti Malaya Kuala Lumpur, 2018).

[9] Abu al-'Abbas Syams al-Din Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Abu Bakar Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat Al-A'yan Wa Abna' Al-Zaman*, ed. Ihsan 'Abbas (Beirut: Dar Sadir, n.d.), 2/ 425

was a direct disciple of Abul Hasan al-Asy'ari (d. 324/936), the founder of the Ash'ari school.[10]

Al-Baghdadi was born in Baghdad around 370/980 and passed away in Isfarayin in 429/1037. He spent his early years in Baghdad before migrating to Khurasan with his father, *Abu 'Abdullah Tahir*, where they settled in Nisapur (in the Tus region of northeastern Iran). In Nisapur, Al-Baghdadi became a prominent scholar and teacher, defending Sunni orthodoxy and critically engaging with heretical groups of the time, particularly the Karramiyyah. Shortly before his death, a Turkmen invasion forced him to flee Nisapur and take refuge in Isfarayin, where he died shortly thereafter and was buried next to his teacher, Abu Ishaq al-Isfarayni.[11]

Further cementing his intellectual legacy, Al-Baghdadi is also recognized as a polymath. The historian Subki reported that he mastered 17 different disciplines, with notable expertise in *usul al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), *fara'id* (inheritance law), mathematics, and *kalam* (Islamic theology). Al-Baghdadi was also a prolific writer, producing works across a wide range of fields, including Islamic theology, Qur'anic studies, Hadith, *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh*, Sufism, and mathematics. One of his notable mathematical works, *At-Takmilah fil Hisab* ("A Supplement of Arithmetic"), which delves into number theory and offers commentary on the work of al-Khwarizmi, was praised by the polymath ar-Razi (d. 606/1210).[12]

Al-Baghdadi's *Al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq* ("The Differences between the Sects") is an important heresiographical source, offering both descriptive and polemical accounts of various Islamic sects. In the final section of the book, spanning approximately forty pages, he outlines the fifteen basic principles of Islam as understood by the Ash'ariyyah. Another significant work, *Usul al-Din* ("The Principles of Religion"), presents a detailed chapter for each of these basic principles, with each chapter divided into fifteen sections. These two works have exerted a lasting influence on later Ash'ari scholars, including Abu Muzaffar al-Isfarayni[13],

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[10] Abu al-Qasim 'Ali bin al-Hasan bin Hibatullah Ibn 'Asakir, *Tabyin Kizb Al-Muftari Fima Nusiba Ila Al-Imam Abi Al-Hasan Al-Asy'ari*, ed. Hisam al-Din Al-Qadasi, 2nd ed. (Damaskus: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 127, 153

[11] Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey* (Edinburgh: The Univeristy Press, 1985), 79

[12] Fakhruddin al-Razi, *Al-Riyadh Al-Muannaqah Fi Ara'i Ahl Al-'Ilm* (Tunisia: Kulliyatul Adab wa al-Ulum al-Insaniyan al-kairuan, 2004), 80

[13] It can be seen from the framework of the discussion of God in his work *at-tabsir*

al-Juwayni[14], al-Ghazālī[15], and as-Syahrastānī (d. 548/1153).[16]

Kitab Usul al-Dīn

When comparing Al-Baghdadi's *Usul al-Din* with other theological works of his time and earlier, we respectfully disagree with Allard's characterization of it as an extended creed rather than a genuine work of theology.[17] Allard's assertion implies that Al-Baghdadi was merely an epigone, a view also echoed by Abraham S. Halikin in the introduction to his translation of *Al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq.18* However, this characterization is misleading. Many of the issues discussed by Al-Baghdadi in *Usul al-Din*, especially those related to epistemology, were unprecedented in Ash'ari thought. Additionally, Al-Baghdadi's interpretation of the *mutashabihat* (ambiguous verses) far surpasses the explanations provided by earlier figures such as al-Ash'ari and al-Baqillani.

Usul al-Dīn was written with the explicit aim of protecting Sunni orthodoxy and defending it against heretical ideas. Al-Baghdādī's theological objectives are clearly articulated in the text, as he seeks to provide Muslims with a correct understanding of their faith while shielding them from the doctrinal deviations of rival theological schools. His work reflects a commitment to presenting the principles of Sunni Islam in a manner that is accessible to both scholars and students, providing a comprehensive framework for engaging with theological debates.

Al-Baghdādī himself states in the introduction to *Usul al-Dīn* that the book was written with clarity, so that it could serve as

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fiddin. In addition, he was also al-Bagdadi's student and brother-in-law. See. Abu al-Muzaffar al-Isfaraini, *Al-Tabsir Fi Al-Din*, ed. Kamal Yusuf al-Hut (Alam al-Kitab, n.d.), 6,91,106

[14] This can be seen from his descriptions of the existence of God, His attributes, the *ru'yatullah*, the kalam of God, and the deeds of God in his work *as-syamil*. See. Abdul Malik ibn 'Abdullah bin Yusuf al-Juwaini, *As-Syamil Fi Usuluddin*, ed. 'Ali Sami Nasysyar (al-Iskandariyah, n.d.).

[15] Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Gazali, *Al-I'tiqad Fil Iqtisad* (al-Qahirah: Maktabah Muhammad 'Ali Sabih, 1962), 609-625

[16] Especially related to the meaning of heretical groups in Islam. The title of as-Syahrastani's book is also similar to al-Bagdadi's *al-Milal wa an-Nihal*. Abu al-Fath Muhammad bin 'abd al-Karim bi Abi Bakr Ahmad al-Syahrastani, *Al-Milal Wa Al-Nihal* (Mu'assasah al-Halabi, n.d.).

[17] Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey*, 80

[18] Abraham S Halikin, *Moslem Schisms and Sects (Al-Fark Bain Al-Firak), Being the History of the Various Philosophic Systems Developed in Islam by Abu Mansur 'Abd Al-Kahir Ibn Tahir Al-Baghdadi (d. 1037)*, 1st ed. (Philadelpia: Procupine Press, 1935), 1

both a handbook for teachers and a source of material for academic discussions among students.[19] The work addresses a broad array of theological issues, but its epistemological contributions are perhaps the most striking and innovative aspects of the text. The book is grounded in the epistemological framework of the Ash'ari school, but it also introduces new ways of interpreting key theological concepts such as divine knowledge, certainty, and the role of human reason in understanding the divine.

One of the key features of *Usul al-Dīn* is its division into fifteen principles, each focusing on a critical aspect of Islamic theology. These principles cover a wide range of topics, including the nature of truth and knowledge, the attributes of God, prophethood, the afterlife, and more. The epistemological themes embedded in these principles are central to understanding al-Baghdādī's approach to knowledge and certainty. The first principle, for example, addresses the nature of truth and knowledge, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of how human beings come to know divine truths. Al-Baghdādī emphasizes that while human intellect (*aql*) can recognize certain basic truths, such as the existence of God, it is revelation (*naql*) that provides the full and unassailable certainty necessary for faith. [20] This distinction between intellectual and revealed knowledge is a core tenet of Ash'ari epistemology, and al-Baghdādī's treatment of it represents a significant contribution to the tradition.

While al-Baghdādī's work draws heavily on the intellectual tradition of the Ash'ari school, he also offers significant innovations, particularly in his treatment of the epistemological status of *mutashābihāt*. Unlike al-Ash'ari and al-Baqillānī, who offered relatively minimal interpretations of these verses, al-Baghdādī engages in a more extensive *ta'wīl* of these verses.[21] His approach reflects a more sophisticated understanding of how to reconcile apparent contradictions in the Qur'an and a deeper commitment to clarifying theological issues that might lead to heretical interpretations. His approach to the *mutashābihāt* is not merely a doctrinal exercise but an epistemological one, as it speaks to how knowledge of the divine can be obtained through revelation. His detailed interpretations of ambiguous verses aim to provide believers with a clear and rational

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[19] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 1

[20] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 1

[21] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin,* 90-91

understanding of otherwise obscure theological concepts, helping them to reach a more certain grasp of God's attributes and actions.

A key feature of *Usul al-Dīn* is al-Baghdādī's use of various argumentative methods: *Khitābī*, *Jadali*, and *Burhānī*.[22] These methods are employed throughout the text and are essential to understanding how al-Baghdādī constructs his epistemological arguments.

1) Khitābī Method (Rhetoric): Al-Baghdādī uses the *Khitābī* method to appeal to the emotions, beliefs, and predispositions of his audience. Through rhetorical strategies, he engages his readers in persuasive speech, aiming to convince them of the correctness of Sunni orthodoxy. For example, he uses terms like "shameless" (*khizyā*), "stubborn" (*mu'ānd*), and "ignorant" (*jāhil*) to criticize his opponents, aiming to position his arguments as not only theologically sound but morally and intellectually superior.

2) Jadali Method (Dialectic): The *Jadali* method, or dialectical reasoning, involves structured debate and argumentation. Al-Baghdādī employs this method to engage with the theological challenges posed by heretical groups. Throughout *Usul al-Dīn*, he anticipates the objections of rival thinkers and responds to them systematically, using logical refutations to defend Sunni positions. His use of the Arabic terms *law* (supposition) and *la* (necessity) illustrates his commitment to dialectical reasoning, as he shows the logical consequences of heretical claims and highlights the necessity of accepting orthodoxy.

3) Burhānī Method (Demonstrative Reasoning): The *Burhānī* method is based on logical proofs and demonstrative reasoning, and it is used throughout *Usul al-Dīn* to establish certainty in theological matters. Al-Baghdādī employs three primary instruments of *Burhānī* reasoning: deductive, inductive, and analogical reasoning. Through deductive reasoning, he derives conclusions from established premises; through inductive reasoning, he generalizes from particular observations; and through analogical reasoning, he draws parallels between known and unknown theological concepts. This method allows al-Baghdādī to offer rigorous, step-by-step arguments for the truth of Sunni

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[22] All explanations regarding the method of study are adopted from Muhammad Khusyt's description in his introduction to *al-Farq*. Basically, Kitab Usuluddin has similarities with *al-Farq*. It's just that the Book of Usuluddin has a more detailed description. See. al-Bagdadi, *Al-Farq Bayn Al-Firaq,* 10-11

theological doctrines, providing his audience with the certainty they need to maintain their faith

Analyizing Epistemological Themes in al-Bagdadi's Usuluddin

The Conception of Knowledge ('Ilm)

In Islamic theological discourse, the term *'ilm* (knowledge) occupies a central place, and al-Baghdādī's treatment of it in his work *Usul al-Dīn* provides key insights into his broader epistemological framework. The Arabic term *'ilm* derives from the verb *'alima* (to know), and in classical Arabic lexicons, it encompasses a wide range of meanings, including understanding (*ma'rifah*), awareness (*syu'ūr*), perception (*idrāk*), capture (*tasawwur*), memory (*hifz*), wisdom (*hikmah*), and intelligence (*firasah*), among others. As such, the concept of knowledge is multifaceted and not easily confined to a singular definition. [23]

In early *kalām*, as noted by scholars like Roshental, there are over 100 different meanings attributed to knowledge, underscoring its complexity and expansive nature.[24] This is because knowledge is limitless. Seen from his various descriptions of knowledge, Al-Baghdādī is classified as a scholar who thinks that knowledge can be defined, but with a description of its nature (*rasm*), not with a definition that sets a precise or concise limit (*hadd*) specifiying the distinctive characteristic of what is being defined as knowledge. Here are al-Bagdadi's descriptions of the nature of knowledge:

a. Knowledge as an Attribute of the Subject

This interpretation aligns with al-Bagdadi's theological perspective as an Ash'ari, which asserts that God's attributes are not substances (*as-sifat laysat 'ayn az-zat*). Instead, attributes are characteristics that are inseparable from the subject to which they belong (*al-amarah al-lazimah li as-sya'i*). Accordingly, for al-Bagdadi, the ability to "know" is an attribute inherent in the subject itself. This stance is intended as a critique of the Mu'tazilah. According to the Mu'tazilah, knowledge is not considered an attribute, a view grounded in their belief that God's attributes are substances (*as-sifat 'ayn az-zat*).

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[23] Badr al-Din al-'Aini, *Umdah Al-Qari'* (Bairut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 2/ 2

[24] Franz Rosental, *Knowledge Triumpht: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970).69

As a result, they reject what al-Bagdadi refers to as the "signifying attributes" (*ma'ani*), including God's omnipotence (*qudrah*), will (*iradah*), knowledge ('*ilm*), life (*hayy*), sight (*basar*), hearing (*sama'*), and speech (*kalam*). For al-Bagdadi, this belief is flawed (batil) both logically ('*aql*) and scripturally (*naql*). Logically, he argues that to consider attributes as substances would equate all attributes of a subject, which is clearly illogical, as we observe that some people possess knowledge while others do not. This distinction implies that when someone knows something, the attribute of knowledge is attached to them, and vice versa.[25]

From a scriptural standpoint, al-Bagdadi contends that the Mu'tazilah's view contradicts several Quranic verses that affirm knowledge as an attribute of God. For instance:

> "He has sent it with His knowledge" (Qur'an, an-Nisa 4:166),

> "No female ever conceives or delivers without His knowledge" (Qur'an, Fatir 35:11).

Moreover, al-Bagdadi elaborates on the attribute of "life" (*hayah*), which he argues is essential for the existence of knowledge in a subject. A dead being, by definition, cannot possess knowledge, as life is a prerequisite. He distinguishes between two types of life: first, the eternal life of God, which is without beginning or end (*qadim azali*), and second, the life of creation, which is finite and involves the combination of body and soul. Al-Bagdadi emphasizes that only living beings can possess knowledge, thereby rejecting the views of groups like the *Karramiyah* and *Salihiyah*, who argued that inanimate objects and even the deceased possess knowledge.[26]

b. Knowledge as Something Distinct from Belief (I'tiqād)

This reflects al-Baghdādī's criticism of the Mu'tazilah elite, particularly al-Ka'bi (d. 317/929), al-Jubba'i (d. 303/915), and Abu Hashim (d. 321/933), who defined knowledge as belief in something as it truly is. For al-Baghdādī, equating knowledge with belief undermines the concept of a subject who knows but does not believe, such as Allah. While this definition might be applicable to human knowledge, it is insufficient because it limits knowledge to temporal subjects (hadis). According to al-Baghdādī, the eternal, self-subsistent subject (qadim)

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[25] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 7-8
[26] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 5

— namely Allah — is also a knowing subject, and thus the Mu'tazilah's definition cannot fully encompass divine knowledge.

Although the Mu'tazilah reject the idea that knowledge is an attribute of God, they affirm that Allah knows through His essence, not through an attribute. They also accept that Allah is "all-knowing" but argue that He is not a "believer." Al-Baghdādī challenges this view, pointing out that it fails to capture the full scope of divine knowledge.

Moreover, al-Baghdādī critiques the Mu'tazilah's use of the term "something" (sya'i) in their definition of knowledge. In their view, this restricts the object of knowledge to what is possible (ja'iz al-wujud), which includes substances and accidents, while excluding the impossible (mustahil al-wujud) — concepts that reside within the human intellect. In the kalām tradition, the term "sya'i" is typically understood to refer only to ja'iz al-wujud. Al-Baghdādī, drawing from al-Baqillānī, offers a broader definition: knowledge is the understanding of objects of knowledge (al-ma'lum) as they truly are. This definition is more comprehensive because it includes not only both the temporal and eternal knowing subjects but also accounts for all categories of existence, including both possible and impossible things.[27]

c. Knowledge as Distinct from Will and Movement of the Heart

Al-Baghdādī also critiques the position of the Mu'tazilah figure an-Nazzām, who identified knowledge with the will and movements of the heart. According to al-Baghdādī, knowledge is a distinct entity and cannot be equated with human will or internal emotional states. He distinguishes between *'ilm* (knowledge) and *irādah* (will), emphasizing that while both are attributes of God, they are fundamentally different.[28]

For al-Baghdādī, God's will is an eternal, essential attribute that determines the course of events in the world, but it does not inherently contain knowledge. Knowledge is a separate attribute that encompasses all truths, past, present, and future. The ability of God to know is not derived from His will but exists independently as part of His essence. Thus, al-Baghdādī's view ensures that both divine will and divine knowledge are distinct, eternal, and inseparable from the nature of God, but they should not be conflated.[29]

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[27] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 5-6
[28] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 6
[29] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 6

c. Knowledge as a Reality, Attainable by Humans with Certainty

Al-Baghdādī offers a strong defense of the existence of objective knowledge and truth, particularly in his criticism of the Sophists (Greek: *sophistēs*), an intellectual movement that arose in ancient Greece and rejected the possibility of objective knowledge. The Sophists held various views, including skepticism, relativism, and subjectivism, all of which denied the existence of certain and universal knowledge. Some Sophists even argued that truth was relative to each individual's perception, making all beliefs equally valid.[30]

Al-Baghdādī was particularly concerned with the influence of these ideas on Islamic intellectual circles, especially in the Abbasid period when Greek philosophy and sophistry were being introduced to the Islamic world. He criticizes groups like the Sophists and their later Islamic counterparts, such as the atheists and Zindiqs, who denied objective reality and truth.[31] Al-Baghdādī insists that knowledge is real, objective, and exists independent of human belief or perception. It is not subjective or relative but based on authority, namely the revelation of God through the Qur'an and Sunnah. These two sources are considered the highest authorities in Islamic knowledge, with human scholars serving as intermediaries who transmit this knowledge truthfully.

d. Knowledge and the Authority of God's Revelation

The reality of knowledge, according to al-Baghdādī, is inseparable from the concept of authority. Islamic tradition distinguishes between two primary sources of authority: divine revelation (the Qur'an and Sunnah) and the learned scholars ('*ulama*). Al-Baghdādī stresses that true knowledge is that which is derived from these authoritative sources, which have been transmitted reliably throughout the generations. This view aligns with his broader critique of Sophist thought, which denies the possibility of objective knowledge.[32]

For al-Baghdādī, knowledge is not merely subjective belief or an internal state; it is grounded in the divine truth that has been revealed to humanity. As such, the role of scholars is crucial—they are the bearers

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[30] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 6-7

[31] Some Muslim intellectual elites appeared to be influenced by Sophist thought at that time, such as Ibn Rawandī (d. 298/911), Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 313/925), Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī (d. 449/1058), and 'Umar Khayyām (d. 525/1131), among others.

[32] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 6-7

of this knowledge, and their task is to preserve, transmit, and interpret the divine truths accurately. The integrity of this intellectual tradition, which depends on a chain of reliable transmission, ensures that the knowledge it conveys is certain and reflective of ultimate reality. [33]

The Classificaton of Knowledge

In his *Usul al-Dīn*, al-Baghdādī provides a comprehensive classification of knowledge, dividing it into two broad categories: the knowledge of Allah (divine knowledge) and the knowledge of humans and animals. This classification reflects his theological perspective, distinguishing between eternal, divine knowledge and the finite, contingent knowledge of humans and animals. Each of these categories is further subdivided based on the nature of the knowledge and its acquisition.

a. The Knowledge of Allah (Eternal Knowledge)

Al-Baghdādī's conception of Allah's knowledge is rooted in the Ash'ari theological view, emphasizing that God's knowledge is eternal (*azali*) and unique. It is not a result of reasoning, sensory perception, or acquisition. God's knowledge encompasses all objects of knowledge in their fullest detail—everything that has happened, will happen, and even things that have not yet occurred. This eternal knowledge is not "new" or contingent but is part of the essence of God, completely independent of time and change. [34]

This eternal knowledge of Allah is contrasted with several heretical views that al-Baghdādī criticizes. For example, he refutes the positions of the Zurariyyah and Jahmiyyah, who claimed that God's knowledge is "new" and that God does not know something before it happens. He also critiques the Mu'ammar al-Qadari's position, which denied that God's knowledge can be called *'ilm* (knowledge with Him), asserting that God's essence is already known, and thus there is no true "object of knowledge." Furthermore, the Qaramiyah sect's view that God's knowledge is divided into two categories—knowledge of what He already knows and knowledge of something else—also comes under criticism. [35]

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[33] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 6-7

[34] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 8

[35] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 8

b. The Knowledge of Humans and Animals

Al-Baghdādī divides human and animal knowledge into two main categories: necessary knowledge (*'ilm daruri*) and acquired knowledge (*'ilm muktasab*). These categories are reflective of his distinction between eternal and new knowledge, further elaborating on the types of knowledge that can be acquired by human beings and other living creatures. [36]

1) Necessary Knowledge (ʻilm daruri)

Necessary knowledge is innate and self-evident. It does not require proof or argumentation to be known. Al-Baghdādī further subdivides this type of knowledge into two forms:

First, axiomatic knowledge (*'ilm badihi*). This is a priori knowledge that is immediate and intuitive, without the need for proof or reasoning. It is self-evident and known by every individual. Axiomatic knowledge includes two subtypes: (1) affirmative knowledge (*isbat*): Knowledge of self-evident truths such as personal experiences of pain, hunger, pleasure, or discomfort. For example, a person knows they are in pain or that they feel pleasure without needing external validation. (2) negative knowledge (*nafi*): Knowledge of impossible things, such as understanding that something cannot be eternal and temporal at the same time, or that one cannot both live and die at the same time. This type of knowledge is based on the inherent contradictions of logical impossibilities.[37]

Second, sensory knowledge (*'ilm al-hissi*). This is a posteriori knowledge gained through the five senses. Sensory knowledge is immediate and direct, but it is based on empirical observation. For example, a person knows the sun has risen by seeing it. Sensory knowledge is clear and intuitive, requiring no complex intellectual labor, but it differs from axiomatic knowledge in that it is based on perception rather than innate understanding.[38]

2) Acquired Knowledge (ʻilm muktasab)

Acquired knowledge is obtained through external sources, intellectual effort, reasoning, and experience. Al-Baghdādī categorizes

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[36] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 8
[37] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 8-9
[38] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 8-9

this type of knowledge into four subtypes: [39]

First, theoretical knowledge (*'ilm nazariy*). This is knowledge obtained through reasoning, analogy, and proof (such as *istidlal*). Theoretical knowledge involves using logic and rational arguments to derive conclusions from established premises. Al-Baghdādī uses the term *istidlal* (seeking guidance through evidence) to describe this process. Examples include knowledge of God's attributes, such as His unity (*tawhid*), His justice, wisdom, and the necessity of creation having a Creator.

Al-Baghdādī emphasizes the importance of theoretical knowledge in Islamic theology (*kalam*), citing examples like the eternity of the Creator and the legitimacy of divine revelation. He criticizes groups like the Sumaniyyah, who denied the validity of reasoning and theoretical knowledge, as "disbelievers" for their denial of proof-based theology and other core doctrines.

Second, experimental knowledge (*'ilm tajribi*). This is knowledge gained through empirical experimentation and practice. It pertains to disciplines such as medicine, pharmacy, professional sciences, and industry. Experimental knowledge is rooted in the observation and practical application of theories in real-world settings. Al-Baghdādī criticizes any denial of this type of knowledge, condemning those who reject the validity of knowledge derived from experimentation as being similar to the Sophists, who were skeptical about objective knowledge.

Third, shari'a knowledge (*'ilm shari'a*). This refers to knowlegde derived from islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the foundational sources of islamic law: the qur'an, the sunnah, Ijma' (consensus) and qiyas (analogy). According to al-Baghdādī, shari'a knowledge includes rulings such as halal, haram, wajib, and sunnah, and it is obtained through reasoning and intellectual effort. For example, the legitimacy of certain legal rulings depends on reasoning about the intent and context of the Qur'anic text or the hadith.

Al-Baghdādī critiques several groups for their rejection of key sources of shari'a knowledge. The Brahmanists, who deny the Shari'a of the Prophets. The Khawarij, who reject the consensus of the scholars and some hadiths. The Rafidah Shi'a, who reject qiyas and argue that the Qur'an was distorted, believing that only the guidance of their Imam is valid. The Nazzamiyah and Zahiriyah, who reject consensus

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[39] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 14-18

as a valid source of law after the time of the Companions.

Fourth, intuitive knowledge (*'ilm al-hads*). This type of knowledge arises through intuition or inspiration and is often linked to creative abilities or talents. Examples include fields such as literature, music, and art, where knowledge is not based on formal reasoning or empirical observation but is inspired or felt deeply by the individual. Al-Baghdādī explains that intuitive knowledge is not acquired through traditional means like proof or reasoning but is instead an intrinsic ability that emerges from within certain individuals.

For example, a poet may write beautiful verses or a musician may compose a remarkable piece of music without formally studying the theory behind these arts. This type of knowledge is unique to individuals who possess a certain intuition, a divine gift from God, and does not rely on structured reasoning or learning.

3. The Sources of Knowledge

Al-Bagdadi identifies four primary sources of knowledge: the five senses (al-hawas al-khams), reason ('aql), true information (khabar sadiq), and intuition (ilham). Below is a detailed explanation of each source of knowledge:

The Five Senses (al-hawas al-khams)

Al-Bagdadi emphasizes the importance of the five senses as a valid source of knowledge. The senses are seen as tools that help humans acquire objective, necessary knowledge, not influenced by the knower's condition. These senses are: vision, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. Each organ plays a unique role in perceiving different types of information.[40]

Organs	Function	Knowledge Output
Eye	Seeing	Visual forms (colours, shapes of objects, etc.)
Ear	Hearing	Types of audio (noisy, melodious, etc.)
Tounge	Tasting	Different kinds of taste (sweet, sour, salty, bitter)
Nose	Smelling	Scents/odours (foul, fragrant, etc.)
Skin	Touching	Soft, Rough, Hot, Cold

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[40] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 9-10

Al-Bagdadi critiques views like that of al-Jubba'i (from the Mutazilah), who argued that sensory knowledge is merely subjective and not objective. He also rejects the notion that the sense of sight only perceives material objects or colors. Al-Bagdadi affirms that the senses are capable of perceiving all aspects of existence. Additionally, he critiques the view of an-Nazzam (Qadariyah) who proposed the existence of additional senses for perceiving emotions like pain or pleasure, a concept that Al-Bagdadi dismisses as unnecessary because such experiences are already captured by the sense of touch.[41]

Reason ('aql)

Al-Bagdadi upholds reason as a valid and important source of knowledge. However, he distinguishes between two forms of knowledge derived from reason: *First*, axiomatic knowledge (*'aql badihi*): This is immediate knowledge gained intuitively without the need for proof or reasoning. It includes self-evident truths, such as the knowledge that one exists or that contradictory propositions cannot both be true at the same time. *Second*, theoretical knowledge (*'aql nazari*): This type of knowledge is acquired through reasoning, proof, and analysis. It requires deliberate thought, argumentation, and evaluation of evidence.

For Al-Bagdadi, reason functions to bind and understand meanings (*al-ma'lumat*). He clarifies that reason is not a physical substance but an immaterial faculty, distinct from the idea of intellect as an independent substance (as per Aristotle or certain Muslim philosophers influenced by him).

True Information (khabar sadiq)

Al-Bagdadi distinguishes between true information (*khabar sadiq*) and false information (*khabar kizb*). True information conforms to the facts, while false information does not. There are also uncertain types of information, which are not clearly true or false.[42]

He divides true information into three categories based on its transmission:

1) *Mutawatir.* Information that is transmitted by many people in such a way that it is impossible for them to conspire to lie. This type of information is certain and necessary knowledge. Exam-

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[41] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 9
[42] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 13-14

ples include knowledge of past kings, countries we have never visited, and religious truths about Prophets. Al-Bagdadi notes two kinds of mutawatir: First, *Certainty-based mutawatir*: Information whose narrators were numerous and reliable, ensuring the truth of the information. Second, *Inference-based mutawatir*: Knowledge that can be inferred from reasoning or falsification, but which is not necessarily obligatory to practice. He critiques views that reject mutawatir as a valid source of knowledge, such as the Brahmanists and the Sumaniyah, who denied that knowledge of distant countries or past events could be trustworthy.[43]

2) *Ahad.* Information transmitted by a single person or a few people. It does not entail certainty, and its validity is determined by the integrity of its chain of transmission (*sanad*). If the narrators are just (*'adl*), the text (*matan*) is consistent with reason, and the chain is unbroken, the information from an *ahad* transmission is valid, though not obligatory to believe.[44]

3) *Mustafid.* [45]This is a category between *mutawatir* and *ahad*, where the information, though not necessarily originating from multiple sources, is so widely accepted by scholars and specialists that it is treated with certainty. For Al-Bagdadi, *mustafid* knowledge is valid and must be practiced, akin to mutawatir, but acquired through academic effort rather than direct transmission.

Intuition (Ilham)

Intuitive knowledge *(ilham)* is a form of knowledge that is directly granted by God, without the need for sensory experience or reasoning. This type of knowledge is distinct from both empirical and rational knowledge, and is received as a direct insight or inspiration. Al-Bagdadi recognizes that both Prophets and ordinary people can experience *ilham*. For example, a person might create beautiful poetry or music without any formal knowledge of those fields. This knowledge is not derived from sensory experience or logical reasoning, but rather

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[43] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 11-12

[44] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 22-23

[45] Etymologically, *mustafid* comes from the word istafa>d}a, synonymous with ittasa'a, meaning to expand, spread, many, lush. It is mentioned in a statement: (⊚⊚⊚⊚⊚⊚ ⊚⊚⊚⊚⊚⊚ ⊚⊚⊚⊚ ⊚⊚ ⊚⊚⊚⊚ ⊚⊚⊚⊚ ⊚⊚⊚⊚), meaning 'the valley is lush with trees'. See. Muhammad 'Ali bin al-Qadi Muhammad Hamid bin Muhammad Sabir al-Faruqi al-Hanafi Al-Tahanawi, *Mausu'ah Kasysyaf Istilahat Al-Funun Wa Al-'Ulum* (Beirut: Maktabah Libnan, 1996), 2/ 1552

from a divine inspiration.[46]

Prophets like Adam, for example, received intuitive knowledge from God (such as the names of all things) directly, not through reading, reasoning, or teaching. Al-Bagdadi sees *ilham* as a vital form of knowledge that complements the other sources (senses, reason, and true information) and provides special insights, particularly in matters of faith and esoteric knowledge. He argues tha *ilham* can be the origin of both theoritical and experimental knowledge, which may later be structured and studied as formal academic knowledge. This is a critique of those like An-Nazzam and his followers, who insisted that knowledge cannot be intuitively acquired, especially in the case of theoretical or experimental knowledge.[47]

The Impact and Legacy of Al-Baghdādī's Epistemology

Al-Baghdādī's contributions to Islamic epistemology, particularly in his work *Kitab Usuluddin*, hold a central place in shaping Islamic theology during the classical period. As highlighted Al-Baghdādī begins his discussion of theological issues with the concept of knowledge, making it the foundational subject of his treatise. This approach reflects a sophisticated attempt to grapple with knowledge itself as both a concept and a tool for understanding theological truths.

While Al-Baqillani, an earlier influential figure in the Ashʿarī school, also discusses knowledge in his work *at-Tamhīd*, it does not receive the same explicit focus as the foundational principle. The emphasis on knowledge, however, became central in the works of subsequent Ashʿarī scholars. Al-Baghdādī's treatment of knowledge as the first principle in *Usuluddin* was part of a broader shift in Ashʿarī kalām. This focus can be seen in the works of scholars like Al-Juwaynī in *al-Irsād* and *as-Syāmil*, Al-Ghazālī in *al-Munqidh* and *al-Iqtisād*, and later figures such as Al-Rāzī, Al-Amīdī, Al-Baydāwī, and Al-Ijī. *48*

The emphasis on epistemology in Ashʿarī thought was further solidified after Al-Baghdādī's time. The concept of knowledge was integral to their understanding of theological issues such as the nature of God, the Quran, and the articles of faith. The foundational role of epistemology in Al-Baghdādī's work highlights his view that theology

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[46] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 15
[47] Al-Bagdadi, *Kitab Usuluddin*, 15
[48] Husin, "Perbahasan Epistemologi, 32

is not a mere matter of doctrinal assertion but is rooted in reasoned arguments, with knowledge serving as the critical basis for deriving theological conclusions.

Al-Baghdādī's decision to place knowledge at the core of his theological discourse reveals several crucial aspects of his epistemological approach. First, he argues that knowledge serves as the foundation for interpreting religious texts, particularly in the domain of *akīdah* (creed). This highlights how theological positions are derived not from mere faith but from a methodical process of understanding and reasoning. Second, the concept of knowledge forms the basis for the methodology employed in deriving theological conclusions. Al-Baghdādī discusses how different groups within Islam interpret religious texts, which ultimately influences their theological positions. His work indicates that the proper understanding of knowledge— especially through reasoning and proof—underpins valid theological arguments.

The third important aspect of Al-Baghdādī's epistemology is its role in the formation of theological decisions (*fatwā*). By establishing epistemological criteria for understanding knowledge, Al-Baghdādī highlights how errors in the conceptualization of knowledge lead to incorrect theological judgments. This suggests that Islamic theological discourse must be grounded in a correct and rigorous understanding of knowledge in order to avoid doctrinal errors.

Finally, Al-Baghdādī stresses the importance of understanding that Islamic theology is not based on blind dogmatism but is instead founded on logical reasoning and conceptual clarity. The rational foundations of *akīdah* are tied to the epistemological understanding of knowledge itself, particularly in how knowledge can be justified through reason, sensory perception, and divine revelation. This epistemological framework ensures that Islamic belief is not merely a matter of tradition but a system that can be intellectually validated.

Al-Baghdādī's contributions to Islamic epistemology are of profound significance, particularly in the way he addressed epistemological challenges and critically engaged with foreign philosophical ideas within the context of Islamic theology. As noted by Al-Attas, Al-Baghdādī was one of the earliest Muslim scholars to write about *"Shopist"* within the tradition of *kalam*. His pioneering work in this area set him apart as a foundational figure in the intellectual development of Islamic thought.

In his writings, Al-Baghdādī was one of the first to systematically address these skeptical challenges in the framework of Islamic theology, something not thoroughly tackled by earlier Ashʿarī scholars, including Al-Baqillānī. Al-Baghdādī's engagement with skepticism and foreign epistemologies represented an innovative effort to strengthen the intellectual foundations of Islam by systematically defending the faith against philosophical doubts that were beginning to penetrate the Islamic intellectual landscape.

Al-Baghdādī's work was groundbreaking in that it marked the beginning of a more critical, systematic engagement with non-Islamic epistemological traditions in Islamic thought. Prior to Al-Baghdādī, figures such as Al-Baqillānī had addressed theological questions, but they had not fully incorporated critiques of external philosophical paradigms in the same manner. Al-Baghdādī's approach was not only a defense of Islam against these foreign influences but also a demonstration of the intellectual robustness of the Islamic theological tradition, showing that it could engage critically with competing systems of thought.

The legacy of Al-Baghdādī's epistemology is evident in its influence on later generations of Muslim scholars. His critical stance toward foreign epistemological systems and his focus on the rational defense of the faith laid the groundwork for the further development of *kalam* and Islamic philosophy. His method of addressing skepticism within the framework of Islamic theology continues to resonate in contemporary discussions of Islamic thought and philosophy, demonstrating the enduring relevance of his intellectual contributions.

Conlusion

Al-Baghdādī's *Usul al-Dīn* represents a groundbreaking contribution to *Kalam*, particularly through its epistemological focus. By positioning knowledge as the foundational principle of theological inquiry, Al-Baghdādī established a methodological framework that integrates reason, sensory perception, and divine revelation. His systematic approach to the concept, classification, and sources of knowledge reflects a sophisticated understanding of epistemology as both a theoretical and practical tool for resolving theological issues. The emphasis on epistemology in *Usul al-Dīn* highlights Al-Baghdādī's recognition of the critical role of knowledge in interpreting religious

texts, constructing theological arguments, and addressing competing perspectives within and beyond the Islamic tradition. His detailed analysis of *khabar mutawatir*, the conditions for valid reasoning, and the interplay between reason and revelation demonstrates his commitment to a rational and structured approach to faith. This methodology not only provided a robust defense against skepticism but also positioned Islamic theology as an intellectually rigorous discipline capable of engaging with foreign philosophical ideas.

The impact of Al-Baghdādī's epistemological contributions extends beyond his immediate work. His ideas laid the groundwork for later Ashʿarī scholar, who further developed the integration of rationality and revelation in Islamic theology. His legacy is evident in the sustained emphasis on epistemology within the Ashʿarī school and its influence on the broader intellectual tradition of Islam.

In conclusion, Al-Baghdādī's *Usul al-Dīn* not only advanced the methodological foundations of *kalam* but also demonstrated the enduring importance of epistemology in Islamic theological discourse. His innovative approach continues to offer valuable insights for contemporary discussions on the relationship between knowledge, belief, and reason, affirming his place as a pivotal figure in the history of Islamic thought.

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