
HUSĀM AL-DĪN AL-SIGNĀQI

BUILDING A PROOF METHODOLOGY IN KALAM

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Abstract

The article examines the methods of proving metaphysical phenomena in creating the world in divine knowledge (Ilahiyyat) Husam ad-Din-as-Sygnaki and the basis of Nasafi's concept of cognition for those who deny the truth of a thing. He is scientifically responsible in the context of Islam, linking metaphysical definitions in ancient Greek philosophy, in the sense of rational logic, with references to the texts of the Quran and the Hadiths. The main category in the theory of cognition of the outstanding representative of the Maturidi school, Husam ad-Din as-Sygnaki, is the truth and knowledge of the thing, the methods of cognition of which are the five sense organs, and analysing the details of the connections of real information and mind, theoretically analysed differentiated methods of rejecting illogical opinions in the framework of maturidic cognition. In our article were detailed metaphysical phenomena in divine cognition (iliahayat) and ways of achieving truth and cognition of things in the context of mind and texts of the Quran and Sunnah in the works of Husam ad-Din as-Sygnaki as al-Kafi, al-Uafi and Tasdid fi Sharh at-Tamhid.

Keywords: sophistry, Sunnah, philosophy, cognition, information

1. Introduction

The science of *kalām* and Muslim *mutakallimūn* occupy a special place in the history of the development of Islamic thought. Islamic philosophers considered as one of their main tasks the protection of Islamic doctrine from the encroachment on various ideas that began to spread widely in the Muslim world after the entry of new territories into the caliphate and the emergence of new trends in the intellectual life of the Arab-Muslim world. One of the most prominent representatives of this pattern in the Central Asian region was Husām Al-Dīn Al-Signāqī (d.1311/1314), a renowned follower of the Hanafī school of *fiqh* and the Maturidi school of *aqīda*.

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He has a secure connection with Kazakhstan where his descendants are still living. It is believed that Ḥusām Al-Dīn Al-Siġnāqī was born in the ancient Syganak city in the valley of the river Syr, on the territory of a modern Kazakh town Kyzyl-Orda [1]. Ḥusām Al-Dīn Al-Siġnāqī grew up in a family of educated parents, undergone Islamic education and early dedicated himself to the Islamic science. To improve his knowledge, Al-Siġnāqī took a long journey but due to the lack of information on the year of his birth and his childhood we cannot accurately determine the beginning of his journey. However, according to the available data, he was educated in Bukhara, one of the major scientific centres of that time, and met a lot of outstanding scientists of his period.

For the Central Asian academic community, the study of the heritage of Al-Siġnāqī is especially important because he is considered to be one of the leading propagandists of the Hanafi madhhab in that region. However, most of his writings stay inaccessible up to now to a wide range of researchers and readers, particularly in Kazakhstan, for they remain to be kept in the form of manuscripts in libraries of other countries. In 2001, the government of Kazakhstan adopted a resolution to collect all available books and manuscripts of Al-Siġnāqī and return them to the homeland [1, p. 143]. Such a decision is essential for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is necessary to introduce the younger generation to the heritage of previous scholars with their whole paradigm of Islam. Secondly, researchers need materials that reflect the views of the Maturidi school representatives because Kazakhstan scholars consider that this very branch of Islamic theology contributes to the consensus and unity in multinational and multi-confessional Kazakhstan. Thirdly, the treatise of Al-Siġnāqī contains excellent examples of how one can resist the various ideologies that threaten the Muslims of Central Asia. In the ancient times, those were Tengrism, Zoroastrianism and different trends of Greek philosophy. In our time the threat comes from an extremist ideology of Islamist terrorist organizations.

In our paper we would like to present the summary of Al-Siġnāqī's renowned treatise *Al-Tasdīd fī Sharḥal-Tamhīd* in which he criticized the views of a number of philosophers, gave a rational-logical interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah, and analysed the truth of the object and means of cognition within the framework of the cognitive concept of Abul-Mu'in Al-Nasafi.

2. Arguing with the sophists for the truth of the object and knowledge

One of the academic merits that should be identified in Al-Siġnāqī's writings is the development of the cognitive concept. The foundation for his ideas he finds with his famous predecessor and teacher Abul-Mu'in Al-Nasafi (1047-1115) who in his treatise *Al-Tamhīd* in the chapter *The Affirmation of the Truth of the Subject and Knowledge* developed the categories of cognition. Al-Nasafi wrote, "Things have the truth, and the truth of things is proven and cannot be refuted. Even if it is refuted, it will be the refutation of the thing itself. Thus, there are three means of cognition: the sense organs, truthful information, and reason." [2]

Al-Signāqī highly evaluated the cognitive construct of Al-Nasafi. “There is no doubt in the superiority and skill of the author. His contemporaries cannot match him in the study of mystery and wonder. He makes his statements to prove that all things have true nature.” [3] Later Al-Signāqī made a detailed development of that theory in his work *Al-Tasdīd fī Sharḥal-Tamhīd* in which he tested it against teachings of the Sophists. It was a remarkable example because that branch of Greek philosophers refuted such fundamental categories of cognition as the truth of the object and knowledge.

In his book, Al-Signāqī identifies three groups of Sophists with whom he argues. The first one includes people who express ‘empty’ thoughts and fantasies. “It is known that people of consciousness do not recommend to enter into a dispute with them because in a dispute one can prove both the truth and the lie.” [4] Why does Al-Signāqī call thoughts of this group ‘empty’? Because the Sophists call hot - cold, sweet - bitter, white - black, the walls of a house built of brick and clay - an empty illusion and not a house at all. Such an approach in Al-Signāqī’s opinion is futile and empty itself [5].

The second group received the name *Al-‘Indīyya* with the specific characteristic of refuting the truth of right and wrong. Al-Signāqī describes them as people who think that the truth of the object is not the truth, even the reality does not relate to the truth. For example, adultery is a sin but they do not consider it as a sin. However, Al-Signāqī argues that the position of this group on refuting the truth of the object proves the general existence of the truth. His rational-logical response to the *Al-‘Indīyya* group the Muslim theologian grounded on the approach of Imam Al-Zāhid Al-Saffar Al-Bukhari (d.1151) about two modes of answering [6].

The first option that Al-Signāqī suggests is to turn away from any conversation with such people because there is no any profit in conversing with people who refute their existence, the existence of others, and even existence of words. Nevertheless, Al-Signāqī identifies a very radical means that could help to prove to this group the truth of the object. Following the example of Abu Hanifa, they could be bitten. “Once Imam Abu Hanifa (may Allah be pleased with him) was in the meeting with the Caliph, and a certain man was brought into their presence which started to argue with Abu Hanifa. When the man refuted everything that was told, Abu Hanifa ordered to bit him, and the man began to scream from biting. But Abu Hanifa (may Allah be pleased with him) said, ‘Stop screaming! Maybe it is not you are bitten, but another man is suffering, and you are dreaming! Maybe you are not a man but a donkey or a dog!’ After those words, the ignorant man rejected his position.” [4]

Al-Signāqī concludes on the first option that if a person agrees that there is the truth of the object, then there is the truth of the object. But if a person says that there is no truth, then there is no truth of the object. The simple illustration is the perception of something as poison. If the person considers some substance as poison, he or she will call it ‘poison’, but if not, the reaction will be neutral.

The second mode of answering to the *Al-‘Indīyya* followers is a dispute. Al-Siġnāqī identifies it as the best way to point out to the doubts of these people who know the truth but refuse to acknowledge it openly [4]. They protest saying that honey is not sweet but insipid. Their reminiscences are about taste anyway, and thus they acknowledge five sensory organs as means of cognition. So Al-Siġnāqī concludes that the *Al-‘Indīyya* do recognize the truth of the object, but consciously reject it and contradict to themselves.

The third group of the followers of the Sophists’ methodology Al-Siġnāqī identified as *Al-lā-Nadrīyya* or people who answer to all questions, “We do not know” [4]. Contesting this group, the theologian used in a wide sense the principle of Imam Al-Nasafi, “If someone rejects, he rejects himself” [7]. Al-Siġnāqī utilized the rational-logical method using words of the *Al-Nadrīyya* against them. Their vague consideration of all things and response ‘we do not know’ prove that doubt is doubt, thus showing the truth. At the same time, such an approach demonstrates faults of their presuppositions and their entire school. As Al-Siġnāqī points out, this group argues with its opponents not because they want to prove the absence of truth but because of an existence of right or wrong truth [4, p. 10].

Thus, we have considered the disputes of the prominent Muslim theologian Al-Siġnāqī with different groups of the Sophists in which he boldly argued for the presence of truth, identifying weak spots and faults of his opponents, utilizing heritage of his famous predecessors for his own platform. Such an approach could be very educating for modern believers who also confront different groups in our postmodern world. Of course, we do not approve any physical execution, but the rational-logical method of discussion could be beneficial.

3. Confirming the means of knowledge

Developing his theory of knowledge and cognition Al-Siġnāqī focuses on the means through which knowledge is obtained. Again, he refers to the foundation laid by his teachers Imam Al-Nasafi who said that there are three modes of knowing the world [7].

Firstly, Al-Siġnāqī affirms that only created beings need cognition because all Allah’s qualities and attributes are eternal, including His knowledge. As for the creation which includes humans, angels and jinns, their knowledge is limited and requires a starting point. (Jinn (Arabic: الجن, al-jinn), also Romanized as djinn or Anglicized as genies (with the more broad meaning of spirits or demons, depending on source) are supernatural creatures in early Arabian and later Islamic theology.) One of them might be a message. If there is no message, there will be no knowledge. So, the latter is achieved through the five senses that constitute the first means of cognition [4, p. 106]. The sense organs are a particular peripheral anatomical and physiological system that performs the primary analysis of information coming from the external environment and the internal organs. The traditional classification of the five sense organs includes

sight (eyes), smell (nose), taste (tongue), touch (skin) and hearing (ears) [W. McKenzie, *Are You a Techno-Constructivist?*, Education World, 2000, https://www.educationworld.com/a_tech/tech/tech005.shtml]. Therefore, all the external information could be obtained with the help of the senses [8].

Al-Siġnāqī analyses the five sense organs from the physiological perspective and concludes that there are special and non-special organs, paired and unpaired ones. Special parts include tongue and nose, the organs of taste and smell respectively which are unpaired. Non-special organs include those that participate in cognition with the help of touch, e.g., skin. Separately from the five senses, the scientist mentions the sixth sense, quoting the words by ‘Alā’ ad-Dīn al-Samarkandi (d.1157): “People have the sixth sense that makes them aware of the feeling of hunger, thirst, and satisfaction. That is instinct.” [9] For Al-Siġnāqī this sixth sense is unconditional and reflexive and could be realized only by the will of Allah Almighty.

The theologian concludes that those who persevere in rejecting the truth of the object want to show themselves, their advantage over others, elevating their ego, proving their superiority. “We can say with assurance that there is no any truth in their words. Quite the reverse, they reject the truth. Those who refuse the fact that the senses take part in reaching the truth reveal their pride. Thus pride, stubbornness, and a desire to show up demonstrate the refutation of truth. Considering the difference between two words, ‘*anād* means ‘turn away from the path, get off the way’ while *mukābara* means ‘rejection, a refutation of truth because of pride’.” [4, p. 116]

The second means of cognition is truthful information that comes through Revelation. In the book *Tabṣīra Al-Adilla* (About Truthful Information) Al-Siġnāqī defined the truthful information received through hearing the following way, “We can identify this information as the one that came from *mutawātir* and the Prophet himself (s.a.s)” [10]. The scholar points out to the opposition to truthful information that was found again in the Sophists who refuted the truth of the object and knowledge together with the means of cognition. But he also describes two more groups in alliance with the latter one. Those are the Brahmans whom Al-Siġnāqī identifies as the natives of India, who do not recognize prophets [11], and the Samanids who accepted reincarnation and worshipping idles [11, p. 156]. The cognitive problem of those groups was in rejection of messages because they held to the postulate that everything contains contradictions and every piece of news includes truth *and* lie. They do not know what information is, that is why they cannot tell the truth of the object [4, p. 12].

Polemizing with the Sophists, the Brahmans, and the Samanids, Al-Siġnāqī refers to the reality. He writes that people speak a language and receive messages in the words they know. They get them and accept them. But if a foreign language is used, then people need a translator who helps to understand and receive the information. Al-Siġnāqī wrote that getting any knowledge with the help of an interpreter is, in itself, an act of a message acceptance. If a person goes to a foreign country where he has not previously been and does not accept messages as true or false, he endangers family and property... Our answer would

be this. Wrong messages cannot bring knowledge. We define knowledge as the information that is free from lies. It includes messages sent through *mutawātir* and supported by the verses of the Qur'an, and *mujiza* (miracles) of the prophets. Referring to the truthful information, these two types of messages we affirm as true ones [4, p. 12].

Specifying who *mutawātir* are, Al-Siġnāqī points out that those were trustworthy people who could not be blamed for agreeing to tell a lie [6, p. 22]. That is why their messages served as a connector of one community to another using continuous transmission of the text from one group to another without any interruptions. Such a method was used by *usuliyyūn*, Muslim scholars of the fundamentals [4, p.12]. In his books *Al-Tasdīd* and *Al-Kāfi* Al-Siġnāqī gives a few examples of *mutawātir*'s messages. He mentions that the path to knowledge through messages of *mutawātir* does not require any proof. Understanding could be achieved through evidence, but it could be received without them, like in case of little silly children who do not need any confirmation of truth. They tell their messages to different people in different circumstances because they would never think to agree to tell a lie. That is why their messages are necessarily correct. There might be two consequences to people who deliver information. The first one is a preservation of the message correctness throughout the process and its compatibility with original words. The second is a corruption of the message. Some messengers could agree to tell a lie but some lived at different times and could not agree to tell a lie. For example, one information conductor gives a message; then the second conductor brings the word a hundred years later, the third messenger delivers the information from the first two people after many years and checks their messages [11].

Following Abu Mansur al-Māturīdī (853–944), Al-Siġnāqī compares a person who refuses messages of *mutawātir* as means of knowledge to a man “who does not know himself, his religion, and his heart” [12].

The second tool used to combat the currents that want to present lie as truth and truth as lie was *mujiza* identified by Al-Siġnāqī [13]. *Mujiza* means miracles of the prophets. The scholar specifies, “By *mujiza* we identify an unusual phenomenon that could be controlled only by Allah and beyond the ability of mere mortals. However, *mujiza* used for preaching the religion must be true. If it is not true, then, of course, it is a lie. Using *mujiza* to confirm a lie is the foolishness, meanness, and disgrace veiled with truth.” [4, p. 12] Thus we can conclude that *mujiza* is given to prophets by Allah to show the truth. The Qur'an says, “That He should establish the truth and abolish falsehood, even if the criminals disliked it” (Al-Anfal 8:8). This verse points out that the message of prophets should and does contain only truth.

Thus, we can conclude that the second means of cognition – truthful information – is represented by messages of the faithful and miracles of prophets.

Now we are coming to the third means of cognition which is reason. Al-Siġnāqī refers to his predecessors to give it definition, “Imam al-Lamishi defines reason as the foundation of knowledge for seeing the invisible through signs and

vision organs” [14]. Among those who refuse reason as a means of cognition the scholar names *al-mulhidūn* (atheists), *al-rauafidūn* (apostates), and *al-mushabbihūn*. The last group represents Anthropomorphists who depicted Allah with the attributes and images of the creations that give Allah the physical characteristics [15]. The fact that there are some contradictions proves for Al-Signāqi that reason does exist and people actively use it for cognition. Again, he insisted that those who refute reason and messages received through five senses are enticed by their stubbornness.

The corrupt nature of the theory that rejects the truth of cognition was discussed by Imam Al-Māturīdī in his treatise *Kitāb Al-Tawhīd*. He wrote, “The one who does not recognize the messages, knowledge, *hawās* of five senses, and what came from the prophets as conclusive evidence (*mujiza*) is stubborn and proud” [16]. This idea was later developed, as we have seen, by Imam Al-Nasafi and Al-Signāqi.

It is well known that Muslim scholars gave a special place to reason in religion. But the apparent position was very much confused by representatives of the currents mentioned above - *al-mulhidūn*, *al-rauafidūn*, and *al-mushabbihūn*. They considered those wrong presuppositions should be confronted with incorrect responses. But Al-Signāqi gave the following attestation to this position, “If they want to give a wrong answer to a wrong statement, then we believe that such a wrong answer is wrong in itself. If we consider the denial of reason as a means of cognition, then the fact of denying gives value to a denial. In the same way, those who deny reason as a means of cognition do it by their own reason because they do not have any other tools except their mind.” [4, p. 15]. The scholar mentions that information that comes from senses is received by human mind; reason develops it that sifts the truth. Therefore, five senses and reason closely relate and cannot be separated.

Moreover, one of the leading features of the Maturidi school is the claim that the mortals come to their God through work of reason. Al-Signāqi in his treatise *Al-Tasdīd*, proving his prominent position as *mutakallim* of the Maturidi school, wrote, “Before arrival of the religion of Islam, the community ‘*ahlul fitra*’ believed in Allah Almighty. It means that they reached that condition by their reason and considered it their duty to believe in Allah the Most High.” [4, p. 16]

To prove the involvement of reason in the birth of faith, Al-Signāqi cites the verse of the Qur’an, “Observe what is in the Heavens and Earth” (Yunus 10:101). Here the text says that faith can come before hearing, through observation. That is why the miracles of prophets were important that time to establish trust in people’s hearts. But understanding of *mujiza* was essential. The involvement of reason helped to distinguish between sorcery and prophetic miracles, thus establishing obligations of the mortal before their God [4, p. 16].

The role of reason caused a stormy debate among Muslim scholars. The primary contest was held between the ‘Ashari and Maturidi schools. Abū Al-Ḥasan Al-Ash‘arī (874–936) argued that faith without knowing Allah is impossible and one should receive a message and then believe. To prove it, Al-

Ash‘arī used an ayah from the Qur’an where Allah says, “Never would We punish until We sent a messenger” (Al-Isra 17:15). Such an approach could be considered as a difference between schools, and many scholars use it as a difference. But we would like to suggest taking it as the complementary views of scholars who belong to the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa’ah* tradition [17].

It is necessary to clarify that Maturidi stated that the mortal has to learn about Allah looking at His creation and contemplating over it. But the knowledge about the hereafter (*al-āhira*) could be received only with the coming of a prophet. The Al-Ash‘arī’s concept that the mortal should not learn about Allah means that it is possible only through the knowledge about *al-āhira*. Though the scholars expressed two different opinions about learning, they both affirm the existence of the hereafter which is disclosed through prophets, thus confirming that correct information comes through Revelation.

Al-Siġnāqī made efforts to prove the reliability of the messages that came down from prophets. He wrote that if someone says that his words are true, then his words and their essence are true. If the essence is true, then his message is true. Therefore what he says is true. We can give the following example. If someone says that his words are lies, it will not be a proof of their false nature because his very statement ‘all my words are lies’ may be true. So here we have a contradiction which should either a proof that his words are liars or truth... If these words come from a mature, mentally healthy person, then they must be true. The contradiction occurs because the foundation of such a message is true and the statement ‘all my words are lies’ contains the truth. Therefore, if a message consists of words that all deliver the truth, the statement will be true without contradiction. But if a message contains some words that relate to a lie, then there will be a contradiction in the whole report because the regulations of the internal character are violated [4].

Now, we can conclude that Al-Siġnāqī made a comprehensive analysis of the primary cognitive means and identified their three types such as five senses, truthful information, and reason. He demonstrated that all these factors are interconnected and complement each other in the process of proving the truth of the object and knowledge.

4. Conclusion

Ḥusām Al-Dīn Al-Siġnāqī was one of the most prominent scholars of the Maturidi school of Theology who lived in Central Asia and left a rich heritage for his descendants [18, 19]. His thoughts, ideas, and every word which is found in the ancient manuscripts are full of profound wisdom and highly required to build a new generation of scholars. The logic, reason and in-depth knowledge of his predecessors that Al-Siġnāqī demonstrated in his writings can serve as an excellent example for modern Muslims who also have to face challenges of strange and sometimes hostile theories as it was in the times of the ancient scholar. We have demonstrated in our research that Al-Siġnāqī’s methodology of confronting false presuppositions of the Sophists, the Anthropomorphists and

other groups that rejected reason, prophetic miracles and human senses to reach the truth in the process of cognition was deeply grounded in the Qur'an and the Sunnah and presented an excellent example of scholarly work.

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