

THE HISTORICAL STAGES OF MATURIDI THEOLOGY

Abstract. *This article examines the historical development of Maturidi theology and its relationship to the Hanafi tradition within Sunni Islam. It argues that an adequate assessment of the school requires a periodization extending beyond its early emergence in Transoxiana to its later institutional consolidation and geographical dissemination. The study adopts a historical and comparative approach to biographical literature, theological writings, and modern scholarship cited in the source article. Following a principle associated with Ibn Khaldun, the contributions of individual scholars provide the principal basis for identifying stages, while political events, textual production, educational institutions, and regional transmission serve as complementary indicators. The analysis distinguishes four stages: foundation, formation, development, and widespread dissemination. The foundational stage concerns Abu Mansur al-Maturidi's integration of rational argumentation with scriptural interpretation; formation concerns the activity of his immediate disciples. The developmental stage encompasses the growth of scholarly centers in Samarqand, Bukhara, and Nasaf, expansion toward Khurasan, and exchanges with Ashari theologians. Widespread dissemination is associated with dynastic patronage, madrasa instruction, and the circulation of commentaries and glosses, particularly those connected with Sad al-Din al-Taftazani. The article emphasizes continuity between Hanafi religious scholarship and Maturidi theology and interprets debates with Asharism within a shared Sunni framework. It concludes that the school's durability depended on both scholarly transmission and institutional support. Chronological discrepancies in the source prevent the proposed boundaries from being treated as exact or uniformly consistent. The four-stage model is therefore presented as a historical framework whose later transitions are approximate and whose final endpoint reflects the source article's own chronological horizon.*

Keywords: *Maturidi theology; Hanafi tradition; Sunni Islam; historical periodization; Transoxiana; Sad al-Din al-Taftazani; madrasa education*

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INTRODUCTION

An objective assessment of the historical standing of Maturidi theology and its place in the development of Islamic thought requires a systematic examination of the school's emergence and subsequent development. The doctrinal foundations associated with the legal schools of Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamaa were systematized principally by the Maturidi and Ashari schools of kalam. Emerging at approximately the same time in different geographical and intellectual settings, these two traditions passed through distinctive historical stages over the ensuing centuries. Examining Maturidism from its foundation through its later systematization and consolidation makes it possible to understand its place in the religious and intellectual life of Muslim societies more fully.

Some publications list Maturidism and Asharism as separate “schools” or “doctrines” alongside Hanafism, Shafism, Malikism, and Hanbalism. Such terminology does not establish that they constituted new doctrinal traditions outside Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamaa. In the interpretation advanced here, Imam Abu Hanifa's (80–150 AH/699–767 CE) traditional approach to doctrinal questions rested on scriptural texts, namely the Quran and hadith. Responding to the intellectual conditions of his time, Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi introduced logical argumentation into this inherited framework. In addition to scriptural evidence, he employed forms of reasoning suited to the arguments of the movements he opposed and potentially acceptable to their adherents. His contribution enriched the school's methodology. Although historically substantial, this work took place within the Hanafi tradition and produced a rational school of doctrinal inquiry.

The combination of an inherited doctrinal orientation with a logical method thus contributed to the emergence of a school of kalam. The present article challenges attempts in some modern studies to separate Hanafism from Maturidism on what it considers one-sided, insufficiently substantiated, or conjectural grounds. Ulrich Rudolph's study is cited as an example of this approach (Rudolph, 2002, pp. 180–181).

Abu al-Muin Maymun ibn Muhammad al-Nasafi (438–508 AH/1047–1115 CE), in *Tabsirat al-adilla*, maintains that al-Maturidi alone would have sufficed to represent the Hanafi scholars of Transoxiana. He praises al-Maturidi's ability to penetrate the depths of learning, retrieve its intellectual treasures, and present the strongest religious proofs with eloquence, exceptional knowledge, and insight (al-Nasafi, 2011, p. 556). This testimony is treated here as evidence of the substantive unity of Hanafi scholarship

and Maturidi theology. Further evidence could be adduced from numerous sources. On this reading, separating Maturidism from Hanafism or setting them in opposition is unwarranted.

Kamal al-Din Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahid al-Siwasi al-Hanafi, known as Ibn al-Humam (790–861 AH/1388–1457 CE), likewise uses the expression “Hanafism and Asharism,” rather than “Maturidism and Asharism,” in his theological work *al-Musayarat* (Ibn al-Humam, 1929, pp. 36–37). The Shafii scholar Taj al-Din Abd al-Wahhab ibn Ali al-Subki (727–771 AH/1327–1370 CE) identifies thirteen disputed questions between “Hanafism and Asharism” in *al-Qasida al-nuniyya* (al-Subki, n.d.-a, pp. 378–389). Such statements by scholars of the Islamic religious sciences provide historical and textual support for locating Maturidism within Hanafism. A parallel is drawn with Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari (259–329 AH/873–941 CE, as dated in the source), who is understood here to have developed Imam Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafii’s (150–204 AH/767–820 CE) doctrinal views through logical argumentation.

An objective examination of these schools’ origins reveals a shared concern with communicating Islamic belief to the wider community in an uncorrupted form. Their adherence to the correct understanding of Islamic doctrine has continued to be acknowledged by prominent scholars across successive periods. Each school nevertheless followed a particular historical trajectory.

Claude Gilliot distinguishes three stages in the development of Maturidi theology, locating the final stage in the fifth/eleventh century (Gilliot, 2000, p. 127). The present article argues that this scheme does not encompass the full chronological range of the historical events and factors important to the school’s development. A more extended investigation suggests four stages: foundation, formation, development, and widespread dissemination. A shared feature of these stages is the production of scholarly refutations of movements that Hanafi-Maturidi scholars regarded as departing from *Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamaa*. Each stage also possesses distinctive features examined below.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs historical analysis and comparison of the theological writings, biographical compilations, and modern studies cited in the article. The materials include works by al-Nasafi, Ibn al-Humam, al-Subki, Ibn Khaldun, al-Tamimi, Ibn Qutlubugha, al-Qurashi, al-Pazdawi, al-Razi, al-Laknawi, Tashkuprizade, al-Zirikli, and al-Khayali,

together with the modern scholarship identified in the References. The inquiry concerns intellectual history and textual transmission; it does not involve experimental materials or quantitative data collection.

The historian Wali al-Din Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Hadrami, known as Ibn Khaldun (732–808 AH/1332–1406 CE), uses the activities of particular scholars as markers in explaining the development of Asharism in his *Muqaddima* (Ibn Khaldun, 2004, Vol. 2, pp. 212–214). An analogous principle is applied here to Maturidism: scholarly contributions constitute the primary criteria of periodization, while historical events provide complementary indicators.

The first two stages are defined by the lifetime of Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi and the activity of his immediate disciples. In the article's initial chronological outline, the founder's period is given as 243–332 AH/857–944 CE. The death of the last surviving disciple establishes the next boundary: Abu Muhammad Abd al-Karim ibn Musa al-Pazdawī died in 390 AH/1000 CE, and formation is consequently assigned to 332–390 AH/944–1000 CE. Development is assigned to 391–750 AH/1001–1349 CE, and widespread dissemination to 751–1440 AH/1350–2019 CE. The final two stages are explicitly relative divisions based on significant historical developments. Political events, the composition of works by representatives of the school, and patterns of regional dissemination are considered together.

The historical narrative retains the source's alternative dates rather than silently harmonizing them. AH and CE indicate the Hijri and Common Era calendars respectively. Where the source provides inconsistent boundaries or paired dates, these are documented in the chronological notes in the Discussion. The endpoint of 2019 belongs to the source's periodization and is not extended to the present without additional evidence.

RESULTS

Foundation

The source labels the foundational stage “238–333 AH/852–853–945 CE,” while its accompanying explanation identifies al-Maturidi's lifetime as 243–333 AH/857–944 CE. These competing formulations are preserved as source variants rather than treated as a single resolved chronology.

This was the school's initial stage. Its defining characteristic was al-Maturidi's use of scholarly and logical argument against interpretations of Islamic doctrine that

he considered biased or distorted, whether arising from objective circumstances or subjective commitments. These conditions encouraged him to establish a school of kalam. His response to these intellectual challenges gives this stage its particular significance.

Formation

The formation stage is headed 333–390 AH/944–1000 CE in the source. It covers the principal period immediately following al-Maturidi's death, when the doctrine first took shape in Samarqand. His direct disciples and the scholars who followed his teaching made a substantial contribution to this process. They came from Samarqand and from other cities, including Bukhara.

After studying with their teacher, some returned to their home regions or traveled elsewhere, gradually establishing the doctrine in new settings. Others occupied responsible offices, including judgeships, which contributed to its growing recognition at the level of government. These scholars continued the school founded by their teacher and composed independent works to refute the sectarian positions they opposed.

Although Maturidism and Asharism emerged at approximately the same time, the present investigation identifies no evidence of debates between them during this stage. Separate works addressing their differences belong to the subsequent developmental stage.

The scholars active in this period included Abu al-Qasim Ishaq ibn Muhammad ibn Ismail ibn Ibrahim ibn Zayd al-Hakim al-Samarqandi (d. 335 AH/947 CE). The source attributes to him *al-Sawad al-azam*, *Aqidat al-Imam*, *Sharh al-Fiqh al-akbar*, *al-Sahaif al-ilahiyya*, and *Risala fi-l-iman juz min al-amal* (al-Tamimi, n.d., Vol. 2, pp. 158–159; al-Nasafi, 2011, p. 558).

Another representative was Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Said al-Rustughfani (d. 350 AH/961 CE), to whom the source attributes *Irshad al-muhtadi* and *al-Zawaid wa-l-fawaid* (Ibn Qutlubugha, n.d., p. 205), as well as *al-Irshad fi usul al-din*, *Fatawa al-Rustughfani*, *Kitab fi-l-khilaf*, *al-Asila wa-l-ajwiba*, and *Bayan al-sunna wa-l-jamaa*.

Other figures included Abu Ahmad ibn Abu Nasr Ahmad ibn Abbas al-Iyadi (al-Qurashi, 1993, Vol. 4, pp. 10–11), Abu Muhammad Abd al-Karim ibn Musa ibn Isa al-Pazdawi (d. 390 AH/1000 CE; al-Tamimi, n.d., Vol. 4, p. 378), and Abu Abd al-Rahman Abu Ismat ibn Abu al-Layth al-Bukhari (al-Qurashi, 1993, Vol. 4, p. 65; al-Laknawi, n.d., p. 196).

Development

The development stage covers 391–750 AH/1001–1349 CE. Although Transoxiana remained the principal center, Maturidi theology spread to Khurasan and neighboring territories, where scholars representing the school also emerged. Under the influence of Samarqand, distinct centers of Maturidi learning developed in Bukhara and Nasaf. The beginning of this period also witnessed the doctrine's first elevation to recognition at the level of government.

Hanafi-Maturidi scholars continued to compose scholarly refutations of movements they regarded as outside Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamaa. At the same time, scholarly debates took place between Maturidi and Ashari representatives. Many Hanafi-Maturidi scholars emerged in Transoxiana, although not all wrote works on doctrine. Those who became known for theological writings belonged to one of the Maturidi centers of Samarqand, Bukhara, or Nasaf.

The period also saw the composition of separate works on the differences between the two theological traditions. This development was natural, since Asharism was itself expanding beyond Iraq. In the interpretation adopted here, these exchanges did not arise from a fundamental opposition between the two traditions (Oqilov, 2017). Material in Abu al-Yusr Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Pazdawi's *Usul al-din* demonstrates that debates between Maturidis and Asharis occurred near the beginning of this stage (al-Pazdawi, 2003, p. 13).

A further example is the direct scholarly exchange between the Bukhara Hanafi-Maturidi theologian Nur al-Din Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr al-Sabuni al-Bukhari (d. 580 AH/1184 CE) and the Shafii-Ashari scholar Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Umar al-Razi (544–604 AH/1149–1207 CE, as dated in the source; al-Razi, 1956). Following their debate, al-Sabuni even issued a fatwa stating that a Hanafi should not follow a Shafii imam in prayer. The source characterizes the works on differences written during this period as problematic less because of the number of disputed issues they listed than because those issues had not been subjected to sufficiently rigorous investigation.

Before the Mongol invasion, some members of ruling dynasties adopted the doctrine. The Seljuk ruler Sultan Tughril Beg (d. 455 AH/1063 CE) is cited as an example (al-Subki, n.d.-b, Vol. 3, pp. 389–394). The Mongol invasion interrupted this process for a time.

Widespread Dissemination

The source heads this stage “after 750 AH/1350 CE,” while its earlier outline gives 751–1440 AH/1350–2019 CE. Its distinguishing features include recognition at the level of government, integration into education, and the establishment of Maturidi schools of kalam and madrasas in different regions of the world.

Hanafi-Maturidi scholars continued their scholarly refutations of movements they regarded as outside Sunni Islam. Supporters of both Maturidism and Asharism also increasingly acknowledged that both traditions belonged to Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamaa. Their differences became the subject of comparative and more closely examined inquiry.

This stage witnessed a second elevation of the doctrine to governmental standing. The article distinguishes this development from the first: earlier recognition involved individual rulers, whereas the later process involved entire ruling dynasties. It is therefore treated as a major event in the history of the school.

Amir Timur, founder of the Timurid dynasty, followed this tradition. By ending Mongol rule in Transoxiana and establishing his own state in the school’s central region, he played an important role in the reestablishment of Maturidi centers. Hanafism likewise retained governmental standing under the Shaybanid, Ashtarkhanid, Manghit, and Qungrat dynasties that successively ruled in the region.

Beyond Transoxiana, representatives of the Ottoman and Baburid, or Mughal, dynasties also adhered to the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition. Ottoman rulers, whose period is given in the source as 698–1342 AH/1299–1924 CE, played a particularly important role. Members of the dynasty followed the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition while recognizing the other three Sunni legal schools. When some officials were Shafii, Maliki, or Hanbali, the rulers recommended that they adopt the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition (Öztuna, 1986, Vol. 2, p. 140).

Sad al-Din al-Taftazani made a major contribution to the emergence of a distinct Maturidi school within Ottoman territories. Shams al-Din Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Hamza al-Fanari al-Rumi al-Hanafi is identified as the first holder of the Ottoman office of shaykh al-Islam (al-Zirikli, n.d., Vol. 6, p. 110; Ágoston & Masters, 2008, pp. 524–525). A Hanafi-Maturidi scholar, al-Fanari also copied al-Taftazani’s books (Tashkuprizade, n.d., pp. 16–21).

These developments contributed both to the establishment of a Maturidi scholarly center in the imperial heartland and to the inclusion of al-Taftazani’s works in madrasa

teaching. Scholars in the region devoted particular attention to his intellectual legacy, producing commentaries, glosses, and further annotations on his writings. Gilliot emphasizes the importance of *Sharh al-Aqaid* in the widespread dissemination of Maturidi theology (Gilliot, 2000, p. 128). The source also attributes to Wilferd Madelung the view that al-Taftazani made the designation “Maturidiyya” widely known (Madelung, 2000; bibliographic details unresolved).

The work of al-Taftazani and his disciples is compared here with that of Imam Abu Hanifa and his students, particularly Imam Abu Yusuf (113–182 AH/731–798 CE). As the first qadi al-qudat, or chief judge, in Islamic history, Abu Yusuf contributed to the spread of the Hanafi school (al-Laknawi, 1990, p. 17). Similarly, numerous madrasas teaching within the Hanafi tradition were established in Ottoman territories, and a Hanafi-Maturidi school of learning developed.

Ahmad ibn Musa al-Khayali (829–860 AH/1426–1456 CE, as dated in the source), described in the article as a leading Hanafi scholar and instructor at the Sultaniyya madrasa in Istanbul, provides a further example. In his gloss on al-Taftazani’s *Sharh al-Aqaid*, he explains that Asharis were known as *Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamaa* in Khurasan, Iraq, Syria, and many other cities, whereas in Transoxiana that designation referred to the Maturidis, followers of Abu Mansur al-Maturidi. He identifies Ma Turid as a village in Samarqand and states that Maturidism had already reached the other regions mentioned (al-Khayali, 2017, pp. 84–85). The source interprets his reference to his own time as the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century.

This testimony is taken to indicate two historical developments: recognition of both traditions as *Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamaa* and the presence of Maturidism beyond Transoxiana, including Ottoman territories, by the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century. Major institutions devoted to Hanafi-Maturidi learning were established in different regions during this stage, although not all have survived. In terms of their reach, they may be divided into institutions of predominantly local significance and those acknowledged internationally.

DISCUSSION

The proposed four-stage model extends the history of Maturidism beyond its early doctrinal formation. Foundation and formation foreground the founder and his immediate disciples. Development concerns regional scholarly centers, the production of theological literature, and exchanges with Asharism. Widespread dissemination

emphasizes dynastic patronage, madrasa curricula, and the circulation of commentaries and glosses. The transitions therefore reflect changes in the principal forms of transmission as well as changes in geographical reach.

The historical argument emphasizes continuity between Hanafism and Maturidism. Al-Maturidi's introduction of rational argumentation is understood as a methodological development within an inherited Sunni tradition. The terminology used by Ibn al-Humam and al-Subki supports this interpretation in the article. Scholarly exchanges with Asharism are correspondingly situated within a shared Sunni framework, even where particular disputes generated restrictive legal opinions. The account also stresses the interaction between individual scholarship and institutional authority: rulers, judges, teachers, and commentators all contributed to the school's persistence.

Al-Taftazani occupies a central place in the explanation of later dissemination. His works and their commentarial reception provided teaching materials that could circulate across regions. The comparison with Abu Yusuf highlights the article's broader contention that scholarship acquired an enlarged historical influence when it was supported by influential offices and educational structures.

Chronological Discrepancies in the Source

The proposed dates require qualification. The methodological outline gives al-Maturidi's period as 243–332 AH/857–944 CE. The foundation heading instead reads 238–333 AH/852–853–945 CE, and its explanatory paragraph gives 243–333 AH/857–944 CE. Thus both the opening date and the closing Hijri year vary, and the corresponding CE endpoints alternate between 944 and 945. No single exact lifetime or foundational boundary can be established from these statements alone.

Formation begins in 332 AH in the outline but in 333 AH in its heading; both passages pair the beginning with 944 CE. Development consistently appears as 391–750 AH/1001–1349 CE. The final stage begins in 751 AH in the outline but “after 750 AH” in its heading, with 1350 CE used in both formulations. The outline ends this stage at 1440 AH/2019 CE, whereas the heading is open-ended. These variants are retained as approximate historical divisions, and the 2019 endpoint is not treated as the date of the present edition.

The source also supplies paired biographical dates for al-Ashari (259–329 AH/873–941 CE), al-Razi (544–604 AH/1149–1207 CE), and al-Khayali (829–860 AH/1426–1456 CE). These are reproduced without independent resolution. The Ottoman span

ending in 1924 and the description of al-Khayali's institutional location likewise remain statements of the source requiring historical verification before publication. These qualifications preserve the source's historical content while making clear that translation does not establish the accuracy of every date or attribution.

Bibliographic Limitations

The twenty-three original notes contain repeated citations and several notes containing more than one work; consequently, they do not correspond to twenty-three distinct reference entries. Repeated works are consolidated below. "n.d." denotes the absence of a publication date in the supplied note. Missing publishers, editors, and other edition details have not been reconstructed by conjecture.

The citation attributed to Madelung combines the title "Al-Taftazani" and Encyclopaedia of Islam, second edition, with the year 2000, volume IV, part II, pages 117–131, and the printer Imprimerie Darantier. This combination is unresolved and is retained in the reference entry only to identify the supplied citation; it should not be taken as verified publication metadata. Gilliot's chapter is cited in the source at pages 127 and 128, without a complete chapter range or editors. The source identifies a printer rather than an unambiguous publisher for that item. These missing elements are not supplied here.

CONCLUSION

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi made a major historical contribution to the communication of Islamic doctrine by combining scriptural interpretation with logical argumentation suited to the intellectual conditions of his time. In doing so, he developed responses to Qarmatian, Rafidi, Mutazili, and other positions regarded in the source as doctrinally erroneous, employing arguments that their adherents could potentially recognize. This enriched the methodology of the Hanafi tradition and established a school of kalam in Samarqand.

The school subsequently passed through stages of foundation, formation, development, and widespread dissemination. The article understands its continuing recognition by prominent scholars over more than ten centuries, and the adherence of a large part of the Sunni community, in relation to its continuity with Islamic doctrine. Maturidism has reached different regions of the world, and scholars continue to write within the tradition in response to the needs of their times.

Al-Taftazani and his disciples made a distinctive contribution to this wider transmission. Their role may be compared with that of Abu Hanifa and his students, particularly Abu Yusuf, in the dissemination of Hanafism. The four-stage framework captures the combined significance of doctrinal argument, scholarly succession, political patronage, and education, while its precise chronological boundaries remain subject to the discrepancies documented above.

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