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# THE LIFE OF ABŪ MANṢŪR AL-MĀTURĪDĪ AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF CENTRAL ASIA IN THE TENTH CENTURY

Aref Chaker\*

**Abstract:** Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī is one of the most influential theologians in the Muslim World. He emerged in the tenth century in Central Asia and established his own theological school, al-Māturīdiyyah; a school that played and continues to play a pivotal role in the formation of the Sunni synthetic theological movement in the Muslim world. A review of the studies undertaken concerning al-Māturīdī demonstrates the influence of the socio-political and theological context of Central Asia on al-Māturīdī has not been studied, examined or analysed. This paper focuses on studying this overlooked aspect in Sunni theology. It evaluates the existence of any influence of the social, political, cultural and religious factors on al-Māturīdī's works and his academic identity. It examines the nature of these influences, positive or negative, by undertaking a qualitative content analysis of all biographical, historical and geographical literature relevant to al-Māturīdī and Central Asia. The study uncovered the strong influence these factors had on al-Māturīdī. These influences were all positive in many of his writings. More importantly, these factors helped shape the synthetic theological paradigm al-Māturīdī adopted in much of his literature.

**Keywords:** *Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, Islamic theology, Sunni theology, Central Asia*

## INTRODUCTION

Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944 CE) was a prominent Muslim scholar of the tenth century. Many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars consider him one of the founding fathers of Sunni synthetic theology. This recognition does not come as a surprise since al-Māturīdī founded one of the two main schools of theology in Islam: al-Māturīdiyyah, a venerable theological institution, which has been followed and continues to be embraced and respected by billions of Muslims across centuries around the globe. Ṭāsh Kubra states, “one should know that the leaders of the Sunni Muslims, in theology, are two; one of them is Ḥanafī and the second is Shāfi’ī. The Ḥanafī is Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī ...”<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, despite the fact he

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<sup>1</sup> A. Ṭāsh Kubra Zadah, *Miftāḥ Al Sa’ādah Wa Miṣbāḥ Al Siyādah*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al ‘Ilmiyyah, 1985), 151.

is one of the theologians of the epoch, the degree of focus on his life and context of his rise, in biographical and academic literature, is so modest that Badawī classifies it as “unfitting and unfair to his calibre.”<sup>2</sup> The biographers who wrote about him, such as al-Laknawī, al-Sam’ānī, al-Qurashī, Ibn Quṭlubughā, Ṭāsh Kubra, al-Bayādī, al-Zabīdī, Abū Mu’īn al-Nasafī and al-Kafawī, provide short sketches of al-Māturīdī’s life and even less on the socio-political and theological context of his region and its influence on his academic constitution.<sup>3</sup> Rudolph attests to this and states,

... after al-Māturīdī became famous his biographers were evidently in a predicament to find any noteworthy reports about him ... Thus the relevant sources do not read as biographies, but rather as lists of works that has been enlarged upon by brief statements on his personage and a few words of praise.<sup>4</sup>

This tendency persisted even in Western literature, such as Pessagno,<sup>5</sup> Rahman,<sup>6</sup> Tritton,<sup>7</sup> Nasir<sup>8</sup> and Bruckmayr,<sup>9</sup> among others. Each researcher studied specific aspects of al-Māturīdī’s theology, but no effort was exerted in examining or studying the influence of his context. Ceric dedicates a chapter in his thesis to study of al-Māturīdī’s life and works.<sup>10</sup> His work presents a creditable endeavour, but inadequate, as far as the context of al-Māturīdī’s life is concerned. First, it focuses on extensively studying only one of al-Māturīdī’s works, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, understandably since it is the backbone of his thesis. Second, it lacks a complete critique and analysis of all the biographical aspects of his life; and third, it does not attempt to study the influence of context on him, save a brief descriptive mention of the Samanid’s reign in the region. Rudolph’s work provides a praiseworthy and critical analysis of al-Māturīdī’s life. Nonetheless, the scope of his work first encompasses the entire Ḥanafī movement in the region, which inevitably causes a loss of focus on the influence of the regional factors that affected al-Māturīdī personally. Second, he relies chiefly on the analysis of the terms and content of the academic traditions of the Ḥanafī scholars to deduce his opinions. Thus, he overlooks many other relevant sources, including other works by al-Māturīdī and biographical, historical and geographical traditions pertinent to the region.

<sup>2</sup> A Badawī, *Al Turāth Al Yunānī Fi Al Ḥaḍārah Al Islāmiyyah* [The Greek Heritage in the Islamic Civilisation] (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat Al Nahda, 1940).

<sup>3</sup> Due to the limits of this paper, a breakdown of which aspect of Al-Māturīdī’s life each biographer covers has not been provided.

<sup>4</sup> Ulrich Rudolph and Rodrigo Adem, *Al-Maturidi and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, (Leiden, NL: Brill: 2015), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10992600>. 125.

<sup>5</sup> J. Meric Pessagno, “The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought,” *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984).

<sup>6</sup> F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> A. S. Tritton, “An Early Work from the School of Al-Māturīdī,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 3/4 (1966).

<sup>8</sup> Sahilun A. Nasir, “The Epistemology of Kalam of Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 43, no. 2 (2005), <http://dx.doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2005.432.349-365>.

<sup>9</sup> Philipp Bruckmayr, “The Spread and Persistence of Maturidi Kalam and Underlying Dynamics,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 13, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>10</sup> M. Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abu Mansur Al-Māturīdī* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995).

Did al-Māturīdī live, study and research in an academic and religious friendly environment or did he forge his own path in opposition to his society's general current? Under which political and economic circumstances did al-Māturīdī acquire knowledge, teach and write? Did his circumstances have any influence, positive or negative, on his motivations and academic accomplishments? What was the intellectual state of the society and how did it influence his thought and motivations? This article attempts to fill a serious gap in the academic literature about al-Māturīdī. It examines the influence of the social, political, cultural, personal and religious factors on his motivations, perceptions and objectives, while revisiting and critically analysing some of the biographical information available about al-Māturīdī. This is realised through a critical analysis of historical and geographical literature and a restudy of the traditional biographical literature related to al-Māturīdī and his region, to shed further light on his context and its influence on him.

### EARLY LIFE OF AL-MĀTURĪDĪ

Al-Māturīdī is a man whose appellations and epithets overshadow his name, a practice quite common in Islamic literature. Nicknames and titles serve as distinguishing markers for people who had very common names. Al-Māturīdī's full name was Muhammad son of Muhammad son of Mahmoud.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, he is famously known by his *kunya*<sup>12</sup> Abū Maṣṣūr and his nickname al-Māturīdī, which means “the one from the city of Maturīd,” referring to his birthplace.<sup>13</sup>

Al-Māturīdī grew up in Central Asia. This region is known in classical Arab literature as *bilād mā warā' al-nahr* (the land beyond the river), in reference to a river referred to in Arabic as *Jayhūn*, which is famous in classical antiquity as the Oxus River.<sup>14</sup> As Hugh Kennedy explains, “these lands were considered to be part of Khurasan,<sup>15</sup> the vast province that also included North East Iran,”<sup>16</sup> which was of great strategic, political and economic importance.

<sup>11</sup> Zabīdī, in his book *Ithāf Al Sādah*, advises that some of the academic sources he read about al-Māturīdī relate the name of his first great-grandfather was also Muhammad. Thus, according to Zabīdī, the full al-Māturīdī's name is Muhammad son of Muhammad son of Muhammad son of Mahmoud, adding another name to his family line. For further information, see M. Zabīdī, *Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqqīn Bi Sharhi Ihyā' Ulūm Al Dīn*. (Beirut: Dar al Kutub al Ilmiyah, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> *Kunya* is a “teknonym in Arabic names, the name of an adult derived from his or her eldest child ... By extension, it may also have hypothetical or metaphorical references, e.g. in a nom de guerre or a nickname, without literally referring to a son or a daughter.” Pedzisai Mashiri, “Terms of Address in Shona: A Sociolinguistic Approach,” *Zambezia*, 26 (1999).

<sup>13</sup> Maturīd was known to a number of famous Muslim historians, such as Sam'āni, Yaqūt and Ibn Al Athīr. Sam'āni describes it as a city “from which a number of virtuous scholars have appeared.” For further information, see A. Al Sam'āni, *Al Ansāb*, vol. 12 (Beirut: Dar Al Fikr), <http://shamela.ws/browse.php/book-12317/page-763>, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Today this river is known as the Amu Darya or Amu River. For further information, see Percy Sykes, *Persia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922); William C. Brice, *An Historical Atlas of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981).

<sup>15</sup> Khurasān is a term used “in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, the term ‘Khurasan’ frequently had a much wider denotation, covering also parts of Central Asia and Afghanistan”. For further information see “Khurasan,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> H. Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007), 238.

The rich and generous nature of the region facilitated cities of political, cultural and economic significance to be built. At the same time, it attracted the attention of Muslim conquerors that were expanding into Central Asia.

In addition, the geographic location of this region allowed its inhabitants to have strong relations with many surrounding civilisations, such as the Byzantium, Sassanid and Chinese.<sup>17</sup> This advantageous quality enriched the region with exposure to various cultures and ideologies. It opened the door for Muslims to interact with cultures they had not known in the Arabian Peninsula or Middle East. Thus, al-Māturīdī's geographical location exposed him to many civilisations, cultures, faith and traditions.

Little is known about al-Māturīdī's family. Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, biographers and heresiographers have provided little information about his personal life. Even his ethnic background seems to be subject to debate and assumptions among biographers and chroniclers. Zādah (d. 1687 CE), a Hanafī Muslim theologian, Zabīdī (d. 1790 CE), a very prominent Muslim grammarian and historian, and Ali, a contemporary Muslim scholar, discussed al-Māturīdī's lineage and stated he comes from an Arab background.<sup>18</sup> More precisely, they argue he comes from the offspring of Abu Ayūb<sup>19</sup> al-Ansārī,<sup>20</sup> one of Prophet Muhammad's disciples. Ali confirms he saw the reference "Ansari", which means in Arabic "the descendants of the Ansar," written in al-Māturīdī's lineage in the margin of the manuscript of his book *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* and is confident he is one of the descendants of this companion.<sup>21</sup> Zādah and Zabīdī list the description "Ansari" in al-Māturīdī's lineage, but do not provide any information to support their claim.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, not all biographers endorse this opinion: Nasr and Mutahharī describe al-Māturīdī as a Persian Muslim theologian.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Fatīma al-Khaymī in her commentary on his life in the introduction of his exegesis book *Ta'wīlat Ahlu al-Sunnah* alludes to this possibility by referring to a book he wrote in Persian titled *al-Fawā'id*.<sup>24</sup> Ceric does not accept the description "Ansari" as absolute truth either. He argues it was added by a third party to al-

<sup>17</sup> M. Shākir, *Al Tārīkh Al Islāmi*, 6th ed. (Beirut: Al Maktab Al Islami, 2000); A. Vambery, *Tārīkh Bukhāra Mundhu Al Qidam Hattā Al 'Aṣr Al Hādīr*, trans. A. Sadati and Y. Khashab (Cairo: Nahdat Al Sharq, 1965); M. Narkhashi, *Tārīkh Bukhāra*, trans. Nasrullah Al Tarazi, 3rd ed., Dhakha'ri Al 'Arab 40 (Cairo: Dar Al Ma'arif, 1956).

<sup>18</sup> Zabīdī, *Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqqīn Bi Sharhi Ihyā' Ulūm Al Dīn*; Ahmad B. Zāda, *Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām* (Beirut: Dar al Kutub al Ilmiyah, 2007); M. Ayūb Ali, *'Aqīdat Al Islam Wal Imam Al Maturīdī* (Bangladesh: Al Mu'assassa Al Islamiyah, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Abu Ayūb Al Ansārī is Khālīd Bin Zayd from the Arab tribe of Khazraj and the family of Al Najjar, who relate to Prophet Muhammad from his mother's side. When the Prophet immigrated to the city of Madinah, he honoured Abu Ayūb by residing in his house for a couple of months. For further information, see M. Dhahabi, *Siyar A'alam Al Nubala'*, 11th ed. (Beirut: Resalah Publications, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Al Ansārī is derived from the term Al Ansar, which is used in Islamic terminology to describe "the people of the city of Madinah from the tribes of Aws and Khazraj who accepted Islam and vowed to protect Prophet Muhammad from all dangers and welcomed him in their city." Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ayūb Ali, *'Aqīdat Al Islam Wal Imam Al Maturīdī*, 262-63.

<sup>22</sup> Zabīdī, *Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqqīn Bi Sharhi Ihyā' Ulūm Al Dīn*; Zāda, *Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām*.

<sup>23</sup> S. H. Nasr and M. Mutahhari, *The Cambridge History of Iran, the Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>24</sup> M. Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlat Ahlu Sunnah*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Resalah Publishers, 2004).

Māturīdī's book and he did not include it personally.<sup>25</sup> The controversy around al-Māturīdī's lineage and ethnic origin becomes important when studying his works. Ceric criticises the fluency of al-Māturīdī in Arabic and describes his writing style in Arabic as "awkward, obscure and hard to follow."<sup>26</sup> He attributes this to two factors: the fact Arabic was his second language; and because "... most probably due to the fact that he thought in Turkish or Persian but wrote in Arabic..."<sup>27</sup> If al-Māturīdī's Arab origin can be confirmed, this criticism will become baseless. If not, this may open the door for further research into the linguistic nature of al-Māturīdī's works and style of writing.

As far as his date of birth is concerned, none of the historians and biographers who wrote about al-Māturīdī's life provides the exact date. Ibrahim and Sayyid 'Awaḍayn state, "the researcher in the life of al-Māturīdī will not be able to find recorded, his exact date of birth..."<sup>28</sup> As a result, some scholars speculate on his date of birth and others attempt to deduce it by extraneous factors. One of the methods a number of scholars, such as Ibrahim and Sayyid 'Awaḍayn and Ali, employed was to estimate his date of birth through the dates of death of his teachers. Ibrahim and Sayyid 'Awaḍayn state, "And whatever the matter may be, the researcher finds no escape from studying the biographies of his teachers in order to estimate his life period..."<sup>29</sup> This method led Ibrahim and Sayyid to conclude al-Māturīdī was born before 862 CE. In other words, al-Māturīdī was born during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil, before the birth of Abu Ḥasan al-Ash'ari (d. 936 CE), one of the most prominent Muslim theologians who founded the Ash'ari synthetic school of theology, minimally by 25 to 27 years.<sup>30</sup> This is a significant finding as far as the evolution of Islamic synthetic theology is concerned. Rahman subscribes to their deduction, but specifies 849 CE as al-Māturīdī's date of birth, which is still within the reign of al-Mutawakkil.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Ali approximates that 852 CE is al-Māturīdī's birth year.<sup>32</sup> Ali discerns this date from the dates of death of two of al-Māturīdī's main teachers: Rāzi died in 862 CE and Balkhi died in 881 CE. Rāzi is considered one of al-Māturīdī's main teachers and it is not possible to assume he died when al-Māturīdī was younger than 10 years because al-Māturīdī could not have learnt from him at such an age.<sup>33</sup>

As far as his date of death is concerned, most biographers concur that al-Māturīdī died in 944 CE and was buried in Samarqand.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> However, this action cannot be evidence that supports or rules out the correctness of the claim. It is possible the one that placed it did so based on evidence they have that confirms Al Māturīdī's lineage.

<sup>26</sup> Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 21-22.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> M. Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahlu Sunnah*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Al Majlis Al A'la Lil Shu'un Al Islamiyyah, 1994), 11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*.

<sup>32</sup> Ayūb Ali, *'Aqidat Al Islam Wal Imam Al Maturidi*.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Zāda, *Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām*; M. Khalīfa, *Kashf Al Thonūn 'an Asāmi Al Kutub Wal Fnoon* (Beirut: Dar Ihyaa' Al Turath Al Arabi, 1966); Ayūb Ali, *'Aqidat Al Islam Wal Imam Al Maturidi*; Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahlu Sunnah*; M. Abu Zahra, *Al Aqeedah Al Islamiyyah* (Cairo: Majma' Al Buhooth, 1969); M. Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah* (Cairo: Hajar, 1993); Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*; Ṭāsh Kubra Zadah, *Miftāḥ Al Sa'ādah Wa Miṣbāḥ Al Siyādah*; *Tabaqāt Al Fuqahā'*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Matba'at Al Zahra' Al Haditha, 1961).

At the first instance, the difference of opinions about al-Māturīdī's dates of birth and death may seem trivial. However, these dates are crucial to determine a number of important factors, among them the period in which he lived, the political and academic climate he grew in, the calibre of the scholars from whom he acquired knowledge, and the academic developments, controversies and challenges that he, as a scholar at his time, faced. It is also important to establish whether al-Māturīdī or al-Ash'ari was the first to provide a basis for Sunni synthetic theology.

Despite the ambiguity and lack of specific details about his personal life, the available information proves constructive. It is apparent through deduction that al-Māturīdī lived during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil.<sup>35</sup> This marks a focal point in the history of Islam and evolution of Islamic disciplines. Many historians and biographers, such as Ibn Abi Ya'la (d. 1131 CE), a famous Hanbali Muslim scholar, Ibn al-Athīr, Suyūṭī (d. 1505 CE), a prominent Muslim scholar, and Wakīl, a contemporary Muslim scholar, confirm that al-Mutawakkil is the caliph that ended the political dominance of the Mu'tazilites over the central government in Baghdad. He ended the trial of "the creation of the Qur'an" that was imposed throughout the Muslim world, and released Ahmad Ibn Hanbal from prison and honoured him.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, this is the era that witnessed the launch of the traditionalists of their counter-radical campaign against the Mu'tazilites and caused the migration of many of the latter to the region where al-Māturīdī lived.

Another valuable insight one gains from the dates is that al-Māturīdī was born approximately 25 years before the birth of the renowned Abu Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, who founded the famous Sunni Ash'ari theological school.<sup>37</sup> This permits me to argue that the first scholar to found a Sunni theological school, debate and establish the tenets of the Sunni creed in a dialectical framework in the face of Mu'tazilites, philosophers and non-Muslim movements was in fact al-Māturīdī and not al-Ash'arī.<sup>38</sup>

In addition, the year of al-Māturīdī's birth is important to determine his role in the evolution of the discipline of Qur'anic exegesis. His date of birth indicates he was a contemporary of Ṭabari, who is one of the most renowned Sunni exegetes. Ṭabari was born in 838 CE and died in 922 CE.<sup>39</sup> His book, entitled *al-Bayān fī Jāmi' al-Qur'ān*, has been classified by many scholars, such as Qaṭān, Dhahabī, Dawūdī, Suyūṭī, Adnaway, Bugha and

<sup>35</sup> M Wakīl, *Al Aṣr Al Dhahabi Lil Dawla Al 'Abasiyya* (Damascus: Dar Al Qalam, 1998); J. Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh Al Khulāfā'*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar Al Arkam Ibn Al Arkam).

<sup>36</sup> A. Ibn Al Athīr, *Al Kāmil Fil Tārīkh*, 1st ed., vol. 8 (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al 'Ilmiyah, 1987); Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh Al Khulāfā'*; M. Abu Ya'la, *Tābqāt Al Hanābilah*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Riyad: Maktabat Malik Fahd Al Wataniyyah, 1999); Wakīl, *Al Aṣr Al Dhahabi Lil Dawla Al 'Abasiyya*.

<sup>37</sup> Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahlu Sunnah*.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Mutawakkil was also the first Abbasid caliph to embrace the Shafi'i jurisprudence school, which is the second most dominant jurisprudence school in the Sunni world. In addition, he revered Ahmad Ibn Hanbal immensely. This could have contributed to overlooking Al Māturīdī's work since he was far from the central government in Baghdad and was from the Hanafi school of jurisprudence.

<sup>39</sup> I. Ibn Kathīr, *Al Bidaya Wal Nihaya*, 2nd ed., 22 vols. (Damascus: Dar Ibn Kathir, 2010); Dhahabi, *Siyar A'alam Al Nubala'*; Y. Hamwi, *Irshād Al Arīb Ila Ma'rifat Al Adīb*, 1st ed., 7 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al Gharb Al Islāmi, 1993).

others, as the first comprehensive book of Qur'ānic exegesis.<sup>40</sup> The fact al-Māturīdī lived during the same era as Ṭabari indicates he lived during an evolving stage of Qur'ānic exegesis, which opens the door wide to debate about the nature of his contributions, their value and his influence on the discipline of Qur'ānic exegesis, particularly when it is established he authored a comprehensive exegesis.

## THE WORKS OF AL-MĀTURĪDĪ

The excellence of al-Māturīdī as a theologian overshadows his important contributions in the other Islamic disciplines. Nonetheless, the wealth of his oeuvre demonstrates he contributed to the main fundamental Islamic disciplines.

One of the fundamental Islamic disciplines in which al-Māturīdī wrote is *uṣūl al fiqh*. Khalīfa, Ṭāsh Kubra, al-Laknawī, Baghdadī and Qutlūbugha list two books for al-Māturīdī in this discipline: *Kitāb al-Jadal* (The Book of Debate) and *Ma'ākhidh al-Sharī'ah* (The Methodologies of Islamic *Sharia*).

'Alā' al-Dīn al-Bukhārī (d. 1330 CE), a prominent Ḥanafī jurist, demonstrates the value of these two books in his discussion of the types of literature Ḥanafī scholars wrote in the field of *uṣūl al fiqh*:

... and the works written by our colleagues in *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* are of two types: books that have been written in the most impeccable and scholarly form. For they were written by scholars who excelled in the sciences that relate to the fundamentals and detailed sciences of Islam. An example of books of such calibre are *Kitāb al-Jadal* and *Ma'ākhidh al-Sharī'ah* by al-Māturīdī.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, according to Khalīfa, these two books became the main references for Ḥanafī scholars in the field of *uṣūl al fiqh* until the twelfth century.<sup>42</sup> In other words, for more than two centuries, Ḥanafī scholars studied, taught and relied on al-Māturīdī's books to shape the understanding of the Ḥanafī school in the discipline of *uṣūl al fiqh* and by extension the discipline of Islamic jurisprudence. This establishes that al-Māturīdī's scholarship and prominence is not and cannot be confined to the field of theology. More importantly, it demonstrates al-Māturīdī was a leading scholar who left his mark in every field he studied. Unfortunately, these two books no longer exist.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> M. Qattān, *Mabāhith Fi Ulūm Al Qur'an* (Beirut: Resalah Publishers, 1998); M. Dawūdi, *Tabaqāt Al Mufasssirīn*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al 'Ilmiyyah, 1983); M. Al Bughā and M. Mistū, *Al Wādh Fi Ulūm Al Qur'an* (Damascus: Al Kalim Al Tayyib, 1998); M. Dhahabi, *Al Tafsīr Wal Mufasssiroon*, vol. 2 (Cairo: 1976); J. Suyūṭī, *Tābaqāt Al Mufasssirīn* (Kuwait: Dar Al Nawadir, 2010); A. Adnaway, *Tābaqāt Al Mufasssirīn* (Madinah: Maktabat Al 'Ulum Wal Hikam, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Khalīfa, *Kashf Al Thonūn 'an Asāmi Al Kutub Wal Funoon*.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, vol. 1, 110.

<sup>43</sup> Ceric lists an additional two books and a variation in the names of the first two books. The additional titles he cites are *Kitāb Al Ma'ākhidh Al Sharī'ah fī Al Fiqh* and *Kitāb Usūl Al Dīn*. None of the other biographers and scholars mention them. In reference to the variation in the names of the first two books, *Kitāb Al Jadal fī Usūl Al Fiqh* and *Kitāb Ma'ākhidh Al Sharī'ah fī Usūl Al Fiqh*, one notices the addition in the names of the first two books is the same – *fī Usūl Al Fiqh* – which means “in the discipline of *Usūl*



Despite al-Māturīdī's excellence in various Islamic sciences, the field of theology is where one finds the majority of his works. It is for his contributions to this field that he is most remembered and revered. His distinction and erudition in theology is what earned him the epithets and reputation he enjoys and turned him into an icon of the Sunni world and an eponym of the theological school, al-Māturīdiyyah.

Al-Māturīdī's theology literature can be divided into three main categories:<sup>44</sup> *al maqālāt*, *al rudūd* and *uṣūl al tawhīd*. *Al-maqālāt* is a genre of theological books in which scholars list the arguments and proofs of the various Islamic schools and orientations. In the *uṣūl al tawhīd* genre, scholars outline and explain the tenets of faith and principles of Islamic creed according to their understanding. On the other hand, in *al rudūd* genre, scholars refute and respond to the arguments of scholars who belong to a different school or sect.<sup>45</sup>

In the genre of *al maqālāt*, al-Māturīdī has a book with the same title: *al-Maqālāt*.<sup>46</sup> Fāṭima and Brockelmann state the book is available as a manuscript in Köprülü Library in Istanbul, Turkey, under number 856.<sup>47</sup> However, Ceric states Tanci and Ali dispute this claim and have been able to prove through checking other manuscripts in Fatih Library in Istanbul and 'Arif Hikmat Library in Madinah that this title belongs to Abū Bakr Fūrak, a prominent Ash'arī scholar who died in 406 CE.<sup>48</sup> Despite, Tanci's and Ali's claim, Ceric maintains one cannot ignore the possibility such a title may belong to al-Māturīdī, but does not provide any evidence that supports this possibility.<sup>49</sup>

While Tanci and Ali may be correct in their conclusion that this specific manuscript belongs to Abū Bakr Fūrak, this in itself cannot be a proof that a similar title was not written by al-Māturīdī, particularly when it is evident this genre of writing was widely and commonly used by different scholars in the field of theology, such as *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, written by his contemporary Abū Ḥasan al-'Ash'arī. Furthermore, what asserts the presence of such a title for al-Māturīdī is the fact that more than 11 of the biographers who wrote about al-Māturīdī's life list this title as part of his works.<sup>50</sup> Outside the context of this debate, al-Nasafī

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*Al Fiqh*." It seems this addition is the result of Ceric's misunderstanding when he quotes the titles from the book of Ibn Qutlubugha, *Tāj Al Tarājim*. He assumes the phrase *fi Uṣūl Al Fiqh* is part of a title of the books when it is part of the sentence of the original author, Ibn Quṭlūbghā. For further information, see Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*; M. Ibn Quṭlūbghā, *Tāj Al Tarājim Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafīyyah* (Baghdad: Matba'at Al 'Aani, 1962).

<sup>44</sup> M. Maturidi, *Ta'wīlāt Ahlu Al Sunnah*, 1st ed., 5 vols. (Beirut: Resalah Publishers, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> I. Baghdādī, *Hadiyat Al 'Arifīn Fi Asmā' Al Mu'allifīn Wa Athār Al Muṣanifīn*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar Ihya' Al Turath, 1957); Zabidī, *Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqqīn Bi Sharhi Ihyā' Ulūm Al Dīn*; Ṭāsh Kubra Zadah, *Miftāḥ Al Sa'ādah Wa Miṣbāḥ Al Siyādah*; Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafīyyah*.

<sup>47</sup> Maturidi, *Ta'wīlāt Ahlu Al Sunnah*; C. Brockelmann, *Tārīkh Al Adab Al 'Arabi*, 5th ed., 6 vols. (Cairo: Dar Al Ma'arif, 1959).

<sup>48</sup> Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Khalīfā, *Kashf Al Thonūn 'an Asāmi Al Kutub Wal Funoon*; Ṭāsh Kubra Zadah, *Miftāḥ Al Sa'ādah Wa Miṣbāḥ Al Siyādah*; Zāda, *Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām*; Baghdādī, *Hadiyat Al 'Arifīn Fi Asmā' Al Mu'allifīn Wa Athār Al Muṣanifīn*; Ibn Quṭlūbghā, *Tāj Al Tarājim Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafīyyah*; Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafīyyah*; Zabidī, *Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqqīn Bi Sharhi Ihyā' Ulūm Al Dīn*; M. Al Laknawī, *Al Fawā'id Al Bahīyyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafīyyah* (India: Al Matba'

unintentionally ascertains the presence of *Maqālāt* in his book *Tabsirat al-Adillah Fi Usūl al-Dīn* as he quotes al-Māturīdī from it on more than one occasion,<sup>51</sup> thus settling the debate and affirming the presence of the *Maqālāt* title for al-Māturīdī.

In addition, al-Māturīdī has more than seven titles in the genre of *al rudūd*, in which he rebutted the arguments of the main theological schools and groups in his time, such as Qarāmiṭah, Rāfidah and the Mu'tazilites.<sup>52</sup> None of the titles al-Māturīdī wrote in this genre have survived, but the number of books he wrote in this genre testifies for the influence and role of the cultural and intellectual diversity of the region on his academic work and the depth of al-Māturīdī's engagement in it.<sup>53</sup>

In the genre of *uṣūl al tawhīd*, one finds the most remarkable of al-Māturīdī's work in the field of theology: *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. Rightly, Ceric calls it the "Summa Theologica"<sup>54</sup> of al-Māturīdī because in it he establishes the foundations of a mainstream Sunni synthetic theology school that attempted to strike balance between the traditional and ultra-liberal Mu'tazilites' methods from one side, and the Islamic doctrine and various ideologies that existed in the region at his time from another side. In addition, the book is a rich historical and academic reference for the opinions of various Muslim schools and non-Muslim schools that al-Māturīdī mentioned and rebutted in his book, which reaffirms the above conclusions about his dynamic engagement in academic debate in his region and its impact on his scholarship.<sup>55</sup>

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Al Mastafaani, 1976); M. Abu Zahra, *Tarikh Al Madhaahib Al Islamiyah* (Cairo: Dar al Fikr, 1934); Brockelmann, *Tārīkh Al Adab Al 'Arabi*.

<sup>51</sup> Maymun Nasafi, *Tabsirat Al Adillah Fi Usūl Al Dīn*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Al Maktabah Al Azhariyah, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Baghdādi, *Hadiyat Al 'Arifīn Fi Asmā' Al Mu'allifīn Wa Athār Al Muṣanifīn*; Ibn Quṭlūbhā, *Tāj Al Tarījim Fi Tabaqūt Al Hanafiyyah*; Brockelmann, *Tārīkh Al Adab Al 'Arabi*; Zabidī, *Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqqīn Bi Sharhi Ihyā' Ulūm Al Dīn*; Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah*; Khalīfā, *Kashf Al Thonūn 'an Asāmi Al Kutub Wal Funoon*; Abu Zahra, *Tarikh Al Madhaahib Al Islamiyah*; Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*.

<sup>53</sup> The titles are: (1) *Al Radd 'Ala Qarāmiṭah*; (2) *Radd Al Uṣūl Al Khamsah*, a rebuttal to Abū Umamah Al Bāhili, who is a Mu'tazilite; (3) *Radd Wa'id Al Fussāq*, which is a rebuttal of the book of Ka'bi, who is a Mu'tazilite, entitled *Wa'id Al Fussāq*; (4) *Radd Awā'il Al Adillah*, which is a rebuttal of the book of Ka'bi entitled *Awā'il Al Adillah*; (5) *Radd Thadhīb Al Jadal*, which is a rebuttal of the book of Ka'bi entitled *Thadhīb Al Jadal*; (6) *Radd Al 'Imāmah*, a rebuttal to the Rāfidah sect; and (7) *Bayān Wahm Al Mu'tazilah*, a rebuttal to the Mu'tazilite school. For further information, see Baghdādi, *Hadiyat Al 'Arifīn Fi Asmā' Al Mu'allifīn Wa Athār Al Muṣanifīn*; Ibn Quṭlūbhā, *Tāj Al Tarījim Fi Tabaqūt Al Hanafiyyah*; Khalīfā, *Kashf Al Thonūn 'an Asāmi Al Kutub Wal Funoon*.

<sup>54</sup> Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 46.

<sup>55</sup> M. Juhani, *Al Mawu'ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Aḥzāb Al Mu'āsira*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Riyad: Dar Al Nadwa Al 'Alamiyyah lil Tiba'ah wal Nashr wal Tawzi', 1997); M. Khamīs, "Māturidiyah Rabibat Al Kalābiyya," *Majalat Al buhuth Al Islāmiyah* 55 (1998); M. Bazdawī, *Uṣūl Al Dīn* (Cairo: Maktabah Azhariyah, 2003); Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*.

In addition, he has written other treatises in the same genre, such as *Risālah Fil Īmān*,<sup>56</sup> *Risālah Fil 'Aqīdah*<sup>57</sup> and *Sharḥ al-Fiqh al-Akbar*.<sup>58</sup> However, scholars differ as to whether these were all his works.

In the field of Qur'ānic exegesis, *Ta'wīlāt Ahlu al-Sunnah*, an exegesis book, is one of the few books that has been preserved from the works of al-Māturīdī and reached us today complete. Most of the scholars that discuss his life and list his books ascertain this fact.<sup>59</sup> Rudolph and Ceric assert this and the latter states, "there seems to be unanimous agreement in the historical reports on al-Māturīdī about the authenticity of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* and *Ta'wīlāt Ahlu al-Sunnah*."<sup>60</sup> It is one of al-Māturīdī's most significant works that won him the admiration of a number of scholars in the field of Qur'ānic exegesis. Abū Mu'īn Nasafī, a Ḥanafī scholar, testifies to the greatness of this book and describes it as "a book that no other book comes close to it in its theme and content or in its academic value ... in it he resolved many of the controversial misconceived thoughts and concepts in the most eloquent language and the most perfect style."<sup>61</sup> Khalīfa and the Muslim scholar al-Kawtharī (d. 1952 CE) share the same opinion as Nasafī. The latter, in his introduction and commentary on the book *Ishārāt al-Marām*, states, "It is a book that has no equivalent in the field."<sup>62</sup>

Is this title the only work of al-Māturīdī in the field of Qur'ānic exegesis? Khalīfa argued that al-Māturīdī has two books in the field with similar titles: *Ta'wīlāt Ahlu al-Sunnah* and *Ta'wīlāt al-Māturīdiyya*. According to him, the former was written by al-Māturīdī personally, while the latter was compiled by his disciples as he was teaching them his exegesis. However, Ibrahim and Sayyid 'Awadāyn dispute what Khalīfa argues and elucidate that the

<sup>56</sup> Abū Mu'īn Al Nasafī in his book *Al Tamhīd* mentions that al-Maturīdī has a short treatise called *Risālah Fil Īmān*. For further information, see Maymun Nasafī, *Al Tamhīd Li Qawā'id Al Tawhīd* (Cairo: Dar Al Tiba'ah Al Muhammadiyah, 1986).

<sup>57</sup> It is a treatise he wrote on the Islamic creed. Baghdadi and Sezgin list it as one of al-Maturīdī's titles. Furthermore, Subkī (d. 1370 CE), a Shafī'ī scholar and historian, has written a commentary on it entitled *Al Sayf Al Mashhūr Fī sharḥī Aqīdat Abī Mansūr*. Conversely, Juhānī and others argue it is the work of some of his students and wrongly attribute to him. For further information, see Baghdādī, *Hadiyat Al 'Arifīn Fi Asmā' Al Mu'allifīn Wa Athār Al Muṣanifīn*; F. Sazkin, *Tārīkh Al Turāth Al 'Arabi*, trans. Mahmud Hijazi, 10 vols. (Riyadh: Imam Su'ud University, 1991); A. Subki, *Al Sayf Al Mashhūr Fī Sharḥī Aqīdat Abī Mansūr*, 1st ed. (Istanbul: Marmara University, 2000); Juhani, *Al Mawu'ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Aḥzāb Al Mu'āsira*.

<sup>58</sup> It is claimed that al-Maturīdī in this book explained the book of *Abū Ḥanīfa Al Fiqh Al Akbar*. However, Kawtharī (d. 1952 CE), a leading Muslim scholar, Brockelmann (d. 1956 CE), a German Orientalist, and Abū Zahra consent that this cannot be from al-Maturīdī's works. They list a number of reasons for their opinion. Among them is the fact that it critiques some of the teachings of the Ash'ari school, which did not become popular until after al-Maturīdī's death. For further information, see Abu Hanifa, *Al 'Alīm Wal Mut'allim* (Cairo: Matba'at Al Anwar, 1948); Brockelmann, *Tārīkh Al Adab Al 'Arabi*; Abu Zahra, *Tarikh Al Madhaahib Al Islamiyah*.

<sup>59</sup> Tāsh Kubra Zadah, *Miftāḥ Al Sa'ādah Wa Miṣbāḥ Al Siyādah; Tabaqāt Al Fuqahā'*; Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah*; Nasafī, *Tabsirat Al Adillah Fi Usūl Al Dīn*, vol. 2; Baghdādī, *Hadiyat Al 'Arifīn Fi Asmā' Al Mu'allifīn Wa Athār Al Muṣanifīn*; Khalīfa, *Kashf Al Thonūn 'an Asāmi Al Kutub Wal Funoon*; T. Tamīmi, *Al Ṭabaqāt Al Sunniyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafiyyah*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Al Majlis Al A'la Lil Shu'un Al Islamiyyah, 1970); Abdullah Al Marāghī, *Al Fathū Al Mubīn Fi Ṭabaqāt Al Uṣūliyyīn*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Wizarat Al Awqaf, 1947); H. Abi 'Adhabah, *Al Rawḍah Al Bahiyyah Fima Bayna Al Ashā'irah Wal Māturīdiyya* (Beirut: Resalah Publishing, 1996).

<sup>60</sup> Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 40.

<sup>61</sup> Nasafī, *Tabsirat Al Adillah Fi Usūl Al Dīn*, vol. 2, 220-21.

<sup>62</sup> Zāda, *Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām*.

second book is not a compilation of al-Māturīdī's exegesis; rather, it is a commentary written by his student Alā' al-Dīn al-Samarqandī on al-Māturīdī's exegesis.<sup>63</sup>

Nasafī's comment, "...in it he resolved many of the controversial misconceived thoughts and concepts in the most eloquent language and the most perfect style,"<sup>64</sup> presents further evidence of al-Māturīdī's continuous efforts to avoid conventional writing, and challenge and engage the controversial issues of his pluralist region.

Out of the 17 titles al-Māturīdī wrote in the Islamic disciplines of theology, *uṣūl al fiqh* (the principles of Islamic jurisprudence) and *tafsīr* (Qur'ānic exegesis), only two titles survived and are accepted by all scholars as his work: *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* and *Ta'wīlāt Ahlu Sunnah*.<sup>65</sup> Given the scarcity of information about al-Māturīdī's life, one may propose a number of causative factors to explain why his works were not preserved as much as other prominent scholars. One of the reasons is his geographical location. Central Asia was far from the centre of the caliphate, Baghdad; a city that was the academic capital of the Muslim world. As a result, many historians, biographers and scholars did not pay adequate attention to academic developments that took place elsewhere. In addition, the remoteness of the city where al-Māturīdī lived, when contrasted to the convenience of Baghdad being the capital and in the heart of the Middle East, made it impractical for foreign students to travel all the way to Central Asia to seek knowledge. Undoubtedly, this would have limited the spread of his teachings to other parts of the Muslim world and restricted his influence to his region alone at least for a few centuries. The second contributing factor is the absence of political support for his school. Al-Māturīdī's school was popular and well-respected in Central Asia, but it did not receive strong political support until the Ottoman period (1299-1923 CE). A relatively short period in comparison to the Ash'arīs who enjoyed complete political immunity and promotion by three major Muslim dynasties: the Seljuq,<sup>66</sup> Ayyubid<sup>67</sup> and Mamluk<sup>68</sup>. These dynasties played a fundamental role in the spread of the teachings of Ash'arism for centuries. The third contributing factor is the influence of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Al-Māturīdī's teachings were adopted by one prominent school of Islamic jurisprudence, the Ḥanafī. Meanwhile, Ash'arī's teachings were embraced by two prominent schools, the Maliki and

<sup>63</sup> Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahlu Sunnah*.

<sup>64</sup> Nasafī, *Tabsirat Al Adillah Fi Usūl Al Dīn*, vol. 2, 220-21.

<sup>65</sup> Al Laknawi, *Al Fawā'id Al Bahiyyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafiyyah*; Khalīfā, *Kashf Al Thonūn 'an Asāmi Al Kutub Wal Funoon*; Zāda, *Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām*; Ibn Quṭlūbghā, *Tāj Al Tarājim Fi Tabaqūt Al Hanafiyyah*; Baghdādī, *Hadiyat Al 'Arifīn Fi Asmā' Al Mu'allifīn Wa Athār Al Muṣanifīn*.

<sup>66</sup> Ṭābīb Rashīd al-Dīn et al., *The History of the Seljuq Turks from the Jāmi' al-Tawā rīkh: An Ilkhanid adaptation of the Saljūq-nāma of Zahr al-Dīn Nishāpūrī* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001); Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>67</sup> R. Stephen Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193-1260* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977); John Davenport, *Saladin* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003).

<sup>68</sup> Reuven Amitai, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhānid War, 1260-1281* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni, "The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society," (2004); David Nicolle, *The Mamluks, 1250-1517* (London: Osprey, 1993); M. Abu Zahra, *Tārīkh Al Madhāhib Al Islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Dar Al Fikr Al Arabi); Juhani, *Al Mawu'ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Ahzāb Al Mu'āsira*.

Shāfi'ī, and by a minority of Hanbali scholars. In the competitive environment that dominated the various schools, this would have discouraged scholars or at least caused them to favour the exegetes of their own schools over those who belonged to other schools.

## EDUCATION AND FORMATION OF AL-MĀTURĪDĪ AS A MUSLIM SCHOLAR

Al-Māturīdī had the privilege of studying under a number of prominent scholars who excelled in various Islamic sciences, such as jurisprudence and theology.<sup>69</sup>

One of al-Māturīdī's early teachers was Abu Bakr Ahmad Ibn Ishāq Ibn Ṣubḥ, <sup>70</sup> al-Jawzajāni. <sup>71</sup> There is little information available about his personal life, but he was one of the few scholars that proved their prominence in all sciences. He was Abu Naṣr al-'Ayādi's main teachers, who was also one of al-Māturīdī's teachers. It seems al-Māturīdī began learning at the hands of Abu Bakr and then continued his tuition under Abu Naṣr.

Abu Naṣr Ahmad Ibn al-Abbās al-Anṣārī<sup>72</sup> was one of al-Māturīdī's main teachers. Qurashi speaks of his reputation, "he was a man that has no equal in the land in knowledge, piety, writings, perseverance and courage."<sup>73</sup> Nasafī draws a similar portrait, "... as far as knowledge is concerned he was an ocean that none can reach its end. He was an Imam in all the disciplines."<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, Hamza al-Sahmi (d. 1036 CE), a Muslim historian, sheds further light on Abu Naṣr's personality and advises he is "from the school of the people of *ra'y*."<sup>75</sup> In other words, he was from the school of Abu Hanifa. By extension, this indicates Abu Bakr al-Jawzajāni is also Hanafi, since he was Abu Naṣr's sole teacher.

Al-Tamīmi (d. 1601 CE), a Hanafi historian, and Ibn Qutlūbugha (d. 1474 CE), a prominent Hanafi scholar, among others, consider Abu Naṣr to be al-Māturīdī's main teacher.<sup>76</sup> In fact, the latter did not list any other teacher for al-Māturīdī. Thus far, one can conclude that al-Māturīdī enjoyed the mentorship of the most prominent teachers of his time and region. This would have enriched his knowledge and understandably affected his understanding of the

<sup>69</sup> Abu Zahra, *Tārīkh Al Madhāhib Al Islāmiyyah*; Zāda, *Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām*; Khamīs, "Māturidiyah Rabibat Al Kalābiyya"; Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah*; Al Laknawi, *Al Fawā'id Al Bahiyyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafiyyah*; Ṭāsh Kubra Zadah, *Miftāḥ Al Sa'ādah Wa Miṣbāḥ Al Siyādah*; *Tabaqāt Al Fuqahā'*.

<sup>70</sup> The biographers differ whether the name of his grandfather is Ṣubḥ or Ṣabīḥ. For further information, see Baghdādi, *Hadiyat Al 'Arifīn Fi Asmā' Al Mu'allifīn Wa Athār Al Muṣanifīn*; Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah*; Al Laknawi, *Al Fawā'id Al Bahiyyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafiyyah*.

<sup>71</sup> Tamīmi, *Al Ṭabaqāt Al Sunniyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafiyyah*; Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah*; Zabidī, *Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqqīn Bi Sharhi Ihyā' Ulūm Al Dīn*.

<sup>72</sup> He is from the descendants of one of the respected companions of the Prophet, Sa'd Ibn 'Ubāda Al Anṣārī. For further information, see Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah*.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Nasafi, *Tabsirat Al Adillah Fi Usūl Al Dīn*, vol. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah*.

<sup>76</sup> Tamīmi, *Al Ṭabaqāt Al Sunniyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafiyyah*; Q. Qutlūbugha, *Tāj Al Tarājim* (Beirut: Dar Al Qalam, 1992).

various disciplines of Islam. In addition, it is apparent his main teachers followed the Hanafi jurisprudential school.

Another of al-Māturīdī's important teachers was Muhammad Ibn Muqātil al-Rāzi.<sup>77</sup> He is a well-known Muslim scholar who was born in the third Hijri century in the same region as al-Māturīdī and died there in 862 CE. He excelled in the field of Islamic jurisprudence and specifically the Hanafi school. Şaymari (d. 1045 CE), a Hanafi jurist and historian, al-Laknawi (d. 1886 CE), a famous Muslim scholar of Indian background, Zabidi, Baghdadi (d. 1920 CE), a Muslim historian and writer, and Qurashi (d. 1373 CE), among others, confirm that Muhammad Ibn Muqātil was one of al-Shaybāni's (d. 805 CE), the second highest figure in the Hanafi school, main disciples.<sup>78</sup> This is a very intriguing finding as it establishes that one of al-Māturīdī's teachers acquired knowledge from the second highest authority in the Hanafi school. In turn, it reinforces the point established earlier about the impact the Hanafi school had on al-Māturīdī and the Central Asian region. It is a distinguishing mark in al-Māturīdī's life to have had the majority of his main teachers acquire their knowledge directly from the literature of Abu Hanifa, in the various Islamic sciences, and under the instructions of his main disciples.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, it sheds the light on al-Māturīdī's calibre in the region's academic circles, since all his teachers had esteemed status.

The influence the Hanafi school had on al-Māturīdī is further elucidated by Abu Zahra's statements, which confirm al-Māturīdī acquired and studied the fundamental books of theology that Abu Hanifa wrote. *Al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ* (The Simplified *Fiqh*), *Risalah Illa al-Bitti* (Letter to *al-Bitti*), *Al-Ālim Wal al-Muta'allim* (The Scholar and the Learner) and *Al-Waṣiyya* (The Bequest) are Abu Hanifa's main titles that al-Māturīdī would have learnt from his teachers in a connected chain of transmission back to Abu Hanifa.<sup>80</sup> In fact, Zāda lists the chain of scholars from whom al-Māturīdī acquired Abu Hanifa's books. He explains, "... al-Māturīdī narrated, these books, from the two Imams Abu Bakr...al-Jawzajāni and Abu Naṣr who acquired it from Abu Sulaymān al-Jawzjāni who acquired it from two Imams, Abu Yusuf and Muhammad."<sup>81</sup> From first glance at this chain of imams, one notices the names Abu Yusuf and Muhammad al-Shaybāni, who are Abu Hanifa's two main disciples and the ones responsible for establishing the Hanafi school.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, the Hanafi school undoubtedly influenced al-Māturīdī in the field of theology, as it did in the field of jurisprudence. However, this raises further questions – was al-Māturīdī simply a blind follower of the school or did he differ in significant ways from what Abu Hanifa taught? If no, why is a theological institution named after him and

<sup>77</sup> Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah*.

<sup>78</sup> Al Laknawi, *Al Fawā'id Al Bahiyyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafiyyah*; H. Şaymari, *Akhbār Abi Hanifa Wa Aṣḥābih*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: 'Alim Al Kutub, 1985); Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah*; Zabidi, *Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqqīn Bi Sharhi Ihyā' Ulūm Al Dīn*.

<sup>79</sup> Maymun Nasafi, *Baḥr Al Kalām Fī Usūl Al Dīn* (Cairo: Al Maktabah Al Azhariyah, 2011); Zāda, *Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām*.

<sup>80</sup> Abu Zahra, *Tārīkh Al Madhāhib Al Islāmiyyah*.

<sup>81</sup> Zāda, *Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> Şaymari, *Akhbār Abi Hanifa Wa Aṣḥābih*; Al-Qurashi, *Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī'ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah*; Al Laknawi, *Al Fawā'id Al Bahiyyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafiyyah*; Qutlūbugha, *Tāj Al Tarājim*.

distinguished from that of Abu Hanifa? And, if yes, what difference are there and what is their nature?

It is of great importance to investigate whether al-Māturīdī made significant contributions to Islamic disciplines, particularly theology and exegesis, that are dissimilar to the Hanafi school. While a number of Muslim scholars would like to see al-Māturīdī as an adherent follower of Abu Hanifa's school, to demonstrate his school is traditionalist<sup>83</sup> and has roots that stem from the greatest of Muslim scholars, Abu Hanifa, there are other Muslim scholars who argue the opposite.<sup>84</sup> Be that as it may, this presents another fertile ground for further research into the traditionalism of al-Māturīdī's literature in theology and the nature of the relationship between his school and that of Abu Hanifa.

## THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STATE OF CENTRAL ASIA DURING AL-MĀTURĪDĪ'S TIME

The first Muslim contact with the region began in 675 CE, with a peace treaty the Muslim General Saīd Ibn Uthmān Ibn 'Affān<sup>85</sup> signed with the local government. In 681 CE and after fierce battles, Sālim Ibn Ziyād, a Muslim general, was able to enter the region, despite strong resistance from the indigenous people.<sup>86</sup> The region remained under the reign of the Umayyad dynasty until it was overthrown by the Abbasid dynasty in 750 CE. From then, it was under the central governance of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad until 819 CE.<sup>87</sup> In this year, Caliph al-Ma'mūn<sup>88</sup> (r. 813-833 CE), an Abbasid caliph, decentralised the region and gave its reign to the sons of Asad Ibn Sāmān, who came from a Persian noble ruling family from the city of Balkh and was a descendant of Bihram Jubin.<sup>89</sup> There were four brothers and the caliph gave each of them a specific part of the region. He gave Samarqand to Noah, Farghanah to Ahmad, Tashqand to Yahya and Harah to Ismael.<sup>90</sup> This marked the beginning of autonomous regional governments for these states until 874 CE when they declared their complete independence and formed the Samanid dynasty state.<sup>91</sup> This was an important

<sup>83</sup> Zāda, *Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām*.

<sup>84</sup> Juhani, *Al Mawu'ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Ahzāb Al Mu'āsira*; Khamīs, "Māturīdiyāh Rabībat Al Kalābiyya."

<sup>85</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Al Bidāya Wal Nihaya*; K. Al-Zirkili, *Al-A'lām Qāmūs Tarājim*, 4th ed., 8 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm Lil Malayin, 2002).

<sup>86</sup> H. Hassan, *Tārīkh Al Islām Al Siyāsi Wal Dīni Wal Ijtimā'i Wal Thaqaḥfi*, 14th ed., 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al Jil 1996); Vambery, *Tārīkh Bukhāra Mundhu Al Qidam Ḥattā Al 'Aṣr Al Ḥādir*.

<sup>87</sup> M. Rifā'ī, *Al Khilāfa Al 'Abbāsiyyah Wal Harakāt Al Istiqlāliyyah Fil Mashriq* (Amman: Dar Al Thaqafa Lil Nashr Wal Tiba'ah Wal Tawzi', 1997); Narkhashi, *Tārīkh Bukhāra*.

<sup>88</sup> Dhahabi, *Siyar A'alam Al Nubala'*; M. Tabari, *Tārīkh Al Rusul Wal Mulūk*, 2nd ed., 11 vols. (Cairo: Dar Al Ma'arif, 1967).

<sup>89</sup> I. Karkhi, *Al Masālik Wal Mamālik* (Leiden: Brill, 1870), [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikisource/ar/5/54/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83.pdf](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikisource/ar/5/54/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83.pdf); M. Ibn Hawqal, *Ṣurat Al Arḍ* (Beirut: Maktabat Al ḥayah, 1992).

<sup>90</sup> A. Amin, *Dhahara Al Islam* (Cairo: Hindawi Foundation for Education and Culture, 2013); Rifā'ī, *Al Khilāfa Al 'Abbāsiyyah Wal Harakāt Al Istiqlāliyyah Fil Mashriq*.

<sup>91</sup> M. Bashari, *Ahsan Al Taqāsīm Fi Ma'rīfat Al Aqālīm*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1991); Ibn Al Athīr, *Al Kāmil Fil Tārīkh*, 8; Narkhashi, *Tārīkh Bukhāra*; Rifā'ī, *Al Khilāfa Al 'Abbāsiyyah Wal Harakāt Al Istiqlāliyyah Fil Mashriq*; Hassan, *Tārīkh Al Islām Al Siyāsi Wal Dīni Wal Ijtimā'i Wal Thaqaḥfi*.

milestone as the independence of the Samanids had a major impact on the region and its academic development.

Did the new independence provide political stability to the region that became notorious for ongoing skirmishes and uprisings? Al-Karkhi presents an account of the reign of the Samanid kings and describes them as "...the best of the Persian rulers."<sup>92</sup> This is evident also in the testimony of Ibn Khallikān (d. 1373 CE), a famous Muslim historian and scholar, who portrays the status of Samanid kings. He states, "The Samanid kings were the sultans of the 'land beyond the river' and Khurasān."<sup>93</sup> He stresses their "predominant characteristics were justice, religiosity and knowledge."<sup>94</sup> Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1233 CE) concurs with Ibn Khallikān and elaborates that many of their kings, such as Ahmad Ibn Asad (d. 860 CE), were "loved by the people"<sup>95</sup> for their ruling and administration. Thus, under the governance of the Samanid, the region enjoyed stability and security, and all political coups and plots against the Samanid kings were swiftly terminated. Some Muslim historians, such as Bashari (d. 990 CE), believe this was the result of divine providence for the leadership of the Samanids because of their fairness and piety.<sup>96</sup>

One cannot overstate the importance of stability and political harmony for the progress of knowledge. It is crucial for academic progress and brilliance as it creates an environment of peace, in which a civilisation can be built and scholars may work and prosper enjoying the patronage of Islamic learning.

Another important characteristic of the Samanids' reign, as far as this study is concerned, is religious piety. Ibn al-Athīr emphasises their dynasty was not only distinguished by its excellent political governance, but equally known for their piety and uprightness. He states, "Nasr Ibn Ahmad, the Samanid King, during his death sickness, built ... a small hut before his Palace and named it 'the house of worship' where he used to pray, supplicate and implore."<sup>97</sup> According to Ibn al-Athīr, in the last days of this king, he used to wear the garment of repentance.<sup>98</sup> The piety of the Samanid kings had a positive impact on their governing and caused them to reject corruption and bribes, and promote justice and religion. This strengthened their relationship with the people and the political stability of their kingdom, and caused them to revere Muslim scholars and value the Islamic knowledge they represented. This led the state to fund and promote academic and religious movements in the region, a practice that was commonly known in the Muslim world.<sup>99</sup> The least result from the piety of the Samanid kings

<sup>92</sup> Karkhi, *Al Masālik Wal Mamālik*, 344.

<sup>93</sup> A. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafīyyāt Al A'yān Wa Anbā' Azzamān*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1968), 245.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibn Al Athīr, *Al Kāmil Fil Tārīkh*, 8, vol. 7, 279-80.

<sup>96</sup> Bashari, *Ahsan Al Taqāsīm Fi Ma'rifat Al Aqālīm*.

<sup>97</sup> Ibn Al Athīr, *Al Kāmil Fil Tārīkh*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> This term could mean he physically used to wear modest garments or he ensured he was always in a state of repentance through his actions and prayers.

<sup>99</sup> The closest example of this common practice is the adoption of the Abbasid caliphate of the Mu'tazilite school before and during al-Māturīdī's life. For further information see, Rifā'ī, *Al Khilāfa Al 'Abbāsiyyah Wal Harakāt Al Istiqlāliyyah Fil Mashriq*; M. Khudari, *Tārīkh Al Umam Al Islamiyyah*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Cairo: Al Maktabah Al Tijariyyah, 1936); Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh Al Khulāfā'*; Wakīl, *Al Aṣr Al Dhahabi Lil Dawla Al 'Abasiyya*.



was tolerance towards scholars and permissibility of freedom for religious study and research, which would have had a direct impact on al-Māturīdī's academic environment, writings and ambitions.

Political stability is the key to success for any nation, including economic and academic sectors, particularly in a country that had recently gained independence.<sup>100</sup> The political stability the Samanid kings established enabled them to guarantee the safety and security of merchants and all caravans that passed through their land on the journey to Baghdad, the Caliphate's capital. They became known as the protectors of the Silk Road and Chinese silk to the markets of Baghdad.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, Metz and al-Hamwī (d. 1229 CE), a Muslim chronicler, related that in 941 CE the Chinese emperor proposed his daughter in marriage to the son of Nasr Ibn Ahmad, the Samanid king. The latter accepted the proposal and this marriage opened to the Muslim merchants a safe passage to the Chinese markets and an unlimited supply of Chinese silk, a commodity in high demand in Baghdad and the Muslim world.<sup>102</sup> This further improved the economic state of the region and changed the perspective about it from a mere rural region to a vital route for commerce and import.

This economic boom strengthened the stability and autonomy of the Samanid government and empowered it to produce its own currency and enjoy strong political relationships with the neighbouring states, as demonstrated by the marriage of Nasr Ibn Ahmad's son to the emperor's daughter.<sup>103</sup> The prosperity of the Samanid dynasty continued until it was overthrown by Sebuktigin, the founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty in 998 CE.<sup>104</sup>

The economic prosperity of the region reinforced the fertile environment that the political stability had created for academic development. Economic prosperity raised the living standards in the society and allowed its citizens to explore other interests and objectives in life, including academic education. The association of these factors with the piety and religiosity of the Samanid dynasty would have encouraged religious studies and provided all the necessary

<sup>100</sup> For further information about the importance of political stability to the economic and academic sector see, A. Alesina, S. Özler, N. Roubini, and P. Swagel, "Political Instability and Economic Growth," *Journal of Economic Growth* 1, no. 2 (1996); Ari Aisen and Francisco Jose Veiga, "How does Political Instability Affect Economic Growth?," International Monetary Fund, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2011/wp1112.pdf>; Adam E Nir and Bhojraj S Kafle, "The Effect of Political Stability on Public Education Quality," *International Journal of Educational Management* 27, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>101</sup> A. Metz, *Islamic Civilization in the Fourth Century of the Hegira*, trans. M. Abu Rayda, 5th ed., 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al Kitab Al Arabi, 1947).

<sup>102</sup> Y. Hamwi, *Mu'jīm Al Buldān*, 1st ed., 5 vols. (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1977); Metz, *Islamic Civilization in the Fourth Century of the Hegira*; I. Al Fiqī, *Al Duwal Al Islāmiyyah Al Mustaqillah Fil Sharq* (Cairo: Dar Al Fikr Al 'Arabi, 1987).

<sup>103</sup> Archaeological works in northern Europe uncovered many coins that came from the Muslim world during the tenth Gregorian century, fourth Hijri century; two-thirds of the discovered coins belonged to the Samanid dynasty in Central Asia. Metz, *Islamic Civilization in the Fourth Century of the Hegira*; Al Fiqī, *Al Duwal Al Islāmiyyah Al Mustaqillah Fil Sharq*; Rifā'ī, *Al Khilāfa Al 'Abbāsiyyah Wal Harakāt Al Istiqlāliyyah Fil Mashriq*.

<sup>104</sup> Ibn Al Athīr, *Al Kāmil Fil Tārīkh*, 8; A. Tha'ālibi, *Yatīmat Al Dahr Fi Mahāsin Al 'Asr*, 1st ed., 5 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al 'Ilmiyyah, 1983); Khudari, *Tārīkh Al Umam Al Islamiyyah*; Al Fiqī, *Al Duwal Al Islāmiyyah Al Mustaqillah Fil Sharq*; Narkhashi, *Tārīkh Bukhāra*; Vambery, *Tārīkh Bukhāra Mundhu Al Qidam Hattā Al 'Aṣr Al Hādīr*.

means to engender a distinguished Islamic academia that made Central Asia a hub of learning and development in Islamic disciplines.

## **THE INTELLECTUAL, SCHOLARLY AND CULTURAL STATE OF CENTRAL ASIA IN TENTH CENTURY**

Did the independence of the Samanid kings arouse their interest in manifesting this independence on cultural, religious and academic levels? Did it inspire them to prove their distinction from the Abbasid caliphate in all fields and construct their own legacies as the sultans of the lands beyond the river?

It is difficult to examine the Samanid kings' intentions, but analysis of their policies confirms they had deliberate interests in turning their region into a capital of knowledge. The political stability and economic boom they achieved paved the way for them to pursue their objectives. During their reign, particularly in the ninth and tenth centuries, the period in which al-Māturīdī lived, intellectual life prospered greatly in Samarqand in secular, cultural and religious disciplines. One of the policies the Samanid dynasty exercised was to sponsor many intellectuals, philosophers, poets and literature writers. Historians, travellers and philosophers who personally enjoyed the monetary and intellectual generosity of these kings documented this practice in their works. Ibn Abī 'Uṣayb'ah (d. 1269 CE), a Muslim doctor and chronicler, recorded in his book, *'Uyūn al-Anbā' fi Tabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'* (The True News about the Classes and Generations of Physicians), the testimony of the prominent Muslim doctor and philosopher Ibn Sīna (d.1037 CE) of the generosity and hospitality with which the Samanid king Nūḥ Ibn Mansūr engulfed him. Ibn Sīna describes how he was granted full access to the royal library in Samanid Palace. He describes the library as a palace in its own right, with various houses and each house dedicated to a specific science. He notes, "And I have seen in it books that many people have not heard of and I myself have never seen before and I have never seen their likes after ..."<sup>105</sup> In addition, the Samanid kings used to offer ministerial posts to intellectuals out of respect for their scholarship, as was the case between King Nūḥ (d. 997 CE) and al-Sahib Ibn 'Abad (d. 994 CE), the great Muslim scholar and writer from the tenth century, who refused the position of minister that King Nūḥ offered him.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, these ministers played vital roles in the growth of literature and science from various cultures. Notably, Abū al-Fadl Muḥammad Ibn 'Ubaidllah al-Bal'amī (d. 975 CE) and Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad al-Jihānī (d. unknown) revived Arabic and Persian literature in Samarqand and the entire region. According to Sam'ānī (d. 1166 CE), a famous Muslim traveller and chronicler, al-Bal'amī was "the best of his time in intellect, wisdom and reverence to science and scholars."<sup>107</sup> He was from an Arabic background and single-handedly translated Ṭabarī's encyclopaedic history book into Persian. During his post, poetry flourished and 100 volumes of Persian poetry were copied,

<sup>105</sup> A. Ibn Abi Uṣayb'ah, *'Uyūn Al Anbāi Fi Tabaqāt Al Aṭibbā'* (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al 'Ilmiyah, 1998), 392.

<sup>106</sup> Hamwi, *Irshād Al Arīb Ila Ma'rifat Al Adīb*, vol. 1, 455.

<sup>107</sup> Al Sam'āni, *Al Ansāb*.

comprising more than 1,300,000 verses.<sup>108</sup> Al-Jihānī, the minister of King Naṣr Ibn Aḥmad, was known for his writings as well. Al-Hamwī describes him as “a virtuous author with many publications.”<sup>109</sup> He sponsored a number of scholars and doctors, among them some Mu’tazilite figures such as Abū Zayd al-Balkhī<sup>110</sup> (d. 934 CE). Thus, academics and intellectuals were able to dedicate their entire efforts to study and research without having to worry about their financial needs. This would have influenced the scholarly community and enriched all fields of study, including Islamic disciplines.

Did al-Māturīdī receive any state sponsorship? The limited biographical information about him does not provide an answer. However, given his prominence among the scholars of the region, his leadership of the Ḥanafī jurisprudential school and the Sunni theological front, and his permanent residence in Samarqand, it is difficult to exclude the likelihood. The admiration of his work by general Muslims and equally scholars would inevitably have led to his recognition and possibly support from the state.

Another practice that points to the interest of the Samanid kings influencing academic life in the region is the construction of public and private libraries. Every single mosque and city in the region had a library that contained books from various sciences, civilisations, languages and cultures. For instance, the great library of the city of Marw held books in Greek and Syriac as well as Arabic and Persian.<sup>111</sup> Al-Hamawī records his amazement at the library, which contained books that traced back to the time of the Sassanian Empire, specifically the last Sassanian king Yazdagerd III. Al-Hamawī spent three years living in the city, enjoying the books of the library that reached more than 12,000 titles. Access to the books was open to all, to the extent that al-Hamawī borrowed 200 titles without having to pay any fee or place any guarantee.<sup>112</sup> The size of these libraries and their contents indicate that, although Central Asia was located at the periphery to Middle Eastern heartlands, intellectually it was very well connected and part of all contemporary debates. Furthermore, the availability of Arabic titles in a Turkish and Persian land proves the widespread use of Arabic as an academic medium similar to the role of Latin in Europe. This is further ascertained by the translation of thousands of verses from Persian to Arabic, such as the case of al-Bal’amī. The availability of titles in Syriac and Greek is an indicator there were attempts to turn the region into another Baghdad, in which the intellectual wealth of all civilisations is translated and studied similar to the house of wisdom in the Caliphate capital. Therefore, Samarqand was not a rural region completely disconnected from the intensity of urban life. These historical evidences controvert the statement of Rudolph whom claims Samarqand was peripheral in comparison to Baghdad and believes this is not surprising due to its remoteness.<sup>113</sup> Rather, Samarqand became the central hub in the development of many Islamic disciplines, including theology and exegesis, through

<sup>108</sup> E. Brown, *Tarīkh Al Adab Fi Irān*, trans. Ibrahim Amin Al Shawāribi, 1st ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Al Thaqaḥ Al Diniyyah, 2007).

<sup>109</sup> Hamwi, *Irshād Al Arīb Ila Ma’rifat Al Adīb*, vol. 1, 455.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Metz, *Islamic Civilization in the Fourth Century of the Hegira*.

<sup>112</sup> Hamwi, *Mu’jīm Al Buldān*, vol. 5, 112.

<sup>113</sup> Rudolph and Adem, *Al-Maturidi and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 73.

the hands of many scholars such as al-Māturīdī, his teachers and disciples. It follows from this that al-Māturīdī had access to writings from philosophical schools of various backgrounds.

Diverse is the best term to illustrate a fundamental attribute of the society in which al-Māturīdī grew, learnt and taught. It enjoyed, what has become known in modern terms, multiculturalism and freedom of religion. Bashārī relates that “many Jews, a minority of Christians and various sects from the Majis”<sup>114</sup> lived in the region. Similarly, Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 990 CE), renowned Muslim bibliographer, in his book *al-Fihrist* confirms the strong presence of the two dominant faiths in the region: Judaism and Christianity. Nevertheless, he advises of the existence of a number of Gnostic religions as well, such as Manichaeism and al-Summaniyya, who were a minority.<sup>115</sup> In fact, al-Māturīdī refers to them in citations in his book *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* and addresses some of the tenets of their beliefs in his theological discussions. This indicates the teachings of these Gnostic faiths were practiced, taught and discussed in the region, albeit they did not present a direct or major challenge to al-Māturīdī.<sup>116</sup> More importantly, it highlights the freedom of thought and debate among the various religions in the society. Therefore, al-Māturīdī’s knowledge was not confined to the traditional teachings of Islam as it was in the traditional cities of Makkah and Madinah. Rather, he was surrounded by various religions and theologies that differed from Islam and in many times challenged its principles. The environment of diversity and freedom would have influenced al-Māturīdī’s perceptions and writing in the Islamic disciplines and the main source from which Islamic belief is sought.

The diversity of al-Māturīdī’s society manifests within the Muslim schools as well. Various Islamic schools and orientations coexisted in the region. Bashārī provides a thorough demographic map of the spread and influence of the various Islamic schools and orientations

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<sup>114</sup> Bashari, *Ahsan Al Taqāsīm Fi Ma’rifat Al Aqālīm*, 156.

<sup>115</sup> M. Al Nadīm, *Al Fihrist*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al ‘Ilmiyyah, 1996).

<sup>116</sup> M. Maturīdī, *Kitāb Al Tawhīd* (Beirut: Dar Sadir 2001).

in the region. Shī'ah,<sup>117</sup> Kharijites,<sup>118</sup> Mu'tazilites,<sup>119</sup> Kharijites,<sup>120</sup> Qadariyyah<sup>121</sup> and Jahmiyyah<sup>122</sup> were all theological sects of the region. They lived in various cities and coexisted with the two main jurisprudential Sunni schools, the Shafi'is and Hanafis.<sup>123</sup> This intrafaith diversity opened the door for a lot of interaction, debates, research and study. The general public in the region, particularly the students of the religious circles, were exposed to many concepts that were at the least opposing, if not contradictory. In such an environment, al-Māturīdī and other scholars would have been exposed to many schools that would have influenced, directly or indirectly, the shaping of their paradigms or approach to teaching the

<sup>117</sup> Shī'ah is a term applied to the largest minority in the Muslim world who believe that, after the death of the Prophet, the *imamate* (political and religious leadership of the Muslim community) should have gone to Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, and his descendants as a divine right. For further information see, Mohamed Shahrastānī, *Al Milal Wal Nihal* (Beirut: Dar al Fikr, 1997); Juhani, *Al Mawu'ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Ahzāb Al Mu'āsira*; Arzina R. Lalani and Studies Institute of Ismaili, *Early Shii'ii Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); N.J. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

<sup>118</sup> Kharijites or Khawārij was one of the earliest sects to emerge. They rebelled against all the Muslim rulers at the time and attempted to assassinate them. They succeeded in murdering Caliph Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. They represent the first extremist sect in Islam. They declared apostasy against all those who oppose them. According to them, any person that commits a major sin becomes an apostate and therefore must be executed. For further information see, Juhani, *Al Mawu'ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Ahzāb Al Mu'āsira*; John L. Esposito, *The Oxford History of Islam* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1999); Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>119</sup> Mu'tazilites is an Islamic school of theology based on reason and rational thought. It flourished in the cities of Basra and Baghdad, both in present-day Iraq, during the eighth to tenth centuries. For further information see, Juhani, *Al Mawu'ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Ahzāb Al Mu'āsira*; Shahrastānī, *Al Milal Wal Nihal*.

<sup>120</sup> Kurrāmīyah is a sect founded by Muhammad Ibn Kurrām in the ninth century. He was an ascetic who held the doctrine of anthropomorphism to an extreme degree and used to narrate what Dhahabī describes as extremely weak traditions. He preached in Central Asia and opposed the teachings of the Mu'tazilites in the region. However, he was not in complete concordance with the teachings of mainstream Sunnis either. For further information see, Edmund Bosworth, "The Rise of the Karamiyyah in Khurāsān," *The Muslim World* 50, no. 1 (1960); Dhahabi, *Siyar A'alam Al Nubala'*, vol. 11; A. Ibn Taymiyah, *Kitāb Al Rad 'Ala Al Manṭiqiyyīn* (Beirut: Mu'asasat Al Rayan, 2005).

<sup>121</sup> Qadariyyah was one of the first sects to appear in the Muslim world during the reign of the Umayyad caliphate. They claim, "humans possess in full the capacity to act free will, and effective power... they claim that human beings retain full initiative, without any priority in Allah's will for their acts, nor even in His knowledge of them." Abu Ya'la, *Tābqāt Al Hanābilah*, vol. 1, 32. For further information, see L.M. Surhone, M. T. Timpledon, and S. F. Marseken, *Qadariyya* (Germany: VDM Publishing, 2010); Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*; Esposito, *The Oxford History of Islam*; Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>122</sup> The Jahmiyyah are the followers of Jahm Ibn Safwān, who said "humans are forced to do what they do and denied all ability to humans. He claimed that Paradise and Hell will end. He also claimed that faith only comprises knowledge of Allah, whereas blasphemy only comprises not knowing Him." A. Q. Ibn Tahir al-Baghdādī, *Al Farq Bayna Al Firaq Wa Bayān Al Firqā Al Nājiyah Minhum*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar Al Afaq Al Jadida, 1977), 199-200. For further information see, Juhani, *Al Mawu'ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Ahzāb Al Mu'āsira*; Shahrastānī, *Al Milal Wal Nihal*.

<sup>123</sup> Bashari states, "The descendants of Ali there are highly revered... Kharijites are found in Sajistan, parts of Harah, Krūkh and Istribyān in large number. Mutazilites have a clear presence, however non-dominant, in Naysabur where the Shia and Karāmiya have some activity. Nonetheless the dominance in the region is to the followers of Abū Ḥanīfā with the exception of kūrāt al shāsh, Ilāq, Tūs, Nasā... Where the Shafi'ī followers are dominant... the majority of the people in Tirmidh are Jahmiyyah, the people of Raqqā are Shia, and the people of Kandar are Qadariyya." For further information, see Bashari, *Ahsan Al Taqāsīm Fi Ma'rifat Al Aqālīm*, 156.

Islamic creed. Robust and at times extreme intellectual and philosophical dialogues and debates used to be undertaken during the time of al-Māturīdī in this region. Bashārī sheds light on the intensity of the debates that used to take place there, in particular between the Shī'ah and Karrāmiyyah schools. He states, "Bloodshed may take place as a result of the intense debates and sometimes it would require the intervention of the Sultan."<sup>124</sup> According to Abū Zahra (d. 1974 CE), a distinguished Muslim scholar, symposiums and public debates were frequent social and intellectual practices. Some were conducted by the general public and particular schools of thoughts, but some were held under the auspices of the Sultan and the crown.<sup>125</sup> To a particular extent, this is similar to the modern practice of convening conferences and debates where a particular theme is studied from different angles and by different parties. Bashārī tacitly concurs with Abū Zahra in this opinion. In Bashārī's narrations on how the nights during the month of Ramadan used to be spent in the region, he states, "[the Sultan] used to have specific symposiums during the month of Ramadan, in which discussions take place between different schools. He would propose a specific topic and open it to discussion before the various parties then they will all contribute."<sup>126</sup> Once more, the historical reports recorded by Abu Zahra, Bashārī and others negate the opinion of Rudolph who claims, "The theological topics that dominated Baghdad only arose with comparable virulence in Transoxania more than fifty years later."<sup>127</sup>

Consequently, in a climate of fervent debates, diverse schools, conflicting concepts between various Islamic orientations, robust competition in all disciplines and a multi-faith region, al-Māturīdī opened his eyes on the world. He lived, studied and taught in such circumstances, and undoubtedly, they influenced his mind, teachings and perceptions of the world and Islam, particularly theology and Qur'anic exegesis.

## MAJOR THEOLOGICAL DEBATES DURING THE TIME OF AL-MĀTURĪDĪ

A close look at the treatises al-Māturīdī wrote in the discipline of Islamic theology reveals he dedicated a substantial part of his academic contribution to debating the ideologies of non-Muslims and Muslim schools and sects in his region. Predominantly, the Mu'tazilite school and Abdullah al-Ka'bī<sup>128</sup> (d. 931 CE) seemed to capture his attention more than others.<sup>129</sup> Hence, al-Māturīdī discussed this scholar and school in six of his titles in the field of theology.

The Mu'tazilite school is one of the main schools that al-Māturīdī and his followers faced in the land beyond the river.<sup>130</sup> Some scholars such as Khamīs, a contemporary Muslim

<sup>124</sup> Ibid; Ibn Hawqal, *Ṣurat Al Arḍ*.

<sup>125</sup> Abu Zahra, *Tārīkh Al Madhāhib Al Islāmiyyah*.

<sup>126</sup> Bashari, *Ahsan Al Taqāsīm Fi Ma'rifat Al Aqālīm*.

<sup>127</sup> Rudolph and Adem, *Al-Maturidi and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 73.

<sup>128</sup> Al Ka'bī is a famous Mu'tazilite scholar and a contemporary of al-Māturīdī.

<sup>129</sup> Rudolph and Adem, *Al-Maturidi and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*.

<sup>130</sup> Abu Zahra, *Tārīkh Al Madhāhib Al Islāmiyyah*; K. Al Bayāḍī, *Ishārāt Al Marām 'an Ibārāt Al Imām* (Beirut: Dar al Kutub al Ilmiyah, 2007); Khamīs, "Māturīdiyāh Rabībat Al Kalābiyya."

theologian, and Juhani (d. 2002 CE), a Muslim academic, argue that al-Māturīdī and his school emerged as an intellectual Sunni theological school to primarily counter the spread of Mu'tazilites in the region.<sup>131</sup> However, this view is inaccurate. Al-Māturīdī's efforts did not stop at rebutting the teachings of the Mu'tazilites, albeit they received a lot of focus in his writings. Rather, he went further to study all the tenets of Islamic theology and wrote his own understanding of it in light of a distinct paradigm that he fashioned, in which he synthesised reason and revelation, and founded an independent Sunni theological school that continues to shape the doctrine of millions of Muslims throughout the world.

The presence of such theological titles in al-Māturīdī's works is evidence he was influenced by the robust and, in some instances, hostile theological debates that overwhelmed the Muslim world and his region specifically. In particular, the debates of the Mu'tazilites, who reshaped the discipline of Islamic theology completely, forced new dynamics in the discipline and dominated the philosophical and theological debates in the Muslim world for centuries. The influence of the Mu'tazilites was a by-product of the interaction the Muslims had with various civilisations beyond the Arabian Peninsula. These ideological and cultural interactions exposed them to various philosophical schools that did not conform to Islamic traditional methods, which relied on textual evidence from the Qur'ān and Sunnah to prove the existence of God and the messengers, and understand the various tenets of faith. This demanded a new approach in establishing the existence of God and explaining Islamic theology,<sup>132</sup> which was necessary for the debates that took place between Muslims and non-Muslims. Later on, it became necessary to explain the ambiguity of some of the aspects of the Islamic creed, including the nature of God, His divine attributes and His actions.<sup>133</sup> This led to the birth of various Muslim movements and two intellectual currents, with two distinct paradigms, which began to clash in the Islamic intellectual arena. The first current was traditional and endorsed by the majority of Sunni scholars. The second was new, philosophical, and promoted and endorsed by Muslim philosophers and the Mu'tazilite school. The attitude of the traditional school was to simply state the importance of believing in the tenets of faith without seeking any further investigations into its nature. On the other hand, the Muslim philosophers and Mu'tazilites, who became the strongest representatives of the philosophical current, sought to study, analyse and answer such questions to the non-Muslims and Muslims who were demanding elaboration.

In the absence of direct and clear answers to these matters in traditional texts, the Mu'tazilites began to employ the faculty of reason and logic. They sought to establish the Islamic creed using methods, considered unorthodox, based on rational and logical principles and arguments. However, the Mu'tazilites, especially at the time of al-Māturīdī, were not immunised against the philosophical approach. They, consciously or unconsciously, were

<sup>131</sup> Juhani, *Al Maww'ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Ahzāb Al Mu'āsira*; Khamīs, "Māturīdiyāh Rabībat Al Kalābiyya."

<sup>132</sup> M. Al Sayyid, *Aṣālat 'Ilm Al Kalām* (Cairo: Al DarAl Thaqāfiyyah wal Nashr wal Tawzi', 1987).

<sup>133</sup> R. Al Bandar, *Madhhab Al Mu'tazila Mina Al Kalām Ila Al Falsafa Dirāsah Fi Nash'atihi Wa Mabādi'ihī Wa Nazāriyyātihi Fil Wujūd* (Beirut: Dar Al Nubugh lil Tiba'ah wal Nashri wal Tawzi', 1994).

greatly influenced by the work of Greek philosophers, particularly Plato and Aristotle.<sup>134</sup> Consequently, logic and human intellect, which the Mu'tazilites intended to use as a tool to defend Islamic dogma, became the criteria that determined what can be classified as Islamically correct. They viewed intellect as the sole authority that can prove anything related to God. Amīn explains, "The Mu'tazilites believed that human intellect has been granted the ultimate authority and vastness to enable it to establish everything related to God. Therefore human's intellect knows no boundaries except what it establishes as proof."<sup>135</sup> Amīn then adds, "This tendency ... manifested ... in all their researches ... they follow the logical reasoning until the end ... once they reach what they perceive as a solution they would interpret the verses ... in a manner that conforms to their logical reasoning."<sup>136</sup> In fact, the Mu'tazilites believed intellect to be the primary and best proof in Islam. Abdul Jabbār (d. 1025 CE), a prominent Mu'tazilite scholar, lists the order of proof and states, "... and the first type of proof is the '*aql* ... for '*aql* is the foundation of all."<sup>137</sup> Thus, the Muslim world was caught in a dichotomy between the proponents of '*aql*, human intellect, and the proponents of '*naql*, revealed texts, who view '*naql* as the primary source of all truths in Islam and '*aql* as subservient to it, and believe that Muslims must unconditionally accept what '*naql* dictates regardless of rational reasoning or interpretation.<sup>138</sup>

Al-Māturīdī engaged with the Mu'tazilites and studied their teachings. This conclusion is not only deduced from his literature, in which he responds to them, but also from historical evidence that proves they lived in his region. In fact, the Mu'tazilites enjoyed a strong presence and flourished in the land beyond the river. Various scholars and historians, such as Abū Zahra, Bashārī and Ibn Ḥawqal, confirm this fact.<sup>139</sup> Their dominance in Samarqand and Khurasān was preceded by their dominance in the heartland of the Abbasid caliphate, Baghdad, where they coerced the scholars' community and the large Sunni population to follow their teachings through the suppression of the Abbasid state.<sup>140</sup> However, their rising star in Baghdad was eclipsed during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 861 CE), who issued a resolution that proscribed the Mu'tazilite movement and stripped its key members from all key public offices. Consequently, many Mu'tazilite scholars towards the end of ninth century immigrated to al-Māturīdī's region to escape the eye of the new caliph and the backlash of the

<sup>134</sup> For further information, see Ṭāsh Kubra Zadah, *Miftāḥ Al Sa'ādah Wa Miṣbāḥ Al Siyādah*; Z. Jārullah, *Al Mu'tazilah* (Beirut: Al Ahliyyah lin Nashr Wal Tawzi', 1974).

<sup>135</sup> A. Amīn, *Ḍuḥā Al Islām* (Cairo: Maktabat Al Usra, 1997), 39.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>137</sup> A. Abdul Jabbar, A. Balkhi and H. Al Jashami, *Faḍl Al I'tizāl Wa Ṭabaqāt Al Mu'tazila* (Tunisia: Al Dar Al Tunisiyyah lil Nashr, 1973), 139.

<sup>138</sup> Amīn, *Ḍuḥā Al Islām*, 39.

<sup>139</sup> Abu Zahra, *Tārīkh Al Madhāhib Al Islāmiyyah*; Bashari, *Ahsan Al Taqāsīm Fi Ma'rifat Al Aqālīm*; Ibn Hawqal, *Ṣurat Al Arḍ*; Al Nadīm, *Al Fihrist*.

<sup>140</sup> Rifā'ī, *Al Khilāfa Al 'Abbāsiyyah Wal Harakāt Al Istiqlāliyyah Fil Mashriq*; Shahrastānī, *Al Milal Wal Nihal*; Ibn Tahir al-Baghdādī, *Al Farq Bayna Al Firaq Wa Bayān Al Firqa Al Nājiyyah Minhum*; Dhahabi, *Siyar A'alam Al Nubala'*.



hādith traditional scholars who found in the new caliph a strong ally against the Mu'tazilites and used him to take revenge on them.<sup>141</sup>

This emigration coincided with the rise of a number of charismatic and prominent Mu'tazilite scholars, such as Abū Uthmān al-Jāhiz (d. 868 CE), Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāt (d. 912 CE), Abū Ali al-Jubbā'ī (d. 915 CE) and his son Abū Hāshim Abdul Salām (d. 933 CE). They stood in the face of the traditionalists' campaign against their school, defended their principles strongly and continued to debate and advocate. In addition to these scholars, two notable Mu'tazilite scholars settled in al-Māturīdī's region and became leaders of the movement there: Abū Qasim al-Ka'bi<sup>142</sup> (d. 931 CE) and Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 934 CE). They played a pivotal role in the spread of the teachings of the Mu'tazilite school and lived in the city of Balkh, in close proximity to al-Māturīdī's birthplace. Many debates took place between them and al-Māturīdī, who dedicated complete titles to respond to their teachings.<sup>143</sup>

Al-Mutawakkil's efforts may have ended the political influence of the Mu'tazilites, but it did not end their academic influence.<sup>144</sup> Nadwi reveals, in the sight of many young academics, the Mu'tazilite school was perceived as esteemed with "astute observations, scholarly debate and open mindedness."<sup>145</sup> This perception was reinforced by the absence of prominent Sunni traditional scholars to present a counter academic front at a time when Mu'tazilite leaders, noted above, were enduring the political campaign against them and resiliently leading the academic front. After the demise of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal,<sup>146</sup> the followers of his traditional school were not interested in the development of rational arguments in the face of the Mu'tazilites. Instead, they adhered to the traditional approach of raw *naql*, which is the mere transmission of textual narrations from the Qur'ān and traditions of the Prophet, without offering a stimulating explanation or well-constructed rebuttal to the teachings of the Mu'tazilites. They avoided debates against the Mu'tazilites and, when they engaged them, they appeared out of touch with modern sciences and contemporary academic methodology.<sup>147</sup>

Thus, the intellectual class within the Sunni realm continued to be influenced by the Mu'tazilites and there was a need for a new leadership and school that would revolutionise the traditional approach to theology, project scholarship and contemporariness, and combat the Mu'tazilites with the style they professed. In such a critical time, al-Māturīdī and, after him,

<sup>141</sup> A. Abu 'Izza, *Inhiyār Al Haḍāra Al 'Arabiya Wal Islamiyyah Wa Sabīl Al Nuhūd* (Amman: 2008); Abu Ya'la, *Tābqāt Al Hanābilah*; M. Abu Zahra, *Ibn Hanbal Hāyātuh Wa 'Asruh* (Cairo: Dar Al Fikr Al 'Arabic, 1947).

<sup>142</sup> Māturīdī wrote several titles rebutting them, including Al Ka'bi's opinions.

<sup>143</sup> Khamīs, "Māturīdīyah Rabībat Al Kalābiyya."

<sup>144</sup> Ali. Nadwī, *Rijāl Al Fikr Wal Da'wah Fil Islam* (Damascus: Dar al Qalam, 2002).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, vol. 1, 221.

<sup>146</sup> Ahmad Ibn Hanbal was born in Baghdad in 780 CE and died there in 855 CE. He was a Muslim theologian, jurist and prominent figure of Islam. He compiled the traditions of Prophet Muhammad and formulated the Ḥanbalī school, the most traditionalist of the four orthodox jurisprudential schools of Islamic law. For further information, see G. Makdisi, "Ahmad Ibn Hanbal," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/10121/Ahmad-ibn-Hanbal>.

<sup>147</sup> Nadwī, *Rijāl Al Fikr Wal Da'wah Fil Islam*.

al-Ash'arī emerged as reformers of Sunni Islamic theology and pioneers of new synthetic theological schools, each in his respective region.

The era in which al-Māturīdī lived was pivotal and influential as far as the evolution of Islamic sciences is concerned. Many Islamic disciplines were still in their formative stages, which was very opportune for scholars of the calibre of al-Māturīdī to engage in the process and contribute. The emergence of polarising schools, such as the Mu'tazilites and traditionalists, encouraged al-Māturīdī to engage in a thorough study, debate and analysis of the divine texts, the Qur'ān and hādith, to search for evidence to refute the unorthodox teachings of the former and the extreme radical interpretations of the latter.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear the environment, circumstances of the region and era influenced al-Māturīdī's education, motivations and academic contributions. The region in which he grew up and studied was economically prosperous and affluent. In addition, it enjoyed a permanent state of political stability and security; therefore, it was an appropriate environment for al-Māturīdī and all scholars to study, research and teach. The religious piety of the Samanid kings and their reverence of knowledge ensured the community of scholars and intellectuals were encouraged and supported by the state. The policies they applied not only promoted the freedom of religious study and research, but also catered for the needs of all scholars and intellectuals, be they locals or visitors. The multiculturalism and freedom of religion the region enjoyed opened the gate to close and frequent cultural, intellectual and religious interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims. The engagement between the Muslim and non-Muslim orientations within the same society and exposure to new sources of knowledge and reason stimulated Muslim scholars to seek new instruments of debate and improvise new methods to counter the non-traditional narratives. Al-Māturīdī was at the forefront of this movement in his region and the Muslim world. This necessitated him to make important contributions in theology and Qur'ānic exegesis because he would construct his new theological arguments on the latter to protect the conventional rhetoric that was applied by Muslims in the traditional cities. It further promoted the use of *'aql*, intellect and logic, in theological thought and debates. Thus, it enriched Muslims with new arguments to support their creed.

Similarly, the diversity of Muslim schools and orientations that the region enjoyed exposed al-Māturīdī to the various Muslim perspectives of understanding the Islamic creed. Furthermore, it compelled al-Māturīdī to encounter conflicting understandings within Islamic circles, which influenced his development of a theological paradigm that took into consideration all thoughts and orientations. The rise of ultra-rational theological movements, such as the Mu'tazilites, and eccentric movements, such as the Qarāmiṭah, drove al-Māturīdī to defend mainstream Sunni traditional theology in a contemporary approach and found a new Sunni dialectical school in an attempt to end the conflict between *'aql* and *naql*. The limited available personal information indicates he preceded the emergence of the Ash'arī theological school by about 25 years. This makes his theological contributions the earliest in Sunni

academia and his school the foremost in the foundation of a complete synthetic theological school. Another important deduction from studying his age is that he is a contemporary of Tabarī, one of the most prominent scholars of Qur'ānic exegesis. Thus, he lived during the evolving stages of the discipline and his exegetical contributions, if proven, are foundational to the field. The investigation of al-Māturīdī's education manifests that he predominantly acquired knowledge of Islamic sciences under the mentorship of the Ḥanafī school, which would have influenced his perception of the relationship between *'aql* and *naql*, particularly since the Ḥanafī school is famous for its use of analogy and logic in jurisprudence. However, it would be worthwhile to explore, in a separate study, whether al-Māturīdī was a blind follower of the school or an innovator that remodelled the approach of the school to theological exegesis.

Al-Māturīdī has demonstrated, through the brief study of his titles that he consistently influenced every discipline in which he wrote and the following generations through his writings. He devised new methods and outlooks to the understanding of these disciplines as per the testimony of all the biographers. In addition, the various genres of theological titles he produced and his exegesis assert the reciprocal influence of the academic environment of his region on his literature. The above findings thus confirm the social, political, cultural, personal and religious context of Central Asia had positive effects on al-Māturīdī's academic constitution.