



STUDY OF ISLAMIC THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IN EUROPE

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20679554>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 02nd June 2026

Accepted: 08th June 2026

Online: 09th June 2026

KEYWORDS

Islamic theology, Kalām, European Islamic studies, Orientalism, Māturīdism, Islamic intellectual heritage.

ABSTRACT

This article examines the historical development and academic study of Islamic theological issues in Europe from the eighth century to the present day. The research analyzes the evolution of European approaches to Islamic theology, beginning with the earliest Christian polemical writings on Islam and continuing through the emergence of modern Islamic studies in European academic institutions. Special attention is given to the contributions of prominent European theologians, orientalists, translators, and Islamic studies scholars who played a significant role in introducing Islamic intellectual traditions to Western academia.

The study highlights the pioneering works of John of Damascus, Niketas of Byzantium, and Robert of Ketton, whose writings and translations shaped early European perceptions of Islam. Furthermore, it explores the institutionalization of Islamic studies in European universities from the sixteenth century onward, including the establishment of centers for Oriental studies and the translation of the Qur'an into major European languages. The article also examines the scholarly contributions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century orientalists whose critical methodologies significantly influenced Western academic discourse on Islam.

Particular emphasis is placed on the European study of Islamic theology (Kalām) and the growing scholarly interest in the Māturīdī theological tradition. The research analyzes the works of leading contemporary scholars such as Josef van Ess, Wilferd Madelung, Ulrich Rudolph, and Angelika Brodersen, who have contributed substantially to the study, translation, editing, and dissemination of Māturīdī intellectual heritage. Their efforts have expanded academic understanding of Sunni theology and facilitated greater engagement with classical Islamic theological sources.



The findings demonstrate that European scholarship has evolved from predominantly polemical and apologetic approaches toward more objective, critical, and specialized academic investigations. Contemporary European researchers increasingly focus not only on Islamic religious sciences in general but also on the intellectual and spiritual legacy of specific theological schools, particularly Māturīdism. This trend reflects the growing recognition of the significance of Islamic theological thought within global intellectual history and intercultural academic dialogue.

Historical sources indicate that the study of Islamic sciences, including issues of Aqeedah, in the Christian world, especially in Europe, dates back to the 8th century. The first attempt at a scientific study of Islam was made by the Christian saint, theologian, philosopher, and hymn writer John of Damascus (John of Damascus (650-75 - 753-80), who took the name Mansur ibn Sarjun at-Taghlibi. John of Damascus, who held a high position in financial affairs under his father, Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, and who himself held a high position in the caliphate for some time before being dismissed, expresses his views on Islam in the sections "On Heresies" (О ересях) and "A Clear Statement of the Orthodox Faith" (Точное изложение православной веры) of the work attributed to him, "The Source of Knowledge," and in the treatise "Three Defensive Words Against Those Who Criticize Holy Icons" (Три защитительных слова против порицающих святые иконы или изображения). In these works, John of

Damascus, in a way that deviates from the usual, based on Christianity, He calls Islam the 101st innovation, and does not consider it (Islam) as an independent religion¹.

Later, the theologian, philosopher, teacher (дидакал), official (патрикий), author of works devoted to debates, Nikitas of Byzantium (IX century) wrote 3 anti-Islamic works. One of them is a treatise entitled "The Refutation of the Quran" (Опровержение Корана) and a letter of response to 2 letters sent to Emperor Michael III from the Muslim side (Caliph al-Mutawakkil). In the apologetic part of the above treatises and letters, he prefers to use only logical arguments, and tries to cite references to texts (narrations) only if they are recognized by both sides in the dispute².

Robert Catton, an English theologian and Arabic translator, translated the Quran into Arabic around 1143 at the request of Abbot Peter the Venerable under the title "Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete" (false prophet Muhammad). This translation was the

¹ John McManners. The Oxford History of Christianity. – New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. - p.185

² Krausmüller D. Killing at God's Command: Niketas Byzantios' Polemic against Islam and the Christian Tradition of Divinely Sanctioned Murder // Al-Masaq. Leeds, 2004. Vol. 16. N 1. P. 163-176;



first and remained the only translation of the Quran into European languages until the 17th century [Thomas E. Berman, "Exegesis and Translation: Traditional Arabic Exegesis of the Quran and the Latin Qurans of Robert Catton and Mark Toledo", *Speculum*, 73 (1998), pp. 703–32].

In the 1500s–1700s, Islam began to be studied in universities in Europe, and orientalists worked in this field. Faculties for the study of Oriental languages were opened in Leiden (1593), Rome (1627), and Oxford (1638). Translations of the Quran appeared in French by André du Rieux (1647), in Latin by Ludovic Maracci (1698), and in English by Georges Sale (1734).

The academic study of Islam continued in the 1800s. One of the researchers was the German orientalist Gustav Weyl (1808-1889), who was a professor of oriental languages at the University of Heidelberg. Gustav Weil is the author of the following works: "Muhammad - the Prophet, His Life and Teachings" (Мухаммед — пророк, его жизнь и учение - 1843), "Historical-Critical Introduction to the Quran" (Историко-критическое введение в Коран - 1844), "Legends of Muslims in the Bible" (Библейские легенды мусульман - 1845), "History of the Caliphs" in 5 volumes (History of the Caliphs - 1846-1862), "History of the Abbasid Caliphate in Egypt" (История халифата Аббасидов в Египте - 1860-1862-йиллар), "History of the Islamic Peoples from Muhammad to Sultan Selim" (История исламских народов от Мухаммеда до времен султана Селима - 1866).

In the late 18th and early 20th centuries, the foundations of scientific Islamic studies were laid in European universities. At the same time, the attitude of many Western Orientalists towards the Muslim tradition was critical (skeptical), which was clearly expressed in the works of Julius Wellhausen (d. 1918), Friedrich Schwali (d. 1919), Ignaz Goldzier (d. 1921), Theodor Nöldeke (d. 1930), Hartwig Hirschfeld (d. 1934), Leona Caetani (d. 1935), Otto Pretzl (d. 1941), Arthur Jeffery (d. 1959), and Josef Schacht (d. 1969). Later, this work was continued by the specialists in Arabic studies of the last century, Richard Bell (d. 1952), John Edward Wansbrough (d. 2002), and William Montgomery Watt (d. 2006). German orientalist, specialist in Arabic language and literature, and linguist of Sami languages, translator, student of T. Nöldeke, Professor Karl Brockelmann (1868-1956) compiled a biobibliographic work entitled "Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur" (History of Arabic Literature), in which he collected information about scholars who wrote works in Arabic and Arabic, including historians of the 7th-20th centuries.

By the first half of the 20th century, Western researchers began to study each of the Islamic sciences in its own way. One of such researchers was Arent Jan Wensink (1882-1932), a Dutch Islamic scholar and comparative linguist of Semitic languages, translator, researcher of Syrian Sufism in Islamic teachings, one of the editorial board members of the first edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam (assistant to Martin Houtsman), professor at the Leiden Academy, foreign member of the Royal Netherlands



Academy of Arts and Sciences (1917) and foreign member of the Asiatic Society. Among his many publications on philosophical-Sufiism in Islam, he wrote a work called *The Muslim Creed* (1932), in which he critically examined the treatises attributed to Abu Hanifa³.

Earl Edgar Elder (1887–1973), an American scholar, missionary, and researcher known for his significant contributions to the fields of Orientalism, Islamic studies, and Arab studies, wrote and translated a number of influential works throughout his career that were instrumental in building bridges of understanding between Western and Islamic cultures. He translated Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi's "Aqeedah" into English in Al-Tahawi's "Bayan al-Sunna wa'l-jama'a" (1933), a collection dedicated to the birthday of Duncan MacDonald. He also translated Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani's "A Commentary on the Creed of Islam" (1950), making this important text available to a wider audience⁴.

Harry Ostrin Wolfson (1887-1974), an American scientist, philosopher and historian, professor at Harvard University, the first chairman of the Jewish Center in the USA, provides information about the science of the word through his works "The Philosophy of the Kalam" (1976), "Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish philosophy" (1979)⁵.

Since the mid-20th century, a number of European scholars have

conducted research not only on Islamic theological sciences, but also on more specific ones, namely on the scientific legacies of theological schools, in particular, the representatives of Maturidiism. In particular, the German Islamic scholar, Professor at the University of Tübingen until his retirement in 1999, Josef van Ess, wrote works and monographs entitled "Theologie Und Gesellschaft Im 2 Lund 3 Jahrhundert Hidschra" (Theology and Society in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries of the Hijra - 2 Hundred) and "The Flowering of Muslim Theology" (The Flowering of Muslim Theology, 2006). Wilferd Madelung (1930-2023), an American-German historian (Orientalist-Arabist), PhD in history, professor of Islamic studies, a major specialist in Islamic history, in particular the Shiite and Ismaili schools, as well as the early history of Islam, published an article entitled "Abu L-Mu'in al-Nasafi and Ash'ari Theology" in the Encyclopedia of Islam.

Ulrich Rudolph, a German scientist, doctor of philosophy, professor of Islamic studies at the University of Zurich, published his "Ratio und Überlieferung in der Erkenntnislehre al-Aš'arīs und al-Māturīdīs" (Reason and discourse in the theory of knowledge in al-Ash'ari and al-Maturīdīs), "Ibn Sīnā et le kalām" (Ibn Sīnā et le kalām), "Das Entstehen der Māturīdiya" (The

³ The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development by A.J. Wensinck, Cambridge University Press, 1932

⁴ 20. Earl Elder. Al-Tahawi's "Bayan al-Sunna wa'l-jama'a". The MacDonald presentation volume. – London: Princeton University press, 1933; Earl Elder. A commentary on the creed of Islam; Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī on the creed of Najm al-Dīn al-

Nasafi. – New York, Columbia University Press, 1950.

⁵ Harry Austryn Wolfson. The Philosophy of the Kalam. – Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976. Harry Austryn Wolfson. Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish philosophy. – Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979.



emergence of Maturīdiya), "Zur Geschichte der Sunnitischen Theologie in Samarkand", "Al-Māturīdī's concept of God's wisdom", "Science as Competition. The Debate between Sa'dadīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390) and al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413)" (Saduddin With his articles such as "Ḥanafī theological tradition and Māturīdism" and his book "Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand" (al-Māturīdī and the Sunni Theology of Samarkand), he succeeded in introducing Europeans to the scholarly heritage of the representatives of the Māturīdist school of thought.

Another such expert, Dr. Angelika Brodersen, a research fellow at the Institute of Oriental and Islamic Studies at the University of Bochum (Germany), in her *Das Compendium der Beweise für die Grundlagen des Ein-Gott-Glaubens oder Talḥīṣ al-adilla li-qawā c id at-tauḥīd von Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Ismā c il aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Bukhari* (A Compendium of Evidence for the Foundations of Belief in One God or the Talḥīs-ul-Adilla li-qawādī-t-tauḥīd of Abu Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Ismā'īl as-Saffār al-Bukhari, 2011), *Der unbekannte kalām. Theologische Positionen der frühen Māturīdiya am*

Beispiel der Attributenlehre (An unknown word. The positions of the early Māturīdīs in theology on the example of the doctrine of attributes, 2014), "Zwischen Māturīdiya und Ašcarīya. Abū Šakūr as-Sālimī and his *Tamhīd fī bayān al-tawḥīd*" his monographs entitled "Tamhid fi bayani-t-tawhid", 2018), and Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. He holds a unique position among European researchers as the editor of the modern Arabic edition of works such as *Ismā c il al-Ṣaffār al-Bukhārī, Talkḥīṣ al-adilla li-qawā c id al-tauḥīd* (Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Ismā'il as-Saffār al-Bukhārī's *Talkhisu-l-adilla li kawa'idi-t-tawḥīd*, 2011), Abū Shakūr al-Sālimī, *Tamhīd fī bayān al-tauḥīd*, in: *Zwischen Aš c arīya und Māturīdiya. Abū Šakūr as-Sālimī and his Tamhīd fī bayān al-tauḥīd* (Abu Shakūr as-Salimī's *Tamhīd fī bayān-ut-tawḥīd*, 2018).

In conclusion, it should be said that from the information given above, European researchers are more and more eager to study not only the religious sciences of Islam, but also the spiritual heritage of the representatives of the Maturid school of thought.