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IMAM AL-MATURIDI AND THE FORMATION OF THE MATURIDIYYA: SCHOLARLY LEGACY AND THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

Abstract. *This article examines the life, scholarly formation, major works, and enduring theological contribution of Imam Abu Mansur Muhammad al-Maturidi al-Samarqandi (d. 333 AH/944 CE), the founder of one of the two principal schools of Sunni Islamic theology. The study traces his intellectual lineage within the Hanafi jurisprudential tradition of Samarkand, surveys the content and significance of his two canonical works – Kitab al-Tawhid and Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunna – and analyses his distinctive positions on the balance between reason and transmitted evidence, the divine attributes, the definition of faith (iman), the freedom of human action, and the relationship between major sin and the boundaries of belief. The article situates the Maturidiyya within the broader landscape of classical Islamic theology as the moderate school positioned between the rationalism of the Mu'tazila and the textualism of the Ash'ariyya, and concludes by reflecting on the contemporary relevance of Maturidi thought as a scholarly bulwark against dogmatic extremism.*

Keywords: *al-Maturidi, Maturidiyya, Kitab al-Tawhid, kalam, Ahl al-Sunna, reason and revelation, iman, divine attributes, Hanafi school, Samarkand.*

INTRODUCTION

In the history of Islamic credal thought, Imam Abu Mansur Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Maturidi al-Hanafi al-Samarqandi occupies a distinctive place. He is counted among the great scholars of kalam who systematically grounded the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a on the basis of the harmony of reason and transmitted evidence. The credal methodology elaborated by al-Maturidi subsequently spread widely across Central Asia, Transoxiana (Mawarannahr), Turkestan, the Ottoman state, and other regions, and became the doctrinal foundation of the Hanafi school (al-Maturidi, 2001:147).

Imam al-Maturidi was born in the second half of the third Islamic century in Samarkand. While his exact date of birth is not recorded in the sources, his death in the year 333 AH (944 CE) is well attested. Samarkand was at that time one of the major centres of learning in which the sciences of jurisprudence (fiqh), hadith, and kalam flourished. Al-Maturidi received his education from scholars of the Hanafi jurisprudential school, including Abu Bakr al-Juzjani, Abu Nasr al-Iyadi, and Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn Ishaq al-Juzjani. He subsequently taught fiqh and kalam himself, producing distinguished students: Abu Ahmad al-Iyadi, Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Sayyid al-Rustuqfani, Abu Bakr al-Samarqandi, Makhul al-Nasafi, Abu al-Mu'in al-Nasafi, and Abu al-Yusr al-Pazdawi. In accordance with his final wishes, he was buried in the Chakardiza cemetery in Samarkand.

MAIN PART

Al-Maturidi's principal works are *Kitab al-Tawhid* («The Book of Divine Unity») and *Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunna* («The Interpretations of the People of the Sunnah»). *Kitab al-Tawhid* is considered the first work of Muslim theology (kalam) in which an epistemological theory is expounded. In the introduction to the work, where the definition of the science of kalam is given, three sources of knowledge are discussed: knowledge obtained through the sensory organs, through transmitted reports (naql), and through rational reflection ('aql). Without departing from the boundaries of pure religion, al-Maturidi exalts reason and emphasizes the importance of logically grounded knowledge. The work analyzes the distance of the views of the deviant sects of his era from the truth. Al-Maturidi expressed the conviction that «the cause of all error on the path of religion lies in blind following of hypocrites.»

As a theologian, al-Maturidi wrote treatises covering important credal questions – limited free will (juz'ī ikhtiyar), faith (iman), eschatology, and related matters. Among them are *Ma'khaz al-Shari'a* («The Sources of the Sharia»), *Kitab al-Usul* («The Book of Foundational Principles»), and *Kitab al-Jadal* («The Book of Dialectic»). Al-Maturidi explained and further developed the views of Imam Abu Hanifa. He refined the foundations of Islamic creed as elaborated by Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (873–935), purifying Sunni doctrine from erroneous and unsound beliefs that had crept into it. Al-Maturidi's views served as a cause of the cultural and scientific flourishing of the region in his era, for he explained the foundations of religion rationally, and developed ideas of the right of choice and the establishment of social solidarity. Al-Maturidi authored approximately fifteen works in total, seven of which were on kalam

and two on fiqh; those have not survived. His works preserved to our day have been partially studied. His Quranic commentary *Ta'wilat al-Qur'an* and its organic continuation *Irshad al-Mubtadi'in fi Tajwid Kalam Rabb al-'Alamin* («A Guide for Beginners in the Recitation of the Speech of the Lord of the Worlds») are preserved at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan.

On several questions of the Quran, al-Maturidi and his followers, like the Ash'ariyya, gave corresponding answers – preferring the rational interpretation of the sacred texts: they considered the Quran to be eternal in its interconnected sense and, in connection with the verbal expression of this meaning, believed it to be created in time; the righteous may see Allah in the hereafter without determining the modality of this vision; all human actions are created by God, and the human being only acquires (*kasb*) them for himself through his will and capacity; and the primary attributes of Allah (knowledge, power, etc.) are real and eternal. But unlike the Ash'ariyya, al-Maturidi recognized the eternity not only of the primary attributes of Allah but also of the active attributes; like the Mu'tazila, he believed in the human being's freedom of will, including the freedom of choice between two opposites, and that faith consists in the verbal acknowledgment of Allah – not in observance of religious rituals (Imam Maturidi, 1984:201). Al-Maturidi's teaching spread among the Hanafis of Mawarannah.

Abu Mansur al-Maturidi achieved success both in Samarkand itself and in debates conducted with representatives of various schools in the surrounding region. He entered into disputations with the Karamiyya, the Shi'a, and the Mu'tazilites, and devoted one of his works to refuting their views (al-Maturidi, 2005:235). In the era he lived in, the credal views of the Mu'tazila, the Jahmiyya, the Qaramita, and other sects were widely spread, and Sunni doctrine was in need of defence. Imam al-Maturidi strengthened the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunna on the basis of scholarly evidence under these very conditions.

At the centre of Imam al-Maturidi's teaching stands the question of balance between reason and transmitted evidence. In his view, reason can independently serve as a means for knowing the existence of Allah, but the specific rulings of the Sharia and their details are determined through revelation. This approach situates the Maturidiyya neither in an entirely rationalist nor in an entirely textualist direction (al-Nasafi, 1993:253).

On the question of the divine attributes, al-Maturidi follows the path of *tafwīd* (entrusting the ultimate meaning to Allah) and *ithbat* (affirmation). He did not deny the attributes, but

firmly refrained from likening them to the attributes of created beings. On the question of faith (iman), he defined faith as the heart's affirmation (taṣdīq al-qalb), emphasizing that acts of worship are not part of the essential nature of faith. At the same time he did not deny the importance of acts of worship, but regarded them as pertaining to the perfection of faith.

On the question of divine decree and human destiny (qaḍa' wa-qadar), al-Maturidi, while acknowledging the voluntary acts of the human being, expounds that they occur within the scope of Allah's knowledge and will. This view is assessed as a moderate methodology, free from the determinism (jabriyya) and the excess of the Mu'tazila (al-Nasafi, n.d.).

In the question of the relationship between faith and acts, al-Maturidi defines faith as the heart's affirmation while holding that its verbal profession is necessary for the purposes of worldly rulings. Acts of worship do not enter into the essential nature of faith, but ensure the perfection and beauty of faith. Through this view he provides a scholarly refutation of the extreme approaches of the Kharijites and the Mu'tazila. Al-Maturidi also defends the Ahl al-Sunna position on the question of the Muslim who commits a major sin. In his view, the perpetrator of a major sin does not exit from faith but remains a sinful believer. Entrusting the ruling to the will of Allah demonstrates that the Maturidiyya is a teaching of broad-mindedness and grounded in hope.

Imam al-Maturidi's immediate students and the scholars of subsequent generations systematized his teaching and disseminated it widely. Scholars such as Abu al-Mu'in al-Nasafi, Najm al-Din Umar al-Nasafi, and 'Ali ibn 'Uthman al-Ushi played an important role in consolidating the Maturidi doctrine. As a result, the Maturidiyya became one of the principal directions of Sunni faith, intimately bound up with the Hanafi school of jurisprudence (al-Nasafi, 1993:253).

Imam al-Maturidi devoted particular attention to the question of reason. In his view, reason is a great blessing bestowed by Allah on His servants, through which the human being can comprehend the existence, unity, and majesty of the Creator. Al-Maturidi also emphasizes human responsibility in this regard. For although the possibility of knowing the truth through reason exists, revelation perfects this knowledge and places it on the right path. In this respect he does not pit reason against revelation but interprets reason in harmony with revelation. As al-Maturidi places great value on the human being's rational capacity, he also chooses a moderate path on the question of legal obligation (taklīf). In his view, the human being is responsible in matters that can be understood by reason, but the details and forms

of worship are determined only through revelation. This approach served to make Maturidi doctrine both vital and adaptable.

The Maturidiyya was the principal doctrinal orientation in Mawarannahr and Turkestan for centuries. During the era of the Ottoman state as well, the Hanafi-Maturidi doctrine was adopted as the official creed. Today too, the religious thinking of Central Asian Muslims is shaped primarily on the basis of the Maturidiyya. In the contemporary period, Maturidi teaching is serving as an important scholarly foundation against religious fanaticism and doctrinal extremism. This school, which promotes the harmony of reason and revelation, is of pressing relevance in ensuring scholarly dialogue and religious tolerance (al-Shahrastani, 2005:164).

CONCLUSION

Imam al-Maturidi is the founder of a moderate and scientifically grounded school that left a deep imprint on Islamic credal thought. His teaching, while maintaining the balance between reason, revelation, and human responsibility, has served the unity and stability of the Muslim community. The Maturidiyya merits deep study as a scholarly legacy in our day as well.

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