Māturīdī Theology

Edited by
LEJLA DEMIRI,
PHILIP DORROLL,
and DALE J. CORREA

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Māturīdī Theology

A Bilingual Reader

Edited by
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In memoriam Josef van Ess
18 April 1934 – 20 November 2021
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Note on Transliteration and Dates

The transliteration of Arabic names follows that of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three (EI3)*. Technical terms in Arabic are all italicised except for terms that have become common in English (e.g. Hadith, Islam, imam, mufti, sufi, Sunni, Shi’i). The *tā’ marbūta* (ة/ـة) is rendered as ‘a’ (e.g. sūra), or as ‘at’ when the word is in the construct state (*iḍāfa*) (e.g. Sūrat al-Fātiha). Double dates are used in reference to the Islamic (A. H.) and Common Era (C. E.) calendars (e.g. 716/1316).
Introduction
Abū Maṣūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Māturīdī al-Samarqandī al-Ḥanāfī (d. 333/944) was a theologian, a jurist, and an exegete hailing from a village outside of Samarqand, known as Māturīt/Māturīd. He was extremely influential in the formation of the Samarqandī/Transoxanian Ḥanafī theological tradition, although the attribution of ‘a doctrinal school’ to his name did not happen until generations after him. His principal teacher was Abū Naṣr Aḥmad al-ʿIyāḍī (d. last third of the 3rd/9th century in skirmishes with Turks), through whom al-Māturīdī can trace an intellectual lineage to Abū Bakr al-Jūzjānī (d. 250/864), Abū Sulaymān al-Jūzjānī (d. 200/816), and Muḥammad al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805). Despite leaving behind only a few works for later generations to study, al-Māturīdī has captured the scholarly imagination across the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds – albeit to varying degrees. North American English-language scholarship on al-Māturīdī and the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī school of thought is just beginning to blossom, while the European and Middle Eastern scholarly relationship with the scholar and those whom he influenced has a comparatively longer history. Much of that history is entangled in the understanding of Ḥanafī theologians as ‘Māturīdis’, when in fact their identity was more complex than an eponym.

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Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī: Life and Works

The field of Islamic studies generally understands the Transoxanian Ḥanafīs as ‘Māturīdīs’, principally on the basis of the work of Wilferd Madelung. However, they are more accurately understood as ‘Samarqandī Ḥanafīs’ in their formative (1st/7th–4th/10th centuries) and early post-formative (5th/11th–6th/12th centuries) periods because of the priority of their regional identification with Samarqand and Mā warāʾ al-nahr, the area ‘beyond the [Oxus] river’ (in English, Transoxania). The Ḥanafīs of Transoxania defined themselves as part of – not separate from – the Ḥanafiyya through reference to Samarqand and to al-Māturīdī in a constellation of theological issues. In their later period, these scholars would formally self-identify (and be identified) as Māturīdīs.

Understanding the nature of Transoxanian intellectual networks beyond the region, and the question of how Transoxanian scholars viewed their participation in an Islamicate intellectual tradition, presents unique challenges because historiographic and prosopographic materials from before the Mongol invasion are few and far between. A preliminary attempt to describe the intellectual networks of Transoxanian scholars of this period by Shahab Ahmed has indicated that they benefited from the work of scholars in other regions, at the very least through the latters’ texts, if not through personal study. However, this process of influence, as shown by Ahmed, seems to dwindle by the 5th/11th century. Wilferd Madelung and Muhammed Tancî have also specified which Ḥanafī works from this region profess a thoroughly articulated Transoxanian theology that vigorously distinguishes itself from that of other regions and schools of thought. Appreciating Transoxanian Ḥanafī scholars’ emphasis on a regional specification is integral not only to revisiting the characterisation of Transoxanian Ḥanafīs as Māturīdīs but also to understanding their theological positions and the ways in which they viewed their own intellectual tradition.

The impression in the field that the Māturīdī school was eponymous in its origins has been both buttressed and challenged by scholarship that focuses on al-Māturīdī himself. Excellent studies of al-Māturīdī’s life and thought – notably, by Ayyub Ali, Salim Daccache, Balqāsim al-Ghālī, ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Maghribī, Sayyid Luṭfullāh Jalālī, Ulrich Rudolph, Mustafā Čerić, J. Meric Pessagno, and most recently, Hureyre Kam and Kayhan Özaykal – provide rich historical and intellectual background for the development of Ḥanafī thought and the eventual formation of the Māturīdī identity. Ali’s ʿAqidat al-Islām wa-l-Imām al-Māturīdī was a foundational review of the history of Islamic theology with a particular focus on locating Ḥanafī theology and al-Māturīdī within the development of the discipline. This study is significant for its contemporary academic contribution to understanding the relationship between al-Māturīdī, Abū Ḥanīfa, and Islamic theology by establishing Ḥanafī theology as a thread of Islamic theology. Imām ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamāʿa Abū Maṣūr al-Māturīdī wa-ārāʾuh al-kalāmiyya by al-Maghribī takes a deeper dive into the life and works of al-Māturīdī. Like Ali and al-Ghāli below, al-Maghribī wrote his study following the publication of Fathalla Kholeif’s edition of al-Māturīdī’s Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, which paved the way for more focused study of al-Māturīdī’s theology. Al-Maghribī’s contribution reviews al-Māturīdī’s life and follows the main topics of the Kitāb al-Tawḥīd to elucidate his theological views. It concludes with a study of the theological differences between al-Māturīdī and Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936), and al-Māturīdī and the Muʿtazila, as well as commentary on where al-Māturīdī sits on the spectrum between the two.

In 1988, Daccache completed his doctoral thesis on al-Māturīdī’s theology of creation, which was revised and published as a monograph in 2008. Daccache situates al-Māturīdī’s work in its Samarqandī context, and focuses in particular on al-Māturīdī’s theological epistemology and his understanding of God’s act of creation, including its implications for metaphysics in general. In 1989, al-Ghāli published his Abū Maṣūr al-Māturīdī. Ḥayāṭuh wa-ārāʾuh al-ʿaqādiyya. Al-Ghāli’s rich exploration contextualises al-Māturīdī’s education, profession, and scholarship among near-contemporaries throughout Muslim society. He focusses on al-Māturīdī’s views of God and humans, and the relationship between the two, using al-Māturīdī’s Kitāb al-Tawḥīd as a launching point. More recently, Jalālī published Tārīkh va ʿaqāyiḍ-i māturīdiyya, which takes a more

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geographically-centred approach to al-Māturīdī’s biography and the study of his theological ideas.11 Jalālī’s study also includes a comparison of Māturīdī, Ashʿarī, Muʿtazilī, and Imāmī doctrines.

Rudolph’s Al-Maturidi und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand was a landmark study for advancing the understanding of Ḥanafī-Māturīdī theology in Europe and North America.12 This essential study became all the more accessible to English-speaking researchers after it was translated from the original German into English by Rodrigo Adem in 2014.13 Rudolph takes great pains to reconstruct the milieu in which al-Māturīdī studied, taught, and developed his ideas and works. A remarkable observation from Rudolph’s work is that al-Māturīdī – despite his invectives against the school – was deeply influenced by, and owed much to, the Muʿtazila, and in particular, to Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī/ al-Kaʿbī (d. 319/931). In contrast, Cerić’s Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islām. A Study of the Theology of Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī takes a theologically sympathetic approach by focusing on al-Māturīdī’s Kitāb al-Tawḥīd in great detail.14 Cerić guides his reader through the logic of al-Māturīdī’s argumentation, connecting it to the broader ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamāʿa creed as well as to related (and essential) works of theology, exegesis, Hadith, and law. Earlier Pessagno contributed to the growing Western understanding of al-Māturīdī and his oeuvre through scholarship about one of al-Māturīdī’s great influencers, Ibn al-Shabīb (d. first half of 3rd/9th century), and al-Māturīdī’s approach to a number of key concepts, including evil, acquisition (kasb), will (irāda), and power (qudra).15

Hureyre Kam, in recent years, has expanded the field’s understanding of al-Māturīdī’s thought by focusing on his conceptualisation of evil.16 Intriguingly, Kam argues that al-Māturīdī conceives of evil – or rather, theodicy – as a proof of God’s very existence. Kayhan Özaykal has also shed light on al-Māturīdī’s unique contributions to Islamic theology through the latter’s middle stance on the ratiocentric-theocentric dichotomy.17 Özaykal finds that while al-Māturīdī’s

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theological-ethics views God as the paramount source of morality, he conceives of reason as the foundation for the ordering of creation and as the primary conduit for human understanding of moral values. Zaid Khalid al-Zuriqat has also focused on the interplay of reason and revelation in his article, “Dalīl maʿrifat Allāh bi-l-ʿaql fi falsafat al-Māturīdī al-kalāmiyya.” Al-Zuriqat concludes that reason is the spark for all pathways of knowledge to God for al-Māturīdī, from the senses to testimony to contemplation of revelation.

**Historical Studies**

Recent scholarship has relied upon and revised that of the above scholars to reveal more detail about Transoxania and Ḥanafī theology before, during, and after the career of al-Māturīdī. In particular, Philip Dorroll’s contribution to our understanding of al-Māturīdī’s metaphysics points to Anke von Kuegelgen and Ashirbek Muminov’s work on epigraphic evidence from the Jakerdize cemetery that elucidates the divisions among Ḥanafī scholars in Samarqand. Furthermore, Dorroll explores the reception of al-Māturīdī’s metaphysical notion of flux/taqallub (or lack thereof) by Abū l-Muʿīn al-Nasafi (d. 508/1115) in the latter’s *Tabṣirat al-adilla*, lending the field a crucial diachronic connection between the opaque thought of the eponym and the mature, lucid writing of later generations of Ḥanafī thinkers. Likewise, Philipp Bruckmayr’s “The Spread and Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām and Underlying Dynamics” explores how al-Māturīdī became an eponym for the Transoxanian Ḥanafī theological school, and where and how al-Māturīdī’s ideas did and did not endure.

M. Sait Özervarlı also connects al-Māturīdī’s thought to that of his intellectual progeny in an effort to authenticate the unique manuscript of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* held at Cambridge. Using *Tabṣirat al-adilla*, Özervalı is able to demonstrate that the Cambridge manuscript is reflected either verbatim or by meaning in al-Nasafi’s text. This article has helped dispel concerns in the field with trusting a unique manuscript to represent a theological eponym’s master work. Özervarlı has also contributed to the field’s understanding of the later Māturīdī school, from the beginning of the Ottoman Empire and onwards.

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22 M. Sait Özervalı, “Attempts to Revitalize Kalām in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries
al-Dīb likewise turns to works outside of the Kitāb al-Tawḥīd for some impression of what al-Māturīdī’s views may have been on issues not otherwise covered in his main, extant theological treatise. Relying on al-Māturīdī’s Tāwilāt ahl al-sunna, al-Dīb is able to parse out two major opinions by al-Māturīdī on the issue of imāma: how the imām is selected, and the qualifications of the imām. Relatively, Iranian scholars Shadi Nafisi and Somayeh Khalili Ashtiyani investigate the place of ahl al-bayt in the narrations about imāma quoted in al-Māturīdī’s and ‘Umar Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī’s (d. 537/1142) works of Qur’anic exegesis. They find that, although al-Māturīdī and al-Nasafī generally honour the ahl al-bayt, the scholars do not rely on ahl al-bayt as sources for the interpretation of verses related to the Prophet’s family and their leadership of the community.

Robert Wisnovsky notes a major shift in the intellectual history of Islamic theology and philosophy through al-Māturīdī. In particular, he focuses on one of al-Māturīdī’s most renowned followers, Abū l-Yusr al-Bazdawī (d. 493/1099), and the influence that Ibn Sinā (d. 428/1037) seemed to have on him. Wisnovsky is able to demonstrate how the ‘philosophising’ of Islamic theology was not a lone product of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) efforts; rather, it can be traced to the lifetime of Ibn Sinā and those he inspired, including al-Bazdawī. Taking us into the present day, Ramon Harvey puts al-Māturīdī into conversation with contemporary phenomenology and analytic theology in order to show how a contemporary Muslim philosophical theology is possible in such a space.

Similarly tracing the dynamics between other Islamic sciences and Islamic theology, Aron Zysow has demonstrated in both his monograph and notable article, “Muʿtazilism and Māturīdism in Ḥanafī Legal Theory”, how theology affects legal theory. Zysow carefully builds an intellectual history of the as-
sociation of key theological concepts with legal theoretical prescriptions in the work of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. 539/1144), showing how theology is the essential foundation to the logic and structure of other disciplines for Ḥanafīs.

Dale J. Correa expands Zysow’s study to trace the development of the epistemological relationship between theology and legal theory in the Ḥanafī school from al-Māturīdī’s generation to that of ʿUmar Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī. 28 Using testimony as her lens, she finds that theology establishes and continues to re-establish the basis upon which legal theory is able to operate. Najah Nadi similarly builds on Zysow’s findings in her study of Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 792/1390), exploring how Islamic theology and Arabic logic were integrated into legal theory. 29 Nadi focuses on theological principles, demonstrating how they play an epistemological role in theology, logic, and legal theory, as they deal with the objects and classification of knowledge, the character and typology of epistemic indication, and the nature of theoretical investigation.

Critical Editions and Textual Studies

In the mid-20th century, the works of al-Māturīdī and key Ḥanafī theologians came to the notice and intense focus of Western scholars. Manfred Götz introduced the field to al-Māturīdī’s exegesis, Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān, well before any comprehensive edition would be completed. 30 He also did so through the lens of a later commentary by the still underappreciated ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, thus capturing two key and previously unfamiliar texts in one study. Walid Saleh recently continued the effort to study al-Māturīdī’s immense exegesis by using it as a lens for understanding the famous exegete Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). 31 However, the most impactful edition of the 20th century was Fathalla Kholeif’s 1970 publication of al-Māturīdī’s Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, based on the Cambridge manuscript. 32 This edition and study opened the door for more scholars to approach al-Māturīdī’s theology directly.

Angelika Brodersen has introduced to the field relatively unfamiliar scholars who further our understanding of the Ḥanafī theological presence in Trans-


oxania. Her edition of Abū Iṣḥāq al-Ṣaffār al-Bukhārī’s (d. 534/1139) *Talkhīṣ al-adilla li-qawā‘id al-tawḥīd*, and the accompanying studies, elucidate the complex intellectual networks between Bukhara and Samarqand in the premodern period.33 Her edition of Abū Shakūr al-Sālimī’s (d. latter half of 5th/11th century) *Tamhīd fi bayan al-tawḥīd* makes relevant and useful a long-overlooked work of the Māturīdī school that persisted in its popularity through the 19th century.34 Likewise, Ayedh Aldosari has made it possible for the field to engage with later Ḥanafi theology and its evolutionary trajectory in the form of ‘Umar ibn Muḥammad al-Khabbāzī’s (d. 691/1292) *Kitāb al-Ḥādī*.35

Lastly, it is necessary to mention the editions of essential theological works attributed to Abū l-Yusr al-Bazdawī, Fakhr al-Islām al-Bazdawī (d. 482/1089), ‘Umar Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, as well as to Abū l-Thanā’ Maḥmūd al-Lāmishī (d. early 6th/12th century). Fakhr al-Islām al-Bazdawī’s theology has been made more accessible through the work of Marie Bernard and Éric Chaumont, who edited and composed a brief study of *Kitāb Ma‘rifat al-ḥujaj al-sharʿīyya*.36 It is a work of legal theory that gives evidence of many of the theological associations of the discipline, aligning with what Fakhr al-Islām’s brother Abū l-Yusr reveals in his *Uṣūl al-dīn* (edited by Hans Peter Linss and Aḥmad Ḥijāzī Aḥmad Saqqā).37 Although not an edition itself, but rather a descriptive study of a manuscript ripe for editing, ‘Imād Ḥasan Marzūq’s article on ‘Umar Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī’s *Maṭlaʿ al-nujūm wa-majmaʿ al-ʿulūm* makes for a crucial entry point for the study of this encyclopedic tome of Islamic sciences, including theology.38 The Bazdawī brothers and ‘Umar Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī were contemporaries with one other notable theologian, al-Lāmishī. His work of theology, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd li-qawā‘id al-tawḥīd*, would have remained in relative obscurity were it not for the critical edition produced by ‘Abd al-Majīd Turkī.39

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"لا علم لنا إلا ما علمتنا" 
"لا تملك عنا بفعل ولهم يسللون" 
"لا يعلمون شيئا ولا يهتدون" 
"لا يفجرون بأمره ولا يفجرون ما دون ذلك ليس يشاء" 
"للمعاني جهنم من الجن والنساء أجمعين" 
"إنك ترون هل السورة على الله خيبة بغيد النسي" 
"ما أصابك من حسناته فبين الله وما أصابك من ضيبته فبين نفسه" 
"ما نرى في خلق الله من تفاؤل" 
"ما منعتك أن تستطيع لما خلقته بعثي" 
" وإذا قال ربك للمملكة إني جاعل في الأرض خليقة فاكن أجعل فيها من يفسد فيها ويشتكي الدمعة ونحن نسئبه بحمدك وقعدست تلك قال إني أعليم ما لا تعلمون" 
"واصنع الفلك" 
"وأنت لا تدري أين يسكن في الأرض أم أردا يهم رحمده" 
"وجها ربك" 
"وجها تؤدي نافرة إلى ريتها ناظرة" 
"وعلم أدآ الأسماء كلها ثم عرضهم علي الململكة فقال أطلوني بأسماء هؤلاء" 
"إن كنت حدادين" 
"وعلامة صناعة لبيكم" 
"وذلك جعلناكم آثاء ومستاء" 
"ولا تتم ما ليس لك به علم" 
"ولكن حق الفؤاد مني" 
"ولو أهلناهم بعذاب من قبله أقالوا لا أرسلت إلينا رسولًا" 
"ولو شنتا لآتينا كل نفس هديها"
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