A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF AL MĀTURĪDI’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS IN HIS BOOK TA’WĪLĀT AHLU SUNNAH:

A STUDY OF THE VERSES RELATED TO SOME OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

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I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Qur’anic exegesis is one of the fundamental sciences in the Islamic Sunni literature. The genre of theological exegesis developed gradually in the Muslim world and was influenced greatly by the political, social and religious circumstances in it as established by Goldziher, Abdul Raof, Hussein and Raḥmān among others. A review of the studies undertaken in theological exegesis in the Islamic Sunni literature, in both English and Arabic, demonstrates that the works of Al Māturīdī in this genre has not been studied or analysed despite the pivotal role he played in the formation of the Sunni synthetic theological movement in the Muslim world during his time and until today. This study refocuses the light on the works of Al Māturīdī in theological exegesis, in his book Ta’wīlāt Ahlu Sunnah, specifically the aspect of the theological verses that address the attributes of God. It examines the contributions of Al Māturīdī to the field by undertaking a qualitative content analysis of the theological verses that relate to three main attributes of God. Within this method, it commences a thematic–analytical study of Ta’wīlāt Ahlu Sunnah to discover the methodology, techniques and maxims employed by Al Māturīdī in explaining these verses. In addition, it compares it and contrasts it with the works of the Sunni exegetes that preceded him to investigate the inventiveness and uniqueness of his contributions. The assessment revealed that Al Māturīdī played a fundamental role in the development of the genre of theological exegesis in the Sunni exegetical literature and provided important contributions to it through the interpretation of verses related to the nature and attributes of God. In addition, it demonstrated that Al Māturīdī was the one of the Sunni pioneers who laid the foundations for the theological exegesis genre, in the sphere of the attributes of God discussion, at his time when traditional exegesis was dominant. He was also one of the earliest Sunni exegetes to legitimate the application of reason and intellect as a trusted source of understanding in Qur’ānic exegesis and to apply
it within his commentary. This research opens the door for further studies into the role of Al Māturīdī in the emergence of rational and theological exegesis in the Sunni world.
INTRODUCTION

Qur’ānic exegesis, usually referred to in Islamic terminology as *tafsīr*, is one of the most important disciplines in the Islamic sciences. To many Muslim scholars, Qur’ānic exegesis is considered the mother of all disciplines and sciences, and the most honourable knowledge that a human may attain. Qur’ānic exegesis has developed into various genres where each genre focuses on studying the verses that relate to a specific field. Theological exegesis is concerned with explaining and interpreting the Qur’ānic verses that relate to Islamic theology; therefore, it is a genre that connects two important fields in the Islamic academia: Qur’ānic exegesis and Islamic theology.

Abū Manṣūr Al Māturīdī (d. 944 CE) is a Muslim scholar who has written in the field of Qur’ānic exegesis and Islamic theology. His major work *Ta’wīlāt Ahlu Sunnah* is one of the earliest written in the field of Qur’ānic exegesis. Al Māturīdī is one of the most revered Sunni Muslim scholars because of his contributions and influence in the evolution of Islamic theology. He is the founder of the *Māturīdiyyah* theological school, one of the two main schools of theology the Muslim world has relied upon for learning and defining the creed of Islam since the ninth century.

The present study is an investigation of the contributions of Al Māturīdī to the field of Qur’ānic exegesis through the critical analysis of the theological verses that are related to the nature of God and his attributes. The study will reveal the forgotten part of Al Māturīdī’s scholarship in the field of theological exegesis and fill an academic gap in both Arabic and English scholarship.
Problem Statement:
Al Māturīdī is a prominent Muslim scholar whose work in Qur’anic and theological exegesis has not been given its right of academic study and analysis. In particular, his writing in the genre of theological exegesis continues to be unexplored. The literature review demonstrated the existence of an academic gap in, both Arabic and English, academic studies in relation to the work of Al Māturīdī in theological exegesis. This research analyses and critiques the commentaries of Al Māturīdī on the theological verses related to three main divine attributes of God and assesses whether they provide a genuine contribution to the discipline.

Significance of research
Al Māturīdī’s writings are among the most fundamental literatures in the study of Islamic theology in particular and within Islamic disciplines in general. This is not a surprise since he is the founder of one of the two main schools of theology in Islam, the Māturīdiyyah, which has been embraced and respected by a large portion of Muslims across centuries around the globe.

Despite his wide fame and reverence, few of Al Māturīdī’s works have been preserved. Many Muslim scholars express sadness and distress for the loss of many of his writings. The exploration of the various reasons that have led to their loss continues to be a subject of discussion and research. Out of seventeen titles attributed to Al Māturīdī in various Islamic disciplines including aqīdah (Islamic theology), usūl al fiqh¹ and tafsīr (Qur’anic

¹ Usually it is translated to “the principles of Islamic jurisprudence.” However, the technical definition of the term is “the aggregate, considered per se, of legal proofs and evidence that, when studied properly, will lead either to certain knowledge of a Shari’ah ruling or to at least a reasonable assumption concerning the same; the manner by which such proofs are adduced, and the status of the adducer.” For further information, see M. Fakhr al-Din alRāzī, Al Maḥṣūl Fi ‘Ilm Uṣūl Al Fiqh, 1st ed. (Riyadh: Imam ibn Saud Islamic University, 1979).
exegesis), only two titles survived and are accepted by all scholars as his work: Kitāb Al Tawhīd and Taʾwīlāt Ahlu Sunnah. The loss of many of his academic works deprives the reader of a clear structured understanding of his personal opinion, principles and contributions to the various Islamic disciplines.

Taʾwīlāt Ahlu Sunnah is an exegesis book that was written by Al Māturīdī between the ninth and tenth centuries. Chronologically, this makes the book one of the earliest comprehensive Qurʾānic exegesis books to be written in the Islamic academic history. Furthermore, it is the only book Al Māturīdī has written in the field of Qurʾānic exegesis. Abū Muʿīn Nasafī (d.1115 CE), a renowned Muslim theologian, testifies for the greatness of this work. Al Qurashī (d.1373 CE), a fourteenth century Muslim scholar, shares Nasafī’s admiration of the book. The testimony of the early scholars such as Nasafī and Al Qurashī has endured throughout Islamic history.

Though the work is essentially an exegesis book, many scholars have indicated it also contains Al Māturīdī’s theological and jurisprudential opinions. Al Ghālī states, “He studied within it scholarly and professionally theological, Uṣūl and jurisprudential matters as well as exegesis and explanation of the Honourable book of God, the Qurʾān…”

The study and analysis of Taʾwīlāt Ahlu Sunnah is an important academic contribution to the understanding of Islam, but more importantly to the understanding of the contributions of this great scholar to the development of Qurʾānic exegesis in general and the genre of theological exegesis in particular. It reveals Al Māturīdī’s insight and contributions to

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4B. Al Ghālī, Abū Mansūr Al Māturīdī Hayaatahu Wa Araa’uhoo (Tunisia: Dar Al Turki, 1989), 58.
theological exegesis particularly in the context of the verses related to the attributes of God. It is the first research to critically analyse the only *tafsir* book written by Al Māturīdī in a systematic and academic fashion. In addition, it compares and contrast his work, in the context of the divine attributes’ verses, with the exegetical works available at his time. Furthermore, it reveals the distinctiveness of his methodology and paradigm in dealing with theological verses and anthropomorphic expressions.

**Research objectives:**

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1) To shed the light on the exegetical work of Abū Mansūr Al Māturīdī.

2) To evaluate the influence of the social, political, cultural and religious circumstances of Al Māturīdī’s region on his academic study in both theology and Qur’anic exegesis.

3) To assess the role of Al Māturidī in the evolution of Qur’anic exegesis during his time and his impact on it on the conceptual and theoretical level as well as the development of the interpretive exegetical style.

4) To examine and analyse the contributions of Al Māturidī to the genre of theological exegesis in Sunni literature and determine the significance of his contributions to Sunni theological exegesis in the context of his discussion and commentaries on the theological verses that relate to the divine attributes of God.

5) To study and critique the methodology of Al Māturidī in his analysis of the divine attributes’ verses and investigate how it differs from the methodologies of his contemporary and preceding Sunni exegetes.
Research questions and the main argument

There is a lack of studies into Al Māturīdī’s methodology used in his exegesis book and his approach to the various themes of the verses of the Qur’ān, particularly the theological verses.

This thesis investigated Al Māturīdī’s contributions in his book Ta’wīlāt Ahlu Sunnah to the development of the discipline of Qur’ānic exegesis. It gives a critical appraisal of his contributions to theological exegesis through a detailed study of the theological verses concerning the nature and attributes of God.

The main argument of this thesis is that Al Māturīdī lived and produced his works in a pivotal era in Islamic history where most Islamic disciplines were crystallising their methods and scopes, and establishing the main texts. Al Māturīdī played a pivotal role in the founding of the genre of theological exegesis in Sunni exegetical literature and revolutionised the methodology of writing in Qur’ānic exegesis.

The following questions are raised to be answered by this study:

1- What were the effects of the social, political, cultural and religious circumstances and dimensions of the region and era of Al Māturīdī on his education, motivations and academic contributions to Islamic disciplines particularly in theology and Qur’anic exegesis?

2- Did Abū Mansūr Al Māturīdī have an influential role on the conceptual and theoretical development of the Qur’anic exegesis evolution during his time?

3- What are the contributions of Al Māturīdī to the genre of theological exegesis in Sunni literature? Specifically in the context of the study and analysis of the theological verses that relate to the divine attributes of God during his time?
4- How did the methodology of Al Māturīdī in his analysis of the divine attributes’ verses differ from the methodologies of his contemporary and preceding Sunni exegetes?

**Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework of this research revolves principally around the field of Qur’ānic exegesis, *tafsīr*, with the primary focus on theological exegesis. Consequently, it is essential to study and explain the evolution of Qur’ānic exegesis as an Islamic discipline as well as its schools, methods and various genres. The thesis also takes into account the framework of classical Islamic theology in its discussion of God’s attributes.

The thesis proposes that, within the framework of Qur’ānic exegesis, Al Māturīdī in his exegesis book *Taʾwīlāt Ahlu Sunnah* makes a significant contribution to Sunni theological exegesis. Al Māturīdī is one of the leading founders of this genre in the Sunni realm and in his era. He developed his own methodology in explaining theological verses concerned with the divine attributes of God.

This theory was examined through studying, examining and critically analysing Al Māturīdī’s approach and explanation of the theological verses related to the nature and attributes of God, and anthropomorphic expressions.

**Methodology**

This research endeavoured to study and analyse classical Islamic topics through modern lens. Hence, its methodology demanded a combination of traditional Islamic and modern
academic methods and tools to accomplish it successfully. Thus, I employed a qualitative content analysis method in examining Al Māturīdī’s exegesis, life and era in order to set the regional and academic contexts of his work, to determine the influence of Al Māturīdī’s circumstances and milieu on his academic works in Qur’anic and theological exegesis and explore his impact on the development of Qur’anic Exegesis in general and theological exegesis in particular. Within this method, I undertook a thematic–analytical study of the divine attribute verses in his exegesis Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah to discover the contributions of Al Māturīdī to the genre, his methodology and the paradigm x he employed in explaining such verses r. In addition, this was essential to the process of discerning the characteristics of his style and has to resort in some instances to heuristic procedures. The study necessitated as well a review of specific phases in the evolution of the science of Qur’anic exegesis and the evolution of the theological debate concerning the attributes of God. The review was dominantly of critical and analytical nature to gain the correct perspectives about the status of Qur’anic exegesis and theological debate during his time and set the platform for the analysis and evaluation of his commentaries later.

As outlined earlier, the nature of study demanded the use of classical Islamic methodologies, to evaluate the correctness of some Islamic views, relevant to the study, and/or rebutting them when necessary. This was carried out by consulting the Qur’an and the various exegeses, the traditions of Prophet Muhammad and whether they enjoy the universal consensus of the Muslim scholars’ community. Furthermore, the quoted traditions of Prophet Muhammad were checked to see if they exist in the main books of Hadith or not. If found to exist then the conclusions of the prominent scholars of Hadith, such as Bukhārī and Tirmidhī, about their authenticity, according to the principles of Musṭalaḥ (Islamic Hadith criteria), were consulted.
In addition, I conducted a succinct study of the exegetical writings of the preceding and contemporary Sunni exegetes of Māturīdī on the divine attributes’ verses. The findings were compared and contrasted with Al Māturīdī’s work on the same verses resulting in a scholarly assessment that determined the distinctiveness of his efforts, the nuances of his work and his paradigm as well as the value of his contributions to the field.

In relation to categorisation, selection and analysis of the verses, the study took a thematic approach. The selection of the verses was based on two criteria: (1) their relativity to the tenets of Islamic doctrines and specifically to the nature and attributes of God; (2) the level of controversy, interest and study associated with the verses concerned with the divine attributes.

Finally, the nature of the theme of the research demanded the translation of a substantial amount of information, predominantly from Arabic to English.

**Research scope and limitations:**

This research concentrates on studying how Al Māturīdī influenced the science of Qur’anic exegesis and how he understood, interpreted and analysed the theological verses that relate to the nature and attributes of God. However, It will not investigate all the commentaries Al Māturīdī wrote on the nature and attributes of God, owing to the fact that the size of the research does not accommodate for such a thorough and comprehensive study. Thus, the focus will be on three divine attributes. Namely, the attributes of *yad* (hand), ‘*ayn* (eye) and *istiwā’* (to be seated) because they have attracted a lot of discussion and analyses in the Muslim theological and exegetical circles. At the same time, the above attributes provide a satisfactory illustration of the approach of Al Māturīdī to the theological verses that address the divine attributes and his contributions to this area in the field.
In addition, despite the interest of the researcher and the importance of this aspect, the research will only compare and contrast the commentaries of Al Māturīdī with that of the Sunni exegetes that preceded him as well as his contemporaries. It will critique his approach and methodology in his commentaries, as well as their approach, to the interpretation of the verses of divine attributes to determine whether Al Māturīdī commentaries can be classified as new contributions to Qur’anic exegesis. Thus, the study will not examine all the commentaries written by all Sunni exegetes on the divine attributes’ verses up to modern times.

**Thesis outline**

In addition to its introduction and conclusion, this thesis has three chapters. Chapter one is devoted to introducing Al Māturīdī, his era, geographic location and academic environment. This chapter studies Al Māturīdī’s personality, how he formed his religious and academic identity and style of education and research. In addition, it examines whether his era and the social, political, religious and academic circumstances of his geographic location, particularly being distant from the academic and political capital of the Islamic empire, Baghdad, had any major influence on his writings, development of his theological school and understanding of God in Islam and the field of Qur’ānic exegesis.

Chapter two introduces the discipline of Qur’ānic exegesis, its evolution, schools and methods. It investigates the nature of exegetical activities in Central Asia and whether Al Māturīdī was influenced by any of the main trends of Qur’ānic exegesis. It further examines the level of development of Qur’ānic exegesis by the time Al Māturīdī began writing in the field. This paves the way to reveal the main influences on Al Māturīdī in relation to the discipline and the genre of theological exegesis and his approach to the interpretation of the verses related to the attributes of God.
Chapter three studies the theological verses that are at the heart of the Islamic doctrine. Specifically, it focuses on verses concerned with the nature and attributes of God. The verses related to three controversial expressions in the Qur’ān – ṣad (hand), ‘ayn (eyes and sight) and istiwa’ (to be seated) – are grouped thematically, studied and analysed. The chapter includes a succinct summary of writings from Sunni exegetes prior to Al Māturīdī, as well as his contemporaries, on the same verses to appreciate the views of the exegetes before and during the time of Al Māturīdī. Their commentaries on these verses are comparatively analysed with Al Māturīdī’s respective commentaries to provide grounding for the critical appraisal and evaluation of Al Māturīdī’s exegesis to establish his unique contributions to the field of Qur’ānic exegesis.
CHAPTER ONE
ABŪ MANŠŪR AL MĀTURĪDI AND THE HISTORIC AND
THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF HIS TIME

1.1 Introduction

A study of Al Māturīdī’s contributions to the field of theological exegesis would be inadequate if it is not undertaken in the appropriate context. The academic accomplishments of a particular researcher, particularly in the Islamic arena, cannot be separated from the dimensions and circumstances, in which they lived.\(^5\) Many factors influence the motivations, perceptions and objectives of any given researcher, be they social, political, cultural, personal or religious,\(^6\) and Al Māturīdī is no different.

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, teach and write? Did his circumstances have any influence, positive or negative, on his motivations and academic accomplishments, specifically in the field of Qur’ānic exegesis? What was the intellectual state of the society and how did it influence his thoughts and motivations? The answers to these questions can be found through exploring the geographical, political, social and religious dimensions in which he lived and worked. They also assist in understanding Al Māturīdī’s life and more importantly his academic contributions to Qur’ānic exegesis, particularly the theological exegesis genre.

1.2 The geographic environment where Al Māturīdī lived

Al Māturīdī grew up in Central Asia. This region is known in classical Arab literature as \textit{bilād mā warā’ al-nahr} (the land beyond the river), in reference to a river referred to in


\(^6\) M. Dhahabī, \textit{Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon}, vol. 2 (Cairo, 1976).
Arabic as Jayḥūn, which is famous in classical antiquity as the Oxus River.\textsuperscript{7} It marked the borderline for the entire region, in the sight of the Arab and Muslim conquerors. As Hugh Kennedy explains, “these lands were considered to be part of Khurasan,\textsuperscript{8} the vast province that also included North East Iran,” which was of great strategic, political and economic importance.

One of the earliest Muslim scholars to describe this region is Al Karkhī (d. 957 CE), a Muslim scholar from a Persian background and a contemporary of Al Māturīdī. He visited the region and describes it as one of the most beautiful regions in the world. Specifically, he describes the city of Samarqand, Al Māturīdī’s birth city, as one of the most beautiful gardens on earth.\textsuperscript{10} Another famous geographer and chronicler, Ibn Ḥawqal (d. 977 CE), a Muslim scholar from the tenth century, describes the region as fertile and abundant with goodness and provisions. According to him, the water of this land was the coolest, purest and lightest of all water he had tasted. He describes how the water descends from the mountains as melted snow and how winter is the most difficult for people because the water freezes.\textsuperscript{11} Adam Metz mentions the large number of rivers as one of the unique qualities of the region.\textsuperscript{12}

The rich and generous nature of the region facilitated cities of political, cultural and economic significance to be built, as will be described later. At the same time, it attracted

\textsuperscript{7} 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).
\textsuperscript{8} 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, eds. C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Brice, “An Historical Atlas of Islam.”
\textsuperscript{10} I. Karkhī, 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.
\textsuperscript{11} M. Ibn Hawqal, Surat Al Ard (Beirut: Maktabat Al ḫayān, 1992).
the attention of Muslim conquerors that were expanding into Central Asia. The most famous cities in the Central Asia region, from an Islamic perspective, are Samarqand, Bukhāra, Tashqand, Marw, Tirmidh, Farghānah, Nasaf and Bazdawah. These cities became part of modern Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Iran.

The native inhabitants of the region were Turks whose lifestyle was similar to that of the Arab tribes in the Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic period. In other words, they lived the nomadic lifestyle of Bedouins – living in tents, travelling from one place to the other and raiding the surrounding areas. The geographic location of this region in Central Asia allowed its inhabitants to have strong relations with many surrounding civilisations, such as the Byzantium, Sassanid and Chinese. In turn, this 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, his geographical location exposed Al Māturīdī to many civilisations, cultures, faith and traditions.

1.3 The political and economic state of the region during Al Māturīdī’s life

The first Muslim contact with the region began in 675 CE, with a peace treaty that Muslim General Saīd Ibn Uthmān Ibn ‘Affān 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. However, the Muslim generals were not

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13 Samarqand is the metropolitan in which Māturīdī lived.
16 Metz, *Islamic Civilization in the Fourth Century of the Hegira*.
able to take complete control of the region. The military struggle did not rest until the famous Muslim Umayyad Army General Qutaybah Ibn Muslim Al Bāhilī (d.715 CE) conquered the region in 705 CE and then re-conquered it in 710 CE. The Islamic empire’s armies faced substantial difficulties entering this land because of the harshness of the climate, roughness of the terrain and fierce resistance from the indigenous Turkish population against the Muslim armies. Muslim and Non-Muslim chroniclers concur on this point and Kennedy states, “of all the campaigns of the early Arab conquests the fighting in Transoxiana was the hardest fought and longest lasting.” The native inhabitants of the land sought the aid of the kings around them including the Chinese and Persians against the Muslims. 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. In this year, Caliph Al Ma’mūn, 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 Bhram Jubin. 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 Herat to Isma’il. This marked the beginning of autonomous regional governments for these states until 874 CE when they declared their

20 Umar Nasaff, Al Qand Fi Dhiyr Ulama’ Samargand, 1st ed. (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Maktabat Al Kawthar, 1991); Vambery, Tārīkh Bukhāra Mundhu Al Qidam Hattā Al ‘Aṣr Al Ḥādir; Shākir, Al Tārīkh Al Islāmi; M. Khudari, Tārīkh Al Umm Al Islamiyyah, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Cairo: Al Maktabah Al Tijariyyah, 1936); Narkhashî, Tārīkh Bukhāra.

21 Kennedy, The Great Arab Conquests, 236.

22 Karkhī, Al Masālik Wal Mamālik; Kennedy, The Great Arab Conquests.


25 Karkhī, Al Masālik Wal Mamālik; Ibn Ḥawqal, Ṣurat Al Ard.

26 A. Amin, Dhahara Al Islam (Cairo: Hindawi Foundation for Education and Culture, 2013); Rifā’ī, Al Khilāfa Al ‘Abbāsiyyah Wal Harakāt Al Istiqlālyyah Fil Mashriq.
complete independence and formed the Samanid dynasty state.\textsuperscript{27} This was an important milestone as the independence of the Samanids had a major impact on the region and academic development therein.

Did the new independence provide political stability to the region that became notorious for ongoing skirmishes and uprisings? Al Karkhī presents an account of the reign of the Samanid kings and describes them as “the only Kings in the Muslim lands who have enjoyed kingship before the days of Islam and during it…they are the best of the Persian rulers.”\textsuperscript{28} This proved advantageous to the Samanid kings since they had plenty of experience in governing. This is evident also in the testimony of Ibn Khallikân (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 Khurasân.”\textsuperscript{29} He stresses their “predominant characteristics were justice, religiosiy and knowledge.”\textsuperscript{30} Ibn Al Athīr (d.1233 CE) agrees with Ibn Khallikân and adds that many of their kings, such as Ahmad Ibn Asad (d. 860 CE), were “loved by the people”\textsuperscript{31} 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 Basharī (d. 990 CE), believe this was the result of divine providence for the leadership of the Samanids because of their fairness and piety. He states, “And He (God) has given them triumph and stability for they were the best of kings as far policies, insights and respect for scholars are concerned…”\textsuperscript{32} One cannot overstate the importance of stability and political harmony for the progress of


\textsuperscript{28} Karkhī, \textit{Al Masālik Wal Mamālik}, 344.

\textsuperscript{29} A. Ibn Khallikân, \textit{Wafsiyyāt Al A’ yan Wa Anbā’ Azzamān} (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1968), vol. 4, 245.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibn Al Athīr, \textit{Al Kāmil Fil Tārīkh}, vol. 7, 279-80.

\textsuperscript{32} Basharī, \textit{Ahsan Al Taqāṣīm Fi Ma’ rifat Al Aqālīm}. 

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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 reign of the Samanids, as far as this study is concerned, is religious piety. Ibn Al Athīr emphasises that this dynasty was not only distinguished by its excellent political governance, but they were 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.” According to Ibn Al Athīr, in the last days of this king he used to wear the garment of repentance. 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 has led the state to fund and promote academic and religious movements in the region, a practice that was commonly known in the Muslim world but not practised by all political leaders. The least result from the piety of the Samanid kings was tolerance towards the 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.

34 This term could mean he physically used to wear modest garments or he used to always ensure he was in a state of repentance through his actions and prayers.
35 The closest example of this common practice is the adoption of the Abbasid caliphate of the Mu’tazilite school before and during the life of Al Māturīdī. For further information see, Rifā’i, *Al Khilāfa Al ‘Abbāsiyyah Wal Harakāt Al Istiqlālyyah Fil Mashriq*; Khudari, *Tārīkh Al Umam Al Islamiyyah*; J. Suyūṭi, *Tārīkh Al Khulāfā’,* (Beirut: Dar Al Arkam Ibn Al Arkam); M Wakīl, *Al Aṣr Al Dhahabī Lil Dawla Al ‘Abasiyya* (Damascus: Dar Al Qalam, 1998).
Political stability is the key to success for any nation, including economic and academic sectors, particularly in a country that had recently gained independence.36 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.37 Consequently, Metz and Al Hamwī (d. 1229 CE), a Muslim chronicler from the twelfth century, 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.38 This further improved the economic state of the region and strengthened the political ties between the two kingdoms.

The abundance of water and large number of rivers facilitated the region to become an economic capital. The agriculture sector, in particular, prospered tremendously with fields of cotton and various fruit farms stretching across the entire region. Karkhī attempts to illustrate the abundance of produce in the region by saying he had never seen anything like it in any other land to the extent that farmers allowed their animals to consume fruit. In addition, the region was known for its metal resources, exotic perfumes and writing paper production, a product extremely advantageous for academic movement at a time when


37 Metz, Islamic Civilization in the Fourth Century of the Hegira.

paper was an expensive commodity. According to Basharī, the region used to export many important products such as dates, sultanas and raisins, sesame seeds, soap and the thickest silk textiles to the rest of the Muslim world.

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. The prosperity of the Samanid dynasty continued until it was overthrown by Sebuktigin, the founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty in 998 CE, a long time after the demise of Al Māturīdī. This automatically suggests that during his lifetime, the region enjoyed a stable state and a prosperous economy and a productive society.

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

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39 Karkhī, Al Masālik Wal Mamālik.
40 Basharī, Ahsan Al Taqāsīm Fi Ma’rifat Al Aqālīm.
41 Archaeological works in northern Europe uncovered a lot of 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 Istiqlālyyah Fil Mashriq.
42 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 Islāmiyyah; Al Fiqī, Al Duwal Al Islāmiyyah Al Mustaqillah Fil Sharq; Narkhashī, Tārīkh Bukhāra; Vambery, Tārīkh Bukhāra Mundhu Al Qidam Hattā Al ’Asr Al Ḥādir.
1.4 The cultural academic and intellectual state of the region

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 an 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…”

In addition, the Samanid kings used to offer ministerial posts to intellectuals out of respect to their scholarship, as was the case between King Nūḥ (d.997 CE) and Al Sahib Ibn ‘Abad (d.994 CE), the great

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Muslim scholar and writer from the tenth century, who refused the position of Minister that King Nūḥ offered him. Consequently, these ministers played vital roles in the growth of literature and science from various cultures. Notably, Abū Al Fadl Muḥammad Ibn ‘Ubaiddīlah Al Bal’amī (d. 975CE) and Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Al Jihānī (d. unknown) revived Arabic and Persian literature in Samarqand and the entire region. According to Samʿānī (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.”

He was from an Arabic background and single-handedly translated the encyclopaedic history book of Ṭabarī into Persian. During his post, poetry flourished and 100 volumes of Persian poetry were copied, comprising more than 1,300,000 verses.

Al Jihānī, the minister of King Naṣr Ibn Aḥmad, was known for his writings. Al Hamwī describes him as “a virtuous author with many publications.”

He sponsored a number of scholars and doctors, among them some Muʿtazilite figures such as Abū Zayd Al Bālkhī (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 community of the scholars 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.

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48 Ibid.
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.\textsuperscript{49} 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.\textsuperscript{50} 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 that 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 that was completely disconnected from the intensity of urban life; rather, it became the central hub in the development of many Islamic disciplines including theology and exegesis in the hands of many scholars such as Al Māturīdī, his teachers and disciples. It follows from this that Al Māturīdī had access to the writings from philosophical schools of various backgrounds.

\textsuperscript{49} Metz, \textit{Islamic Civilization in the Fourth Century of the Hegira}.
\textsuperscript{50} Hamwī, \textit{Mu’jam Al Buldān}, vol. 5, 112.
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. Basharī relates that “many Jews, a minority of Christians and various sects from the Majis”\(^{51}\) 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 Samniya.\(^{52}\) 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, commonly taught and discussed.\(^{53}\) 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, particularly his understanding and teaching of interpretations of the Qur‘ān, 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. Basharī provides the reader with a thorough demographic map of the spread and influence of the various Islamic

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51 Basharī, *Ahsan Al Taqāsīm Fi Ma‘rifat Al Aqālīm*, 156.
schools and orientations in the region. Shī‘ah,\(^{54}\) Kharijites,\(^{55}\) Mu‘tazilites,\(^{56}\) Kharījītes,\(^{57}\) Qadariyyah\(^{58}\) and Jahmīyyah\(^{59}\) were all theological sects of the region. They lived in various cities and in different proportions and coexisted peacefully with the two main jurisprudential Sunni schools, the Shafi‘is and Hanafis.\(^ {60}\) This intra-faith diversity opened the door for a lot of interaction, debates, research and study. The general public in

\(^{54}\) 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); M. Juhanī, Al Maw‘ah al Muyassara Fil Adyan Wal Mathāhib Wal Azhāb Al Mu‘āsira, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Riyad: Dar Al Nadwa Al ‘Alī, 1997); Arzina R. Lalani and Studies Institute of Isma'ilī, Early Shi‘i 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).

\(^{55}\) Kharījītes or Khawaṣīrī 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, Juhanī, Al Maw‘ah al Muyassara Fil Adyan Wal Mathāhib Wal Azhāb 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).

\(^{56}\) Mu‘tazilītes 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, Juhanī, Al Maw‘ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyan Wal Mathāhib Wal Azhāb Al Mu‘āsira; Shahrastānī, Al Milal Wal Nihal.

\(^{57}\) 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 Dhalabī describes as extremely weak traditions. He preached in Central Asia and opposed the teachings of the Mu‘tazīlītes in the region. However, he was not in complete the concordance with the teachings of mainstream Sunnis either. For further information see, Edmund Bosworth, “The Rise of the Karāmiyyah in Khurāṣan,” The Muslim World 50, 1 (1960); Dhalabī, Siyar A’lām Al Nubala’, vol. 11; A. Ibn Taymiyyah, Kitāb Al Rad ‘Ala Al Mantiqiyyīn (Beirut: Mu’asasat Al Rayan, 2005).

\(^{58}\) 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.” M. Abū Ya’la, Tābqāt Al Hanābilah, 2nd ed. (Riyad: Maktabat Malik Fahd Al Watanīyyah, 1999), vol. 1, 32. For further information, see L.M. Surhone, M.T. Timpledon, and S.F. Marseken, Qadariyya (Location: 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).

\(^{59}\) The Jahmīyyah 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 Tāhir al-Baghḍādī, Al Farq Bayna Al‘liraq Wa Bayān Al Firaq Al Nāfiyyah Minhuma, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar Al Afaq Al Jadida, 1977), 199-200. For further information see, Juhanī, Al Maw‘ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyan Wal Mathāhib Wal Azhāb Al Mu‘āsira; Shahrastānī, Al Milal Wal Nihal.

\(^{60}\) Bashārī states, “The descendants of Ali there are highly revered…Kharījītes are found in Sajistan, parts of Harāsh, Krūkh and Iṣtrībīyān in large number. Mu‘tazīlītes have a clear presence, however non-dominant, in Naysabur where the Shī‘a and Karāmiyya have some activity. Nonetheless the dominance in the region is to the followers of Abū Ḥanīfah with the exception of kūrat al shāsh, Ilāq, Tūs, Nasā…Where the Shafi‘ī followers are dominant…the majority of the people in Tirmidh are Jahmīyyah, the people of Raqqa are Shī‘a, and the people of Kandar are Qadariyyah.” For further information, see Bashārī, Ahsan Al Taqāsīm Fi Ma‘rifat Al Aqālim, 156.
the region, particularly the students of the religious circles, were exposed to many concepts at the least opposing, if not contradictory. In such an environment, inevitably, 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 at least their approach to teaching the 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 specific region. Basharī sheds a 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.”

According to Abū Zahra (d. 1974 CE), a distinguished late 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. To a particular extent, this is similar to the modern practice of convening and organising conferences and debates today where a particular theme is studied from different angles or debated by different parties. Basharī tacitly concurs with Abū Zahra in this opinion. In Basharī’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.”

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

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61 Ibid; Ibn Hawqal, .SingleOrDefault { new, ungalow }

62 M. Abū Zahra, Tārīkh Al Madhāhib Al Islāmiyyah (Cairo: Dar Al Fikr Al Arabi).

63 Basharī, Ahsan Al Taqāsīm Fi Ma’rifat Al Aqālim.
circumstances and undoubtedly, they influenced his mind, teachings and perceptions of the world and Islam particularly theology and theological exegesis.

1.5 The major theological debates during the time of Al Māturīḍī

A close look at the treatises Al Māturīḍī wrote in the discipline of Islamic theology reveals he dedicated a substantial part of his academic contribution to debating the ideologies of non-Muslims, Muslim schools and sects in his region. Predominantly, the Mu’tazilite school and Abdullah Al Ka’bī (d. 931 CE) seemed to capture his attention more than others. Al Ka’bī, whose exegetical work will be studied in chapter three and compared to that of Al Māturīḍī, is a famous Mu’tazilite scholar and a contemporary of Al Māturīḍī. Al Māturīḍī 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 Māturīḍī and his followers faced in the land beyond the river.64 Some scholars such Khamīs, a contemporary Muslim theologian, and Juhanī (d.2002 CE), a Muslim academic, argue that Al Māturīḍī and his school emerged in the first place as an intellectual Sunni theological school to counter primarily the spread of Mu’tazilites in the region.65 However, this view is inaccurate. Al Māturīḍī’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 the Islamic theology and write his own understanding of it in light of a distinct paradigm that he fashioned, in which he synthesized reason and revelation and founded an independent Sunni theological school that continues to shape the doctrine of Millions of Muslims throughout the world until this day of age.

The presence of such theological titles in Al Māturīdi’s works is evidence that he was influenced by the robust and in some instances hostile theological debates that overwhelmed the Muslim world and his region. 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 textural 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, 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 and His divine attributes. This new demand began during the Umayyad caliphate (661-750 CE) and remained mild for various reasons, but reached its climax during the Abbasid caliphate, particularly after the translation of many Greek and Indian philosophy titles. 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 and philosophical and was promoted and endorsed by Muslim philosophers and the Mu’tazilite school. The traditional school believed that matters of creed should only be acquired, understood and explained in light of the revealed textural evidences, Qur’ān and Sunnah. A new term emerged and became the main reference for the revealed textural evidences, naqīl;

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67 R. Al Bandar, Madhhab Al Muʾtazila Mina Al Kalām Ila Al Falsafa Dirāsah Fi Nashʿatthi Wa Mabādiʿihī Wa Naẓāriyyāthī Fil Wujūd (Beirut: Dar Al Nubah lil Tiba’ah wal Nashri wal Tawzi’, 1994).
lexically, it means transmitted texts. The traditionalists refused to delve into any further exploration or explanation of the various aspects of this creed.\(^6\) For instance, how should the attribute of the hand of God be understood? Does it indicate resemblance with humans or does it have other lexical interpretations? How could one distinguish between the notion of freedom in humans and the notion of divine decree? The attitude of the traditional school was to simply state the importance of believing in these attributes 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 on these matters.

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. It is noteworthy to highlight this is the main difference between Muslim philosophers and the Mu’tazilites. The Muslim philosophers used logic as a tool to understand the concept of existence and the universe without any religious or ideological presumptions or principles, while the Mu’tazilites used logic to defend their belief in the Islamic creed. However, the Mu’tazilites, especially at the time of Al Māturīdī, were not immunised against the philosophical approach. They, consciously or unconsciously, were greatly influenced by the work of Greek philosophers, particularly Plato and Aristotle.\(^6\) 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


\(^6\) For further information, see A. Ṭāsh Kubra Zadah, Miftāḥ Al Sa’ādah Wa Miṣbāḥ Al Siyādah, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al ‘Ilmiyyah, 1985); Z. Jārullah, Al Mu’tazilah (Beirut: Al Ahliyyah fi’l Nashr Wal Tawzi’, 1974).
classified as islamically correct. They viewed intellect as the sole authority that can prove anything that is 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.”  

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.” Thus, the preconceived theological principles determined the interpretation of the theological verses more than the actual text and context of these verses. Zuhdi confirms Amīn’s conclusion, and relates that the Mu’tazilites stated “if naql was to clash with ‘aql, it is incumbent to follow ‘aql because it is the basis of naql.” In fact, the Mu’tazilites believed that intellect is the primary and best proof in Islam. Zamakhsharī alludes to this when he states, “whoever follows both the ‘aql and shar combines the primary and subsidiary.” 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.” to the extent that some Mu’tazilite scholars, such as An Naẓẓām (d.845 CE), believed that intellect has the discretion to abrogate verses of the Qur’ān and traditions from the Sunnah if it is not incongruous with its

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70 A. Amīn, Ẓuhā Al Islām (Cairo: Maktabat Al Usra, 1997), 39.
71 Ibid, 42.
72 Naql is a term used to describe the revealed texts of Islam: the Qur’an and traditions of the Prophet known as Sunnah.
73 Abdul Jabbār defines ‘aql as “the collection of specialized acquired sciences and knowledge that once the responsible human obtains, they become qualified to reason, analyse, establish an argument and capable of carrying out their legal duties.” A Abdul Jabbār, Al Taklīf, ed. A.; Najjār, M,Al Mughni Fi Abwāb AlTawḥīd Wal ‘Adl (Cairo: Matba’at Issa Al Baby, 1965), vol. 11, 375.
74 Jārullah, Al Mu ‘tazilah, 247.
75 ‘Shar’ is a synonym of the term Sharia.
76 S. Taftazāni, Al Ni’am Al Sawābigh Fi Sharh Al Kalim Al Nawābigh (Cairo: Matba’at Wadi Al Nil, 1286), 13.
77 A; Abdul Jabbar Balkhi, A; Al Jashami, H, Faḍl Al I’tizāl Wa Ṭabaqāt Al Mu’tazila (Tunisia: Al Dar Al Tunisiyyah lil Nashr, 1973), 139.
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, human intellect, subservient to it and who believe that Muslims must unconditionally accept what naql dictates regardless of rational reasoning or interpretation.

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, despite the Samanid dynasty’s support of the main Sunni school. This was confirmed by various scholars, such as Abū Zahra, Basharī and Ibn Ḥawqal. 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. 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 administrative positions. Consequently, many of the Mu’tazilite scholars towards the end of ninth century immigrated to Al Māturīdī’s region to escape the

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78 M. Abū Ruyda, ʻIbrahīm Ibn Sayyār Al Nazzām Wa Ārā’uhu Al Kalāmiyyah Al Falsafiyyah (Cairo: Matba’at Lajnat Al Ta’lif wal Tibā’a wal nasr, 1946); Ḥ. Mansūr, “Al Nazzām Wa Ārā’uhu Al Kalāmiyyah Wal Falsafiyyah” (Jami’at Ayn Shams, 1990); M Sālim, ʻIbrahīm Ibn Sayyār Al Nazzām Wal Fikr Al Naqdi Fil Islām (Alexandria: Mu’assasat Shabab Al Jami’a lil tiba’a wal Nashr wal Tawzi’).

79 A. Amīn, Duhā Al Islām (Cairo: Maktabat Al Uṣra, 1997).

80 Abū Zahra, Tārīkh Al Madhāhib Al Islāmiyyah; Basharī, Ahsan Al Taqāsīm Fi Ma’rifat Al Aqālīm; Ibn Hawqal, Ṣurat Al Arḍ; Al Nadīm, Al Fihrist.

81 Rifā‘ī, Al Khilāfa Al ‘Ābbāsiyyah Wal Harakāt Al Istiqlālyyah Fil Mashriq; Shahrestānī, Al Milal Wal Nihal; Ibn Tāhir al-Baghdādī, Al Farq Bayna Alfirāq Wa Bayān Al Fīrqa Al Nājiyah Minhum; Dhahabī, Siyar A’alam Al Nubala’.
eye of the new caliph and the backlash of the hadith scholars who found in the new caliph a strong ally against the Mu’tazilites and used him to take revenge on them.\footnote{A. Abū ‘Izza, Inhiyār Al Hadārā Al ‘Arabiya Wal Islamiyyah Wa Sabīl Al Nahūd (Amman, 2008); Abū Ya’la, Tābqāt Al Hanābilah; M. Abū Zahra, Ibn Hanbal Hayātuḥ Wa ‘Arṣūḥ (Cairo: Dar Al Fikr Al ‘Arabic, 1947).}

This emigration coincided with the rise of number of charismatic and prominent Mu’tazilite scholars, such as Abū Uthmān Al Jāḥīz (d.868 CE), Abū Al Ḥusayn Al Khayyāṭ (d.912 CE), Abū Ali Al Jubbāʾī (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 the region of Al Māturīdī and became the leaders of the movement there: Abū Qasim Al Ka’bī\footnote{Māturīdī wrote several titles rebutting them, including Al Ka’bi’s opinions.} (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 there and lived in the city of Balkh, which is 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.\footnote{Khamīs, “Māturidiyah Rabibat Al Kalābiyya.”}

Al Mutawakkil’s efforts may have ended the political influence of the Mu’tazilites, but it did not end their academic influence.\footnote{Ali. Nadwi, Rijāl Al Fikrwal Da’wah Fil Islam (Damascus: Dar al Qalam, 2002).} Nadwi reveals that, in the sight of many young academics, the Mu’tazilite school is perceived as esteemed with “astute observations, scholarly debate and open mindedness.”\footnote{Ibid, vol. 1, 221.} This perception was reinforced further by the absence of prominent Sunni traditional scholars to present a counter academic front at a time when Mu’tazilite leaders, mentioned above, were enduring the political campaign against them and resiliently leading the academic front. After the demise of Ahmad Ibn
Hanbal, 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 in them, they appeared out of touch with modern sciences and contemporary academic methodology.

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 new 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, 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 very 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 hadith, to search for evidence to refute the unorthodox teachings of the former and the extreme radical interpretations of the latter. This would influence Al Māturīdī to write in theological exegesis, reflect innovatively on the meaning of the verses of the Qur’ān and seek new answers and solutions.

87 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 strictly traditionalist of the four orthodox jurisprudential schools of Islamic law. For further information, see G. Makdisi, “Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal,” http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/10121/Ahmad-ibn-Hanbal.

88 Nadwi, Ṣayl Al Fikr wal Da‘wah Fil Islam.
1.6 His personal life

Al Māturīdī is a man whose appellations and epithets overshadowed his actual name. This practice is quite common in Islamic literature. Nicknames and titles serve as distinguishing markers for people who had a very common name. Al Māturīdī’s full name was Muhammad son of Muhammad son of Mahmoud. Nonetheless, he is famously known by his kunya Abū Manṣūr and his nickname Al Māturīdī. The school he founded is named for this nickname, which means “the one from the city of Māturīd” referring to his birthplace. It is unclear why he was called Abū Manṣūr, which literally means “the father of…” None of the autobiographers recorded any information about his marital status and whether he had children.

Little is known about Al Māturīdī’s family. Many questions remain unanswered because Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, biographers and heresiographers have provided little information about his personal life. Tritton suggested Al Hakīm Al Samarqandi was Al Māturīdī’s brother. However, this suggestion was negated easily by a number of scholars, such as Kholeif, Ceric and Al ‘Omar. Al Hakīm Al Samarqandi was in fact one of Al Māturīdī’s students and one of his peers.

89 Zabīdī, in his book Iḥāf 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 name of Al Māturīdī is Muhammad son of Muhammad son of Mahmoud, adding another name to his family line. For further information, see M. Zabidí, Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutāqqīn Bi Sharhi Iḥyā Ulūm Al Dīn, 12 vols. (Beirut: Dar al Kutub al Ilmiyah, 2002).

90 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 Addresses in Shona: A Sociolinguistic Approach,” Zambezia 26 (1999).

91 Maturid was known to a number of famous Muslim historians, such as Sam‘ānī, Yaqūt and Ibn Al Athīr. Sam‘ānī describes it as a city “from which a number of virtuous scholars have appeared.” For further information, see Al Sam‘ānī, Al Ansāb. vol. 12, 3.


94 Al ‘Omar, “The Doctrines of the Maturidite School.”
Zādah (d. 1687 CE), a Ḥanafi 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. More precisely, they argue that he came from the offspring of Abū Ayūb Al Ansāri, who was 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. Zādah and Zabīdī list the description “Ansari” in Al Māturīdī’s lineage as well but do not provide any information to support their claim.

Nevertheless, this opinion is not endorsed by all biographers: Nasr and Mutahhari describe Al Māturīdī as a Persian Muslim theologian. Similarly, Fatīma Al Khaymi in her commentary on his life in the introduction of his exegesis book Ta’wilat Ahlu Al Sunnah alludes to this possibility by referring to a book he has written in Persian titled Al Fawā’id. Ceric does not accept the description “Ansari” as absolute truth. He argues that this word was added by a third party to Al Māturīdī’s book and he did not include it personally. The controversy around Al Māturīdī’s lineage and ethnic origin becomes important later during the assessment of his exegesis. Ceric criticised the fluency of his

96 Abū Ayūb Al Ansāri is Khālid 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 Abū Ayūb by residing in his house temporarily for a couple of months. For further information, see Dhahabī, Siyar A’lam Al Nabala’.
97 Al Ansāri 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, vol.2, 403.
99 Zabidī, Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqqīn Bi Sharhi Ihyā’ Ulūm Al Din; Zāda, Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām.
100 S. H. Nasr and M. Mutahhari, The Cambridge History of Iran, the Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), vol. 4.
101 M. Māturīdī, Ta’wilat Ahlu Sunnah (Beirut: Resalah Publishers, 2004), vol. 5.
102 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.
writing in Arabic and described his writing style in Arabic as, “awkward, obscure and hard
to follow.” He attributed it to the fact that Arabic was his second language. He states,
“…which is most probably due to the fact that he thought in Turkish or Persian but wrote
in Arabic…” If Al Māturīdī’s Arab origin can be confirmed, then this criticism will
become baseless. The assessment of Al Māturīdī’s writing style in his exegesis will assist
in determining his fluency in Arabic and may provide further insight about whether Ceric
was correct in his assumption.

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 of his birth. 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…” As a result, some scholars speculated on his date of birth and others
attempted to deduce it by extraneous factors. One of the methods that a number of
scholars, such as Ibrahim and Sayyid ‘Awaḍayn and Ali, used to estimate his date of birth
is 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…” This method led Ibrahim and
Sayyid to conclude that 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 Abū
Ḥasan Al Ash’arī (d. 936 CE), one of the most prominent Muslim theologians who
founded the Ash’arī synthetic school of theology, minimally by 25 to 27 years. Rahman
subscribes to their deduction, but specifies 849 CE as Al Māturīdī’s date of birth, which is

103 Ceric, Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam, 21-22.
104 Ibid.
105 M. Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah (Cairo: Al Majlis Al A’la Lil Shu’un Al Islamiyyah, 1994), 11.
106 Ibid, 12.
107 Ibid.
still within the reign period of Al Mutawakkil. 108 Similarly, Ali approximates that 852 CE is Al Māturīdī’s birth year. 109 Ali discerns this date from the dates of death of two of Al Māturīdī’s main teachers: Rāzī who died in 862 CE and Balkhī who died in 881 CE. Rāzī 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. 110

As far as his date of death is concerned, most biographers concur that Al Māturīdī died in 944 CE and was buried in Samarqand. 111 However, Haji Khalīfā (d. 1657 CE), a famous Muslim historian and geographer, and Nadwi (d. 1919 CE), a late Muslim scholar, claimed Al Māturīdī died in 943 CE. 112 Haji Khalīfā later retracted this opinion in his book and endorsed the opinion of the majority of the scholars. Haji Khalīfā’s retraction was verified by Ibrahim and Sayyid ‘Awadayn and Juhanī. 113

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’arī was the first to provide a basis for the Sunni synthetic theology.

110 Ibid.
111 Zāda, Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām; Khalīfā, Kashf Al Thonūn ‘an Asāmi Al Kutub Wal Funoon; Ayūb Ali, ‘Aqidat Al Islam Wal Imam Al Maturidi; Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah; M. Abū Zahra, Al Aqeedah Al Islamiyah (Cairo: Majma’ Al Buhooth, 1969); Al Qurashī, Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī’ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah; Ėceric, Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam; Ṭāsh Kubra Zadah, Miṣfāh Al Sa’ādah Wa Miṣbāḥ Al Siyādah; Tabaqāt Al Fuqahā’ 2nd ed. (Beirut: Matba’at Al Zahra’ Al Haditha, 1961).
112 Khalīfā, Kashf Al Thonūn ‘an Asāmi Al Kutub Wal Funoon; Nadwi, Rijāl Al Fikrwal Da’wah Fil Islam.
113 Juhanī, Al Mawu’ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Aḥzāb Al Mu’āsira; Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah.
Despite the ambiguity and lack of specific details about his personal life, the available information is constructive. It is apparent through deduction that Al Māturīdī lived during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Al Mutawakkil.\textsuperscript{114} This marks a very pivotal point in the history of Islam and Islamic disciplines. Many historians and biographers, such as Ibn Abī 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 over Muslims throughout the Muslim world, released Ahmad Ibn Hanbal from prison and honoured him.\textsuperscript{115} At the same time, this is the era during which the traditionalists launched a counter radical campaign against the Mu’tazilites, which caused the migration of many Mu’tazilites to the region where Al Māturīdī lived.

Another valuable insight that one gains from the dates is that Al Māturīdī was born approximately 25 years before the birth of the renowned Abū Ḥasan Al Ash’arī, who founded the famous Sunni Ash’arī theological school.\textsuperscript{116} This permits the researcher to argue 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. This is crucial to this study because whatever the contributions Al Māturīdī made in his theological exegesis may be, he was the earliest scholar to present them long before any other Sunni school or scholar.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{114} Wakīl, \textit{Al Āṣr Al Dhahabī Lil Dawla Al ‘Abasiyya}; Suyūṭī, \textit{Tārīkh Al Khalāfā’}.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibn Al Athīr, \textit{Al Kāmil Fil Tārīkh}, 8; Suyūṭī, \textit{Tārīkh Al Khalāfā’}; Abū Ya’la, \textit{Tābqāt Al Hanābilah}; Wakīl, \textit{Al Āṣr Al Dhahabī Lil Dawla Al ‘Abasiyya}.

\textsuperscript{116} Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah}.

\textsuperscript{117} Al Mutawakkil was also the first Abbasid Caliph to embrace the Shafī’ī 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.
As far as Qur’ānic exegesis is concerned, the year of Al Māturīdī’s birth is important to determine his role in the evolution of the discipline. While the discussion about the history of Qur’ānic exegesis will be left to the following chapter, Al Māturīdī’s year of birth gave him advantages as far as the process of shaping the academic form of Qur’ānic exegesis is concerned. Al Māturīdī was a contemporary of Ṭabarī, who is one of the most renowned Sunni exegetes. Ṭabarī was born in 838 CE, lived in Ṭabaristān in the city of ‘Āmil and died in 922 CE. He wrote one of the most influential and comprehensive Qur’ānic exegesis books. His book, entitled جامع البناء في تأويل القرآن, has been classified by many scholars, such as Qaṭṭān, Dhahabī, Dawūdī, Suyuṭī, Adnaway, Bugha and others, as the first comprehensive book of Qur’ānic exegesis. The fact Al Māturīdī lived during the same era as Ṭabarī indicates he lived during an evolving stage of Qur’ānic exegesis, which opens the door wide to debate about his contributions and their influence on the discipline.

1.7 His education

Al Māturīdī had the privilege of studying under a number of prominent scholars who excelled in various Islamic sciences, such as jurisprudence, theology and principles of jurisprudence.

One of Al Māturīdī’s early teachers was Abū Bakr Ahmad Ibn Ishāq Ibn Ṣubh, Al Jawzajānī. There is little information available about his personal life, but he was one of

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118 Ibn Kathīr, Al Bidaya Wal Nihaya; Dhahabī, Siyar A’alam Al Nubala’; Hamwī, Irshād Al Arīb Ilā Ma’rifat Al Adīb.
119 Dhahabī, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassirūn, 2; M. Qaṭṭān, Mabāhith Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān (Beirut: Resalah Publishers, 1998).
121 M. Abū Zahra, تأريخ المذاهب الإسلامية (Cairo: Dar al Fikr, 1934); Zāda, Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām; Khamīs, “Māturidīyah Rabībat Al Kalābiyya”; Al Qarshī, Al Jawāhir Al Mūhi’ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafīyah; Al Laknawī, Al Fawā’id Al Bahiyyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafīyah; Ṭāsh Kubra Zadah, Miftāḥ Al Sa’ādah Wa Miṣbāḥ Al Siyādah; Tabaqāt Al Fuqahā’
the few scholars that proved their prominence in all sciences. He was the main teacher of Abū Naṣr Al ‘Ayādi, who was also one of Al Māturīdī’s teachers. It seems Al Māturīdī began learning at the hands of Abū Bakr Jawzajānī and then continued under Abū Naṣr.

Abū Naṣr Ahmad Ibn Al Abbās Ibn Al Ḥusayn Al Anṣārī is one of Al Māturīdī’s main teachers. The biographers do not provide his exact dates of birth or death, but they record he lived in the region of Samarqand. He is one of the main disciples of the famous scholar Abū Bakr Al Jawzajānī, mentioned earlier, and he became one of the prominent scholars in his region. Qurashī speaks of his reputation, “he was a man that has no equal in the land in knowledge, piety, writings, perseverance and courage.” Nasafi 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…He had no peers like him.” Interestingly, Hamza Al Sahmi (d. 1036 CE), a Muslim historian, sheds further light on Abū Naṣr’s personality and advises that he is “from the school of the people of ra’y.” In other words, he was from the school of Abū Ḥanifa. This indicates Abū Bakr Al Jawzajānī is also Ḥanafi, since he was the only teacher of Abū Naṣr.

Al Tamīmī (d. 1601 CE), a Ḥanafi historian, and Ibn Qutlūbugha (d. 1474 CE), a prominent Ḥanafi scholar, among others, consider Abū Naṣr to be Al Māturīdī’s main

122 The biographers differ about the name of his grandfather whether it is Ṣūbḥ or Ṣabīḥ. For further information, see I. Baghdādī, Ḧadiyat Al ‘Arifīn Fi Asmā’ Al Mu’allīfīn Wa Athār Al Muṣanīfīn, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā’ Al Turāth, 1957); Al Qurashī, Al Jawāhir Al Muḍī’ah fi Tabaqāt Al Ḥanafīyyah; Al Laknawī, Al Fawā’id Al Bahīyyah Fi Tarājim Al Ḥanafīyyah.
123 T. Tamīmī, Al Tabaqāt Al Sunniyyah Fi Tarājim Al Ḥanafīyyah 4vols. (Cairo: Al Majlis Al A’la Lil Shu’un Al Islamiyyah, 1970); Al Qurashī, Al Jawāhir Al Muḍī’ah fi Tabaqāt Al Ḥanafīyyah; Zabīdī, Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqqīn Bi Sharhi Iḥyā’ Ulūm Al Dīn.
124 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 Qurashī, Al Jawāhir Al Muḍī’ah fi Tabaqāt Al Ḥanafīyyah.
125 Zabīdī, Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqqīn Bi Sharhi Iḥyā’ Ulūm Al Dīn; Al Qurashī, Al Jawāhir Al Muḍī’ah fi Tabaqāt Al Ḥanafīyyah.
126 Al Jawāhir Al Muḍī’ah fi Tabaqāt Al Ḥanafīyyah.
127 Nasafi, Tabsirat Al Adillah Fi Usūl Al Dīn 2.
128 Al Qurashī, Al Jawāhir Al Muḍī’ah fi Tabaqāt Al Ḥanafīyyah.
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 logically affected his understanding of the various disciplines of Islam and his approach to the Qurʾān and its exegesis. In addition, it is becoming apparent that his main teachers followed the Ḥanafī jurisprudential school. This would inevitably influence his thoughts on jurisprudence, but how much would it influence his theology and exegesis? This remains unknown and will be explored in the analysis of his exegesis works.

Another of Al Māturīdī’s important teachers was Muhammad Ibn Muqātil Al Rāzī. 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 delved into the disciplines of jurisprudence, theology and hadith. Al Dhahabī and Ibn Ḥajar advise that he acquired and transmitted hadith narrations from a number of renowned scholars such as Wakiʾ and Sufyān Ibn ‘Uuyaynah. Nonetheless, he excelled in the field of Islamic jurisprudence and specifically the Ḥanafī School. Ṣaymaṛī (d. 1045 CE), a Ḥanafī jurist and historian, Laknawī (d. 1886 CE), a famous Muslim scholar of Indian background, Zabidī, Baghdadi (d. 1920 CE), a Muslim historian and writer, and Qurashī (d.1373CE), among others, confirm that Muhammad Ibn Muqātil was one of Al Shaybāni (d. 805 CE), the second highest figure in

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129 Tamīni, ʿAla Tabaqāt Al Sunniyāh Fi Tarājim Al Hanafiyyah; Q. Qutlûbugha, Tāj Al Tarājim (Beirut: Dar Al Qalam, 1992).
130 Al Qurashī, Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī’ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah.
131 M. Dhahabī, Mizān Al I’tidāl Fi Naqd Al Rijāl, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al ‘Ilmiyyah, 1995); A. ibn Ḥajar, Lisān Al Mīzān, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al Basha’ir Al Islamiyya, 2002); Al Qurashī, Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī’ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah.
132 Wakiʾ Ibn Al Jarrāḥ was born in 129 AH in the city of Kūfah, Iraq, and began acquiring Prophetic hadith from a very early age. He became a prominent scholar of hadith in Iraq. A number of scholars acquired Prophetic hadith from him such as Ibn Mahdi and Abū Ḥanifā. He died in 197 AH. Dhahabī, Siyar Al ‘alam Al Nubala’.
133 Sufyān Ibn ʿUuyaynah was born in 107 AH in the city of Kūfah, Iraq. He is one of the leading scholars in the science of Prophetic hadith. He acquired Islamic knowledge from leading hadith scholars such as Ibn Al Zuhri and Abī Al Zinād. Many scholars narrated hadith from him, among them Imam Shafiʾi and Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. He died in 198 AH. Ibid.
the Ḥanafī school, main disciples.\textsuperscript{134} This indicates one of Al Māturīdī’s teachers acquired knowledge from the second highest authority in the Ḥanafī School, which reinforces the point established earlier about the impact of the Ḥanafī School on Al Māturīdī and the Central Asian region. It is a distinguishing mark in the life of Al Māturīdī to have had some of his main teachers acquire their knowledge directly from the literature of Abū Ḥanifa, in the various Islamic sciences, and under the instructions of his main disciples.\textsuperscript{135} Additionally, it sheds the light on Al Māturīdī’s calibre in the academic circles of the region since all his teachers had esteemed status.

The influence the Ḥanafī School had on Al Māturīdī is further elucidated by Abū Zahra’s statements, who confirm that Al Māturīdī acquired and studied the fundamental books of theology that Abū Ḥanifa wrote. \textit{Al Fiqh Al Absaṭ, Risalat Illa Al Battiyyyu, Al Ālim Wal Al Muta’allim} and \textit{Al Waṣiya} are the main titles by Abū Ḥanifa that Al Māturīdī would have learnt from his teachers in a connected chain of transmission back to Abū Ḥanifa.\textsuperscript{136} In fact, Zāda lists the chain of scholars from whom Al Māturīdī acquired Abū Ḥanifa’s books. He explains, “…Al Māturīdī narrated, these books, from the two Imams Abū Bakr…Al Jawzajānī and Abū Naṣr who acquired it from Abū Sulaymān Al Jawzjānī who acquired it from two Imams, Abū Yusuf and Muhammad.”\textsuperscript{137} From the first glance at this chain of imams, one notices the names Abū Yusuf and Muhammad Al Shaybānī, who are Abū Ḥanifa’s two main disciples and were responsible for establishing the Ḥanafī School.\textsuperscript{138} Therefore, it is established that the Ḥanafī School undoubtly influenced Al Māturīdī in the field of theology until he became one the greatest scholars of this school.

\textsuperscript{134} Al Laknawī, \textit{Al Fawā’id Al Bahiyyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafiyyah}; H. Ṣaymari, \textit{Akhbār Abī Ḥanifa Wa Aṣḥābih}, 2nd ed. (Beirut: ‘Alim Al Kutub, 1985); Al Qurashī, \textit{Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī’ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah}; Zabīdī, \textit{Ihāf Al Sāda Al Mutaqāqin Bi Sharhi Ihyā’ Ulūm Al Din}.

\textsuperscript{135} Maymun Nasafi, \textit{Bahr Al Kalām Fi Usūl Al Din} (Cairo: Al Maktabah Al Azhariyah, 2011); Zāda, \textit{Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām}.

\textsuperscript{136} Abū Zahra, \textit{Tārīkh Al Madhahib Al Islamiyah}.

\textsuperscript{137} Zāda, \textit{Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām}, 11.

\textsuperscript{138} Ṣaymari, \textit{Akhbār Abī Ḥanifa Wa Aṣḥābih}; Al Qurashī, \textit{Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī’ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah}; Al Laknawī, \textit{Al Fawā’id Al Bahiyyah Fi Tarājim Al Hanafiyyah}; Qutlūbugha, \textit{Tāj Al Tarājim}.
1.8 His works

The excellence of Al Māturīdī as a theologian overshadowed his important contributions in the other Islamic disciplines. Nonetheless, the wealth of literature he left behind demonstrates he contributed to a number of disciplines, among them Qur’ānic exegesis.

One of the fundamental Islamic disciplines in which Al Māturīdī wrote is usūl al fiqh. Khalīfa, Ṭāsh Kubra, Laknawī, Baghdadi and Qutlūbugha list two books for Al Māturīdī in this discipline: *Kitāb Al Jadāl* (the book of debate) and *Ma‘ākhīdha Al Sharī‘ah* (The methodologies of Islamic Shariah).

‘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 usūl al fiqh:

…and the works written by our colleagues in *Usūl Al Fiqh* are of two types: books that have been written in the most perfect 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 Jadāl* and *Ma‘ākhīdha Al Sharī‘ah* by Al Māturīdī.

Furthermore, according to Khalīfa, these two books became the main references for Ḥanafī scholars in the field of usūl al fiqh until the twelfth century.¹⁴⁰ 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 usūl al fiqh. This establishes that Al Māturīdī’s scholarship and prominence was not confined to the area of theology. More importantly, this demonstrates Al Māturīdī was a leading scholar that left his mark in every field he studied. Thus, this supports the argument of the researcher that Al Māturīdī’s

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contributions in exegesis are worthy of study and analysis. Unfortunately, these two books no longer exist.\textsuperscript{141}

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 Al Māturīdī 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 Māturīdiyah.

Al Māturīdī’s theology literature can be divided into three main categories:\textsuperscript{142} maqālāt, alrudūd and uṣūl al tawhīd. Maqālāt is a genre of theological books in which scholars list the arguments and proofs of the various Islamic schools and orientations. While in the uṣūl al tawhīd genre, scholars outline and explain the tenets of faith and their principles of Islamic creed. On the other hand, in the alrudūd genre, scholars refute and respond to the arguments of scholars who belong to a different school.\textsuperscript{143}

In the genre of maqālāt, Al Māturīdī has a book with the same title Al Maqālāt.\textsuperscript{144} Faṭima and Brockelmann state the book is available as a manuscript in Kőprülü Library in Istanbul, Turkey, under number 856.\textsuperscript{145} However, 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 AlSharī’ah fi Al Fiqh and Kitāb Uṣūl Al Din. None of the other biographers and scholars mentions them. In reference to the variation in the names of the first two books Kitāb Al Jadal Fī Uṣūl Al Fiqh and Kitāb Ma’ākhidh Al Sharī’ah fi Uṣūl Al Fiqh, one notices the addition in the names of the first two books is the same –fī Uṣūl Al Fiqh – which means “in the discipline of Uṣūl Al Fiqh.” It seems this addition is the result of Ceric’s misunderstanding when he quotes the titles from the book of Ibn Quṭlūbghā, Tāj Al Tarājim. He assumes the phrase fī 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; Ibn Quṭlūbghā, Tāj Al Tarajim Fī Tabaqqāt Al Hanafiyyah.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[141]{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 AlSharī’ah fi Al Fiqh and Kitāb Uṣūl Al Din. None of the other biographers and scholars mentions them. In reference to the variation in the names of the first two books Kitāb Al Jadal Fī Uṣūl Al Fiqh and Kitāb Ma’ākhidh Al Sharī’ah fi Uṣūl Al Fiqh, one notices the addition in the names of the first two books is the same –fī Uṣūl Al Fiqh – which means “in the discipline of Uṣūl Al Fiqh.” It seems this addition is the result of Ceric’s misunderstanding when he quotes the titles from the book of Ibn Quṭlūbghā, Tāj Al Tarājim. He assumes the phrase fī 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; Ibn Quṭlūbghā, Tāj Al Tarajim Fī Tabaqqāt Al Hanafiyyah.}
\footnotetext[142]{M. Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahlu Al Sunnah, 1st ed., 5 vols. (Beirut: Résalah Publishers, 2004).}
\footnotetext[143]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[144]{Baghdādī, Hadiyat Al ’Arifīn Fi Asmā’ Al Mu’allifīn Wa Aṯār Al Muṣanifīn; Zabīdī, Ithāf Al Sāda Al Mutāaqiqīn Bi Sharhi Iḥyā’ Uṣūl Al Din; Tāsh Kubra Zadah, Miṣḥāb Al Saʿādah Wa Miṣḥāb Al Sīyādah; Al Qurashī, Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī’ah ah Fī Tabaqqāt Al Hanafiyyah.}
\footnotetext[145]{Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahlu Al Sunnah; C. Brockelmann, Tārīkh Al Adab Al ’Arabi, 5th ed., 6 vols. (Cairo: Dar Al Ma’arif, 1959).}
\end{footnotes}
Istanbul and ‘Arif Ḥikmat library in Madinah that this title belongs to Abū Bakr Fūrak, a prominent Ash’arī scholar who died in 406 CE.\textsuperscript{146} Despite, Tanci’s and Ali’s claim, Ceric maintains one cannot ignore the possibility that such a title may belong to Al Māturīdī.\textsuperscript{147}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 that this genre of writing was widely and commonly used by different scholars in the field of theology such as \textit{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 eleven of the biographers who wrote about Al Māturīdī’s life list such a title as part of his works.\textsuperscript{148}

In addition, Al Māturīdī has more than seven titles in the genre of \textit{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.\textsuperscript{149}None of the titles Al Māturīdī wrote in this genre have survived.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{146} Ceric, \textit{Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam.}
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{150} The titles are: (1)\textit{ Radd ʿAla Qarāmiṭah}; (2)\textit{ Radd Al Uṣūl Al Khamsah}, a rebuttal to Abū Umamah Al Bāhili, who is a Muʿtazilite; (3)\textit{ Radd Waʾid Al Fussāq}, which is a rebuttal of the book of Kaʿbi, who is a Muʿtazilite, entitled \textit{Waʾid Al Fussāq}; (4)\textit{ Radd Awāʾil Al Adillah}, which is a rebuttal of the book of Kaʿbi entitled \textit{Awāʾil Al Adillah}; (5)\textit{ Radd Thadhīb Al Jadal}, which is a rebuttal of the book of Kaʿbi entitled \textit{Thadhīb Al Jadal}; (6)\textit{ Radd Al ʿImāmah}, a. rebuttal to the Rāfidah sect; and (7)\textit{ Bayān Wahm Al Muʿtazilah}, a rebuttal to the Muʿtazilite school. For further information, see Baghdādī, \textit{Hadiyat Al ‘Arifīn Fi Asmāʾ Al Muʾallīfīn Wa Aṯār Al Muṣanīfīn}; Ibn Quṭlūbgḥā, \textit{Tāj Al Taʿrījīm Fi Tabaqāṯ Al Hanafīyyah}; Khalīfa, \textit{Kashf Al Thonūn ‘an Asāmi Al Kutub Wal Funoon}. 
In the genre of uṣūl al tawhīd, one finds the most remarkable Al Māturīdī’s work in the field of theology: Kitāb Al Tawhīd. Rightly, Ceric calls it the “Summa Theologica” 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’τazilites’ methods from one side, and between Islamic doctrine and the various ideologies that existed in the region at his time from another side. In addition, the book is considered 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. He has written other treatises in the same genre as well, such as Risālah Fil Īmān, and Sharḥ Al Fiqh Al Akbar. However, scholars differ as to whether these were all his works.

Repeatedly, one encounters the fact that, despite the substantial number of titles Al Māturīdī gifted to the Islamic academia, the majority of them are missing. Thus, while various biographers and scholars praise his efforts and scholarship, the reader today is unable to see, assess or critique his contributions. This highlights the academic value of

151 Ceric, Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam, 46.
152 Juhanī, Al Mawu’ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Ahzāb Al Mu’āsira; Khamīs, “Māturidīyah Rabibat Al Kalābiyya;” M. Bazdawi, Usool Al Deen (Cairo: Maktabah Azhariyyah, 2003); Ceric, Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam.
153 Abū Mu’in Al Nasafi in his book Al Tamhīd mentions that Al Maturīdi 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 Muhammadiyyah, 1986).
154 It is a treatise he wrote on the Islamic creed. Baghdadi and Sezgin list it as one of the titles of Al Maturīdi. Furthermore, Subkī (d. 1370 C.E), a Shafi’ī scholar and historian from the fourteenth century, has written a commentary on it entitled Al Sayf Al Mashhūr Fī sharḥi Aqīdat Abī Mansūr. Conversely, Juhanī 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 Muṣānīfīn; F. Sazkin, Tārīkh Al Turāth Al ‘Arabi, trans. Mahmud Hijazi, 10 vols. (Riyadh: Imam Su’ud University, 1991); A. Subkī, Al Sayf Al Mashhūr Fī Sharḥi Aqīdat Abī Mansūr(Istanbul: Marmara University, 2000); Juhanī, Al Mawu’ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Ahzāb Al Mu’āsira.
155 It is claimed that Al Maturīdi in this book explained the book of Abū Ḥanifa Al Fiqh Al Akbar. However, Kawtharī (d.1952 C.E), a leading Muslim scholar from 20th century, Brockelmann (d. 1956 C.E), a German Orientalist from the 19th century, and Abū Zahrī consent that this cannot be from the works of Al Maturīdi. They list a number of reasons that ascertain their opinion. Amongst them the fact that it critiques some of the teachings of the Ash’āri school which teachings did not become popular until after the demise of Al Maturīdi. For further information, see Abū Ḥanifa, Al ‘Alīm Wal Mut'allim (Cairo: Matba’at Al Anwar, 1948); Brockelmann, Tārīkh Al Adab Al ‘Arabi; Abū Zahrī, Tārīkh Al Madhuḥahib Al Islamiyyah.
this research as it attempts to discover Al Māturīdī’s contributions through ones of his few surviving titles.

In the field of Qur’ānic exegesis, Ta’wīlāt Ahlu Al Sunnah, an exegesis book, is one of the few books that have been preserved from the works of Al Māturīdī and has reached today complete. This fact has been ascertained by most of the scholars that discussed his life and listed his books. Ceric states, “there seems to be unanimous agreement in the historical reports on Al Māturīdī about the authenticity of Kitāb Al Tawḥīd and Ta’wilāt Ahlu Al Sunnah.” 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 (d.1115 CE), a Ḥanafī scholar, testifies for 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.” Al Qurashī shares the Abū Mu‘īn Nasafī’s admiration of the book and repeats nearly the exact same words. He describes the title as, “…a book that has no match. In fact, none of the books that preceded it comes close to it in its innovative style in the field.” Khalīfa and the Muslim scholar Al Kawtharī (d.1952CE) share the same opinion as Al Qurashī. 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.” However, how factual is this praise? What are the contributions and

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157 Ceric, Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam, 40.

158 Nasafi, Tabaqrat Al Adillah Fi Usūl Al Din 2, 220-21.

159 Al Qurashī, Al Jawāhir Al Mūdī’ah Fi Tabaqāt Al Hanafiyyah, vol 2, 130.

160 Zāda, Ishārāt Al Marām Min Ibārāt Al Imām.
distinctions of the book that would warrant such praise? This will be investigated in chapter three.

Following from the above, is this title the only work of Al Māturīdī’s in the field of exegesis? Khalīfa argued that Al Māturīdī has two books in the field of exegesis with similar titles: Taʾwīlāt Ahlu Sunnah and Taʾwīlāt 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. He explains, “And this is what his distinguished disciples have learnt from him orally. Hence, it is easier to comprehend than what he had written. It has been compiled by Alāʾ Al Dīn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Al Samarqandi…”161 However, Ibrahim and Sayyid ‘Awadayn dispute what Khalīfa argues and elucidate that the second book, Taʾwīlāt Al Māturīdiyya, is not a compilation of Al Māturīdī’s exegesis, rather it is a commentary written by his student Alāʾ Al Dīn Al Samarqandi on Al Māturīdī’s exegesis.162

Al Māturīdī’s exegesis was not edited until late in the twentieth century. Ibrahim and Sayyid ‘Awadayn were the first to edit the exegesis book under the sponsorship of the High Committee of Islamic Affairs in the Ministry of Islamic Endowment in Egypt in 1971. However, this study was partial. They extracted and edited Al Māturīdī’s commentary on the first chapter of the Qurʾān, Al Fatiha, which comprises seven verses, and half of the second chapter, Al Baqarah, which comprises 286 verses; they reached verse 134 and stopped.163 This effort was followed in 1983 by another partial editing of the book by the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs in Iraq. Muhammad Mustafīḍ Al Raḥmān edited the first and second chapters of the Qurʾān fully. Since then, the book

162 Māturīdī, Taʾwīlāt Ahlu Sunnah
163 Ibid.
remained untouched until 2003 when Fātima Al Khaymi edited the entire book and published it complete in 2004 in five volumes.\textsuperscript{164}

Out of the seventeen titles Al Māturīdī wrote in the Islamic disciplines of theology, \textit{uṣūl al fiqh} and \textit{tafsīr}, Qur'ānic exegesis, only two titles survived and are accepted by all scholars as his work: \textit{Kitāb Al Tawhīd} and \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah}.\textsuperscript{165}Given the scarcity of information about Al Māturīdī’s life, a number of causative factors can be proposed 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 also the academic capital of the Muslim world. As a result, many of the 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,\textsuperscript{166} the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{164} Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahlu Al Sunnah}.
\end{footnotesize}
Ayyubid\textsuperscript{167} and the Mamluk\textsuperscript{168}, who played a fundamental role in the spread of their teachings for centuries, or in comparison to the Mu'tazilites, whose teachings were enforced by the Abbasid caliphs Al Ma'mūn and Al Mu'tasim (d. 842 CE) upon the entire Muslim world. 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 Ḣanafī. Meanwhile, the Ash’arī’s teachings were embraced by two prominent schools, the Maliki and Shāfi‘ī, and by a minority of Hanbali scholars. In the competitive environment that dominated among 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.

Despite the loss of many of Al Māturīdī’s academic works, a fact that deprives the reader of a clear structured understanding of his personal opinion, principles and contributions to various Islamic disciplines, the study of Ta’wilāt provides partial respite for the loss. Although Ta’wilāt is essentially an exegesis book, many scholars have indicated it also contains Al Māturīdī’s theological and jurisprudential opinions. Al Ghālī, a contemporary Muslim scholar, states, “He studied within it scholarly and professionally, theological, Uṣūl and jurisprudential matters as well as exegesis and explanation of the Honourable book of God, the Qur’ān.”\textsuperscript{169} Therefore, the study and analysis of Ta’wilāt offers important academic insight to understanding Al Māturīdī’s general academic contributions. Nonetheless, the focus of this study remains on the field of Qur’ānic exegesis as far as the


\textsuperscript{169} Al Ghālī, Abū Mansūr Al Māturīdī Hayaatuhū Wa Araa‘uhoo, 58.
God’s attributes are concerned. Potentially, this opens the gate for further studies into other aspects of his Qur’anic exegesis and his contributions to other Islamic disciplines.

1.9 Conclusion

Based on the above findings, it is clear that the environment, circumstances of the region and era had positive effects on Al Māturīdī’s education, motivations and academic contributions. The region in which he grew up and studied was economically prosperous and affluent. This raised the living standards of the residents and encouraged education and research. 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 local or visitors. The multi-culturalism 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 the Muslims 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 Al Māturīdī 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 of a homogenous Muslim society. 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 the 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 twenty-five years. This makes his theological contributions the earliest in the 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’anic exegesis. Thus, he lived during the evolving stages of the discipline and his exegetical contributions, if proven, are foundational to the field and unprecedented.

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 explored further whether Al Māturīdī was a mere 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 influenced following generations through it. He devised new methods and outlooks to the understanding of these disciplines as per the testimony of all the biographers. However, the nonexistence of most of his titles

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deprives the researcher from the opportunity to assess, analyse and evaluate his contributions. Nonetheless, the study of Ta’wilāt presents an opportunity to explore Al Māturīdī’s work across the various disciplines, particularly theology and Qur’ānic exegesis. It is likely Al Māturīdī reached new heights in the field of Qur’ānic exegesis in general, particularly in relation to the nature and attributes of God. This hypothesis will be examined and evaluated in the subsequent chapters. In order to accurately do so, it is essential to have a clear grasp about the nature and state of Qur’ānic exegesis as a discipline and its characteristics during the era when Al Māturīdī wrote Ta’wilāt.
CHAPTER TWO
THE EVOLUTION OF QUR’ĀNIC EXEGESIS AND AL MĀTURĪDI

2.1 Introduction

Starting with Prophet Muhammad and spanning the history of Islam, the discipline of Qur’ānic exegesis, *tafsīr*, has become one of the most fundamental disciplines in Islamic scholarship. Al Qurtubī (d.1272 CE) highlights the relationship between the Qur’ān and Islamic sciences: “the book of God is the warrantor for all the sciences of the Sharia both the obligatory and the recommended.”\(^{170}\) A contemporary of Al Qurtubī, the famous exegete Bayḍāwī (d. 1292 CE), agrees on the foundational status of the Qur’ān and identifies *tafsīr* as “the regent of all the religious disciplines and its crown.”\(^{171}\) Such views on the Qur’ān and its exegesis are often repeated by numerous classical and modern *tafsīr* scholars. Since discovering the meanings encapsulated in the verses of the Qur’ān and interpreting them is one of the best achievements a Muslim scholar may aspire to accomplish, it does not come as a surprise that Al Māturīdī sought to study the Qur’ān and write *tafsīr*.

It is difficult to specify the exact reasons that led him to engage in this particular discipline. Nonetheless, if one takes into consideration the facts learnt about him from the previous chapter, one can detect various factors that would encourage him to explore the *tafsīr* field. First is academic subscription and excellence in a climate where religious knowledge was highly honourable. Al Māturīdī lived in a society that was educated, intellectual and competitive. Public debates and rigorous research were encouraged by the state and society. As a scholar, Al Māturīdī excelled in every field in which he engaged, as per the testimonies of the biographers who wrote about his life and achievements. Thus, writing in

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the field of *tafsīr* is an important step in the quest for further academic contribution. Second is the discipline’s need for a new approach that could respond to the religious assertions and arguments in his time. As established earlier, Al Māturīdī lived at a time when many Muslim and non-Muslim movements were spreading their teachings in the region. Particularly, the Mutazilite school whose members and scholars were exiled from Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid caliphate, and found in Samarqand, Al Māturīdī’s hometown, a suitable location.

This chapter examines the evolution of the discipline of *tafsīr* and the main stages of its development in order to identify the stages of the evolution of the discipline during which Al Māturīdī wrote his exegesis. In turn, it becomes easier to assess whether the characteristics of the relevant stage had any influence on his work and it enables one to evaluate Al Māturīdī’s role and position. In addition, this chapter studies the notions of *tafsīr* and *ta’wil*, and Al Māturīdī’s contribution to the scholarly debate about them, which will help clarify Al Māturīdī’s approach to the field of *tafsīr*. Finally, the chapter discusses the legality of *tafsīr* bil ra’y (rational exegesis) and its legitimacy, since it is the type of *tafsīr* in which Al Māturīdī wrote his work. This chapter argues that Al Māturīdī was aware of the exegetical debates in his time, contributed to them and was a scholar who pioneered the interpretative style of exegesis.

### 2.2 The evolution of the discipline of *tafsīr*

Similar to many Islamic disciplines, *tafsīr* experienced various stages and developed as a discipline in its own right over the course of centuries and through the efforts of generations of scholars. Each stage in the evolution is distinguished by its unique contributions, characteristics and figures. In addition, each stage complements the stages that preceded it and enriches the stages that followed. It is of utmost importance to identify
the various stages in the evolution of *tafsīr*. First, it helps pinpoint Al Māturīdī’s place in the geographical, historical and academic context of the discipline. Second, it provides insight into the state of exegesis across its history and during the time of Al Māturīdī, which helps appreciate the nature of the discipline and its progress. Third, it helps in the process of assessing Al Māturīdī’s work since it informs one of the characteristics of the various stages and in determining the extent to which Al Māturīdī contributed to the field.

There are two main views regarding the stages of the evolution of *tafsīr*:172 the traditional Muslims’ view and the Orientalists’ view.173

According to some Orientalists and Western scholars’ views, the reliability and authenticity of exegetical transmissions and dating them to an early period of Islam is all suspect. The point of departure in the debate started in the work of Goldziher (d. 1921CE) and was later adopted and promoted by Joseph Schacht, J. Wansbrough,174 Fred Leemhuis175 and Uri Rubin176 among others.177 According to them, *tafsīr* became a Qur’anic science during the second century and first half of the third century when it was subject to strict methods of transmission used for hadith and this is when it obtained a theoretical foundation.178 However, this view is not unanimous in Western academia, Nabia Abbott, Claude Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur’ān: Classical and Medieval,” in Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2015); K. Ullah, Al-Kashaf: Al-Zamakhshari’s Mu’tazilite Exegesis of the Qur’an (Washington: Georgetown University, 2013).

172 Ullah describes it as “the western views.” Berg contests the assumption that the Western school should be put in contrast with the Islamic school in general. He says, “The distinction between ‘Muslim’ and ‘Western’ is becoming more blurred. There are Muslims who work within the ‘Western’ tradition, and Western scholars (geographically speaking) who operate within a Muslim framework.” A better choice of words is the one the researcher adopted, which was also adopted by Gilliot. For further information, see H. Berg, The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5.

173 Cited in Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur’ān.”


175 Cited in H. Berg, The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam.


177 Schacht, The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence; Berg, The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam.
Fuat Sezgin,\textsuperscript{179} James Robson,\textsuperscript{180} Mohammad Mustafa Azmī and Harris Birkeland assert that earlier written transmission of exegesis existed and they should not be collectively impugned.\textsuperscript{181} Sezgin confirms “almost all the earliest Qur’anic commentary together with the transmission chains are preserved unaltered in later works.”\textsuperscript{182} Robson and Azmī agree that the use of transmission took place in the last third of the first century based on the report of Ibn Sīrīn (d. 728 CE),\textsuperscript{183} which would mark the genesis of \textit{tafsīr}. Gilliot does not favour the Orientalists’ reading, but does not accept the traditional Muslims’ view as a whole either. He believes there is a need for further research.\textsuperscript{184}

According to the general Muslim scholarship, the main stages of the evolution of exegesis were: (1) exegesis during the time of Prophet Muhammad; (2) exegesis during the time of the \textit{ṣahāba}\textsuperscript{185} (companions); (3) exegesis during the time of the \textit{tābi’īn}\textsuperscript{186} (successors); and (4) exegesis during the era of \textit{tadwīn} (the documentation of the Islamic disciplines).\textsuperscript{187} This typology has been advocated by some classical scholars such as Zarkashī, Suyūṭī and Ibn ‘Aqīlah and the overwhelming majority of late and contemporary scholars such as Zarqānī,

\textsuperscript{179} Cited in Ullah 2013.
\textsuperscript{180} Cited in Juynboll 1983.
\textsuperscript{182} Ullah 2013
\textsuperscript{183} Ibn Sīrīn reports the Muslims did not begin to demand a chain of transmission for narrated statements and reports until the \textit{fitnah}, the major tribulation, took place. Hadith scholars differ in pinpointing the exact date, but many of them associate it with the assassination of the third caliph ʻUthmān in 656 CE. For further information, see N. İtr, \textit{Manhaj Al Naqd Fi Ulūm Al Hadīth} (Beirut: Dar Al Fikr Publication, 2003); U. Ibn Al Ŝalāḥ, \textit{Muqaddimat Ibn Al Ŝalāḥ Fi ‘Ulūm Al Hadīth} (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al ‘Ilmiyyah, 2003).
\textsuperscript{184} Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur’an.”
\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Sahāba} is the plural form of \textit{Ṣahābi}. Literally, it means ‘companion,’ but the technical definition of the term is “Anyone who saw the Prophet, believed in him and died upon this (i.e. died Muslim)” (Bakrī 2004, 15).
\textsuperscript{186} \textit{TABI’IN} and \textit{TABI’ĪN} are the plural forms of \textit{TABI’I}, which literally means successor. The technical definition of the term is “a person that met and learnt from the Śahāba of the Messenger of God while being a believer” (Itr 2003, 147).
Dhahabī, Qaṭṭān and Juday’ to mention a few. However, it is not as conveniently perfect, as they proclaim. Especially when adopted as it is by the contemporary scholars, without any alterations, because it does not take into consideration the developments that have taken place in the 1200 years gap that exists between the fourth stage and today, as Saleh argues.\(^\text{188}\) In addition, this typology does not factor the contributions of other Muslim orientations in the evolution of Qur’anic exegesis such as the Shiite and the Mu’tazilite and therefore it is theologically subjective rather comprehensive. Nevertheless, since the study focuses on the Sunni exegetical literature alone and investigates the evolution of the science up until the time of Al Māturīdī, these deficiencies will not affect the integrity of the research.

2.2.1 Exegesis during the time of Prophet Muhammad

From a Muslim perspective, the founder of the discipline of \(\text{tafsīr}\) is Prophet Muhammad. He used to elucidate to the companions what they were not able to comprehend from the Qur’ān independently.\(^\text{189}\) This does not come as a surprise, for the overwhelming majority of the companions had not received divine revelation or met a messenger before.\(^\text{190}\) This fact is confirmed by several verses in the Qur’ān, such as, “It is He (God) who sent among the unlettered ones (the Arabs) a Messenger…teaching them the book (the Qur’ān).”\(^\text{191}\) This practice can be illustrated in the encounter that took place between the Prophet and a companion named ‘\text{Uday Ibn Ḥātim}, who misunderstood the figurative use of the phrase, ‘the white thread and black thread’\(^\text{192}\) and interpreted it literally. The Prophet explained to him that it refers to the clear distinction between the end of night and the beginning of


\(^{189}\) Dhahabī, \textit{Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon, 2}; ‘\text{Ilm Al Tafsīr} (Cairo: Dar Al Ma’arif); A. Ibn Taymiyyah, \textit{Muqaddimah Fi Usūl Al Tafsīr} (Beirut: Dar Al Hayat, 1980); M. Ma’rifa, \textit{Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon Fi Thawbīhi Al Qashīb}, 2nd ed. (Najaf: Al Jami’a Al Rudawiyyah Lil ‘Ulum Al Islamiyyah, 2004).

\(^{190}\) M. Ibn Sa’d, \textit{Al Ṭabaqāt Al Kubrā}, 11 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Al Khanji, 2001).

\(^{191}\) Qur’ān 62:2.

\(^{192}\) This phrase is found in Qur’ān 2:187.
dawn, the time when a Muslim should begin their obligatory fasting. However, the Prophet did not have to explain every single utterance to the companions for their linguistic competence enabled them to understand many verses.

At this stage, the sources to interpret the Qur’ān were limited to other explanatory verses and explanations from Prophet Mohammed. Notably, tafsīr, at this stage, was selective and mostly ad hoc. Upon examining the various exegetical narrations recorded from the Prophet, one notices they are mostly responses to enquiries from the companions and, while there are instances when the Prophet took the initiative to explain the meaning of particular utterances, they remain very scarce. Another important observation is that most of the exegetical comments of the Prophet are brief and succinct. There are no recorded narrations in which the Prophet breaks down a verse and explains it word for word.

In addition, most of the prophetic commentary in tafsīr was transferred orally, with the exception of some commentaries that were written by some of the companions for personal purposes. Another important characteristic of tafsīr that one observes at this stage is that there was a unified source of information: the statements of the Prophet. Consequently, there was no reason for any difference of opinion to surface, because it was all divinely explained. This stage demonstrates the legitimacy of tafsīr as a practice and its early beginning. However, it does not exhibit tafsīr as a science because it relies predominantly on explanations provided by revelation, which eliminates all human input. Nonetheless, one may argue that this stage provides the foundations from which the exegetes deduced some of the fundamental rudiments of tafsīr as a science, but it does not showcase a development of the discipline.


194 Dhahabī, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon, 2.

195 One of the companions that wrote some of the prophetic exegetical comments is Ubay Ibn Ka’b. For further information, see the tafsīr of Surat Al Bayyinah in tafsīr Al Qurtubī.
2.2.2 Exegesis during the time of the companions

The demise of the Prophet marked the end of divine revelation and the end of an infallible and divine source, in the view of Islamic scholarship, to explain the meanings of verses and infer the required legal rulings. Consequently, the companions began to seek exegesis from one another. Expectedly, they did not all enjoy the same level of knowledge and expertise that would qualify them to explain the Qur’ān. Some companions rose to prominence in the field – such as Abdullah Ibn Abbās (d.687 CE), Abdullah Ibn Mas’ūd (d.650 CE) and Ali Ibn Tālib (d.661 CE), who possessed the necessary competence to practice *tafsīr*. They became the main authorities of the field upon whom the other companions and new Muslims alike relied for knowledge of *tafsīr*. An example of this new development is an incident that took place during the time of the second caliph ‘Umar (d. 664 CE) between Qudāmah Ibn Mażʿūn196 (d.657 CE) and Abdullah Ibn Abbās, the famous exegete. Qudāmah claimed that Islam did not prohibit intoxicating beverages and quoted a verse from the Qur’ān: “Those who believe and do righteous good deeds, there is no sin on them for what they ate or drank if they fear God, and believe and do righteous good deeds…”197 However, Abdullah Ibn Abbās rebutted Qudāmah’s interpretation and explained to him that this verse was revealed as a pardon to the companions who used to drink in the past and died before the prohibition was clearly established in verse 90 of chapter Al Māʿīdah.198 Ibn Abbās’ statement was accepted by all the companions and Qudāmah conceded. Thus, the exegesis of the companions became the official authority from which people acquired *tafsīr*.

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196 Qudāmah Ibn Mażʿūn is also a companion. For further information about the names of the companions of the Prophet, see A. ibn Hajar, *Al Iṣāba Fi Tamyīz Al Ṣaḥāba*, 16 vols. (Cairo: Markaz Hajar, 2008).

197 Qur’ān 5:29.

In their endeavours to explain the Qur’ān, the companions resorted to new sources that were not employed earlier. These were:

1. the Arabic language and its rhetoric;
2. Arab customs;
3. the customs and history of the Jews and Christians who lived in the Arabian Peninsula;
4. the pre-Islamic revealed scriptures acquired from the converted Jews and Christians living in the Arabian Peninsula; and
5. their personal understanding, analysis and study of the Qur’ān. The new sources complemented those already employed by the Prophet, explaining verses with other Qur’ānic verses and the Prophet’s inspired interpretations. These new sources later became the main rudiments of the field of tafsīr. They represent the commencement of the development of tafsīr as a science and the first human tools developed to explain what the revealed sources did not address.

Suyūṭī, Dhahabī, Adnaway, Zarqānī and Qaṭṭān list the names of the companions who contributed the most to the field of exegesis: Abū Bakr (d.634 CE), ‘Umar, ‘Uthman (d.656 CE), Ali Ibn Abī Tālib, Abdullah Ibn Abbās, Abdullah Ibn Mas`ūd, ‘Ubay Ibn Ka’b (d.649 CE), Zayd Ibn Thābit (d.665 CE), Abū Müsa Al Ash’arī (d.662CE) and Abdullah Ibn Al Zubayr (d.692 CE).

According to Qaṭṭān, there were many other exegetes among the companions, but they engaged in tafsīr less frequently and in a limited fashion, and consequently were not equally recognised. Out of the ten prominent exegetes of the companions, four outshone the rest in their insight and knowledge in the field: Abdullah Ibn Abbās, Abdullah Ibn Mas`ūd, Ali Ibn Abī Tālib and Ubay Ibn Ka’b. Subsequently, they became the founders of the main schools of tafsīr in the Muslim world, from which essentially emerged the third stage in the evolution of tafsīr.

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201 Zarqānī, *Manāhīl Al Irfān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān*.
202 Qaṭṭān, *Mabāhith Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān*.
203 The names of the companions are listed according to the number of narrations transmitted from them.
Despite the important development of introducing new sources to *tafsīr* during the era of the companions, their exegetical efforts remained concise and did not attempt to explain the whole Qur’ān verse by verse. It seems the companions felt their role was to provide the context in which the Qur’ān was revealed. Hence, they focused predominantly on relating *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the causes of revelation) and the historical context and circumstances of the revealed verses. They clarified which verses were abrogated and explained the rulings from the legal verses, but did not provide a complete structured *tafsīr* of the Qur’ān. Further reflections on their commentaries reveal they share the same characteristics as the first stage’s commentary: briefness and succinctness. However, an interesting distinction of this stage is the emergence of differences of opinions in *tafsīr* among the companions. For instance, Ibn Abbās differed with Ali in relation to the meaning of the word ‘ādiyāt in verse 1 of chapter 100, *Al ʿĀdiyāt*. The former interpreted it to mean the horses galloping in a battle, while the latter interpreted it as the camels of the pilgrims running to Makkah during *Hajj*. The appearance of differences of opinion among the exegetes of the companions indicates they were not limited to the use of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad; rather, they began to apply analysis and personal deduction in their exegetical commentary. One may posit that the use of the new sources such as Arabic language, the cultural context and the scripture of the Christian and the Jews opened the door to the use of their own rationale and personal understanding. Furthermore, a systematic and methodological approach emerged during their time. This can be deduced from the steps they followed in their exegetical commentary by first consulting the Qur’ān in search for an explanation of a given verse, then consulting the traditions of the Prophet before resorting to the new sources they had introduced. The main

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204 The topic of the causes of revelations, otherwise known as *asbāb al-nuzūl*, is a sub-discipline that is traditionally taught as part of the sciences of the Qur’ān. See Jalal Din. Suyūṭī, *Al Itqān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dar al Fikr, 1999); Zarqānī, *Manāhil Al Irfān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān*.

205 For further information, see Tafsīr Al Qurtubī vol. 20 of *Surat Al ʿĀdiyāt*. 
benefit from the era of the companions was the introduction of the new sources of
exegesis, which proves its legitimacy, including guided rational thought and the
introduction of a methodological process in exegesis. Nonetheless, *tafsīr* remained ad hoc,
short and undocumented.

2.2.3 Exegesis during the time of the successors

Conventionally, this stage is known as the era of the *tābi‘īn*, who were the followers and
students of the companions. While this description is correct chronologically, what is most
remarkable about this stage is the emergence of the phenomenon of the schools of *tafsīr*.
The four aforementioned companions settled in specific cities in the Muslim world and
engaged in teaching the various Islamic disciplines, particularly *tafsīr*. They conducted
their lessons primarily in public circles in the main mosques. Rapidly, these circles
developed into specialised tutorials attended by specific disciples who designated their
efforts to the field of *tafsīr*. After the demise of the companions, and in some instances
while they were alive, their disciples, the *tābi‘īn*, became the main scholars of these
schools. The cities in which these schools emerged became the *tafsīr* capitals.206 There are
three fundamental schools of exegesis that all scholars identify and highlight their
significance in the evolution of *tafsīr*—the school of Makkah, the school of Madinah and
the school of Kūfah.207 All subsequent scholarship in Qur’ānic exegesis refers to one or
more of these schools and the scholars they produced.

The school of Makkah was founded by Abdullah Ibn Abbās208 and his disciples.209 After he
died, his pupils who were in the hundreds carried his knowledge to the world. The most

Watanīyyah, 2005); Qaṭṭān, *Mabāhith Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān*; Zarqānī, *Manāhil Al Irfān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān*.
208 Abdullah Ibn Abbās is the cousin of the Prophet from his uncle Al Abbās. He was born in Makkah while
the Prophet and the Muslims were boycotted and deported to the valleys of Makkah, which took place before
their migration to Madinah by three years. He was very close to the Prophet, because of his kinship and his
prominent of them became the leading figures of the Makkah school: Sa‘īd Ibn Jubayr (d. 714 CE), Mujāhid Ibn Jābir (d. 722 CE), ‘Ikrimah (d. 723 CE), Tāwūs Ibn Kaysān Al Hamadānī (d. 724 CE) and ‘Atā’ Ibn Abī Rabbāḥ (d. 732 CE). Even though the scholars list three schools equally, the school of Makkah was the most famous.\textsuperscript{210} It influenced the scholarship of \textit{tafsīr} as a whole as well as the other schools. The reason for this influence is that its founder Ibn Abbās engaged in \textit{tafsīr} more than any other companion did.\textsuperscript{211} Even some of the famous exegetes of the other schools acquired knowledge from him and his disciples, such as Abū Al ‘Āliyah (d. 711 CE) and Qatādah (d. 736 CE).

Another reputable school of \textit{tafsīr} is the school of Madinah. The city of Madinah remained the capital of the Muslims during the reign of the first three caliphs – Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān – and had the largest population of companions. Consequently, many of the companions and their descendants contributed to all Islamic disciplines, including \textit{tafsīr}.\textsuperscript{212} The most renowned of the companions in Madinah who had the largest number of disciples was ‘Ubay Ibn Ka’b.\textsuperscript{213} One of the factors that contributed to his remarkable knowledge in

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\textsuperscript{209} His disciples were all former slaves whom he accepted and taught indiscriminately. For further information, see Dhahabī, \textit{Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon}, 2.


\textsuperscript{211} To the extent that other famous companions such as Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar reprimanded him for speaking in \textit{tafsīr} excessively. For further information, see Suyūṭī, \textit{Al Itqān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān}.

\textsuperscript{212} Khālidī, \textit{Tā rif Al Dārisīn Bi Manāḥij Al Mufassirīn}; Dhahabī, \textit{Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon}, 2; Al Rūmī, \textit{Dirāsāt Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān}.

\textsuperscript{213} ‘Ubay Ibn ka’b Ibn Qays comes from one of the indigenous Arab tribes of Madinah who became famously known as the Anṣār. He was the first scribe from Madinah for the Prophet, appointed to write the revealed chapters of the Qur’ān. There are various opinions in relation to the specific time of his death. Ibn Al Athīr relates that he died during the reign of ‘Umar. However, Dhahabī, Wāqūdī and Al Ḥākim assert he died during the reign of ‘Uthmān in 32 AH/652 CE. ‘Ubay was ranked one of the best reciters of the Qur’ān. The Prophet described him as, ‘the most skilful in recitation amongst you is ‘Ubay’. For further information, see
tafsīr is his position as one of the scribes of the Prophet. It enabled him to have a close and interactive relationship with the Qur’ān, the circumstances of revelation, and all the facets that relate to it. Hence, he became a famous exegete of Madinah. Many of his disciples graduated from Madinah, but the most famous of them were: Abū Al ‘Āliyah (d.711 CE), Muhammad Ibn Ka’b Al Quraẓī (d.726 CE) and Zayd Ibn Aslam (d.753 CE).

Another important school in the field of tafsīr is the school of Kūfah. It was founded by the companion Abdullah Ibn Mas’ūd214 and his disciples. Despite the presence of other companions in Kūfah who contributed to the school of tafsīr, such as Abū Mūsa Al Ash’arī, Abdullah Ibn Mas’ūd remained the main exegete and scholar of the city.215 One of the reasons for the wide recognition and dominance of Abdullah in Kūfah is the fact he was the first scholar dispatched to them from the time of the second caliph ‘Umar and lived among them for more than 15 years.216 A bond of trust and closeness was built between him and the residents of the city, and he became the undisputed authority in it.217 His disciples became the main scholars of the city in all the disciplines including tafsīr. The most famous among them are: Alqamah Ibn Qays (d. 682 CE), Masrūq Al Ajda’ (d. 682 CE), Murrah Al Hamadānī (d. 704 CE) and ‘Āmir Al Sha’bi (d. 718 CE).

Suṣuṭā, Ṭābaqāt Al Mufassirīn; Adnaway, Īṭābaq Al Mufassirīn; Dhahabī, Siyar A’alam Al Nubala’; ibn Hajar, Al Iṣaba Fi Tamyīz Al Ṣaḥāba.
214 Abdullah Ibn Mas’ūd is also known as Ibn Umm ‘Abd son of Umm ‘Abd in reference to his mother. His lineage traces back to the tribe of Muḍar and he was one of the earliest companions to embrace Islam. He personally confirms this fact and states, “I was the sixth person to embrace Islam.” In addition, he was the first companion to recite the Qur’an publicly in Makkah and one of the memorisers of the Qur’an. The Prophet enjoyed listening to his recitation and used to praise him and say, “Whoever would like to hear the Qur’an as identical and lively as it has been revealed to me then let him listen to the recitation of ‘Ibn Umm ‘Abd”. After the demise of the Prophet and Abū Bakr, the first caliph, he was appointed as the treasurer of the city of Kūfah during the reign of the second caliph ‘Umar and the third caliph with ‘Uthmān. Shortly before his death, he travelled back to Madinah, where he died in 32AH/652 CE. For further information, see M. Ibn Sā’d, Kitāb Al Ṭabaqāt Al Kabīr, 11 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Al Khanjī); Dhahabī, Siyar A’alam Al Nubala’, vol. 1, 465.
215 Al Rūmī, Dirāsāt Fi ‘Ullām Al Qur’ān Al Karīm; Khālidī, Ta’rīf Al Dārisīn Bi Manāhij Al Mufassirīn; Dhahabī, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon, 2.
216 Siyar A’alam Al Nabala’; Ibn Kathīr, Al Bidaya Wal Nihaya; ibn hajar, Al Iṣaba Fi Tamyīz Al Ṣaḥāba.
217 Dhahabī, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon, 2.
Before discussing the characteristics of this stage, one must reflect on the nature of the *tafsīr* schools. How do these schools differ? Do they represent different approaches and methodologies in *tafsīr*? Al Ansari defines a school as “an academic direction that has its distinguishing characteristics that…advocate others to follow…”218 Najjār elaborates “…and sharing a common perspective, which forms an academic front that unifies scholars of a single opinion.”219 In light of these definitions, one cannot describe these *tafsīr* movements as schools. It seems their classification as schools is related to their geographic location rather than their distinct methodologies. There are no indications of any substantial methodological differences among them, such as the adoption of narrative *tafsīr* versus rational *tafsīr*. This is further verified by the exchange of students that took place between them and the absence of any discussions, debates or record of substantial disparities. Hence, the schools represent mostly versatile sources of narrative *tafsīr* and not distinct paradigms.

During this stage, the *tabi‘īn* used the same sources as the companions. However, the exegetical commentaries of the companions gained an extraordinary authority and were elevated nearly equal to the prophetic exegetical commentaries.220 The field became dominated by the transmitted commentaries of the Prophet and the commentaries of the companions rather than personal inferences. Another characteristic of this stage is the extensive use of the scriptures of the Jews and Christians through the new converts. The *tabi‘īn* extensively quoted from the previous scriptures the stories of the prophets and the historical stories and legends of past nations. Despite the abundance of exegetical narrations, the *tabi‘īn* still felt the need for further research because these narrations were

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brief in their exegesis. Thus, the *tabi‘īn* attempted to rely, in a limited fashion, on their deductions in explaining what had not been covered by the transmitted narrations from the companions and the Prophet.

### 2.2.4 Exegesis during the era of documentation

The fourth stage involved dramatic changes to the development of the science and marks an important milestone. It began towards the end of the Umayyad caliphate and the beginning of the Abbasid caliphate. At this stage, the science of *tafsīr* benefitted greatly from the campaign of the collection of the traditions of the Prophet. *Tafsīr* was predominantly a corpus of narrations from the Prophet, the companions and their successors. Hence, scholars, while collecting and compiling the hadith of the Prophet, incorporated exegetical narrations that reached them as a chapter in their books and entitled it *kitāb al tafsīr* (book of exegesis). Following this, a number of scholars began to designate separate books in which they collected and compiled *tafsīr* narrations that reached them. This can be classified as the nucleus of independent *tafsīr* books. Among the early scholars that took this important initiative were: Yazīd Ibn Hārūn Al Salami (d. 735 CE), Sufyān Ibn ‘Uyaynah (d. 815 CE), Abdul Razzāq Ibn Hu’mām (d. 826 CE) and Sufyān Al Thawrī (d. 778 CE). Thus, *tafsīr* began to appear independent from the hadith science.

The next progressive step was that scholars began to categorise the commentary of *tafsīr* according to the order of the *suwar*. For the first time, *tafsīr* books began to take the form known today where the author would list the verses of the chapters and explain them

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223 *Suwar* is the plural form of *Sūrah*, which is the title given to the chapters of the Qur’an.
verse by verse listing the exegetical narrations of the early generations. Among the scholars, who became famous for this style were Ibn Mājjah (d. 887 CE), Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), Ibn Hibbān (d. 883 CE), Ibn Abī Hātim (d. 938 CE) and Abū Bakr Al Mundhiri (d. 930 CE), and many other scholars.224

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly who was the first scholar to write tafsīr in this form, simply because the classical scholars and equally the contemporary ones differ on who is the first exegete to do so. However, the overwhelming majority of the classical and modern scholars consent that Ṭabarī had one of the earliest and most comprehensive tafsīr books written in the narrative form.225 Nonetheless, recent studies led to the publication of earlier works such as the tafsīr of Mujāhid Ibn Jabr226 (d. 719 CE), Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān227 (d. 767 CE), Sufyān Al Thawrī228 (d. 777 CE) and others, which will be studied and analysed in chapter three.

The era of documentation was distinguished from the previous stages by two main characteristics. First, the science of tafsīr developed from an annexed chapter in hadith books into an independent science written in its own designated books. Second, a complete tafsīr work began to appear following the order of the suwar, and attempted to explain it verse by verse. However, the emphasis on the narrative exegetical commentaries remained the most important part of the work including in the commentaries of the tabi‘īn. Suyūṭī

224 Khālidī, Ta’rīf Al Dārisīn Bi Manāhij Al Mufassirīn; Dhahabī, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon, 2; Juday’, Al Muqaddimāt Al Asāsiyya Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur’ān.
225 M. Juwaynī, Manhaj Al Zamakhsharī Fi Tafsīr Al Qur’ān Wa Bayān I’jāzuh, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dar Al Ma‘arif, 1968); Š Şālih, Mabāhith Fi Uṣūl Al Qur’ān, 17th ed. (Beirut: Dar Al ‘Ilm Lil Malayin, 1988); Mohamed. Zarkashī, Al Burhān Fil Uṣūl Al Qur’ān, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar al Jil, 1988); Suyūṭī, Al Itqān Fi Uṣūl Al Qur’ān; Dhahabī, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon, 2; Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qurʾān.”
228 S. Al Thawrī, Tafsīr of Sufyān Al Thawrī (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al ‘Ilmiyyah, 1983).
elaborates, “and all the contents of books of *tafsīr* are narrated from the companions, the *Tabi‘īn* and their followers. It does not contain anything else…”

2.3 **Central Asian school and the *tafsīr* of Al Māturīdī**

Geographically, Al Māturīdī was very far from the three main capitals of *tafsīr*. The nearest school to his region was the school of Kūfah. At this point of the research, a series of questions arise: did Al Māturīdī’s geographical location affect his understanding and approach to *tafsīr*? Did it deprive him of important exegetical narrations of the companions and their successors?

Despite the fame of the three schools, exegetical evolution was not confined to them. Many other regions in the Muslim world enjoyed their own exegetical circles and movements, such as Al Shām, Egypt, Andalusia and Central Asia. Unfortunately, the focus of the Muslim scholars in their literature pivoted around the schools and no comprehensive studies were undertaken about the exegetical efforts in other regions, particularly Central Asia. This limits the ability to discuss the nature of the development of *tafsīr* there as a discipline at length. Nonetheless, upon reviewing the biographies of a number of Muslim scholars, despite the brevity and scarcity of the available biographical information, who influenced, directly or indirectly, the science of *tafsīr* one discovers that a number of them were from Central Asia. For instance, ‘Abdul Ḥamīd Ibn Ḥumayd (d. 863 CE), who had among his students three of the authors of the six canonical books of hadith, is considered one of the leading scholars in narrative *tafsīr* and one of the earliest authors to

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230 Also known as the Levant region.
233 Bukhārī (d. 870 CE), Muslim (d. 874 CE) and Tirmidhī (d. 892 CE).
write in this genre.\textsuperscript{234} Ibn Ḥajar (d. 1449 CE) classifies him as one of the four main authorities\textsuperscript{235} that compiled the corpus of all the exegetical narrations of the companions and their successors.\textsuperscript{236} Ibn Al Mundhir\textsuperscript{237} (d.930 CE), who comes from Nīsābūr, a province in Central Asia, is another important authority whose work pertains to the same genre of \textit{tafsīr} and among the four Ibn Ḥajar listed. Dhahabī states his complete \textit{tafsīr} book\textsuperscript{238} “…testifies of his scholarship in the field…”\textsuperscript{238} Another exegete of great note from the same region is Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān\textsuperscript{239} (d. 767 CE). Gilliot states, “They almost all qualify him as a ‘great qur’anic commentator’.”\textsuperscript{240} Shāfiʿī\textsuperscript{241} adds, “Whoever wants to excel at studying \textit{tafsīr} profoundly he will depend fully on the \textit{tafsīr} of Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān.”\textsuperscript{242} In fact, all the four main scholars that Ibn Ḥajar listed come from the same region as Al Māturīdī, including his contemporary Ṭabarī.\textsuperscript{243}

Another strong indicator of the robust exegetical studies in the region is that most of the main canonical collections of the prophetic traditions have a section on \textit{tafsīr} and its virtues. If one investigates the biographies of the prominent hadith scholars, namely the

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{235} The other three authorities are Ṭabarī, Ibn Al Mundhir, who will be mentioned shortly, and Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 938 CE). For further information see Ibn Hajar, \textit{Al ‘Ujāb Fi Bayān Al Asbāb}.
\item\textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{238} Dhahabī, \textit{Siyyar A’lam Al Nubala’}, vol. 18, 492.
\item\textsuperscript{239} For further information about his biography, see Al Zirkilī, \textit{Al A’lām Qāmūs Tarājim}; Dhahabī, \textit{Tadhkirat Al Ḥuffāẓ}; Ibn Sa‘d, \textit{Al Ṭabaqāt Al Kubrā}.
\item\textsuperscript{240} Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qu’ān,” 7.
\item\textsuperscript{241} Muhammad Ibn Idrīs Al Shāfiʿī is one of the four great imams of which a legacy on juridical matters and teaching eventually led to the Shafiʿī school of fiqh. For further information, see Dhahabī, \textit{Siyyar A’lam Al Nubala’}.
\item\textsuperscript{242} J Ḥajjāj, “Manhaj Al Imām Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān Al Bālkhī Fi Tafsīrihi” (PhD diss., The Islamic University of Gaza, 2010), 15.
\item\textsuperscript{243} Many other scholars contributed to the \textit{tafsīr} field from Central Asia, including Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān (d. 753 CE) (some of his exegetical traditions are quoted by Ṭabarī and Abū AlFutūḥ Al Rāżī (d. 1131 CE)), Yahya Ibn Ja‘far Al Bikandi (d. 857 CE), Zakariyya Ibn Dawūd (d. 889 CE), Muḥammad Ibn Ḥurayth (d. 914 CE), Al-Ḥasan Ibn Ali Al-Ṣāghīrī (d. 970 CE), Muḥammad Ibn Ali Al-Ṭāhsī (d. 975 CE) and Naṣr Ibn Muḥammad Al-Samarqandī (d. 983 CE). For further information, see Al Sam’a‘ī, \textit{Al Ansāb}; Al Zirkilī, \textit{Al A’lam Qāmūs Tarājim}; Ibn Khallikān, \textit{Wafayyat Al A’yān Wa Anbā’ Azzamān}; Suyūṭi, \textit{Tabaqāt Al Mufassirīn}; Baghdādī, \textit{Hadyyat Al ‘Arifin Fi Asmā’ Al Muallifin Wa Atīrah Muṣanihīn}; Dawūdī, \textit{Tabaqāt Al Mufassirīn}.
\end{itemize}
authors of the six canonical books of hadith, one would find that most of them originate from cities in Central Asia. Therefore; Al Māturīdī’s geographical location neither deprived him from important exegetical information nor diminished his ability to engage in exegetical debate. His region was at the heart of academic development of the discipline, despite being overshadowed in the evolution of *tafsīr* literature. In fact, a desire to contribute may be a key factor that drove Al Māturīdī to write in the field.

In chapter one, this study established that Ṭabarī is a contemporary of Al Māturīdī. Therefore, Al Māturīdī’s exegesis, chronologically and academically, is one of the earliest comprehensive and complete books to be written in the history of the *tafsīr* science. The presence of the *tafsīr* of Al Māturīdī stands as a testimony to his great contributions to the field. However, it is not surprising that the *tafsīr* of Al Māturīdī was not noted duly when the role of his entire region has not been comprehensively studied and researched.

Furthermore, Al Māturīdī’s presence during this stage of the evolution of *tafsīr* manifests another important fact: he existed during a time when the final form and methodology of *tafsīr* had not yet crystallised. This presented an opportunity for Al Māturīdī to influence the nature of *tafsīr* and enrich it. An opportunity he seized, as will be demonstrated in his discussion on the differences between *tafsīr* and *ta’wil*. In principle, even before undertaking an analysis of his work, Al Māturīdī contributed to the field by providing a complete verse by verse explanation of the Qur’ān. However, the degree of his contribution and extent of his influence are yet to be determined, which will take place in the coming chapter.
2.4 The development of the notions of tafsīr and ta'wil

2.4.1 The lexical meaning and morphological root of the term tafsīr

Muslim scholars differed on the lexical roots of the term tafsīr and consequently they also differed about its meaning. In fact, the split of the Arab philologists about the morphological root of the term formed two main opinions. Some philologists claimed tafsīr is derived from the root word al-fasru. According to Ibn Fāris (d.1004 CE), al-fasru“…points to explaining a thing and clarifying it.” Al Azharī (d.981 CE) offers the same explanation, but relates the term to a lafẓ (an utterance) instead of an entity. He states, “al-fasru…the clarification and the explanation of an ambiguous utterance…” However, Ibn Manẓūr (d.1311 CE), a prominent Muslim lexicographer of the Arabic language and author of the encyclopaedic famous dictionary Lisān Al ’Arab, clarifies the use of the term: “al fasru, likewise al tafsirah is a term used to describe the process of a doctor diagnosing a patient’s sickness through examining their faecal matter.” This indicates the use of the root word revolves around the concept of studying and explaining an object, concept or utterance, which is not clear immediately in itself.

Other philologists argued that tafsīr is derived from the root word al safar. Zarkashī states, “and others stated that it is inverted from al safar, which means ‘to reveal and expose’.” Similarly, Ibn Fāris explains, “it points to the notions of lucidity and divulgement.” For example, the phrase “asfara al sabāh” means “the morning illuminated and revealed (the world).” Similarly, the phrase “safarat al mar’atu sufūran” means “the woman revealed her face.” Al Alūsī (d. 1853 CE), a renowned Muslim exegete

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247 A. Al Farāḥīdī, Kitāb Al ’Āyn, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dar Wa Maktabat Al Hilal, 1999); Zarkashī, Al Burhān Fil Ulūm Al Qur’ān; M. Ibn ‘Aqīlah, Al Ziyādah Wal Iḥsān Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur’ān, 9 vols. (United Arab Emirates: Shariqa University, 2006); Suyūṭī, Al Itqān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān.
249 Ibn Fāris, Mu’jam Maqāyिःs Al Lugha, 462.
and poet, declined the suggestion there is a link between *tafsīr* and the root word *al safar* because the order of the letters is different. As far as he is concerned, *tafsīr* and *al safar* are two distinct words with close meanings. Nonetheless, in the words of Al Rāghib Al Asfahānī (d. 1108 CE), both respond to the objection of Al Alūsī and explicate the correlation between the two proposed root words, *al fasru* and *al safar*. He clarifies *al fasru* and *al safar* “…are close in meaning as they are close in structure.” The former is used in the process of revealing and explaining abstract meanings…when the latter is used…in the process of revealing tangible and concrete entities to one’s sight.”

Hence, the use of the word *al safar* in reference to unveiling the face of a woman and the light of sunrise, which is tangible, and the use of *al fasru* in reference to explaining the meaning of a given word, which is intangible.

While Muslim and Arab scholars did not dispute the Arabic origin of the word *tafsīr*, a number of non-Muslim scholars did. Gilliot argues, “Although *tafsīr* with no other qualification refers in most cases to a Qur’anic interpretation or commentary, its origin is not Arabic. The verb *fassara*, ‘to discover something hidden’ is a borrowing from Aramaic, Syriac or Christian-Palestinian (*peshar, pushshar…*).” Similarly, Fraenkel argues “*Fassara* is a borrowing from the Syriac, ‘to expound, make clear,’ which is very commonly used in early Syriac texts in the sense of interpretation of scripture. In the Aramaic, it means ‘to solve, to interpret’.” The only difference between Gilliot and Fraenkel is that the latter confirms the origin of the word is Syriac when the former lists more than one possible origin. However, Gilliot provides the reason for his view, he states,

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251 Ibid.
252 Both are three letter words and use the same letters, *sa*, *fa*, *ra*. The only difference is the order of letters.
254 Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qurʾan,” 1.
255 Siegmond. Fränkel, *Die Aramäischen Fremdwörter Im Arabischen* (Leiden: Brill, 1866), 248; Ullah, *Al-Kashaf: Al-Zamakhshari’s Mu’azzilite Exegesis of the Qurʾan*
“The same verb is also found in Jewish-Aramaic. Accordingly, it cannot be determined whether Arabs or Muslims took the word over from the Jews or from the Christians.”\(^{256}\) Despite the fact Gilliot and Fraenkel consent that the origin of the word is not Arabic, neither of them clarifies when the term was borrowed or from whom. Arabic and Aramaic have a common linguistic ancestry, which is common Semitic.\(^{257}\) Hence, the presence of common words between all Semitic languages is expected. The key question here is, could the term have been borrowed late during the Islamic period or was it borrowed in the pre-Islamic period? Gilliot and Fraenkel do not provide any information that can answer this question.

Conversely, Rippin confirms that “*tafsīr* is an Arabic word meaning ‘interpretation’.”\(^{258}\) This view is supported by the absence of any reference to such a borrowing in Arabic lexicography books. In addition, Arab philologists have not mentioned any dispute in reference to the origin of the word or it being borrowed. In fact, Ibn Fāris in his book *Maqāyīṣ Al Llugha* states the three Arabic letters “*fa, sa, ra*” are used together to express the action of clarifying a matter and explaining it.\(^{259}\) If this word was borrowed from Syriac or Aramaic during the Islamic period, then such a morphological analysis could not be observed since borrowed words are adopted for their meaning as a whole and there is no relation between the meaning they express and the combination of the Arabic letters used in saying them. For instance, “cappuccino” is a term borrowed from Italian into Arabic to refer to a particular type of coffee. An analysis of the morphological order of the letters in it and its relation to the meaning associated with the word is impossible since it is a foreign word. The fact Ibn Fāris discussed the morphological analysis of the word *tafsīr* is evidence it could not have been a borrowed word. Furthermore, upon reviewing a number

\(^{256}\) Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur‘ān,” 1.


\(^{258}\) Andrew Rippin, *Tafsīr* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 44.

\(^{259}\) Ibn Fāris, *Mu‘jam Maqāyīṣ Al Lugha*. 
of linguistic books that list the words borrowed from foreign languages into Arabic written by Muslim and non-Muslim authors the terms \textit{tafsir} and \textit{fasara} were not listed at all.\textsuperscript{260}

Therefore, \textit{tafsir} lexically refers to studying and explaining an object, concept or utterance that is obscure. The two potential root words the scholars argue that \textit{tafsir} may be derived from reinforce this understanding, but one refers to concrete objects while the other relates to abstract concepts and meanings. Despite the fact, that some non-Muslim scholars, such as Gilliot and Fraenkel, claim the word has a non-Arabic origin, all available evidence substantiates it is of Arabic origin.

\subsection*{2.4.2 The technical definition of the term \textit{tafsir}}

Muslim, Arab and non-Muslim scholars, despite the different views they held about the various linguistic aspects of \textit{tafsir}, all consent that the term became customarily associated with the explanation of the verses of the Qur’an. Gilliot states, \textit{“tafsir with no other qualification refers in most cases to a qur’anic interpretation or commentary.”}\textsuperscript{261} Remarkably, Gilliot echoes Zarkashi, a Muslim scholar from the fourteenth century, who affirms, \textit{“…tafsir in the jargon of the scholars refers to revealing the meanings of the verses of the Qur’ān and what is intended by them…”}\textsuperscript{262} However, Muslim scholars differed when it came to formulating a technical definition that outlines the various key elements employed in the process of \textit{tafsir}. Dhahabī reports, \textit{“Some scholars believe that tafsir is not from the sciences that can have a set definition.”}\textsuperscript{263} They justify their opinion by claiming \textit{tafsir} is not based on specific principles or aptitudes that may develop over time. Thus, according to them, it suffices to say that \textit{tafsir} is \textit{“the explanation of the speech of God and the clarification of the words of the Qur’an and its

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\textsuperscript{260} M. Al Jawālīqī, \textit{Al Mu’arrab Min Al Kalām Al A’jamī} (Damascus: Dar Al Qalam, 1990); A. Jeffrey, \textit{The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’an} (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938).
\textsuperscript{261} Gilliot, \textit{“Exegesis of the Qur’ān,”} I.
\textsuperscript{262} Zarkashī, \textit{Al Burhān Fil Ulūm Al Qur’ān}, vol. 2, 149.
\textsuperscript{263} Dhahabī, \textit{Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon}, 2, vol. 1, 14.
\end{flushright}
implications.” Interestingly, Dhahabī does not list the name of the scholars that held this opinion. Other prominent scholars who wrote in the field, such as Zarkashī, Suyūṭī and Ibn Aqīla, did not mention this opinion in their works.

On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of Muslim exegetes and scholars believed tafsīr could be defined and developed various definitions for the discipline. Nearly all the exegetes discussed their preferred definitions or formulated their own in the introductions of their tafsīr books. As a result, there are multiple definitions for the discipline and they vary in specificity and length. At the same time, the various definitions reflect what different scholars considered essential to the process of tafsīr and, expectedly, in some instances they had opposing opinions. For example, Abū Hayyān considered the various modes of Qur'ānic readings (qirā‘āt) essential to understanding the complete meaning of the verses. Hence, he underpinned them in his definition of tafsīr. Conversely, Zarqānī did not believe they are related to tafsīr and excluded them from his definition. The most commonly accepted and quoted definition of tafsīr is that from Zarkashī. His definition has been endorsed by many classical and contemporary scholars and is cited in the main titles of the field, including the books of Suyūṭī and Ibn ʿAqīlah.

He defines tafsīr as “‘ilmu yufḥamu bihi kitāb Allah al munazzal ‘ala nabiyyihī Muhammad wa bayān maʾānīh wa istikhrāj aḥkāmihī wa ḥikāmihī[a discipline that helps

264 Ibid.
265 Suyūṭī, Al Itqān Fi Ulūm Al Qur‘ān; Zarkashī, Al Burḥān Fil Ulūm Al Qur‘ān; Ibn ʿAqīlah, Al Ziyādah Wal Iḥsān Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur‘ān; Zarqānī, Manāhil Al Irfān Fi Ulūm Al Qur‘ān.
267 Abū Ḥāyyān Al Tawḥīdi, Al Bahr Al Muḥīṭ Fi Tafsīr Al Qur‘an Al Adhīm.
268 Zarqānī, Manāhil Al Irfān Fi Ulūm Al Qur‘ān.
269 Suyūṭī, Al Itqān Fi Ulūm Al Qur‘ān; Ibn ʿAqīlah, Al Ziyādah Wal Iḥsān Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur‘ān; Qaṭṭān, Mabāhith Fi Ulūm Al Qur‘ān; Al Bughā and Mistū, Al Wādīh Fi Ulūm Al Qur‘ān; Itr, Ulūm Al Qur‘an Al Kareem.
one understand the book of God revealed to his Prophet Muhammad and its meanings and facilitates the inferring of its rulings and wisdoms].”

Some may find this definition shorter than the one quoted by Suyūṭī. The reason for the variation is that Suyūṭī, deliberately or inadvertently, included Zarkashi’s explanation of his definition. Consequently, Ullah fell into the same error because he obtained Zarkashi’s definition from Suyūṭī’s book and not directly from Zarkashi’s book.

2.4.3 The lexical definition of ta’wīl

The term ta’wīl is one of the key terms commonly discussed in tafsīr books and quoted by exegetes and scholars that specialise in the field. This term gained significance because many scholars use it in reference to defining many facets of tafsīr. Therefore, it is essential to capture the denotations and connotations of the term and understand the various contexts and meanings in which the different scholars employed it.

A number of exegetes, such as Suyūṭī, Zarkashi, Ibn ‘Aqīlah and Abū Hayyān, state that ta’wīl could be derived from two possible root words: al awl and iyālah. Al awl means, “to return to the origin.” In Lisān Al ‘Arab, Ibn Mandhūr states, “Al Awlul Al Rujū [is the return] Wa Ultu ‘An Al-Shay’i Irtadadtu [I turned away from something and returned to the original state of not wanting it].” Similarly, Fayrūz Abādī in his dictionary explains, “Āla Ilayhi…Raja’a means he returned to it.” As for the word Iyālah, it means, “to lead and direct.” Zarkashi comments on it, “and it has been said that its root is iyālah, which means...

271 Suyūṭī quoted Zarkashi’s definition in his book Al Itqān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān.
272 Zarkashi offers a comprehensive explanation of his definition. He states, “This (science) should be obtained (through studying the aspects related to) philology (‘ilm al-lugha), grammar (nahw), morphology (taṣrīf), metaphorical and rhetorical sciences (‘ilm al-bayān), principles of jurisprudence (uṣūl al-fiqh), various modes of Qur’anic readings (qirā’āt), occasions of revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl) and the familiarity with the abrogative and the abrogated verses (al-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh).” For further information, see Zarkashi, Al Burhān Fil Ulūm Al Qur’ān, vol. 1, 13.
273 Ullah, Al-Kashaf: Al-Zamakhsharī’s Mu’taṣīlītī Exegesis of the Qur’an.
275 M. Fayrūz abādī, Al Qāmūs Al Muḥīṭ, 8th ed. (Beirut: Resalah Publishers, 2005), 963.
leading and directing.”

While the above scholars narrate both possibilities, they focus on al awl, rather than iyālah, indicating their preference. However, when studying the works of some prominent philologists, lexicographers and exegetes, such as Ibn Fāris, Zamakhsharī and Al Rāghib Al Asfahānī, one notices iyālah is not given an independent entry, rather it is listed under the entry of the word awl. This ascertains iyālah cannot be considered as a root in its own right since it is one of the morphological forms of the word al awl. This is clearly illustrated in Al Zamakhsharī’s book Asās Al Balāghah, in which he links the word iyālah to one of the verbs of the al awl, which is āla. He explains it within an example sentence, “Āla al-rajayah wa ya’aluha iyālatan ḥasana [He led the people and he leads them in good leadership].”

When the term ta’wīl is collocated with one’s speech it mean to explain and contemplate. In Lisān Al ‘Arab, Ibn Mandhūr confirms this is in relation to ta’wīl of speech, “wa awwal al kalām wa ta’awwalahu: dabbarahu wa qaddarahu wa fassarahu wa raja’a bihi ilā murād al mutakallim[he performed ta’wīl of the speech means he contemplated it, evaluated it, and explained it and returned the intended meaning of the Speaker].” Therefore, the term ta’wīl lexically is derived from the root word al awl, which means, “to return to the original state” and has multiple uses. It is neither directly related nor confined to the clarification or explanation of speech. Rather, this is one of the various uses of the word. This conclusion is of utmost importance when it comes to the discussion of how ta’wīl is used in the Qur‘ān. This will be explored in the next section.

276 Zarkashī, Al Burhān Fil Ulūm Al Qur‘ān, vol. 2, 149.
and the section related to the technical definition of the term, a subject that has caused much of controversy among Muslim scholars in the field of *tafṣīr* and theology.

### 2.4.4 The use of *ta’wil* in the Qur’ān

Despite the semantic scope of the term *ta’wil*, its use in the Qur’ān has been versatile and enriching. In fact, the word *ta’wil* has been used the Qur’ān seventeen times as opposed to the word *tafṣīr*, which has been used once. Nonetheless, the meaning of *ta’wil* in the seventeen quotes is not fixed. Dāmaghānī (d. 1085 CE), Al ‘Askarī (d. 1005CE), Ibn Al Jawzī (d. 1201CE) and Dhahabī discuss and explain the various meanings of *ta’wil* in the Qur’ān. Whilst they consented on most of the posited meanings, their views differed greatly in relation to one of them. Interestingly, the first citation of *ta’wil* in the Qur’ān is verse 7 of chapter Al ‘Imrān, the one that attracted much discussion and analyses. Dāmaghānī and Ibn Al Jawzī stated the word “*ta’wilahu*” in the verse refers to “the duration of the existence of Prophet Muhammad and his nation.”

In contrast, Ibn Kathīr, Al Ḥakīm Al Tirmidhi, Ṭabarī and Al ‘Askarī stated the meaning of *ta’wilahu* in the verse is “to discover the unclear meanings of a particular concept or utterance.” Another point of contention among them, within the context of the same verse, was whether the

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281 “And no question do they bring to Thee but we reveal to Thee the truth and the best explanation (thereof),” Qur’ān 25:33.
283 “It is He who has sent down to you (Muhammad) the Book (this Qur’an). In it are Verses that are entirely clear, they are the foundations of the Book [and those are the Verses of Al-Ahkām (commandments, etc.), Al-Farā’id (obligatory duties) and Al-Hudud (legal laws for the punishment of thieves, adulterers, etc.)]; and others not entirely clear. So as for those in whose hearts there is a deviation (from the truth) they follow that which is not entirely clear thereof, seeking Al-Fitnah (polytheism and trials, etc.), and *ta’wilahu*, but none knows its *ta’wil* save God. and those who are firmly grounded In knowledge say: “We believe in it; the whole of it (clear and unclear verses) are from Our Lord” and none receive admonition except men of understanding.
285 Al ‘Askarī acknowledges the meanings proposed by Al-Dāmaghānī and Ibn Al Jawzī, but views it as secondary and weak.

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hidden meaning can be decoded and therefore interpreted by learned scholars. The word *ta‘wīl* has been used in the Qur‘ān to mean “various types and various descriptions of an entity or entities.” An example of this is found in the context of chapter Yusuf verse 37, in which the Qur‘ān uses the term *ta‘wīlihi* to describe the extraordinary ability of Prophet Joseph to foretell to people what they will get in the future and even provide the description of the various types of food they will receive.

The result and/or consequence of a specific action is another meaning in which *ta‘wīl* is quoted in the Qur‘ān. An example is evident in verse 59 of chapter Al Nisā‘.

The phrase “*ahsanu ta‘weela*” in the verse means a good end, consequence and abode. It is used in the context of recommending the companions refer matters of dispute back to the Prophet to resolve them. Furthermore *ta‘wīl* was used to refer to “the materialization of a foretold event.” An example of this use is in verse 53 of chapter Al A‘rāf.

The phrase “*Illāta‘wīlah. Yawmaya‘īt ta‘wīluhu*” refers to the time when the foretold event, which is in this instance the day of resurrection, takes place and becomes a reality. Moreover, *ta‘wīl*

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287 The cause of the difference of opinion among them in this instance is not related to the word *ta‘wīl*, rather it relates to the manner in which the phrase is read and the placement of the full stop. For further information, see Al Qurṭūbī, *Al Jāmi‘ Li Aḥkām Al Qur'an*; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al Qur'an Al Adhīm*.


289 “He said: ‘Before any food comes (in due course) to feed either of you, I will surely reveal to you its *ta‘wīlihi* descriptions and types before it befall you: that is part of the (duty) which My Lord hath taught me. I have (I assure you) abandoned the ways of a people that believe not In God and that (Even) deny the Hereafter.’”

290 Ibn Al Jawzī, *Nuzhat Al A'yun Al Nawādhir Fi 'Ilm Al Wujūh Wal Nadhā'ir*.

291 “O You who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger (Muhammad), and those of You (Muslims) who are in authority. (And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to God and his Messenger, if you believe In God and In the Last Day. That is better and *ahsanu ta‘weela* more suitable for final determination.”


293 “Await they just for *Illā Ta‘wīlah. Yawmaya‘īt ta‘wīluhu* the final fulfilment of the event? On the Day the event is finally fulfilled (i.e. the Day of Resurrection), those who neglected it before will say: “Verily, the Messengers of Our Lord did come with the truth, now are there any intercessors for us that they might intercede on our behalf? Or could we be sent back (to the first life of the world) so that we might do (good) deeds other than those (evil) deeds which we used to do?” Verily, they have lost their own selves (i.e. destroyed themselves) and that which they used to fabricate (invoking and worshipping others besides God) has gone away from them.”
is used to refer to the interpretation of a dream as well as the motive behind a given action. An example of the former is in verse 6 of chapter Yusuf in which the phrase “ta’wil al aḥādīth” refers to the ability to interpret dreams. An example of the latter is evident in verse 82 of chapter Al Kahf, in which ta’wil refers to the covert motivations and aims of Al Khadir, rather than the interpretation of his words.

The exploration of the various uses of ta’wil in the Qur’ān provides insight into the manner in which the term may be used in Arabic and a religious context. It demonstrates the Qur’ān did not define the term restrictively; rather it displayed a continuum of meanings. This justifies the presence of various technical definitions by scholars and simultaneously stands as proof against the attempts to confine it to a single meaning, which will be explored in the following section.

2.4.5 The technical definition of ta’wil

According to Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 CE), Dhahabī and Al Ṭayyār, the technical definition of ta’wil has not always been the same. Rather, it has undertaken distinct meanings in different periods of time. They distinguish between two main approaches: the predecessors’ approach and the late scholars’ approach.


296 “Thus will Your Lord choose you and teach you the ta’wil al aḥādīth interpretation of dreams (and other things) and perfect his Favor on You and on the offspring of ya’qūb (Jacob), as He perfected it on your fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ishāq (Isaac) a foretime! Verily, Your Lord is All-Knowing, All-Wise.”

297 “And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the town; and there was under it a treasure belonging to them; and their father was a righteous man, and Your Lord intended that they should attain their age of full strength and take out their treasure as a Mercy from Your Lord. And I did it not of my own accord. That is ta’wil of those (things) over which you could not hold patience.”

298 Al Khadirī the title of the man to whom God sent Prophet Moses to acquire from the knowledge of the unseen world. For further information about the story of Al Khadir with Prophet Moses, see the exegesis of surat Al Kahf in any Qur’ānic exegesis book.

They emphasise that the predecessors associated ta’wīl with two meanings only. The first meaning is “the explanation of a given phrase or sentence.” Therefore, according to them, it is synonymous with the term tafsīr. They supported their argument with statements from the famous exegetes from the predecessors, such as Mujāhid (722 CE) who used the term ta’wīl as a synonym for tafsīr in his commentary on verse 7 of chapter Al ‘Imrān. He explains, “The scholars know its ta’wīl,” meaning they know the interpretation of the verses. Similarly, they quote Ibn Abbās’ statement, the founder of the school of tafsīr in Makkah, in reference to the same verse, “I am from the firmly grounded scholars who know its ta’wīl,” in other words, the interpretation of the verses. Similarly, Ṭabarī used the term ta’wīl in his exegesis book as a substitute for the word tafsīr. He continuously states, “The opinion in the ta’wīl (the meaning) of God’s word is such and such…,” indicating the opinion of the scholars in the explanation of this is verse is such and such.

The second main meaning of ta’wīl, according to them, is “What is meant and intended by the speech.” This use of the term features a variety of interpretations, depending on the nature of the speech. If the speech is a command, then the ta’wīl of it would be to carry out the command because this is what the speaker intended. If the speech is a statement that foretells an event, then the ta’wīl of it would be for what is foretold to come to pass.

In contrast, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, Dhahabī and Al Ṭayyār, the late scholars deviated from the legacy of the predecessors. They claim many jurists, theologians, philosophers,
Sufis and deviants that came later changed the meaning of the term ta’wīl. The late scholars defined it as “it is to favour a probable meaning, in the understanding and explanation of an utterance, over a dominant meaning due to extraneous evidence that supports the former over the latter.”

Therefore, for ta’wīl to take place, three conditions must be satisfied: a) the utterance must be open to being interpreted in various meanings; b) the preferred meaning must be in line with the wording of the text; and c) extraneous evidence must support the preference of the far or probable meaning over the dominant one.

Ibn Taymiyyah used this argument to point to the existence of a rift between the classical scholars and the late scholars in the use of ta’wīl and to prove the late scholars’ approach is not traditionally endorsed and portrays a deviation from the early predecessors’ approach, who are traditionally viewed as more pious and knowledgeable.

The citations Ibn Taymiyyah and the others quote in their work to establish that the term ta’wīl was used synonymously with tafsīr by the early scholars are factual to a particular extent. Ullah confirms, “In the first two Islamic centuries, there was no differentiation between tafsīr, ta’wīl, and ma’ānī when used as a technical term for the works of exegesis.” However, these citations are irrelevant to the prime objective of the argument of Ibn Taymiyyah and the others about the existence of a rift between the classical and subsequent scholars. Simply, the classical scholars’ use of the term ta’wīl was not a technical use, rather it was lexical. The examples Ibn Taymiyyah quoted highlight two main uses of ta’wīl: (1) a synonym of the term tafsīr for an explanation of a given utterance in the Arabic language; and (2) a synonym of the term tafsīr in an explanation of the verses of the Qur’ān. Both uses of the term ta’wīl cannot be described as technical.

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307 Dhahabī, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon, 2; Al Ṭayyār, Mafhūm Al Tafsīr Wal Ta’wīl Wal Istinbāt Wal Al Tadabur Wal Mufassir; Ibn Taymiyyah, Al Ikāl Fi Al Mutashābih Wal Ta’wīl.
308 Ullah, Al-Kashāf: Al-Zamakhsharī’s Mu’tazilite Exegesis of the Qur’an; Rippin, Tafsīr.
because they do not deviate from the semantic continuum of the word,\textsuperscript{309} which is interpretation and explanation.\textsuperscript{310} Therefore, the examples Ibn Taymiyyah and his proponents cite do not warrant the need to divide the use of the term between the predecessors’ approach and the late scholars’ approach. Even if one was to assume Ibn Taymiyyah’s argument is correct, the variation between the early and late scholars in the employment of the term does not necessarily suggest the former opposed the technical definition introduced by the latter. Such a thought can only be scholarly valid if the classical scholars openly criticised or impugned the late scholars’ practice, a matter that is not possible because they lived at different times and such a debate did not take place. Therefore, the various definitions that were given by the subsequent scholars, including Al Māturīdī, represent a development in the genesis of \textit{ta’wīl} rather than a rift or deviation. It is noteworthy to state that the late scholars never waived the use of \textit{ta’wīl} as a synonym of \textit{tafsīr} nor did they introduce the technical definition as a replacement of the lexical one. Rather, they continued to use \textit{ta’wīl} as a synonym for \textit{tafsīr} in addition to the technical definition they devised.\textsuperscript{311}

The use of terms \textit{ta’wīl} and \textit{tafsīr} is not absolute in Islamic academia and the evidence of this conclusion is the different explanations that scholars provide in illustrating the differences between \textit{tafsīr} and \textit{ta’wīl}. This will be discussed in next section and will illustrate Al Māturīdī’s engagement in important academic debates related to the science of Qur’ānic exegesis during his time.

\textsuperscript{309} This has been elaborated earlier in the section of “the lexical definition of \textit{ta’wīl}”\thinspace \\\textsuperscript{310} Ibn Manẓūr, \textit{Lisān Al ‘Arab}, vol.1, 87.\thinspace \\\textsuperscript{311} One demonstration of this is the fact the scholars use the term \textit{ta’wīl} in such a context in the titles of their \textit{tafsīr} books, as is the case with Baydāwi and Zamakhsharī, for example.
2.4.6 The differences between *tafsīr* and *ta’wīl*

The exegetes differed whether *ta’wīl* and *tafsīr* should be used as identical synonyms or whether each term should be designated to highlight a distinct aspect or method in the process of Qur’ānic exegesis.

According to Dhahabī, many of the early scholars of *tafsīr*, one of them is Abū ‘Ubaydah (d. 828 CE), believed that both terms are completely synonymous.312 However, Dhahabī does not back up his claim with any specific quotations. Conversely, the early exegete Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān (d. 767 CE) held the opinion that a distinction between *tafsīr* and *ta’wīl* exists. In his view, *tafsīr* refers to the meanings that can be derived by humans and *ta’wīl* refers to meanings known by God alone.313 Abū Ishāq Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Al Tha’labī (d. 1035 CE) concurs with Muqātil that the terms are not synonymous. However, he argues that, “*tafsīr* is the science of learning about the revelation of the verse, its subject matter, its story and asbāb al-nuzūl (the reasons behind its revelation),”314 which can only obtained from narrative sources. While *ta’wīl* is “the rendering of the verse by a meaning that it might entertain and it is not prohibited on the scholars to infer it…because it becomes our reflection on the Qur’an and Sunnah.”315

Ḩusayn Ibn Muḥammad Al Rāghib Al Aṣfahānī (d. 1108 CE) considers *tafsīr* more generic than *ta’wīl*. According to him, *tafsīr* focuses on explanation of utterances, whereas *ta’wīl* focuses on explanations of notions and experiences. Furthermore, *ta’wīl* is used strictly for explanation of divine scriptures, while *tafsīr* is used for explanations of all texts. Another

313 Ullah, *Al-Kashaf: Al-Zamakhsharī’s Mu‘tazilite Exegesis of the Qur’an*
315 Ibid.
distinction he makes between the terms is *tafsīr* focuses on explanations of utterances when *ta’wīl* focuses on explanations of phrases and sentences.316

Abū Tālib Al Tha’labi subscribes to Al Aṣfahānī’s opinion as far as the meaning of *tafsīr* is concerned.317 However, he differs in relation to *ta’wīl*. He defines it as “the explanation of the inner part of the utterance,” 318 which focuses on the lessons and messages the speaker intends to convey.319 Abū Muḥammad Al Ḥusayn Al Baghawī (d. 1122 CE), Aḥmad Ibn Yūsuﬁ Muwaffaq Al Dīn Al Kawāshī (d.1281 CE) and Muḥammad Ibn Habīb Al Naysābūrī (d. 1016 CE) hold the same opinion on *tafsīr*. It focuses on explanations of the verse and its *sabab al-nuzūl* (cause of revelation) and tale, while *ta’wīl* is “the interpretation of the meaning of the verse in a manner that conforms to the context of the…verses and is not contrary to the Qur’ān and Sunnah through applying the method of *istinbāṭ* [inference].” 320

According to Abū Naṣr Ibn Al Qushayrī (d. 1120 CE), *tafsīr* refers to explanation of the verses obtained from the narrative sources strictly following the commentary of the Prophet, his companions and their disciples, a method he defines as *al ittibā’ wal samā’* (listening and following the transmitted narrations). On the other hand, *ta’wīl* refers to explanations of the verses through the method of deduction and *istinbāṭ* (inference). 321 Al Bajalī (d. 895 CE) subscribes to the same concept, but refers to them by the terms “*riwāya*” and “*dirāya*”, which respectively mean “the transmission from the

316 Al Rāghib Al Asfahānī, *Muqaddimat Jāmi’ Al Tafāsīr Ma’a Tafsīr Al Fāṭiha Wa Matāli’ Al Baqarah*.
318 Ibid.
319 He illustrates his opinion by providing an example of verse 14 of *surat* Al Fajr: “Verily, Your Lord is in Mirṣād (ever Watchful over them)”. According to Al Tha’labi, the *tafsīr* of the word “mirṣād” would be to watch someone and to keep track of their movements and actions. However, the *ta’wīl* of the “mirṣād” would be to warn one from belittling the command of God and being careless in the preparation for the moment of account in the Hereafter. For further information, see Zarkashī, *Al Burhān Fil Ulūm Al Qur’ān*; Suyūṭī, *Al Itqān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān*; Dhahabī, *Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon*, 2.
321 *Al Burhān Fil Ulūm Al Qur’ān*, vol. 2, 150.
early authorities’ method” and “critical reflections’ method.” Muḥyī’ Al Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240 CE) linked the terms tafsīr and ta’wīl to the concepts of exoteric and esoteric meanings. He explains, “and I understood from him that exoteric meanings are explained in tafsīr and esoteric meanings are explained in ta’wīl.”

The differences of opinion of the scholars about tafsīr and ta’wīl indicate, in essence and for a long period of time, there were no set markers that distinguished each term that all Muslim scholars accepted and followed. The claim of Ibn Taymiyyah, Dhahabī and Al Tayyār that the predecessors followed one set definition for ta’wīl and the late Muslim scholars followed a different set definition of ta’wīl is factually contradicted by the main authors that wrote in the field of exegesis and the sciences of the Qur’ān, such as Suyūṭī, Zarkashī and Ibn Aqīla, among others. In the introduction of his exegesis, Al Alūsī (d. 1854 CE) lists the main opinions that discuss the differences between tafsīr and ta’wīl and then states, “and all the opinions about the differences between them, the ones listed above and the ones aren’t, are different to what has been consented up on today.” Al Alūsī’s statement demonstrates the debate about the differences between tafsīr and ta’wīl was still happening in the nineteenth century.

2.4.7 Al Māturīdī’s opinion on tafsīr and ta’wīl

Did Al Māturīdī engage in the ongoing scholarly discussions about tafsīr and ta’wīl? And if yes, what was his opinion? Suyūṭī, Al Alūsī, Dhahabī and Ibn ‘Aqīlah in their discussions of the subject matter noted Al Māturīdī’s opinion about tafsīr and ta’wīl. They concurred that Al Māturīdī differentiated between the terms and did not see them as

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322 Suyūṭī, Al Itqān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān; Zarkashī, Al Burhān Fil Ulūm Al Qur’ān; Dhahabī, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassīroon, 2.
323 The pronoun ‘him’ refers to Prophet Mohammed’s commentary about the fact the Qur’ān has apparent and implied meanings.
325 Al Alūsī, Rūḥ Al Ma‘āni Fi Tafsīr Al Qur’an Al Karīm Wal Sab’ Al Mathānī, vol. 1, 6.
completely synonymous. According to them, he stated that *tafsir* is used in reference to the definitive meaning that one testifies and asserts that it is what God intended to say. Conversely, *ta’wil* is the process of favouring one meaning over the other without confirming it is definitely what God intended from the verse.\(^{326}\) Ullah subscribes partially to this opinion and affirms that Al Māturīdī differentiates between *tafsir* and *ta’wil*; however, he argues that, according to Al Māturīdī, “*tafsir* belongs to the companions because they witnessed the events and knew the circumstances of the revelation of the Qur’ān, whereas *ta’wil* is the domain of the scholars.”\(^{327}\)

In reality, both opinions are not far from each other; however, they differed because each side highlighted a specific aspect in the distinction that Al Māturīdī made between the terms and did not relate accurately to all the points he presented. In the introduction of his exegesis book, Al Māturīdī addresses the differences between *tafsir* and *ta’wil*. He explains, “…It is said that *tafsir* is to be used with the commentary of the companions when *ta’wil* should be used with the commentary of the scholars of profound knowledge…”\(^{328}\) Al Māturīdī then details the reasons for his definition of *tafsir*:

> The reason for such distinction is the fact that the companions witnessed all the events of revelation and know the matters for which the Qur’ān was revealed. Hence, their commentary, in this regard, is more important because of what they lived and observed which points to the objective behind the revelation and this can only be obtained from a credible and correct source that witnessed the revelation…\(^{329}\)

He continues to define *ta’wil* and states, “…it is to direct the meaning of the speech to one of its possible interpretations and one should not be strict in accepting it as they should be


\(^{328}\) Māturīdī, *Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah*, vol. 1,1.

\(^{329}\) Ibid.
with *tafsīr*...”330 and then elucidates the grounds for differentiating between *ta’wīl* and *tafsīr*. He explains:

...because in *ta’wīl* one does not claim that they definitely know what God intended of the speech and testify that it is what they say...Rather they say these are the possible interpretations of the speech according to the usage of the humans in language and only God knows whether it is what is intended not...*tafsīr* is related to what has a single possible meaning and *ta’wīl* is used in reference to what has more than one possible meaning.331

Following from the above, one understands that Al Māturīdī does not confine the use of the term *tafsīr* to one single definition. He uses it in reference to two important notions: (1) the commentary of the companions in reference to the events and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (causes of revelation) of a given verse and the direct intent behind it; and (2) the explanation of the words and clauses that have a single possible meaning.

On the other hand, he uses *ta’wīl* to refer to the exegetical commentary on the verses open to various interpretations and one cannot, in full conviction, claim that one specific interpretation represents the intention of God behind them. Al Māturīdī’s opinion and the argument he constructs to establish the distinction between the terms demonstrate his focus on contributing to the field and critiquing previous opinions rather than merely imitating the opinions of the scholars that preceded him. It is not coincidental that Al Māturīdī named his exegesis book *Ta’wilāt*, which is the plural form of the word *ta’wīl*, and then provided an explanation of the differences between *tafsīr* and *ta’wīl* in his introduction.

It seems Al Māturīdī was preparing the readers for the style he would employ in his exegesis. He wanted to explain from the outset that his commentary will include *tafsīr*-type information and simultaneously *ta’wīl*-type analysis and interpretation. In addition, Al Māturīdī does not see a conflict between the existence of a commentary provided by the

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330 Ibid.
331 Ibid.
companions and that provided by the scholars, given that each commentary stays within its relevant scope. Hence, he defines the framework of *tafsīr* and *taʿwīl*. This indicates Al Māturīdī was keen on opening discussions beyond the narrative exegetical method, which was traditionally and blindly followed. This point is reinforced further by his statement, “….one should not be strict in accepting (*taʿwīl*) as….should be with *tafsīr* because in *taʿwīl* one does not claim….they definitely know what God intended of the speech and testify that it is what they claim.” Al Māturīdī invites the readers to open their minds and at the same is careful not to allow the commentator to overstep their line of authority. Succinctly, Al Māturīdī points to the fact that the existence of *tafsīr* does not contradict the permissibility of seeking further analysis of the actual verse and practicing *taʿwīl*.

2.5 *Tafsīr bil maʿthūr* (exegesis by narration) and *tafsīr bil raʿy* (exegesis by reason)

2.5.1 *Tafsīr bil maʿthūr*

*Tafsīr bil maʿthūr*, a term commonly used, may be rendered in English as “traditional *tafsīr*” or *tafsīr al naqli* (tafsīr by narration), as Al ’Ak defines it, constitutes one of the two main categories of commentaries in the field of *tafsīr*. Despite the fact that many classical and contemporary Muslim scholars consent on the main constituents of *tafsīr bil maʿthūr*, there are differences between their approaches to the subject matter in style and content. Classical scholars such as Zarkashī, Ibn ’Aqīlah and Suyūṭī do not focus on defining this category, rather they review the scholarly discussion of the main elements in *tafsīr bil maʿthūr* and critique them with a focus on what they deem acceptable and authentic. In contrast, late scholars such as Dhahabī, Zarqānī, Al Rūmī and Qaṭṭān adhere to a structured approach that begins with defining narrative *tafsīr*, and then discusses the

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332 Ibid.
333 In the opinion of the researcher, Al ’Ak choice of term is equally suitable to the common term This is because it focuses on the most important element in this type of commentary, which is that it is transmitted from specific authorities. In fact, it is more accessible and clearer to contemporary readers.
334 K. Al ’Ak, *Usūl Al Tafsīr Wa Qawāʿiduh* (Beirut: Dar Al Nafa’is, 1986).
various related elements. Despite the fact the contemporary scholars endorse the same style; their content and perspective of narrative *tafsīr* are not congruent.

The first instance at which one witnesses the differences between them is the definition of *tafsīr* *bil ma’thūr*. Zarqānī provides the succinct definition of “what has come in the Qur’an or the prophetic traditions or the words of the companions, which explains the meanings that God intends in his book”\(^\text{335}\) and then discusses the various aspects of it. Al Rūmī, a contemporary Muslim scholar, subscribes to Zarqānī’s definition of *tafsīr* by narration, but confines it to the following conditions, “It does not include the attempt to explain a meaning (in the Qur’ān) without a proof, it does not consider explaining (matters) that are not substantial and no benefit can be obtained from learning them.”\(^\text{336}\) Al Rūmī neither provides the source from which he obtained this condition nor does he elaborate on the reasons that drove him to demand such conditions. The judgement of whether specific narrations provide substantial or beneficial information or not is highly subjective for it depends on what the scholar or assessor deems substantial or beneficial. Similarly, Qaṭṭān subscribes to Zarqānī’s definition, but incorporates the commentary of the senior *tabi‘īn*.\(^\text{337}\) He explains, “*Al tafsīr* *bil ma’thūr* is the commentary that can be relied upon from what has been authentically transmitted…and then from the senior *Tabi‘īn* for they have acquired most of their commentary from the companions.”\(^\text{338}\) The inclusion of the commentary of the *tabi‘īn* by Qaṭṭān in his definition of *tafsīr* by narration implies that all narrations of the *tabi‘īn* are an agreed upon constituent among exegetes. However, this is stand is debatable.

\(^{336}\) Al Rūmī, *Dirāsāt Fi ‘Uḥūm Al Qur’ān Al Karīm*, 165.
\(^{337}\) A term that refers to the senior disciples of the companions of Prophet Muhammad.
\(^{338}\) Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith Fi Uḥūm Al Qur’ān*, 347.
The classical scholars differed about the status of the commentary of the *tabi‘īn*. Zarkashī advises there are two opposing narrations from Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855 CE) in relation to accepting their commentary. He explains it is probable that Ibn Hanbal accepted their narrations from the companions, but opposed the inclusion of their commentary when it is merely their personal opinions.\(^{339}\) Similarly, Ibn ‘Aqīl and Shu‘bah did not accept the commentary of the *tabi‘īn* as part of *tafsīr* by narration. Dhahabī confirms this fact and states, “the scholars differed in reference to the commentary of the *Tabi‘īn* when it is not narrations from the Prophet and the companions.”\(^{340}\) After presenting the argument of the opposing scholars,\(^{341}\) Dhahabī concludes, “and what I am inclined to believe to be correct is that it is not compulsory on one to accept the commentary of the *Tabi‘īn* in exegesis unless it is based on narrative information and not just their personal opinion.”\(^{342}\)

Likewise, Ibn Taymiyyah endorses the views of Dhahabī and the early scholars. He states, “Shu‘bah Ibn Al Ḥajjāj and others contested and stated, ‘and how could the commentary of the *Tabi‘īn* be binding on Muslims…in exegesis when it is not so in any other discipline?’”\(^{343}\) He then concludes, “…and they are correct.”\(^{344}\) The only instance in which the aforementioned scholars accepted absolutely the commentary of the *tabi‘īn* is when they formed a consensus on a single opinion.\(^{345}\) Therefore, Qaṭṭān’s acceptance, of the commentary of the *tabi‘īnas* part of *tafsīr* by narration, is highly controversial, contested and rejected by many classical and contemporary scholars. Importantly, this does not mean their commentary is

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\(^{339}\) Zarkashī, *Al Burhān Fil Ulūm Al Qur‘ān*.

\(^{340}\) Dhahabī, *Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, 128.

\(^{341}\) The scholars of AlRa‘y supported their argument against the acceptance of the narrations of the *tabi‘īny* by the fact they did not acquire anything directly from the Prophet and therefore such a distinction cannot be ascribed to them. In addition they argued the credibility of the *tabi‘īn* has not been established through the divine sources as it is the case with the companions.

\(^{342}\) Dhahabī, *Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, 128.


\(^{344}\) Ibid.


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not accepted as a source of exegesis in *tafsīr* by narration; rather, it clarifies it is not considered binding.

As far as the narrations of the companions are concerned, most exegetes deemed them a fundamental part of narrative *tafsīr*. Al Ḥākīm (d. 1014 CE) explains, “and their (the companions) *tafsīr* is treated by them (the early scholars) equal to what is narrated directly from the prophet.” Nonetheless, a number of late scholars, such as Ibn Al Ṣalāḥ (d. 1245 CE), contested this generic statement. Ibn Al Ṣalāḥ explained that the view Al Ḥākīm presented is rather strictly applied in the context of the narrations that transmit *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the causes of revelation) of specific chapters, verses and matters that cannot be learnt through personal deductions and opinions. He asserts:

and what has been stated that the exegetical commentaries of the companions are to be given the status of *musnad* (prophetic traditions) is correct strictly in the context of reporting the cause behind the revelation of a specific verse…however, the exegetical commentaries that do not provide such information are classified as *mawqūf* (suspended - narrations attributed to the companions but not definitely to the Prophet).

Abū Shuhba, a contemporary Muslim scholar, concurs with Ibn Al Ṣalāḥ. In his opinion, if the exegetical commentaries of the companions are “…based on their personal opinions and…not quoted…from the Prophet should not be treated as hadith traditions…” rather they should be treated as personal opinions of the same status as the information the companions obtained from the former Christians and Jews. Interestingly, Al Ḥākīm, in his book *Ma’rifat Ulūm Al Ḥadīth*, clarifies his generic statement and explains, “when the companion who witnessed the revelation (of the Qur’ān) informs that a specific verse was

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347 Ibn Al Ṣalāḥ, Muqaddimat Ibn Al Ṣalāḥ Fi ‘Ulūm Al Ḥadīth, 81.
349 Ibid.
revealed because of such and such then such statements are classified equal to muṣnad hadith (prophetic traditions).”

Therefore, one may conclude that the definition of ṭaḥṣīr by narration that enjoys the consensus of all Muslim scholars refers to the traditions that narrate explanations of the Qur’ān by other verses, by the authentically transmitted traditions of the Prophet and by the authentic commentaries of the companions, which narrate asbāb al-nuzūl (the causes of revelation) its circumstances and information that is not based on their personal reasoning and deductions. In addition, it includes the commentaries upon which the tabīʿīn concur.

This discussion paves the way towards not only an accurate understanding of ṭaḥṣīr by narration, but more importantly it highlights Al Māturīdī’s opinion on the subject matter. Despite the fact Al Māturīdī did not explicitly offer his view on ṭaḥṣīr by narration and ṭaḥṣīr by reason, a revisit to the differences he establishes between ṭaḥṣīr and taʿwīl enables one to infer his opinion. When Al Māturīdī defines ṭaḥṣīr, as “the commentary of the companions…who witnessed all the events of revelation…Hence, their commentary, in this regard, is more important…,” he is in fact describing what is defined above as ṭaḥṣīr by narration. This conclusion is further ascertained by the similarities between the definitions. Moreover, Al Māturīdī’s description of ṭaḥṣīr conforms completely to the elements of consensus, stated above, among most of the classical and contemporary scholars of the Qur’ān in their definition of ṭaḥṣīr by narration. This stands as testimony of his profound grasp on the subject and his astute analysis and evaluation.

351 Māturīdī, Ta‘wīlāt Aḥlu Al Sunnāh, vol.1, 1.
2.5.2  Tafsīr bil ra’y

_Tafsīr bil ra’y_, a term commonly used by Muslim scholars, literally translates to “opinion-based exegesis” or _tafsīr al’aqli_, or _ijtihād_ based exegesis, which is a very accurate title for this genre of _tafsīr_. _Tafsīr bil ra’y_ represents the parallel category to _tafsīr bil ma’tūr_. It is the foundation of all the genres of _tafsīr_ including theological exegesis, which is at the heart of the study of Al Māturīdī’s work and his contributions to _tafsīr_.

2.5.3  The lexical and technical definition of _tafsīr bil ra’y_

The lexical root of the word _al ra’y_ relates to the ability to see. Ibn Fāris explains, “it is a root word that points to the ability to see and recognise (an entity or a notion) by the eye or by insight.” Ibn Manẓūr and Ibn Saydah concur with Ibn Fāris and state, “it is to sight with the eye and the heart.” However, they advise it may also be used in relation to “_i’tiqād_” (belief).

As far as the general technical use of the term by Muslims scholars is concerned, Munāwī, Al Kafawī and Aṣfahānī restrict its use, in the context of dogma, to “one’s belief that one

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352 Qaṭṭān, _Mabāḥith Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur’ān_; Juday’, _Al Muqaddimāt Al Asāsiyya Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur’an_; Zarqānī, _Manāhil Al Irfān Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur’ān_; Al Bughā and Mistū, _Al Wādih Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur’ān_; Suyūṭī, _Al Itqān Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur’ān_.

353 Al ‘Ak, _Usūl Al Tafsīr Wa Qawā’iduh_.

354 _Ijtihād_ is to exert all efforts, by a qualified scholar, to discover the religious ruling in a given case. Then Dhahabī explains that _ijtihād_ could be performed only “after the exegete acquires the language of the Arabs and their speech styles, the Arabic utterances and their implications. He seeks aid in the Pre Islamic poetry and the causes of the revelations of the chapters of the verses. He must have knowledge of the abrogating verses and the abrogated ones as well as the other instruments that an exegete must possess in order to explain the Qur’an.” For further information, see Dhahabī, _Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon_, vol 1, 255.


357 Ibn Fāris, _Mu’jam Maqāyīs Al Lugha_.


359 Ibn Manẓūr, _Lisān Al ‘Arab_; Ibn Saydah Al Mursi, _Al Muḥkam Wal Muḥīṭ Al A’ẓam_.

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of two opposing views is more correct based on stronger probability and proof." Ibn Al Qayyim concurs, but elaborates on the process of developing al ra’y. He explains it takes place, “…after thinking, contemplating and seeking the truth about a matter that is unclear.”

In the discipline of tafsīr, al ra’y is synonymous with ijtihād. Zarqānī elaborates, “…what is meant by al ra’y here (in the context of tafsīr) is ijtihād.” Similarly, Dhahabī defines it as “the explanation of the Qur’an using ijtihād.” Despite the brevity of his definition, most scholars subscribe to Dhahabī’s definition. Nonetheless, Qaṭṭān defines it as:

It is when the exegete relies on his intellectual effort to explain the meanings (of the verses) based on his personal understanding and deduction – it doesn’t include the understanding that is congruent with the spirit of the Sharia – such personal opinion, which is unascertained, is a radical and unscholarly understanding of the book of God.

Qaṭṭān’s definition is problematic as it not only opposes the definitions of the overwhelming majority of exegetes and scholars of Qur’ānic science, but it is also inconsistent with the personal deduction he provides later in his discussion of the topic. He states, “whoever speaks (in the matters of tafsīr) based on a legitimate academic background in Sharia and Arabic language then there is no sin or repercussions for their

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362 Zarqānī, Manāhil Al Irfān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān; Dhahabī, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon, 2; Itr, Ulūm Al Qur’an Al Kareem; Al Bughā and Mistū, Al Wādih Fi Ulūm Al Qur’an; Juday’, Al Muqaddimāt Al Asāsiyya Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur’ān; Al Ibrāhīm, Buḥūth Manhajiyyya Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur’ān Al Karīm; Al Rūmī, Dirāsāt Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur’an Al Karīm; Al ‘Ak, Usūl Al Tafsīr Wa Qawā’iduh.
363 Zarqānī, Manāhil Al Irfān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān, vol. 2, 44.
364 Dhahabī, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon, vol. 1, 255.
365 Al Ibrāhīm provides a more succinct and clearer definition and discussion of the topic. He states, “it is the tafsīr in which the exegete relies on ijtihād and inference which is based on the credible linguistic and religious principles. He does not stop at (in his endeavour to explain the verses) transmitting the meanings of the verses that the early Muslim exegetes that preceded him provided.” For further information, see Al Ibrāhīm, Buḥūth Manhajiyyya Fi ‘Ulūm Al Qur’an Al Karīm, 100.
366 Qaṭṭān, Mabāhith Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān, 351.
efforts.” The exception Qaṭṭān makes here represents one of the main elements in the definitions formulated by all the other scholars of *tafsīr bil ra’y*. The statement demonstrates Qaṭṭān accepts the use of *ijtihād* in *tafsīr*, which raises the question: why did he fail to mention it in his definition? One may find the answer to this question in the overall argument Qaṭṭān builds in the paragraph about the ruling concerning the permissibility of *tafsīr bil ra’y*. Qaṭṭān openly opposes *tafsīr bil ra’y* and stresses the importance of adhering to *tafsīr by narration* only. It seems he opposes the legitimating of *tafsīr bil ra’y* altogether. This prompted him to limit the definition to the baseless opinion that results from personal inclinations and non-academic analysis and inferences.

2.5.4 The legitimacy and permissibility of *tafsīr bil ra’y*

The legitimacy and permissibility of the use of *ra’y* or *ijtihād* in *tafsīr* was the subject of much debate and controversy among Muslim exegetes. Particularly in the first two centuries of the development of the science, the topic polarised academic circles between those who refrained from it and opposed it vehemently, and those who valued and practiced it.

In the first two centuries of the evolution of *tafsīr*, the narrative exegesis dominated the discipline of *tafsīr*. Narrative *tafsīr* was fairly limited because it explained selected verses and did not provide a comprehensive explanation of the entire Qur’ān. The need for more information and clarity opened the door to the discussion of the use of *ra’y* in *tafsīr*. Consequently, scholars split in two main groups: (1) the opponents of *ra’y* in *tafsīr*; and (2) the proponents of *ra’y* in *tafsīr*. Each party constructed an argument to justify and

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367 Ibid, 353.
368 The title of the paragraph is “*Ḥukm Al tafsīr bil ra’y*” and is found on page 352
369 Khālidi, *Ta’rif Al Dārisīn Bi Manāhij Al Mufassirīn*; Dhahabī, *‘Ilm Al Tafsīr; Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon*, 2.
370 Khālidi, *Ta’rif Al Dārisīn Bi Manāhij Al Mufassirīn*; Dhahabī, *Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon*, 2; Dhahabī, *‘Ilm Al Tafsīr*.
ascertain the validity of their view. A common error in the description of the argument of both sides is that it is illustrated as an argument between those who endorse tafsīr by narration and those who endorse tafsīr bil ra’y. This is inaccurate because the reality is this is a debate between those who oppose tafsīr bil ra’y and those who permit it. The scholars who supported the use of ra’y did not reject the narrative tafsīr. This is important because some present the argument as an opposition between the traditionalists who were trying to preserve the integrity and authenticity of tafsīr bil ma’thūr and those who want to compromise and obliterate it.

The opponents of tafsīr bil ra’y supported their argument with various evidences from the Qur’ān and traditions of the Prophet to classify the use of ra’y in tafsīr as prohibited. When reflecting on the verses they quoted in support of their view, three fundamental points are revealed. The first is that tafsīr bil ra’y is speaking on behalf of God without a granted authority, which is prohibited in the Qur’ān. God says, “Say (o’ Muhammam): the things that My Lord has indeed forbidden…and saying things about God of which you have no knowledge”\textsuperscript{371} and in another verse of the Qur’ān God says, “and pursue not that of which you have no knowledge…”\textsuperscript{372} They argue that exegete using tafsīr bil ra’y cannot unequivocally ascertain his commentary reveals what God intended to convey. Therefore, they are delving into an area in which they have no knowledge and are assuming to explain what God intends without any evidence. The counter-argument of the proponents of ra’y to this point is that the astute and pious exegetes neither assume such an authority nor do they claim their commentaries are what God intended. Rather, they explore the various possibilities of meanings that can be conveyed by the utterances within the boundaries of Sharia and rudiments of tafsīr.

\textsuperscript{371} Qur’ān 7:33.
\textsuperscript{372} Qur’ān 17:36.
The second point is that such commentary is built on ẓan, which means, according to them, conjecture and speculation that cannot be verified. God says, “But they have no knowledge therein. They follow nothing but ẓan (conjecture); and ẓan (conjecture) avails nothing against Truth.” Therefore, to attempt to explain the Qur’ān on such grounds is prohibited and cannot be true. The proponents of ra’y argue this is correct when the truth is evident and yet one ignores it and follows conjectures and personal preferences. However, this is not the case in the correct practice of ra’y in tafsīr because it is used in the absence of definite and clear explanations from God and the Prophet. In addition, the quotation of the above verse in support of the prohibition of ẓan in tafsīr is incorrect and irrelevant because the verse was revealed in the context of rebutting the claim of the polytheist Arabs that the angels that serve God are females. Hence, the word ẓan in the verse refers to conjecture and speculation. Conversely, when scholars use the term ẓan they refer to the result of academic analysis. Al Jurjānī defines ẓan as “the belief or opinion built on what is most probable with the possibility of the opposite being correct.” In other words, it refers to knowledge based on probable evidence with a small possibility of error.

The third point is the confinement of the right of exegesis to Prophet Muhammad exclusively. The Qur’ān says, “…and we have sent down unto you (also) the Message; that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them…” According to their understanding of the verse, God restricted the right to comment on the meanings of the Qur’ān to Prophet Muhammad alone and consequently the use of ra’y or ijtihād is not authorised. The proponents of ra’y concurred with the fact the Prophet has the right to

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373 Ẓan is an Arabic word that enjoys various lexical and technical meanings and may be used to refer to opposites. Thus, ẓan may mean “doubt” or “conjecture” and at the same time be used to refer to “belief” and “conviction.” For further information, see Ibn Manẓur, Lisān Al ‘Arab and Jurjānī, Al Ta’rīfā.


375 This is one of various meanings, see footnote 374. Al Qurṭūbī, Al Jāmi‘ Li Ahkām Al Qur’ān; Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr Al Qur’ān Al Adhīm.

376 A. Jurjānī, Kitāb Al Ta’rīfāt (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnan, 1985), 149.

377 Qur’ān 16: 44.
explain the Qur’ān. However, the undeniable truth is that the Prophet did not explain everything in the Qur’ān. Thus, it is the duty of the scholars, who are the heirs of the Prophet, to explicate what has not been explained based on methodology that can be derived from prophetic exegetical commentaries.

In addition to the Qur’ānic verses, the opponents of ra’y sought aid in quoting a few prophetic narrations that, in their view, prohibit the use of ra’y in tafsīr. However, many scholars such as Al Maqdisi, Ibn Al Qaṭṭān, Al Bayhaqi, Aḥmad Shākir, Al Munāwī, and Albāni questioned the authenticity of these narrations, while others such as Zarkashī, Suyuṭī, Bayhaqī, Al Māwardī, Zarqānī and Al ‘Ak questioned the relevance of these narrations to the subject of discussion. They all consent that the prophetic narrations do not stipulate an absolute prohibition of the use of ra’y; rather, it prohibits the use of ra’y when it is based on one’s whims and not supported by academic reasoning. Al Bayhaqī states:

And even if one assumes that the narrations are authentic, what the prophet would have meant by them is to refer to… the ra’y that is not supported by any evidence.

378 This phrase is taken from a tradition in which the Prophet describes Muslim scholars as his inheritors, which points to their authority and status in Islam. The Prophet says, “Indeed, the scholars are the inheritors of the prophets, for the prophets do not leave behind a dinar or a dirham for inheritance, but rather, they leave behind knowledge. So whoever takes hold of it, has acquired a large share (i.e. of inheritance).” For further information, see A. Tirmidhī, Jamī’ Tirmidhī, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al Gharb, 1998); S. Al Sijistānī, Sunan Abī Dāvūd (Beirut: Dar al Kutub Al ‘Ilmiyyah, 2008).

379 They used two main narrations: “whoever explains the Qur’an based on his own opinion and without knowledge then let him be warned of a seat in the Hellfire” and “whoever explains the Qur’an based on his own opinion is at fault even if what he says turns out to be true.”


382 A. Al Bayhaqi, Al Jāmi’ Li Shu’ab Al Īmān, 14 vols. (Riyadh: Makatabat Al Rushd, 2003).


385 Zarkashī, Al Burhān Fil Ulūm Al Qur’ān.

386 Suyuṭī, Al Iqān Fī Ulūm Al Qur’ān.

Such use of *ra’yi* isn’t allowed whether in the Islamic jurisprudence or in *tafsīr*. To contrary, the *ra’yi* that is based on evidence may be used in the Islamic jurisprudence and in *tafsīr*.

Al Māwardī agrees with Al Bayhaqī and elucidates that such a literal understanding of the narrations belongs to “few ultra-conservative scholars of Hadith” and is not endorsed by the majority of Muslim scholars. He asserts their opinion defies the command of God to contemplate the Qur’ān and, if applied, most of the Qur’ān will remain unexplained.

In addition to their rebuttals, the proponents of *tafsīr bil ra’yi* formulated a strong argument backed by various types of evidence from the Qur’ān and the traditions of the Prophet. They quoted many verses that demand and encourage Muslims to ponder the words of the Qur’ān, conduct *al tafakkur* (reflection) and use the faculty of ‘*aql* (reason) to understand and unlock their hearts to gain piety and elevation. For instance, the Qur’ān says, “Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur’ān, or are their hearts locked up by them?”

In addition, they quoted verses that encourage investigation through inference and deduction, such as verse 83 of chapter Al Nisā’, “if they had only referred it to the Messenger, or to those charged with authority among them, the proper investigators would have tested it from them (direct).” Ibn Abbās explained the clause “to those charged with authority” refers to scholars who are qualified to infer, deduce and investigate. They argue how could knowledge acquired through *ra’yi* be prohibited when God encourages Muslims to reflect over his verses? It is impossible for Muslims to fulfil the command of God to contemplate, reflect and infer from the Qur’ān without using the faculty of ‘*aql* (reason). Furthermore, the prohibition of *ra’yi* leads to an instant prohibition of *ijtihād* in Islamic law, because the former is one of the manifestations of the latter. How could one

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390 An example of this is verse 242 of *surat* Al Baqarah:“Thus Allah makes clear his Ayāt (Laws) to you, In order that You may, use your ‘Aql, to understand.”
392 Al Qurṭūbī, *Al Jāmi‘ Li Aḥkām Al Qur‘ān*. 

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infer new rulings without the employment of *ijtihād* to verses of the Qurʾān, which is the primary source of all laws in Islamic jurisprudence? A fact that cannot be denied is that the Prophet did not explain all verses or stipulate the laws of every matter. The right of scholars to use *ijtihād* was established by the consensus of the companions and scholars.\(^{393}\)

Thus, it cannot be waived in either the Qurʾān or the traditions of the Prophet.

In addition, in a well-known hadith, Prophet Muhammad supplicated for Ibn Abbās to be given insight in knowledge of religion and *tafsīr*. He said, “O’ God, provide him with profound understanding of religion and teach him the skill of *ta‘wil* (understanding and explanation of the Qur’an).”\(^{394}\) If the scope of exegesis was restricted to what one learns from narrative sources only, then this supplication is pointless because one cannot explain verses when they have already been explained by the Prophet. The fact of the matter is, Ibn Abbās, and other companions, used *ra‘y* in *tafsīr* and none of the companions objected to the practice, which can be classified as an *ijmā’* *sukūti* (tacit consensus).

It is undeniable that many of the prominent scholars in the fields of ‘*ulūm al Qurʾān* (sciences of the Qurʾān), *tafsīr* and Arabic philology, such as Zarkashī, Suyūṭī, Al Rāghib Aṣfahānī, Zarqānī, Dhaḥabī, Mistū, Bugha, ‘Itr, Māwardī, Ibn Aṭiyyah and Qurṭūbī believed that *tafsīr* *bil ra‘y* is acceptable as long as it follows scholarly criteria and is not built on one’s whims and personal inclinations. Consequently, they divided the use of *ra‘y* in *tafsīr* into two types: (1) *ra‘y Maḥmūd*, praiseworthy and credible reason; and (2) *ra‘y* Madhmūm, blameworthy and unsound reason. Ibn Aṭiyyah states:


And it is not part of (ra’y Madhmūm) when the philologists interpret the Qur’an according to the uses of the Arabic language, when the grammarians interpret it according to the laws of grammar and when the Jurists interpret it according to the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. Each one of them practices Ijtihād in his respective field observing the academic maxims and scholarly methodology.395

It is needless to state that Al Māturīdī believed in the legitimating of tafsīr bil ra’y and promoted the use of ra’y in tafsīr through his personal practice in his exegesis. One may assume that Al Māturīdī did not address the issue directly, but his definition of ta’wil implies tafsīr bil ra’y when he discusses one of the elements of ta’wil and states it is “the possible interpretations of the speech according to the usage of the humans in language,”396 which is a clear reference to the use of human reason and intellect in explaining verses.

2.6 Conclusion

The discipline of tafsīr passed through various stages that underscore the development of tafsīr into an academic field. The characteristics of the various stages point to the fact that tafsīr was not all divinely revealed to Prophet Muhammad; therefore, it is open to study, assessment and critique. Chronologically, Al Māturīdī lived during the early stages of classical exegesis when the science was beginning to appear as an independent science in its own right. Therefore, Al Māturīdī is among the earliest scholars to write in the field of tafsīr, particularly as he was a contemporary of Ṭabarī, who is recognised as the first exegete to write a complete and comprehensive tafsīr book in the narration style. He lived when the discipline was still evolving, which makes his contributions to tafsīr, established in chapter 3, historically and academically significant and important. The existence of his title during such a critical period is sufficient testimony of his contributions to the science of tafsīr and scholarship. Geographically, Al Māturīdī lived far from the main cities of tafsīr. The closest capital of tafsīr to him was Kūfah, in modern day Iraq, which is still

396 Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahlu Al Sunnah, vol. 1, 1.
distant from Central Asia and Samarqand. This opens the debate to the possibility Al Māturīdī did not have access to narrative \textit{tafṣīr} sources as readily as other exegetes, which may have influenced him to resort to rational exegesis. However, a review of the status of the \textit{tafṣīr} movement in his region, which this research undertook for the first time ever, indicates Muslim scholars there were not only aware of the dynamic developments in the field of \textit{tafṣīr}, but they significantly contributed and influenced the discipline in their region and the capitals of \textit{tafṣīr} of the Muslim world. Accordingly, Al Māturīdī was at the heart of robust debates that were concerning exegetical circles. At the same time, his study under prominent Ḥanafī scholars who inherited the knowledge of Ibn Masʿūd, the founder of the Kūfah \textit{tafṣīr} school, would have enriched his knowledge in the field further. This leads to the very important conclusion that the style Al Māturīdī applies in his exegesis was not forced upon him by the restrictions of his circumstances or geographical location, rather it was a methodology he devised and applied based on his personal perceptions and thoughts in the field.

\textit{Tafṣīr bil raʿy}, rational exegesis, the genre, in which Al Māturīdī wrote his exegesis book, is one of the two main categories of \textit{tafṣīr} in Islam. The legitimacy of this category has been established through scholarly debate and the endorsement and recognition of the majority of the classical and contemporary scholars to its importance. It has enriched the discipline of \textit{tafṣīr} and influenced the contemporary form of \textit{tafṣīr}. Al Māturīdī’s contribution to the debate about the notions of \textit{tafṣīr} and \textit{ta’wīl}, and the recognition of the scholars of his views on the matter proves he was a leading figure and not an imitator. The above findings establish the premise that Al Māturīdī was aware of the exegetical debates in his time and was a scholar who pioneered the interpretative style of exegesis. His contributions to \textit{tafṣīr} in the aspects of the divine attributes will be examined and critiqued in the following chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: 
THE ANALYSIS OF AL MĀTURĪDĪ’S COMMENTARY ON THE 
DIVINE ATTRIBUTES VERSES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on Al Māturīdī’s contributions to the field of exegesis specifically in verses related to the nature and attributes of God. To assess Al Māturīdī’s efforts in the field and whether they can be classified as new contributions to exegesis, it is essential to establish the views of the preceding Sunni exegetes and their approach to the interpretation of the verses of divine attributes. This requires a summary of their writings and commentaries in *tafsīr*, which reflects their various opinions about the subject matter. This helps establish whether Al Māturīdī was an imitator or founder of a new methodology or paradigm to the explanation and analysis of the verses related to divine attributes.

While not all the exegetical titles of the early Sunni exegetes exist or were formally published, a substantial number of important exegeses have become available in recent centuries. Mainly, this is due to the efforts of contemporary Muslim academics who located, edited, studied and published a number of manuscripts of earlier Sunni exegetes. This necessarily changes the Sunni exegesis landscape and affords the reader a better insight into the academic movement before the time of Al Māturīdī. Some of the important titles that preceded the exegesis of Al Māturīdī in print today, are: (1) the *tafsīr* of Mujāhid Ibn Jabr (d. 719 CE), whose exegesis represents the earliest written Qur’anic Sunni exegesis in existence; (2) the *tafsīr* of Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān (d. 767 CE); (3) the *tafsīr* of Sufyān Al Thawrī (d. 777 CE); and (4) the *tafsīr* of Abdul Razzāq Al Ṣana’ānī (d. 826 CE), whose exegesis precedes that of Al Māturīdī by an entire century and has been

completely preserved. In addition, the investigation consults other important sources of the Sunni exegesis: (1) contemporary studies that focused on collecting all the exegetical narrations and commentaries of prominent Mu’tazilite exegetes before and during the time of Al Māturīdī and compiled it in one title, such as the *tafsīr* of Abū Bakr Al Aṣmm (d. 839 CE), the *tafsīr* of Abū Al Qāsim Al Ka’bī (d. 931 CE) and the *tafsīr* of Abū Muslim Al Aṣfahānī (d. 933 CE); and (2) encyclopaedic exegesis books, written by contemporaries of Al Māturīdī, namely Tabarī and Ibn Abī Ḥātim who attempted to collect all the exegetical commentaries from the first three generations, which represents the traditional Sunni exegesis. This is coupled with a chronological and analytical study of the evolution of the theological debate about the attributes of God and how the various theological schools approached it until the time of Al Māturīdī.

Since the overarching aim of the chapter is to investigate Al Māturīdī’s contributions to the interpretation of divine attributes verses, this study analyses and critiques the main categories of the divine attributes: (1) *sifāt al dhāt*, the absolute attributes, which relate to the Divine Self in Himself, such as the attributes of oneness, *yad* and ‘*ayn; and (2) *sifāt al af’āl*, the attributes of actions, also known as relative attributes, such as the attributes of creation, *istiwā* and speaking to creation. The limitations of this study do not permit investigation of all the attributes listed under each category. Hence, the focus will be on the main attributes in each category that became the focus of theological debate among the various Sunni schools and the attributes Al Māturīdī emphasised in his exegesis.

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400 These narrations have been collected from various Sunni and Shia’ exegesis titles. For further information, see A. Al Aṣmm, *Tafsīr Abū Bakr Al Aṣmm* (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al ‘Ilmiyyah, 2007).
401 Ibid.
404 This is a reference to the generations of the companions, their successors and the disciples of the successors.
405 *Yad* may refer to power and hand or hands.
406 ‘*Ayn* may refer to many meanings, among them eye and protection.
407 There are many differences of opinion about the meaning of *istiwā*, among them dominion and rising on the throne.
It investigates his approach to the anthropomorphic expressions in the related verses and his understanding of their impact on the interpretation of divine attributes. This chapter argues that Al Māturīdī contributed greatly to Sunni theological exegesis and played an influential role in founding an innovative approach in Sunni exegesis to the study and belief in the nature and attributes of God.

3.2 The history of the debate about the attributes of God

Al Māturīdī’s interpretations cannot be understood correctly without studying the evolution of Muslim theology, specifically the various opinions of Muslim scholars about the attributes of God and how they later shaped as independent theological schools. How did the various schools develop their views on the attributes of God? Have these views influenced Al Māturīdī’s approach to the exegesis of the divine attributes verses? A chronological study of the evolution of the theological movements will best serve the purpose of this thesis as it will simplify the numerous theological opinions, which are complex, unclear and overlapping, and shed light on Al Māturīdī’s exegetical and epistemological contributions. The focus will be on theological aspects that are directly related to the attributes of God throughout the Islamic history until the time of Al Māturīdī.

3.2.1 During the time of the Prophet and the companions

Despite the fact that the companions of the Prophet discussed some theological topics during the lifetime of the Prophet, such as the divine decree, they did not engage in any discussion related to the names and attributes of God. Chroniclers and Muslim scholars agree that such a topic was not opened during the life of the Prophet, either by him or by his companions.⁴⁰⁸ Ibn Al Qayyim states, “…Indeed the companions disputed in relation to many matters…However they did not dispute not even in one aspect that relates to the

⁴⁰⁸ Shahrastānī, Al Milal Wal Nihal; Ibn Tāhir al-Baghdādī, Al Farq Bayna Alfiraq Wa Bayān Al Firqa Al Nājiyah Minhum.
names, attributes and actions of God…”409 Al Maqrīzī (d. 1442 CE), a famous Muslim chronicler, confirms Ibn Al Qayyim’s statement and stresses, “…and know when God sent from amongst the Arabs his prophet Muhammad…he described to them their God…and none from the Arabs…asked him about the meaning of any of it (the attributes)…”410 After the Prophet’s demise, the status quo continued and all theologians, from the various schools, confirm that the companions believed in the attributes of God and did not study or explain them, with the assurance that God cannot be similar to his creation. Hence, the books that collected traditions of the Prophet and the exegetical narrations do not contain a record of any authentic narrations from the exegetes of the companions that delve into these topics. Al Maqrīzī emphasises this further, “…and whoever looks closely in the tens of books of prophetic traditions and the narrations of the Salaf411 would know for certainty that none reported from the companions…any narration…about the meaning of what God described himself with…”412 Then he continues, “…and none of them differentiated between the attribute of Al Dhāt413 and the attributes of Al fi’l414…”415 

Thus, topics such as “is an attribute of God part of his self or not?” and “are there different types of attributes?” are foreign to the generation of the companions. They believed in the attributes of God as a homogenous concept and that God is perfect and these attributes reflect his perfection. Moreover, there are records in which the second caliph ‘Umar publicly and openly advocated against delving into the meanings of the unclear verses and utterances in the Qur’ān.416 This fact puts all the theological schools that developed later in

411 It refers to the Righteous predecessors from the Sunni scholars that lived during the first three Islamic centuries.
412 Ibid.
413 Al Dhāt is a term used by Muslim theologians in reference to the Self of God.
414 Al fi’l is a term used by Muslim theologians in reference to the attributes of God.
416 Al Qurṭūbī, Al Jāmi’ Li Aḥkām Al Qur’an; Tabarî, Jāmi’ Al Bayān Fi Ta’wil Al Qur’an.
a conundrum. The lack of direct commentaries from the companions makes it difficult for one to determine unequivocally which understanding is factual and legitimate. This serves as an indicator of Al Māturīdī’s objectivity in his commentary and how he explains the verses in comparison to others.

3.2.2 The period post the conflict of ‘Ali and Mu’āwiyyah and the emergence of the Shiite movement

According to Sunni and Shiite scholars, the suggestion of a relationship or link between the nature of God and His attributes and creation, namely humans, began with some radical Shiite personalities that falsely pledged allegiance to the fourth caliph Ali Ibn Abī Ṭālib (d.661 CE). Abdullah Ibn Saba’ (d. unknown), as indicated in the biographical and historical sources of Sunni and Shiite literature, was the first person in the Muslim nation to suggest assimilation between God and humans, which became known among Muslim theologians as the concept of tashbīh.\(^{417}\) Ibn Saba’ claimed God embodied Ali; therefore, the latter is a physical human part of God. This indirectly assumes God can have a physical and dimensional shape.\(^{418}\) It is essential to clarify that Ibn Saba’’s teachings were rejected by Ali and scholars of the Muslim community.\(^{419}\) However, it did gain some acceptance among some of the new Muslims in the lands far from the capital. This was followed by Bayān Ibn Sam’ān Al Tamīmī (d. unknown), who claimed God “...has a human image and can perish completely except his face and that the spirit of God resided in Ali, then in his son Muhammad Ibn Al Ḥanafiyyah...”\(^{420}\) This concept metamorphosed further in the hands of Mughīrah Ibn Sa’d Al ‘Īljī (n.d) who claimed God is “an actual man of light who wears

\(^{417}\) Tashbīh is a term used in Islamic theology to describe the concept of attributing human likeness to God.
\(^{418}\) M. Ṭūsī, Ikhtiyār Ma’rifatu Al Rijāl (Iran: Mu’assasat Al Nashr Al Islami); Ibn Tāhir al-Baghdādī, Al Farq Bayna Alfiraq Wa Bayān Al Farq Al Nājiyah Minhum; Shahristānī, Al Milal Wal Nihal; A. Ibn Hazm, Al Mawu’ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Aḥzāb Al Mu’āṣira.
\(^{419}\) Later on Ibn Saba’ claimed he is a prophet from God. For further information, see Ṭūsī, Ikhtiyār Ma’rifatu Al Rijāl.
\(^{420}\) N. Al Jazā’īrī, Al Anwār Al Nu’māniyyah (Beirut: Mu’assasat Al A’la lil Matbu’at, 2010), vol. 2,206; Sa’d. Al Qummī, Al Maqālāt Wal Firaq, 55.
a crown and whose heart is the source of wisdom...and he writes the actions of the humans on the palm of his hand421…” and Muhammad Ibn Abī Zaynab Al Asadī (d. unknown), who claimed all the heirs of the Prophet are Gods and then claimed that he is God.422 Little information is recorded about the development of these movements in Sunni and Shiite literature. Does Al Māturīdī address the issue of tashbīh in his exegesis? Did it affect his exegesis and how does he counter or treat it? This is a fundamental element of this study. The practice of tashbīh took place in Sunni circles as well and its proponents became commonly known as al Mushabbiyah,423 but were also called by some scholars al Hashawiyyah.424 However, their appearance came late chronologically after the emergence of al Mu’āṭṭilah,425 who are discussed below.

3.2.3 The era of the Umayyad and emergence of the notion of taʿṭīl of the attributes

According to Ibn Kathīr426(d. 1373 CE) and Ibn Taymiyyah427(d. 1328 CE), the first person recorded in Islamic history to introduce the notion taʿṭīl428 is Al Ja’d Ibn Dirham429(d. 724

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421 Al Jazā’irī, Al Anwār Al Nu’māniyyah, vol. 2, 206; Al Qummi, Al Maqālāt Wal Firaq, 55.
423 It is the adjective form of the noun tashbīh, which relates to claiming likenesses between God and his creation.
424 Al Hashawiyyah is a derogatory term that has been used by various groups to refer to their opponents. Ibn Taymiyyah argued it was devised by the Mu’tazilites to attack hadith scholars, while Al Subkī and Tahāniwī used it to refer to those who claimed God has bodily features. In the context of this thesis, it is used to refer to those who believe that God resembles his creation. For further information, see M. Tahāniwī, Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥat Al Funūn Wal ‘Ulūm (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnan, 1996); Isfārā’īnī, Al Taḥṣīr Fī Al Dīn Wa Tamyīz Al Firaq Al Nājiyah ‘an Al Firaq Al Hālikin; Ibn Taymiyyah, Majmū’ Fatāw Shaykh Al Islām Ibn Taymiyyah.
425 Al Mu’āṭṭilah is a term used to describe those who disable the meanings of the attributes of God. For further information, see Ibn Tahir al-Baghdaḍī, Al Farq Bayna Al Firaq Wa Bayān Al Firaq Al Nājiyah Minhum; Shahrastānī, Al Milāl Wal Nihāl; Juhanī, Al Mawu’ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Aḥzāb Al Mu’āṣira.
427 Dhahabī, Tadhkirat Al Ḥuffāẓ; Abū Ya’la, Tābqāt Al Hanābilah.
428 Taʿṭīl refers to the concept of disabling the meanings of the attributes of God mentioned in the Qur’an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad.
429 Amīn, Ḍuḥā Al Islām; Ibn Kathīr, Al Bidaya Wal Nihaya.
CE), from whom Jahm Ibn Safwān(430(d.749 CE) acquired the concept and then publicised and became known for it.431 Thus, according to Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathīr, Al Ja’d is the intellectual founder of this notion, but Jahm Ibn Safwān is the public propagator. This claim is endorsed by Ibn Abī Al ‘Izz 432(d. 1390 CE), Al Dhahabī433 and the contemporary Al Ghurābī,434 but there is no record of Al Ja’d’s personal writings and opinions. A question that arises is, what caused Al Ja’d to deny the attributes of God? Ibn Kathīr relates that Al Ja’d used to attend the circles of Wahb Ibn Munabbih435(d.732 CE) and ask him about the attributes of God. Wahb warned him multiple times of his ideas and advised him, “…refrain from discussing this topic…If God did not inform us in his book that he has a yad (hand) we would not have affirmed it…and if he did not informs he has a, ‘ayn (eye)…nafs (self)…sam’(hearing) we would not have affirmed it.”436 This narration may indicate one of the root causes that led Al Ja’d to his theological concepts. It is the extremism of al Mushabbihah in affirming the attributes of God to the extent of likening them to the attributes of the creation. Ayyūb confirms the presence of such extremism. He states, “…it is clear from what we mentioned (earlier) that Al Mushabbihah and Al Mujassimah437 reached the furthest limits in their practice of Tashbīh and Tajṣīm438 during the reign of the Umayyad…they portrayed God in the image of a man…”439 Moreover, he confirms that this extremism caused the emergence of the Mu’āṭṭilah school. He states, “…Hence the appearance of those who deny the attributes (of God) is a reaction to such

431 Ibn Kathīr, Al Bidaya Wal Nihaya; Ibn Taymiyyah, Majmū‘ Fatāwa Shaikh Al Islām Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah.
433 Dhahabī, Siyar A’alam Al Nubala’.
434 A. Al Ghurābī, Tārīkh Al Firaq Al Islamiyyah (Cairo: Maktabat Al Anjilu Al Misriyyah, 1985).
435 Dhahabī, Siyar A’alam Al Nubala’.
437 Al Mujassimah refers to the school that believes God has bodily features and describes Him as a being with body parts.
438 It is the notion of believing that God has bodily features and an actual body, which is referred to in Arabic with the word jism.
Conversely, Ibn Abī Al ‘Izz remarks there are some narrations that advise that Al Ja’d came in contact and learnt from the philosophers of Al Ṣābi’ah from the region of Ḥarrān and he acquired some of his knowledge as well from “…some Jews, who distorted their religion, who are related to Lubayd Al A’ṣam” who according to Ibn Abī Al ‘Izz, “…attempted to bewitch the prophet and kill him…” but he does not provide any substantial evidence for this opinion.

Muslim theologians consent that the practice of denying the attributes of God became widely known at Jahm’s hands, whose public emergence took place towards the end of the Umayyad caliphate. He divided the attributes of God into two main categories: (1) the attributes of al ḥāt, which are related to the God’s self; and (2) the attributes of al af’āl, which are related to the actions of God. He denied all the attributes related to al ḥāt and affirmed to God the attributes of qudrah (power), mūjid (to bring into existence), Khaliq (to create), and muḥyī and mumīt (to give life and cause death). The aim of denying the remaining attributes was to disallow resembling God to his creation. Jahm states, “I do not describe him (God) by any attribute that may be used to describe anyone besides him such as being a thing, existing, alive, knowledgeable and wilful.” Accordingly, he affirmed to God the attribute of action and denied it to the creation, which earned his school the name

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440 Ibid.
441 It is a religion based on worshipping the stars and planets and was common in the city of Harrān. For further information, see M.A.H. Ḥamad, Ṣābi’at Ḥarrān Wa Iḥ Wān Al Ṣafā (Dār al awā’il, 2003); M.A.H. Ḥamad, Ṣābi’at Ḥarrān Wal Tawḥīd Al Durzī (Dār al Ṭall’a al khadīda, 1999).
442 Ḥarrān is an ancient town in the north of ancient Syria, which is now located in the modern Turkish province of Diyarbakır. For further information, see Ḥamad, Ṣābi’at Ḥarrān Wa Iḥ Wān Al Ṣafā; M.A.H. Ḥamad, Ṣābi’at Ḥarrān Wal Tawḥīd Al Durzī.
443 Lubayd is a Jewish magician that lived in Madinah and was accused of trying to bewitch Prophet Muhammad. For further information, see Ibn Sa’d, Kitāb Al Ṭabaqāt Al Kabīr; Tabarī, Tārīkh Al Rusul Wal Mulūk.
444 Cited in al-Baghdādī, Al Farq Baṣna Al-Firaq Wa Bayān Al Firaq Al Nājīyah Minhum.
447 Shahristānī, Al Milal Wal Nīhal; Ibn Tāhir Al-Baghdādi, Al Farq Bayna Al-Firaq Wa Bayān Al Firaq Al Nājīyah Minhum.
of Al Jabriyyah,\textsuperscript{448} which means those who believe that God enforces his actions upon his creation. Jahm’s statement indicates he relies mainly on reason for valid knowledge. If an attribute rationally implies resemblance then it is denied altogether. The classical chroniclers and historians such as Ibn Qutaybah and Ibn Al Athīr as well as some of the late scholars such as Ahmad Amīn and Zuhdī Ḥassan concur on the fact Jahm was influenced negatively by Jewish theological teachings that permit similarities between God and humans.\textsuperscript{449} However, others such as Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Al Qayyim, Shahrastānī and Ibn Abī Al ‘Izz, relate that the main cause for his teachings was his contact with Indian philosophers, specifically, an Indian sect called Al Ssumaniyyah,\textsuperscript{450}also known as Al Shshumaniyyah, who debated with him on the notion of God. Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal retells the full debate that took place between Jahm and Al Ssumaniyyah, which caused the former to refuse the attributes of God and deny their existence.\textsuperscript{451} In fact, he informs that Jahm declared a disbeliever anyone that affirms any attribute to God. He states, “…and he (Jahm) claimed that whoever describes God with an attribute that God described himself with it in his book or on the tongue of his Messenger then he is a disbeliever and he is from the Mushabbihah…”\textsuperscript{452} A question that arises here is, did Jahm acquire his thoughts from Al Ja’d or from his debates with the Ssumaniyyah? This conflict of opinions can be resolved by Ibn Abī Al ‘Izz’s statement who clarifies that after the debates Jahm believed God is “the absolute existence”\textsuperscript{453} and then joined the circle of Al Ja’d Ibn Dirham (d. 724

\textsuperscript{448} Al Jabriyyah is a title given to those who believe that humans have no will or choice in their actions and statements, and it is all imposed by God. For further information, see Juhanī, Al Mawu‘ah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Ahzāb Al Mu’āsira; Shahrastānī, Al Milal Wal Nihal; Ibn Tāhir al-Baghdādī, Al Farq Bayna Alfiraq Wa Bayān Al Firqa Al Nājiyah Minhum.

\textsuperscript{449} A. Ibn Qutaybah, Ta‘wil Mukhtalafi Al Ḥadīth (Riyadh: Dar Ibn Al Qayyim, 2010); Ibn Al Athīr, Al Kāmil Fil Tārīkh, 8; Shahrastānī, Al Milal Wal Nihal; Ibn Abī Al ‘Izz, Sharḥ Al ‘Aqīdah Al Taḥḥāwiyyah.

\textsuperscript{450} M. Bayrūnī, Fi Tahqiqi Ma Lil Hind Min Maqūlah Maqūlah Fi Al ‘Aqīl Aw Marthūlah (India: Matba’at Majlis Dar Al Ma‘arif, 1958).


\textsuperscript{452} Ibid, 97.

\textsuperscript{453} Ibn Abī Al ‘Izz, Sharḥ Al ‘Aqīdah Al Taḥḥāwiyyah, 795.
CE) who became his mentor and main teacher, and crystallised the fundamental principles of his school in theology, as indicated earlier.

The Mu’tazilah school is another important theological school that shared the views of Jahm and Al Ja’d in relation to the names and attributes of God. According to Jarullah, the Mu'tazilite school appeared in the eighth century between 718 CE and 728 CE. One of the main pillars of the Mu'tazilite school is the doctrine of tawḥīd (unification of God), which they believe they were the first to establish properly, as Al Khayyāṭ proclaims. Under the slogan of defending the doctrine of tawḥīd, Wāṣil Ibn ‘Aṭā’ (d.748 CE), one of the main founders of the school, denied all the attributes of God save that of qidam (ever existence and eternity). Shahristānī and Jarullah explain this concept was not completely well-defined in Wāṣil’s mind. Shahristānī clarifies, “…and initially this statement was not completely mature…Wāṣil used to proclaim it under the accepted belief that it is impossible for two ever existing and eternal Gods to exist…” Hence, Wāṣil considered the acceptance of an ever existing attribute to God blasphemous because it would by necessity, in his opinion, lead to acknowledging the existence of two Gods, which nullifies the doctrine of tawḥīd. Later on, the Mu’tazilites developed their doctrine on the attributes further and differed greatly in it. They reasoned that sifāt al dhāt, the attributes of Godhead, are a product of the limitations and plurality of our own intellectual faculties; in reality, they are identical with God’s essence. Thus, Al Hamadānī (d. 1025 CE) emphasises that “…God is living without life…Knowledgeable without knowledge…powerful without power…” and maintains that “…God is knowing by his essence and powerful by his essence and he does not need life and doesn’t have to be alive…”

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454 Jārullah, Al Mu’tazilah.
455 Al Khayyāṭ, Al Intiṣār Wal Radd ‘Ala Ibn Al Rawandi Al Mulḥid.
456 Shahristānī, Al Milal Wal Nihal, 36.
458 Ibid, 163.
point of view, these attributes merely deny the negative qualities to God and he states, “...If I say that God knows, I merely confirm the divine essence and deny in it all ignorance. If I say that God is powerful, living...I am...denying in it all powerlessness, mortality...” Therefore, the Mu'tazilites reduced the divine attributes to artefacts of human reason and intellect alone and used them to determine how a Muslim should perceive God and His attributes. Historically, Al Māturīdī opposed the Mu'tazilites in many theological rudiments, but has he expressed this opposition in his exegetical commentary of the divine attributes verses? Does he differ with them in relation to the role of intellect in understanding God, His attributes and the Qur’ān? This will be evaluated in the subsequent sections.

3.2.4 The Sunni reaction to the emergence of the Mu'tazilites

The Mu'tazilites’ views faced fierce opposition from the Sunni school. A small minority of Sunni scholars confronted the radical denial of the Mu'tazilites of the attributes with a radical confirmation reached the degree of assimilating God to humans; they became known as the Hashawiyyah. Shahrastānī informs that a number of Sunni hadith scholars, when faced with the extremism of the Mu'tazilites in opposing the traditional teachings of the early scholars and the social promotion the political government granted to their dialectical teachings, either by the Umayyad or the Abbasid, “…openly declared the correctness of tashbīh…” Some of those who became known as Mushabbihah are Kahmas Ibn Al Ḥassan (d. 766 CE), Ahmad Al Hajimī (d. 815 CE) and Muḍar Ibn

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459 A. Al Ash’arī, Maqalat Al Islamiyyin Wa Ikhtilaf Al Musallin (Beirut: Al Maktabah Al ‘Asriyyah, 1990), 484.
460 Shahrastānī, Al Milal Wal Nihal, 51.
461 According to the biographers’ records, he could be Kahmas Ibn Al Ḥassan (d. 766 CE) or Kahmas Ibn Al Minhāl. However, the former is more likely to be the correct one because he was known to be a Sufi and some of their thoughts mentioned above include the element of mysticism. Dhahabī, Siyar A’alam Al Nubala’, Y. Al Mizzī, Tahdhib Al Kamāl Fi Asmā’ Al Rijāl, 2nd ed., 35 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assasat Al Risalah, 1983); Dhahabī, Tadhkirat Al Huffāz.
462 Shahrastānī, Al Milal Wal Nihal; Al Mizzī, Tahdhib Al Kamāl Fi Asmā’ Al Rijāl; Dhahabī, Tadhkirat Al Huffāz.
Muhammad Al Asadī\(^{463}\) (d. 890 CE). They proclaimed that God can be touched by His creation, which implies He has a physical mass, and consistent mysticism and sincerity would allow one to see God physically in this life.\(^{464}\) Dāwūd Al Jawāribiyyī\(^{465}\) exaggerated further and claimed, with the exception of genitals and a beard, he would confirm all attributes to God. These thoughts developed from opinions of individuals ‘to schools’ principles, Al Ash’arī, Dhahabī and Baghdadi note.

One of the important schools that emerged is the school of Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān (d. 767 CE), the famous exegete, who along with his followers believed God has a body and is made of flesh and blood. He has limbs such as hands and feet, a head, eyes and ears, yet he does not resemble anything and nothing resembles him.\(^{466}\) The Karrāmiyyah is another school, founded by Muhammad Ibn Karrām (d. 868 CE), that can be considered the strongest movement that advocated God has a body. They were backed by Sultan Maḥmūd Ibn Sibtikīn, also known as Mahmud of Ghazni\(^{467}\) (d. 1030 CE), who ruled the Ghaznavid empire and his son, Muhammad, who embraced the belief and became one of the followers of the Karrāmiyyah. Hence, their influence spread throughout Iran, Transoxiana and North India, and their school remained influential until the eleventh century. Among their prominent figures are Isḥāq Ibn Miḥmish\(^{468}\) (d. 993) and Muhammad Ibn Al Hayṣam (d. unknown).\(^{469}\) In the sphere of the attributes of God, they believed God has a jism, which lexically means body, which means God can be defined, and He has two hands unlike the

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\(^{463}\) Al Baghdādī, Tārikh Baghdādī. No further information can be found about him or his character.

\(^{464}\) Shahrastānī, Al Milāl Wal Nihal.

\(^{465}\) None of the biographers and scholars that mentioned him in their books provided any personal information about him, such as his date of death. The focus has been on his theological teachings alone.

\(^{466}\) Shahrastānī, Al Milāl Wal Nihal; Ibn Tāhir al- Baghdādī, Al Farq Bayna Alfiraq Wa Bayān Al Firqa Al Nājiyah Minhum; M. Maqdisi, Kitāb Al Bida’i Wal Tārīkh (Cairo: Maktabat Al Taqafah Al Dinniyyah, 1971).


\(^{468}\) Al Zirkilī, Al A’lām Qāmus Tarājim.

\(^{469}\) Isfarā’īnī, Al Taḥṣīr Fi Al Din Wa Tamyız Al Firqaq Al Nājiyah ’an Al Firqaq Al Hālikīn; Ibn Kathīr, Al Bidaya Wal Nihaya; Dhahabī, Siyār A’lām Al Nubala’.
hands of the creation and that he sits, touches fully the upper part of the throne,\textsuperscript{470} which resembles the sitting of the humans. In addition, they claimed any change that takes places in the created world begins with a change in the Godhead.\textsuperscript{471} A common denominator among all these groups is that they denied the authority of reason in the matter and refused it any role that it may play in developing Muslims’ understanding of God. They accepted solely the narrations of the early scholars, interpreted them literally and did not see in this a conflict with believing in the inimitability of God. What are Al Māturīdī’s views on this methodology? Does he engage in this debate in his exegesis? This will be explored later.

If the Mushabbiyah represent the radical reaction of a minority in the Sunni school to the deniers of the attributes, the Şifātiyyah represent the intellectual reaction, and the view and belief of the overwhelming majority of the Muslim world. Firstly, the Şifātiyyah is a term introduced by Shahrastānī and Baghdādī to describe the Sunni scholars that affirmed the attributes of God that have been revealed in the sacred sources, the Qur’ān and hadith, and that can be elicited from God’s actions in the universe.\textsuperscript{472} Baghdādī explains, “…the leading scholars from both schools, Al Ra’y and Hadith, believe in the principles of religion that the Şifātiyyah believe in relation to God and his eternal attributes and denounce al-Qadar and Aa-i ’tizā\textsuperscript{473} …”\textsuperscript{474} They believe the attributes of God are eternal like His self and do not distinguish between the attributes of al-dhāt and al-fāl. This reflects the position that traditional scholars, otherwise known as salaf, believed and preached.\textsuperscript{475} However, they differed in relation to how anthropomorphist expressions in the

\textsuperscript{470} Shahrastānī, \textit{Al Milal Wal Nihal}.
\textsuperscript{471} Ibid; Isfarā’īnī, \textit{Al Tabṣīr Fi Al Dīn Wa Tamyīz Al Firqah Al Nājiyah ‘an Al Firaq Al Hālikīn}.
\textsuperscript{472} Shahrastānī, \textit{Al Milal Wal Nihal}, 79.
\textsuperscript{473} It means, “The one that seclude themselves and depart from particular places or groups” and refers to the practice of the founder of the Mu’tazilite, Wāsil Ibn ‘Atā’, who deserted the circle of his primary teacher Al Baṣrī and formed his own.
\textsuperscript{474} Ibn Tāhir al-Baghdādī, \textit{Al Farq Bayna Alfiraq Wa Bayān Al Firqa Al Nājiyah Minhum}, 189.
\textsuperscript{475} Ibid; Shahrastānī, \textit{Al Milal Wal Nihal}. 
Qurʾān should be interpreted and whether taʾwiḥ⁴⁷⁶ should be applied. Some of them applied taʾwiḥ in a manner that fits with the semantic indications of the actual utterances. The Kullābiyyah, Māturīdiyyah and Ashāʾirah belong the Şifātiyyah schools that apply taʾwiḥ, while others decided to refrain completely from it and practice tafwīḍ,⁴⁷⁷ which is in concordance with the practice of the salaf. Among the latter were the famous imams Abū Ḥanifa, Mālik Ibn Anas, Shāfiʿī and Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal.⁴⁷⁸ Both parties consent that intellect and revelation confirm that nothing can be similar to God and reject the notion of denying his attributes. Does Al Māturīdī apply taʾwiḥ in his exegesis and abandon Abū Ḥanifa’s stance?

Abdullah Ibn Saʿīd Ibn Kullāb (d. 854 CE), founder of the Kullābiyyah school, was the first Sunni scholar to debate the Muʿtazilah in the court of Al Maʾmūn (d.833 CE), the Abbasid caliph, using dialectical methods and debunk them. Subkī confirms, “Abdullah Ibn Saʿīd…is one of the early scholars of ‘Ilm Al Kalām…”⁴⁷⁹ Even Ibn Taymiyyah, who disagrees with some of his teachings, praises him for his defence of the traditional Sunni creed.⁴⁸⁰ Ibn Kullāb confirms all the attributes of God and believes they are eternal. He believes the attributes are distinct from al-dhāṭ, Godhead, but also they cannot exist independently and cannot have its own attributes.⁴⁸¹ The Ashāʾirah school, founded by Abū

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⁴⁷⁶ The secondary meaning of an utterance is favoured over the apparent primary meaning because of a proof that indicates the latter is not intended and cannot be accepted. For further information, see Y. Ibn Al Jawzī, Kitāb Al ‘Iddī Li Qawānīn Al Istilāḥ (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1991); Zarqānī, Manāhil Al Irfān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān; Ibn Taymiyyah, Majmūʿ Fatāwa Shaikh Al Islām Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah; Āmidī, Al Iḥkām Fi Uṣūl Al Aḥkām.

⁴⁷⁷ Al ‘Asrī explains that tafwīḍ is affirming the names and attributes of God that have been stated in the Qurʾān and hadith, and avoiding explanations of the attributes where meanings are vague and may lead to resembling God to His creatures. For further information, see S. Al ‘Asrī, Al Qawlu Al Tamām Bi Ithbāt Al Tafwīḍ Madhaban Lil Salaf Al Kirām (Abū Dhabi: Dar Al Fajr, 2009), 80.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibn Tāhir al-Baghdādī, Al Farq Bayna Alfiraq Wa Bayān Al Firaq Al Nājiyah Minhum; Shahrastānī, Al Milal Wal Nihal; Juhanī, Al Mawuʿah Al Muyassara Fil Adyān Wal Mathāhib Wal Aḥzāb Al Mu‘āsira; Al ʿghurābi, Tārīkh Al Firaq Al Islamiyyah.


Al Ḥassan Al Ash’arī (d. 936 CE), carries the same beliefs as the Kullābiyyah and later in history the latter dissolved in the former. The only point of difference between the schools, according to Subkī and Juwaynī, is that Ibn Kullāb holds that the eternal speech of God cannot contain commands and tales, while the Ashā’irah believe it can.⁴⁸²

Chronologically, Maturidīyyah, founded by Abū Manṣūr Al Māturīdī (d. 944 CE), appeared in the Sunni theological landscape before the Ashā’irah, but relatively after the Kullābiyyah. However, Al Māturīdī’s geographical location, Samarqand, did not allow contact with any of these Sunni schools, which were founded in close cities and in the heart of the Abbasid caliphate mainland, Baghdad and Al Baṣrah. This geographical fact, along with other factors, facilitated the amalgamation of the Kullābiyyah in the Ashā’irah and the independence of the Maturidīyyah.

3.3 The analysis of the divine attributes verses

3.3.1 The attribute of yad

The attribute of yad lies at the centre of theological debates among various Muslim schools. This debate is as vehement today as it was in the past. Yadd has multiple meanings in Arabic, which will be discussed later, but one of them is ‘hand’. The word yad is used in various morphological forms to describe one of the attributes of God. It appears in the Qur’ān in the singular form, yad, seven times. It appears in the dual nominative form, yadāh, once. It appears in the dual genitive, yadāy and yadayya, five times and appears in the plural form⁴⁸³ once, aydīna. Thus, the attribute is mentioned in fourteen different verses in twelve different chapters in the Qur’ān. The chapters, in which the attribute appears, belong to the Makkī⁴⁸⁴ category and Madani⁴⁸⁵ categories.⁴⁸⁶ The context in which the

⁴⁸² A. Al Juwaynī, Al Irshād Ilā Qawāṭi’ Al Adillah Fi Uṣūl Al I‘tiqād (Cairo: Maktabat Al Khanji, 1950).
⁴⁸³ The plural form in Arabic language refers to three and above.
⁴⁸⁴ Makkī refers to chapters that were revealed before the migration of the Prophet from Makkah. For further information, see Suyūṭī, Al Itqān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān; Zarqānī, Manāhi Al Irfān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān.
attribute of *yad* occurs differs from one verse to the other. Notably, none of the verses addresses the attribute directly, rather the mention of it is always secondary to another main message.

Discussion by Sunni exegetes, before Al Māturīdī, of the attribute of *yad* and its related verses is minimal. Many of these verses, such as verse 26 in chapter Al Imrān, verse 88 in chapter Al Mu’mīnūn, verse 48 in chapter Al Furqān and verse 29 in chapter Al Ḥadīd, were not explained at all. With the exception of Al Māturīdī and his contemporary Tabarī, most of the commentaries of the early exegetes do not explain the utterance of *yad* and its relationship to the attributes of God. In his commentary on the use of *yad*, in relation to God, Al Māturīdī is the only exegete who consistently discusses its meanings and relevance. He comments on the meaning of the *yad* in eight of the fourteen verses. The closest to him is Tabarī who limitedly discusses the attribute of *yad* and its meanings in reference to God in one verse only, verse 64 of chapter Al Mā’īdah, and then reinforces the same meaning, without a supporting argument, for verse 10 in chapter Al Faṭḥ. Other exegetes discuss briefly the meaning of the utterance in selected verses, but none of them discusses the theological aspects. This stands proof that the study of these utterances and their relevance to the attributes of God is a new practice in Sunni exegesis.

As far as exegetical literature demonstrates, none of the early exegetes considered the theological study of the verses essential to exegesis. In this instance, it seems Al Māturīdī breaks from the traditional norm and addresses these controversial topics. One may claim Tabarī, the contemporary of Al Māturīdī, does the same and therefore they both share the initiative. At first glance this conclusion seems acceptable. However, when one contrasts their approaches to the matter, key differences manifest. First, Tabarī discusses the matter

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[485] Madani refers to chapters that were revealed to the Prophet after he settled in Madīnah. For further information, see Zarkashī, *Al Burhān Fil Uloom Al Qur‘ān*; Zarqānī, *Manāhil Al Irfān Fi Uloom Al Qur‘ān*.

[486] Five out of the twelve chapters are *Madani* and the remaining seven are *Makkī*. 

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once, while Al Māturīdī discusses it in eight different occasions in various verses. Second, Al Māturīdī interprets the utterance in the context of the verse, discusses the theological elements openly, states his opinion and then supports it with evidence. This attests that Al Māturīdī consistently embeds this approach as part of his methodology in exegesis, while Tabarī only raises the issue once, perhaps because it is widely discussed in the academic circles of the time. Hence, it suffices, for his purpose, to mention it once and list the views and implicitly favour a specific opinion without delving into many details. This conclusion is further ascertained by the tacit consensus of all the exegetes and scholars of Qur’ānic sciences that Tabarī exegesis is narrative rather than analytical, let alone theological.  

Therefore, Al Māturīdī opens the gate of exegesis to the discussion of theological aspects of the verses. If this practice proves to be a trend in his tafsīr, then this would demonstrate he is the first Sunni scholar to institute the genre of theological exegesis, at least in the category of the names and attributes of God. 

The discussion of the attribute of yad begins with the exegesis of verse 64 in chapter 5, Al Mā’idah, but does not end with it, particularly in Al Māturīdī’s literature. The verse reads, “the Jews say: ‘(Allah)’s yad is tied up…Nay, His yadān are widely outstretched: He gives and spends (of His bounty) as He pleases…”” The verse represents God’s response to a statement made by some of the Jews at the time of the Prophet.  

The utterance yad appears twice in the verse, in the singular form “(Allah)’s yad” and in the dual form “His yadān.” When translated into English, the meanings of the words seem self-explanatory at first. Commonly today, yad is translated as “hand” and yadān is translated as “two hands” to represent the dual form of the utterance, which English grammar does not accommodate. However, yad is a word that has multiple independent meanings in Arabic. It may refer to:

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487 Zarqānī, Manāhīl Al Irfān Fi Ulūm Al Qur‘ān; Zarkashī, Al Burhān Fil Ulūm Al Qur‘ān; Qaṭṭān, Mabāḥīth Fi Ulūm Al Qur‘ān; Dhahabī, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassirūn, 2; ‘Ilm Al Tafsīr
488 Suyūṭī, Lubāb Al Nuqūl Fi Asbāb Al Nuzūl; Al Wāhidī, Ashāb Al Nuzūl; Al Wādi’i, Al Sahīh Al Musnad Min Asbāb Al Nuzūl
(1) the hand as a limb and its various variations; (2) the bounties; (3) dominion; (4) the handle; (5) power and force; (6) congregation and unity; (7) donations and charity; (8) capability; (9) favour and service; or (10) submission and obedience. As far as the first sentence in which yad is used, all the exegetes that commented on the verse, Sufyān, Mujāhid, Muqātil, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Al Māturīdī and Tabarī, explained the word yad in the phrase “the hand of God is tied” expresses stinginess or tightfistedness. In fact, Ibn Abī Ḥātim in his exegesis, reports a narration from Ibn Abbas that states, “…they (the Jews) did not mean an actual hand…rather they mean that he is tight-fisted and he holds back from spending what he has…” Similarly, Tabarī listed many narrations from renowned great exegetes from the generation of the successors, such as Qatādah (d. 736 CE), Al Suddī (d. 744 CE) and Al Daḥḥāk Ibn Muzāḥim (d. 718 CE), that confirm this understanding. On the other hand, the controversy thrives in the second part of the verse: “…Nay, his yaddan (both hands) are widely outstretched…” Ibn Abī Ḥātim reports a narration from ‘Ikrimah, in which he interprets yaddan as hands with no further explanation. He follows the narration from ‘Ikrimah with one from Qatādah, who states, “…he spends with them however he pleases.” Nonetheless, these two narrations are vague because they repeat rather than spell out the meaning of yaddan, but they implicitly affirm the existence of the attribute. None else from the early exegetes

489 It may refer to the palm of the hand or the entire extremity, from the tips of the fingers to the beginning of the shoulder.
492 Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Tafsir Ibn Abī Ḥātim.
493 Tabarī, Jāmi’ Al Bayān Fi Ta’wīl Al Qur’ān.
494 The Muslim scholars who acquired exegesis and various Islamic sciences from the companions and represent the second Muslim generation.
495 Adnaway, Tābaqāt Al Mufassirīn.
496 Dhahabī, Siyar A’lam Al Nubala’.
497 Suyūṭi, Tābaqāt Al Mufassirīn.
498 Dhahabī, Siyar A’lam Al Nubala’; Suyūṭi, Tābaqāt Al Mufassirīn.
499 Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Tafsir Ibn Abī Ḥātim, 1168.
elaborated on the meaning of *yadān* and how it is to be interpreted when associated with God. Al Māturīdī and Tabarī are the earliest exegetes to discuss the meaning of *yadān* in exegesis literature. It is easy to capture Tabarī’s view on the topic because he discusses the meaning and relevance of the attribute once in his exegesis, which happens to be in the context of the above verse. Conversely, Al Māturīdī discusses it thoroughly and analytically in various places throughout his exegesis and, while there are some repetitive statements in his work, his interpretations of the utterance differ depending on the verse subject to study. Tabarī lists four main dialectical interpretations that the word *yadān* may mean: (1) bounty, (2) power; (3) kingship; and (4) hand, but not similar to the limbs of humans. Fleetingly, he presents the arguments of the first three views. Then he relates at length the argument of the fourth opinion, which suggests *yad* and *yadān* mean a hand that is not a limb. This, rightly, may lead to the belief that Tabarī implicitly endorses this opinion. One of the focal proofs that support this interpretation is that Arabs do not use the dual form of *yad*, which is *yadān*, to refer to power, bounties or categories; rather, they use it to refer to specific and countable entities.

In the context of the same verse, Al Māturīdī differs completely from Tabarī in style, argument and clarity. First, Al Māturīdī does not list various opinions—he points to one he endorses and interprets *yadān* as bounties of God. Second, he expresses his opinion directly and clearly, and does not resort to indirect implications. Hence, he states, “…his *yadān* are widely outstretched…means his bounties are widely outstretched…” Subsequently, Al Māturīdī forwards an argument that has not being preceded by anyone before him and surprisingly has not being stated or rebutted by anyone after him, as far as the study indicates. Interestingly, his argument does not state a direct

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500 Tabarī, *Jāmi’ Al Bayān Fi Ta’wil Al Qur’an.*
501 This is one of the fundamental elements in the argument Ibn Taymiyyah used to establish his interpretation of the attribute of *yad*.
proof that ascertains his interpretation, rather it aims at falsifying the fundamental proof, mentioned above that Tabarī and others claimed that it nullifies the interpretation of yad as bounties. Al Māturīdī professes that the use of the dual form of yad in the Qur’ān and Arabic language is not confined to species and does not necessarily refer to physical entities, limbs or concrete meanings as it has been used to refer to other meanings. He cites verse 42 in chapter 41, Fuṣṣilat: “Falsehood cannot come to it bayna yadayhi (from before it) aw min khalfīhi (or behind it). (It is) sent down by the All-Wise, Worthy of All praise.” This verse is describing the Qur’ān and its immunity from falsehood and all the exegetes consented that the meaning of bayna yadayhi, even though literally it means “between his both hands,” the dual form, in the context of this verse it means ‘before it’ or ‘in front of it.’ 503 Al Māturīdī states, “None understands from the above use that the Qur’ān has an actual hand like one would understand when yad is used with a creature.” 504 If one peruses the verse more it becomes apparent that even the meanings “in front” and “behind”, as spatial directions, are not intended, rather it stresses the impossibility of falsehood penetrating the Qur’ān. If one uses logic then it would be necessary to also mention “from above” and “from under” to express complete immunity. However, in the Arabic language, it suffices to use “from the front” and “from the back” to convey the same meaning.

Based on the above, Al Māturīdī formulates an exegetical and theological principle, “the annexation of the utterance yad to God cannot and should not be interpreted the same as when it is in next to creatures (hand or limb).” 505 Al Māturīdī then proceeds to cite more examples of the utterance yad in the Qur’ān used in dual and plural forms to refer to abstract meanings. He quotes verse 10 from chapter 22, Al Ḥajj –“…That is because

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503 Tabarī, Jāmi’ Al Bayān Fi Ta’wil Al Qur’an; Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr Al Qur’an Al Adhīm; Al Qurṭūbī, Al Jāmi’ Li Ahkām Al Qur’an; Abū Hayyān Al Tawḥīdi, Al Bahr Al Muhīṭ Fi Tafsīr Al Qur’an Al Adhīm.
504 Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah, vol. 2, 52.
505 Ibid.
The formulation of exegetical principles as a guide in the interpretation of theological verses was an innovative step that no other exegete had recommended or discussed. In spite of Al Māturīdī being a dialectical theologian, in exegesis, he uses the Qur’ān considerably as an underpinning in his framework of understanding the meanings of the divine attributes, in this instance yad, in verses and formulates a principle based on them. In the above argument, Al Māturīdī with one proof rebuts the opinion of the proponents of the hand interpretation, establishes the legitimation of his opinion through the Qur’ān and formulates an exegetical maxim to facilitate the correct interpretation of yad in other verses. This interpretation marks the use of ta‘wīl, as defined by theologians earlier in the evolution of the theological debate section, by Al Māturīdī since he opted for a secondary meaning, bounties, instead of the primary one, hand, because it may lead to resembling God to his creation. From the outset of the analysis of his exegesis, the influence of the early theological debate is manifesting.

Al Māturīdī does not standardise the meaning of yad, bounties, and then apply it to the other verses, unless they are similar as is the case in verse 57 from chapter 7, Al ’Arāf, and verse 48 from chapter 25, Al Furqān. He observes verses individually based on their characteristics. For instance, in verse 75 from chapter 38, Ṣād: “He (Allah) said: “O Iblīs (Satan)! What prevents you from prostrating yourself to one whom I have created bi yadayya (with both my hands)…” Al Māturīdī does not supply a specific meaning of yadayya. Conversely, he considers it irrelevant and argues that the intent of the use of

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506 Ibid.
yadayya is to express the greatness of the creation of Adam, stressing a connotative meaning. He clarifies, “…the association of Adam’s creation with Him (God) is to be interpreted as an expression of the greatness of the creation of Adam…” He constitutes this interpretation on an exegetical principle he formulated based on a pattern he observed in the verses of the Qur’ān where association with God aims at distinguishing and valuing specific creatures. He stresses, “…and as we have mentioned multiple times earlier, when one specific creature is annexed to God it intends to emphasise the distinction and status of this creature or individual…” Upon analysis of the above statements, one discovers that Al Māturīdī uses inductive reasoning in the formulation of his exegetical maxims. He observes the recurring association of specific creatures with God, and then forms his principle. Is this sufficient proof that Al Māturīdī believes that intellect is a fundamental pillar in his epistemology? This will have to be substantiated by more examples.

Al Māturīdī seems to favour the use of clear verses in explaining what he considers to be vague verses. This falls under the mother method that Muslim exegetes consider the strongest and best method of Qur’ānic exegesis: to explain the Qur’ān via the Qur’ān. This method manifests again when Al Māturīdī addresses the controversy among the Muslim theologians in interpreting the meaning of yad and highlights the weakness of their views. He states, “…and the people of dialectics and theologians exaggerated in their attempt to interpret the utterance of yad when annexed to God. Some of them interpreted it to mean power and others interpreted it to mean such and such…” Then he rebuts their views, “…however all these interpretations are marginal when compared to the fact that

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508 Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt Ahlu Sunnah*, vol. 4, 284.
509 Ibid.
510 Inductive reasoning is based on a specific case or cases and deriving a general rule. It draws inferences from the observations in order to make generalizations. For further information see, M. Vince, “Reasoning in Every Day Life,” [http://dai.fmph.uniba.sk/courses/ICS/examples/paper-vince.pdf](http://dai.fmph.uniba.sk/courses/ICS/examples/paper-vince.pdf).
512 Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt Ahlu Sunnah*
the utterance of *yad* has been used in the Qurʾān with what cannot possibly have a hand or a limb…” referring to the examples he gave earlier in his commentary on verse 64 in chapter Al Māʾidah. This statement signifies the importance of revelation in Al Māturīdī’s methodology and epistemology. It sits at the top of the hierarchy of evidence that he uses in interpreting verses and forming his opinion. In the context of the same verse, Al Māturīdī points to another element of strength in his opinion, which is that no scholar whether from the predecessors or the contemporaries disputed the meaning of *yadayhi* in the evidence he provided, hence a tacit consensus among them on this interpretation.

Nonetheless, Al Māturīdī explores other possibilities and motives and lists them if they seem appropriate. For example, in the exegesis of the above verse, he points to another possibility for the use of *yaddāy*. He explicates it is possible that God mentioned the utterance with His self because the humans intellect cannot imagine such actions being done without the use of the hands. Thus, he described it in a manner that conforms to their comprehension and experience in the real world. He clarifies, “…and it is possible that he mentioned the utterance of hands with himself and added it to him to describe the actions in a manner that matches how it would be done in the real world by the creatures, had it been done by them…” An important conclusion that may be drawn from the above is that Al Māturīdī does not seek to deliver a general explanation that would fill an empty gap and then continue in his exegesis. To the contrary, he studies the verse and utterances delicately, elicits all possible interpretations and presents them to the reader. Thus, he originates a unique paradigm in Qurʾānic exegesis that explores rather than relates and does not view the narrative source as the only legitimate source of exegesis; it opens the gate for the intellect to aid in discovering potential meanings. These qualities, thus far,

513 Māturīdī, Taʾwilāt Ahlu Sunnah,5.
514 In reference to verse 42 in chapter 41, Fuṣṣilat: “Falsehood cannot come to *it bayna yadayhi* from before it *aw min khalfihi* or behind it. (It is) sent down by the All-Wise, Worthy of All praise”.
515 Māturīdī, Taʾwilāt Ahlu Sunnah,5.
separate Al Māturīdī’s work from all the early and contemporary exegetes and is a strong testimony of his distinctive contributions.

In line with the above, Al Māturīdī persists in his exploration of the meanings of yad in verse 10 in chapter 48, Al Fatḥ: “Verily, those who give pledge to you (O Muhammad) they are giving pledge to Allâh. The yad of Allah is over their hands…” He relates six possible interpretations: (1) reward from God for the pledge;\(^{516}\) (2) a generous reward if they fulfil their pledge with the Prophet; (3) the Prophet; (4) the hand of the Prophet; (5) the aid of God; and (6) the victory of God to His messenger. Apart from Muqātil and Tabarī, no other early exegete comments on the meanings or objective of the use of yad besides Al Māturīdī. Muqātil interprets it as “the fulfilment of the promise.”\(^{517}\) Tabarī repeats the meaning he explained earlier as “hand of God.”\(^{518}\) Thus, Al Māturīdī enriches the exegesis literature of the verse with formative interpretations. The number of potential interpretations Al Māturīdī discerns displays his ingenious analytical capability in the field and the exercise of rational appraisal. It further demonstrates the application of deductive reasoning\(^{519}\) on his part when other exegetes simply do not comment on it or hold to the apparent lexical meaning of the word, which proves abandonment of reason. Even though Al Māturīdī does not favour a particular interpretation, he unfolds what makes every proposition a feasible interpretation. For instance, he interprets yad as the Prophet because he is the representative of God in this pledge. In addition, he interprets it as possibly the hand of the Prophet because the actual hand that was above the hands of the companions

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516 The verse refers to a specific pledge known as “Bay’at Al Riḍwān,” which took place in 627 CE. The companions were travelling to Makkah as peaceful pilgrims, but they were banned from entering the city by the polytheists. There was a rumour the messenger of the Muslims was killed, which was considered an act of war. The companions pledged to the Prophet that they will fight until death if they are attacked. For further information, see Ibn Sa’d, Kitāb Al Ţabaqāt Al Kabîr; Ibn Kathîr, Al Bidaya Wal Nihaya.

517 Ibn Sulaymân, Ṭafsîr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymân, vol. 4, 70.

518 Tabarî, Jâmi’ Al Bayân Fi Ta’wîl Al Qur’ân.

519 Deductive reasoning was set by Aristotle who defines it as “a speech in which, certain things having been supposed, something different from those supposed results of necessity because of their being so”. For further information see, M. Vince, “Reasoning in Every Day Life,” http://dai.fmph.uniba.sk/courses/ICS/examples/paper-vince.pdf.
was his. He supports this interpretation with another persuasive point, which is to teach the companions that they have no favour upon the Prophet personally; rather they entered into a pledge with God. Hence, God describes the hand of the Prophet as His hand.\textsuperscript{520}The rational analysis shines vividly in Al Māturīdī’s commentary. He factors in the circumstances and events in which the verses are revealed and the objective behind the revelation. The exercise of a context-guided rationale in the process of determining the meaning of the utterances related to the divine attributes does not exist in the work of any exegete before him, as far as the early literature shows.

Notwithstanding the presence of some repetition in Al Māturīdī’s exegesis, he seizes it as opportunities to exert all efforts in discerning new evidence to reinforce his earlier interpretations. Verse 1 of chapter 49, Al Ḥujurāt, serves as a verification of this: “O You who believe! Do not put (yourselves) forward bayna yadayi Allah and his Messenger…”\textsuperscript{521}Al Māturīdī repeats the earlier discussion and interprets bayna yadayi Allah, which is the dual form of yad, as before God.\textsuperscript{522}This time he complements the discussion with a new perspective. He states all the exegetes interpreted the phrase yaday Allah in this verse to mean “speaking or acting before or without the permission or the order of the messenger of God.” Then he objects the discrepancy in the exegetes’ opinion who interpreted yaday as “hand” in verse 75 of chapter Ṣād, when speaking about the creation of Adam, but interpreted it as “speaking or acting before” in this verse. The question that Al Māturīdī poses is legitimate because despite the fact the utterance is the same in the same morphological form, which is the dual form yaday, when associated with the name of God; it is interpreted differently without validating this inconsistency with any proof or justification. In the same sequence, even though unrelated, he proposes another

\textsuperscript{520}Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah}, vol 4, 540.  
\textsuperscript{521}“O You who believe! do not put (yourselves) forward before Allāh and his Messenger (Sal-Allaahu ‘alayhe Wa Sallam), and fear Allāh. Verily! Allāh is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.”  
\textsuperscript{522}Ibid.
possible meaning for *yaday* in verse 75 of chapter Ṣād, which is “…created him (Adam) with full knowledge of all his mistakes and sins…”

Thus, Al Māturīdī progresses in constructing his arguments and opinions as he travels from one verse to the other. He revisits past verses, revises them and then reconstructs the discussion or supplements it in light of the new understanding he develops.

The study of Al Māturīdī exegesis of the verses on the attribute of *yad* reveals very significant findings. First, Al Māturīdī does not confine the meaning of *yad*, when annexed to God, to a single meaning. Rather, he interprets it based on the context of the verse and the Arabic language. Mostly, Al Māturīdī focuses on the phrase’s meaning rather than the word’s meaning in the verse. This is not because he overlooks the meaning on a word level; he believes it is redundant and not intended by God. In particular, this manifests when *yad* is used in the dual form. This interpretation is not grounded on his personal inclinations, but on the pattern he identifies in various verses in the Qur’ān and the Arabic language, which guides his inductive reasoning. This raises an important question: does Al Māturīdī view *yad* as a distinct attribute of God as other exegetes have? He does not address this question directly, but analysis of his exegetical comments does not point to any distinct or new meaning or attribute. He interprets *yadd* to mean:

1. bounties;
2. distinction in creation;
3. before or in front of;
4. respect;
5. obedience of the Prophet;
6. divine aid;
7. victory;
8. recompense;
9. hand of the Prophet; and
10. ownership. These interpretations illustrate that, in Al Māturīdī’s exegesis, *yad* is an allegoric expression that God uses to highlight various meanings rather than a disparate attribute. Therefore, Al Māturīdī is the first Sunni scholar to discuss the meaning of *yad* of God thoroughly and present novel yet well-built interpretations of it. As far as the theological debate is concerned, Al Māturīdī denies all opinions that argue the attributes of

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523 Māturīdī, *Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah*, vol. 4, 540.
God can be similar to the attributes of the humans or accept a tacit indication of that. This does not come as a surprise because, as indicated earlier, Al Māturīdī is one of the founders of the Sunni school that affirms the attributes of God and denounces all forms of *tashbīh*. As far as epistemology is concerned, Al Māturīdī holds in high esteem the role of the Arabic language as a trusted source, which he uses in determining the correct interpretations of the verses. It remains, however, secondary to other sources such as *naqîl* (revelation) and *ʿaqîl* (intellect). His extensive application of rational reasoning, both inductive and deductive, and analysis in his exegetical process stand proof that he believes *ʿaqîl* is a valid source of proof and knowledge, which is a first for a Sunni exegete and a milestone in the evolution of Qur’ānic exegesis. Nonetheless, he does not employ it independent from *naqîl*, rather he harmonises between them throughout his commentary. *Naqîl* remains his most preferred and trusted ground upon which he constructs his commentary, but not the only one.

### 3.3.2 The attribute of *ʿayn*

ʿAyn is an attribute that raised a lot of controversy among Muslim theologians. In Arabic, the ʿ*ayn* utterance belongs to the *al mushtarak al lafḍî* category. Zabīdī and Ibn Manẓūr define *al mushtarak al lafḍî* as, “the single utterance that indicates, at least, two semantic meanings or more that are different and equally acceptable by the scholars of the language.” Thus, intrinsically, ʿ*ayn* has multiple unrelated meanings, such as: water spring, sun, money, spy, best of thing and protection, but the most commonly known meaning is eye, the organ of sight. In reference to God, the word ʿ*ayn* is used in one morphological form in the Qur’ān, the noun form. In some verses it appears in the singular form and others in the plural form. It is found in five different verses of the Qur’ān in five

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different chapters. Interestingly, all these chapters belong to the Makkī category and none of them are Madani. One of the possible reasons for the concentration of ‘ayn in the verses revealed in the Makkī period is because they are characterised by establishing the Islamic doctrine and narrating the tales of the past messengers and nations. Unlike the attribute of yad, all the ‘ayn verses have a common theme; they all address prominent messengers of God: Noah, Moses and Muhammad. However, a common denominator between the verses of both attributes is that the primary aim is not to discuss God or His attributes directly.

The context in three out of the five verses focuses on the construction of the Ark of Prophet Noah and the revelation of God about it. One of the other two verses relates to the dialogue between Prophet Moses and God at Mount Sinai and the other is an admonition to Prophet Muhammad. All the instances of ‘ayn are in the genitive case. The plural form is the dominant one, bi’a’yuninā in all the verses with the exception of verse 39 of chapter Ṭahā, which has the singular form, ‘ala ‘ayni.

Many of the early Sunni exegetes, such as Thawrī, Mujāhid, Ibn jurayj and Wakī and all the Mu’tazilite exegetes, whose work is relevant to the study do not comment on the meaning of ‘ayn in any of the verses, except Abū Muslim who comments on it once in verse 39 of chapter Ṭaha. On the other hand, other respected early Sunni exegetes, such as Muqātil, Ṣana’ānī and Ibn Abī Ḥātim, comment on it briefly and selectively. Muqātil and Ṣana’ānī address it in the exegesis of some verses and overlook it

526 Al Bughā and Mistū, Al Wādih Fi Ulūm Al Qur’an; Zarkashī, Al Burhān Fil Ulūm Al Qur’ān; Zarqānī, Manāhīl Al Irfān Fi Ulūm Al Qur’ān.
527 Four of the verses are in this form.
528 Al Thawrī, Tafsir of Sufyān Al Thawrī.
531 M. Al Qurashi, “Wakī” Ibn Al Jarrāḥ Aqwālulu Wa Marwiyyātulu Fi Al Tafsir” (PhD. diss., Umm Al Qurah University, 1999).
532 Al Aṣmm, Tafsir Abū Bakr Al Aṣmm; Al Ka’bi, Tafsir Abū Al Qāsim Al Ka’bi.
533 The relevance of the scholar to the study is determined by the time period in which they lived to determine whether they had an impact on Māturīdī.
534 Al Aṣfahānī, Tafsir Abū Muslim Al Aṣfahānī.
535 Mainly in chapters Hūd and Ṭaha.

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elsewhere, and Ibn Abī Ḥātim resorts to conveying relevant narrations from prominent companions and successors about the meanings of ‘ayn. In terms of commentary, Al Māturīdī interprets the meaning of ‘ayn every time it appears in relation to God. This is consistent with his practice in the exegesis of yad where he endeavours to explain and comment on every verse when appropriate. None of the early Sunni exegetes maintains the same frequency of commentary on ‘ayn, except Muqātil.536 Thus, this confirms a pattern in Al Māturīdī’s methodology as he focuses on devising a revolutionised genre of exegesis, where the theological aspect is studied as frequently as other aspects of Qur’ānic exegesis.

Muqātil approaches the explanation of ‘ayn in relation to God with a degree of ambiguity. In his commentary on verse 37 of chapter Hūd –“And construct the ship biʿa’yuninā (under our eyes) and with our inspiration…” –in the context of relating the construction of the Ark of Noah, he interprets it as “the knowledge of God.” He states, “…biʿa’yuninā means bi ‘ilminā,(by our knowledge)…”537 However, in verse 39 of chapter Țaha –“…and I imbued you with love from me, in order that you may be brought up ‘alā ’ayni (under my eye)” – which narrates the story of the protection of Moses when he was an infant from Pharaoh, Muqātil leaves the meaning of ‘ayn ambiguous. He explains, “…when he (Moses) was thrown in the coffin and then in the river, when he was found and when he was fed all this under the ‘ayn of God…”538 He does not elaborate on what he means by the ‘ayn of God. Does he mean the knowledge of God as per his earlier explanation or does he mean the eye of God as the organ of sight? Even in the verses that speak about the Ark of Noah, such as verse 14 of chapter Al Qamar and verse 27 of chapter Al Muʿminūn, Muqātil repeats the same expression “the ‘ayn of God” without providing any further commentary or referring the reader to his first interpretation of ‘ayn as knowledge of God. In light of the

536 Muqātil comments on the meaning of ‘ayn in four instances out of five.
chronological study conducted earlier, it is likely Muqātil meant an actual eye because he is anthropomorphist. However, the fact, he interpreted ‘ayn as knowledge in chapter Hūd makes it difficult to confirm this indisputably. As far as the works of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ṣana’ānī are concerned, it centralises on the first two verses, verses 37 of chapter Hūd and 39 of chapter Ṭaha. In chapter Hūd, Ibn Abī Ḥātim reports a narration from Ibn Abbas stating that a’ayunina means the ‘ayn of Allah and his revelation. Similarly, Ṣana’ānī relates a narration from Qatādah that provides the same interpretation. Neither Ibn Abī Ḥātim nor Ṣana’ānī provide any further explanation on the meaning of the ‘ayn of God in the narrations they transmitted. They maintain the same level of ambiguity as Muqātil, which leaves the door open to various possibilities. They perhaps thought the term is self-explanatory and does not require further explanation or they did not know the meaning of ‘ayn, in the context of God, so they left it unexplained or they believed ‘ayn refers to the fact God has a physical eye. If the last opinion is what they intended, then one may wonder, why do they interpret it in the singular form, one eye, and not the plural form, eyes?

Conversely, lucidity is one of the dominant features that manifests in Al Māturīdī commentary, despite the fact he does not expand on his commentary of the verses of ‘ayn as much he does on the other attributes, such as the yad verses. He aims at explaining and informing, rather than briefly commenting and reporting. For instance, in his commentary on verse 37 of chapter Hūd, he states that ‘ayn could mean, “…the protection and care of God…” or “…the teaching of God…” Nonetheless, the simplicity and clarity in his exegesis does not compromise the scholastic reasoning and academic element in it. Prior to drawing this conclusion, Al Māturīdī begins relating what, according to him, represents the general opinions of the exegetes. He clarifies, “…some of the scholars of exegesis said,
bi’a’yuninā means ‘by our command and our revelation’ and other said that it means ‘under our sight and our vision…”541 The opinions Al Māturīdī quotes were not mentioned by the exegetes whose work was investigated earlier. Thus, in addition to the lucidity of his commentary, Al Māturīdī provides valuable insight into the main commentaries that were discussed by exegetes during his time. Are they acquired through narrative sources or the product of rational reasoning? It is difficult to discern because Al Māturīdī does not name these scholars. Nonetheless, this marks yet another contribution of Al Māturīdī’s work.

After informing the reader of the common opinions, Al Māturīdī formulates his personal exegetical opinion. He states, “…however in our opinion it (bi’a’yuninā) can have two possible meanings…our (God’s) care and guard…and our (God’s) teaching…”542 Al Māturīdī’s keenness on contributing by personal reflections to Qur’ānic exegesis that one notices in his commentary on the attribute of yad recurs here. He bases the first possibility he proposes on the idiomatic use in the Arabic language. He explains, “…they (the Arabs) say, ‘the two eyes of God on you’ means may the protection of God guards you…”543 However, the meanings of ‘ayn are multiple, so how does Al Māturīdī further strengthen this interpretation? He does so by a rational analogy. He hypothesises that God might have used ‘ayn to refer to protection because in real life, the humans intellect cannot offer complete protection without maintaining visual surveillance over the protected, which demands the use of the eye. He states, “…and as he (God) mentioned hands (in the Qur’an) to describe the actions, in a manner that conforms to how it would be done in the creatures’ world, likewise he used ‘ayn because protection can’t take place without it.”544 On the epistemological level, Al Māturīdī considers the Arabic language and its various uses as a valid source of knowledge and truth. This occurred before in his commentary in the yad

541 Ibid.
542 Ibid.
543 Ibid.
544 Ibid.
verses where he interpreted it as power and bounties. However, does he see it as an independent source? His commentary so far demonstrates he does not rely upon it alone. Rather, he uses it along with other primary sources of knowledge, such as rationale. So far, Al Māturīdī continues to weave his argument using new knowledge and examples. The simile quoted above focuses on the association of the eye with protection and care and is built on real experiences from the world. Hence, it provides a more compelling argument. This entire approach is novel to exegetical literature of his time.

At this point and before elucidating on the grounds of the second possibility he proposes, Al Māturīdī digresses from the main discussion to reaffirm the impossibility of interpreting ‘ayn as the organ of sight. He emphasises, “…And the expression bi a’yuninā cannot be understood to mean an actual eye…” Al Māturīdī not only has an interest in explaining the meaning of ‘ayn in the verses, but also likes to engage in theological debate about whether an anthropomorphic interpretation of ‘ayn, when associated with God, has any grounds. Obviously, he believes it does not and continues to rule out the practice of tashbīh. Notably, he quotes verse 51 of chapter Al Anfāl and verse 30 of chapter Al Shūra, which he used in the discussion of the attribute of yad to aver that yad should not be interpreted as a physical hand. Recurrently, he uses the same verses the exegetes consented that cannot be understood literally to apply the same understanding; however, this time in reference to the meaning of ‘ayn. Thus, Al Māturīdī continues to use clear and agreed upon verses to support his understanding of the controversial ones. In addition, this evinced that he applies a universal maxim in interpreting all the attributes of God regardless of the context of the verse. He conceptualises that once an utterance is

545 Ibid.
546 “This is because of (your actions) that which your hands had forwarded. And Verily, Allāh is not unjust to his slaves.”
547 “And whatever of misfortune befalls you, it is because of your actions (what your hands have earned) and He pardons much.
associated with God it loses all semantic relevance that may indicate any shade of similarity to creatures.

As for the second possibility of the meaning of ‘ayn in verse 37 of chapter Hūd, Al Māturīdī bases it on what was described earlier\textsuperscript{548} as the context-guided rationale in determining the meaning of the utterances, which is sui generis to him. He elaborates, “…because if it weren’t for God teaching him (Noah) how to build an ark, he would not have learnt how to craft one…he only learnt this through God’s instructions.”\textsuperscript{549} Al Māturīdī continues to exercise the same apparatus as the one applied in comprehending the various meanings of yad. The use of context-guided rationale is also evident in his commentary on verse 48 of chapter Al Ṭūr. The verse addresses Prophet Muhammad and reads, “so wait patiently (O Muhammad) for the decision of Your Lord, for Verily, You are under our bi a’yuninā (eyes)…” The approach Al Māturīdī adopts in explaining the verse is aberrant. He states, “if the command to be patient in the verse is (for Prophet Muhammad) to endure the difficulties of conveying the message…then bia’yuninā would express a promise of divine aid and triumph…”\textsuperscript{550} None of the other early exegetes commented on the use of ‘ayn in this chapter let alone suggested such an analysis. Then he continues, “…however if the command to be patient is (for prophet Muhammad) to not to expect much acceptance or appeasement from them (those who belie his message) then (bi a’yuninā) would refer to the knowledge of God of how they would mock, harm and ridicule him…”\textsuperscript{551} “The triumph of God” and “the knowledge of God” are not among the semantic meanings of ‘ayn, rather they are contextual rational interpretations that Al Māturīdī espouses. This method of interpretation, which fuses context, circumstances and reasoning, is unique to Al Māturīdī and he applied it in his commentary on verse 10 of

\textsuperscript{548} See section 3.3.1.
\textsuperscript{549} Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah}, vol. 2, 526.
\textsuperscript{550} Ibid, vol. 4, 600.
\textsuperscript{551} Ibid.
chapter Al Fath in the context of the verses of yad. Another noteworthy conclusion from
the above interpretations, which solidifies an earlier observation, is the fact Al Māturīdī
does not generalise the interpretations that he concludes from one verse and apply it to the
remaining verses. Rather, he considers all possible interpretations and puts them before the
reader. He adheres to the same modus with the meanings of the attribute of yad.

In verse 39 of chapter Ṭaha, Ibn Abī Ḥātim records three narrations: Abū Nuhayk or Nahīk
(d. unknown), who interprets the phrase “‘li tuṣnna’a ‘ala ‘aynī” to mean “to be fashioned
under my ‘ayn;” 552 Abū Imrān Al Jūni553(d. 745 CE), who interprets it as “to be brought up
under my ‘ayn;” 554 and Qatādah, who interprets it as “to be nourished under my ‘ayn,” 555
which is also recorded in Şana’ānī’s exegesis on the same verse. 556 None of the early
exegetes educates the others about the meaning of ‘ayn nor critiques or even assesses the
narrations they transmit. This underlines another major difference between the early
exegetes and Al Māturīdī. He does not simply relate the commentaries of others
unconditionally; he assesses and critiques their opinions. This quality is evident in his
commentary on verse39 of chapter Ṭaha as well. He mentions the two main opinions of the
meaning of ‘ala ‘aynī in the verse, which are “to be fed under the care of God…and to be
brought up with the knowledge of God…” 557 and then favours the former over the latter.
He confirms, “…and the first one is most likely to be correct.” 558 Verse 27 of chapter Al
Mu’minūn is another illustration of this practice. Al Māturīdī lists two opinions that the
exegetes commonly favour, “under our supervision” 559 and “under our sight.” 560 However,
he opts for a third opinion and argues, “...and it is possible…that God informed him that

552 Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim, 2422.
553 Dhahabī, Siyar A’alam Al Nubala”; Al Mizzā, Tahdhīb Al Kamāl Fi Asmā’ Al Rijāl.
554 Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim, 2422.
555 Ibid.
556 A. Al Şana’ānī Tafsir Abdul Razzāq Al Şana’ānī,3vols. (Riyadh: Maktabt Al Rushd, 1989).
558 Ibid.
559 Ibid.
560 Ibid.
we will let you triumph over them and they will not be able to stop you from building it (the Ark).”\textsuperscript{561} In his commentary on the meaning of \textit{yad} in verse 64 in chapter Al Mā’īdah, Al Māturīdī applies a critical assessment as well. This indicates his consistency in the application of the instruments of analysis in the exegesis of all of the divine attributes verses.

Furthermore, in his investigation of the meanings of ‘\textit{ayn}, Al Māturīdī helps resolve the ambiguity encountered in the exegetical narrations of the other exegetes. As demonstrated earlier, many Sunni exegetes did not go beyond stating the obvious that ‘\textit{ayn} means an ‘\textit{ayn} of God, which left the term open to many interpretations. In the course of his exegesis, Al Māturīdī clarifies that Qatādah and Al Ḥassan meant “the protection of God.”\textsuperscript{562} While it is arguable that this may represent his understanding of their opinion and not what they really intended, the context of the verses and commentaries of other exegetes, such as Tabarī, confirm this conclusion.

Momentous outcomes and contributions emerge from the study of Al Māturīdī’s exegetical commentary on the subject of ‘\textit{ayn} verses. They are evident at the methodology and content levels. At the level of methodology, striking similarities exist between the framework Al Māturīdī applies in the exegesis of the \textit{yad} verses and the ‘\textit{ayn} verses. He maintains a substantial level of consistency in the argument, instruments and maxims he employs. On the content and contribution level, Al Māturīdī’s commentary leads to an important conclusion, which is that he does not believe the expression of ‘\textit{ayn} in reference to God in the Qur’ān intends to inform the reader about a new distinct attribute of God. Even though Al Māturīdī does not openly articulate it, the meanings he informs of and validates for ‘\textit{ayn} in all the verses attest to the correctness of this inference. He interprets

\textsuperscript{561} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{562} Ibid.
‘ayn as: (1) the care and protection of God; (2) the instructions and teachings of God; (3) the victory of God; and (4) the aid of God. Thereupon, he does not recognise ‘ayn as a new attribute. Rather, he sees it as an idiomatic expression that expresses other attributes of God. Therefore, Al Māturīdī proposes alternative interpretations for anthropomorphic expressions. He does not ignore them, as evident in the works of many early exegetes, nor does he force unreasonable and unsupported interpretations on them to escape their problematic interpretation. Rather, he follows a scholastic methodology in explaining and shedding the light on the interpretations that are in concordance with Islamic theology and exegetical methods. This in itself is a significant finding to be added to his contributions.

The employment of rational analogy in his exegesis on the attributes verses is another unprecedented practice in the Sunni exegesis literature. He combines some of the traditional methods, such as the explanation of the Qur’ān by other verses from the Qur’ān, and innovative analytical techniques. This is a shift from the traditional narrative exegesis to a new paradigm in Qur’ānic exegesis, a *tafsīr bil ra’y*. Therefore, one witnesses in Al Māturīdī’s work the first Sunni attempt to synthesise between traditional and progressive ones. He largely uses ‘*aql*; however, it is cleverly moulded within a framework that does not undermine the importance of *naqāl*, represented in this instance by the use of other Qur’ānic verses for interpretation.

At the content level, Al Māturīdī’s commentary is more comprehensive in comparison to many early exegetes. The overwhelming component in his exegesis is not narrations of earlier opinions, but personal weighty analysis. Even when he records the narrations of the early exegetes, he examines and annotates them. He aims at educating the reader properly and clears all ambiguities that may arise in his personal views or the commentaries of other exegetes that he cites. This marks a new style of *tafsīr* unfound in earlier Sunni exegesis.

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563 Explained in chapter 2.
works. He provides adequate reasoning for his personal conclusions and discusses the theological elements of the verses without disturbing the flow of the exegesis. He gives ample consideration to the context of the verses and various possibilities of interpretations, which distinguishes his exegesis by a theological content unprecedented in other exegetical works. While engaging in theological debate, he upholds the principles of the school he belongs to, which affirm the attributes of God, and debunks the arguments of anthropomorphist scholars. Al Māturīdī remains calm in his analysis of the verses. He discusses controversial points, but without personalising the discourse or becoming aggressive against those who hold opposite views. He is careful not to rule out the correction of other opinions while he establishes the validity of his personal deductions unless it violates the core tenets of his theological school. Hence, his continuous rebuttal of anthropomorphic interpretations.

3.3.3 The attribute of *istiwā’*

The attribute of *istiwā’* introduces a new dimension to the debate about the attributes of God. Contrary to the attributes discussed earlier, *istiwā’* represents a point of intersection between the attributes and actions of God. In the previous sections, the discussion centred on attributes that essentially relate to the nature of God. Does the *yad* of God mean the hand of God? Does the ‘*ayn* of God mean the eye of God? Essentially these attributes do not manifest or affect the relationship between God and His creatures. However, the attribute of *istiwā’* is associated predominantly with the ‘*arsh*, commonly interpreted as the throne of God, which is one of His great creations,\(^{564}\) and discusses whether God sits and what is intended by associating the *istiwā’* utterance with God in the Qur’ān.

\(^{564}\) Al Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al Bukhārī*.  

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In the Qur’an, *istiwā*’ whether as an utterance or an attribute is not affiliated with God alone. Rather, it is used in various verses in relation to humans, angels, plants and objects. In reference to God, the word *istiwā*’ is employed in nine verses found in nine separate chapters. These chapters are spread out in the Qur’an; some of them belong to the *Makkī* period and some belong to the *Madanī* period. One of the reasons for the consistent reference to *istiwā*’ in both periods is because it is associated with the concept of the beginning of creation, which the Qur’an often highlights in many of the chapters. *Istiwā*’ appears in one morphological form in all the relevant verses, the past tense form of *istawa*. All the verses associate it with the *‘arsh* of God following the completion of the creation, except verse 29 in chapter Al Baqarah where *istiwā*’ is associated with the creation of the heavens.

The early exegetes, such as Mujāhid Ibn Jabr, Sufyān Al Thawrī, Abdul Razzāq Al Ṣana’ānī, Abū Bakr Al Aṣmm, Abū Al Qāsim Al Ka’bī, Abū Muslim Al Aṣfahānī and others, whose work is investigated in the study, did not provide adequate commentary that explains the meaning of *istiwā*’ in reference to God. With the exception of Muqātitl and Ibn Abī Ḥātim, the other exegetes, including the Mu’tazilites, either did not explain the verses or they overlooked, in their brief commentary, the component that relates to *istiwā*’. Despite the fact that Muqatil and Ibn Abī Ḥātim touched on *istiwā*’ in their exegesis, they approached it differently. The latter follows the narrative approach and limits his input to listing the various narrations from early prominent exegetes such as Abū Al’Āliyah(566(d.708 CE), Al Rabī’ Ibn Anas(567(d. 757 CE) and Al Ḥassan(568(d.728 CE). In addition, Ibn Abī Ḥātim reports conflicting narrations that specify the time period in which *istiwā*’ took place. According to Qatādah, it happened on the seventh day after the

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565 Verse 14 of chapter Al Qaṣaṣ, verse 29 of chapter Al Fath and verse 6 of chapter Al Najm.
566 Al Mizzī, *Tahdhib Al Kamāl Fi Asmā’ Al Rijāl*; Dhahābī, *Siyar A’alam Al Nubala*’.
568 Dhahābī, *Siyar A’alam Al Nubala*’.
completion of the creation of the celestial and terrestrial worlds. However, according to ‘Ikrimah,\(^{569}\) it happened on the sixth day in the last three hours.\(^ {570}\) Conversely, in this instance, Muqātil does not provide any narrations from the early exegetes. Instead, he attempts to interpret the verses personally. However, his explanation lacks consistency. In his exegesis of verse 29 of chapter al Baqarah\(^{571}\) and verse 54 of chapter Al A’rāf\(^{572}\) he overlooks the attribute of \(istiwā’\) completely. Then in verse 3 of chapter Yunus\(^{573}\) and verse 2 of chapter Al Ra’d\(^ {574}\) he comments on the order of phrases in the verses and explains that \(istiwā’\) took place before the creation of the celestial and terrestrial worlds,\(^ {575}\) but fails to comment on the meaning of \(istiwā’\). This contradicts completely all the narrations that Ibn Abi Ḥātim presented in his exegesis, which advise that it took place after the creation of the universe. As far as the meaning of \(istiwā’\) is concerned, the narrations Ibn Abi Ḥātim reports, on the authority of Abū Al ‘Āliyah, Al Rabī’ Ibn Anas and Al Ḥassan, explain it as \(irtafa’a\) or \(irtifā’\), which means to rise above or rising. Ibn Abi Ḥātim reiterates these narrations in his exegesis without any further clarification.

On the other hand, Muqātil, in his commentary on verse 5 of chapter Ṭāha, addresses the exegesis of \(istiwā’\) and interprets it, very briefly, to mean \(istaqarra\), which has multiple meanings and among them is to settle, rest upon something or become fixed after being mobile.\(^ {576}\) He does not elaborate on what he intends by this vague explanation nor does he support it with an argument. However, when one keeps in mind that Muqātil is a

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\(^{569}\) A second exegete whom Ibn Abi Ḥātim quotes in his commentary of the verse.

\(^{570}\) Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Tafsir Ibn Abi Ḥātim*.

\(^{571}\) “He it is who created for You All that is on earth. Then he \(istawā\) towards the heaven and made them…”

\(^{572}\) “Indeed your lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth In six days, and then he \(istawā\) on the \(‘arsh\)...”

\(^{573}\) “Surely, your lord is Allah who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then \(istawā\) on the \(‘arsh\)...”

\(^{574}\) “Allah is he who raised the heavens without any pillars that you can see. Then, he \(istawā\) on the \(‘arsh\)...”

\(^{575}\) Ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsir Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān*.

mushabbih, as was established in chapter 2, it becomes more likely for it to be interpreted as sitting.

Al Māturīdī comments on the meaning of *istiwā’* in five out of the nine verses in which *istiwā’* of God appears. Thus, he maintains a substantial consistency in the explanation of the verses and attempts to approach the explanation of every verse independently. This feature distinguishes his work from the early exegetes and his contemporaries who often suffice themselves by explaining the different aspects of the attribute in one place, such as Tabarî, or resort to repetition, such as Ibn Abî Ḥātim.

It is noteworthy to remember that Al Māturīdī maintains the same level of frequency, and sometimes higher, in the exegesis of all the attributes he explains. In his discussion of the meaning of *istiwā’* in verse 29 of chapter Al Baqarah577, Al Māturīdī begins by relating the various opinions of the exegetes at his time about its meaning. The style in which he presents the opinions is succinct and tactful. The first meaning he refers to is *al qaṣd*, which has different meanings among the main ones, including “to address something or someone directly”, “to direct one’s attention and will towards something or someone”578 or “to focus one’s effort on a specific task or person or matter.”579 Al Māturīdī is the one of the first exegetes, as far as extant literature shows, to list *al qaṣd* as one of the possible meanings of *istiwā’* along with his contemporary Tabarî. However, Al Māturīdī does not state it plainly as Tabarî has done. Rather, he points to it indirectly by referring to one of the verses in which this meaning is used. He states, “…one of the possible meanings of *Istawā* here (in chapter Al Baqarah) is…similar to what he (Allah) states (in the verse 11 of chapter Fuṣṣilat) ‘then he made *istiwā’* to the heavens when it was smoke like’…”580

577 “He it is who created for you all that is on earth. Then he *istawā’* towards the heaven…”
Pertinently, Al Māturīdī specifically quotes verse 11 of chapter Fuṣṣilat\(^{581}\) because its context makes it easier for the reader to see the possibility of *istiwā‘* been interpreted as *al qaṣd*, which means “to address” or “to focus”. In the verse, the phrase about *istiwā‘* is followed by a phrase in which God addresses a command to the heavens and the Earth to declare their obedience to Him. Hence, *istiwā‘* is interpreted as to address or direct attention, speech or will to something or someone directly. Thus, clarity is an element that Al Māturīdī continuously seeks to achieve in his evidence. He does not twist or stretch the meaning of the words beyond their lexical elasticity or Qur’ānic implications.

The second possible meaning Al Māturīdī uses is *tamma*, which means “to complete” or “to perfect.”\(^{582}\) He supports this possibility by referring to verse 14 of chapter Al Qaṣaṣ, where the verb *istawā‘* describes His bounty on Moses who, by the blessing of God, reached a state of perfection in his body and mind.\(^{583}\) Consistently, Al Māturīdī resorts to the Qur’ān as the primary reference to verify the meanings he is proposing. This was witnessed earlier in his commentary on the verses of *yad* and *‘ayn* and reinforces an important element in his methodology, which is to explain as much as possible the meaning of the words in the Qur’ān by using the same words in other verses. This underlines that to Al Māturīdī there is no greater source of truth and evidence than the Qur’ān. In other words, *naql* takes the first priority and by extension this reflects the traditional dimension of Al Māturīdī’s scholarship. From another perspective, this qualifies him the respect of the general community of exegetes who prefer this method.

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\(^{581}\) “Moreover He made *Istiwā‘* to the sky and it had been (as) smoke: He said to it and to the earth: ‘Come ye together, willingly or unwillingly.’ They said: ‘We do come (together), in willing obedience.’”

\(^{582}\) Māturīdī, *Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah*, vol. 1, 52-53.

\(^{583}\) Verse 14 of chapter Al Qaṣaṣ states, “and when He attained his full strength, and was perfect (in manhood), we bestowed on Him Hukman (Prophethood, Right judgement of the affairs) and religious knowledge [of the Religion of his forefathers i.e. Islamic Monotheism]. And thus do we reward the Muhsinûn (i.e. good doers)”.
The last possible interpretation of *istiwā'* that Al Māturīdī indicates is *istawla* “to govern and have complete control.” Al Māturīdī makes no mention of the interpretations the early exegetes mentioned such as *istaqarra*, which means to settle and rest, or *irtafa’a*, which means to rise above. Is this because the verse does not speak about the notion of *‘arsh*, the throne of God? Even if one accepts this presumption in relation to *istaqarra*, it does not hold in relation to *irtafa’a* because Ibn Abū Ḥātim and Tabarī believe it applies to the heavens as well.\(^{584}\) Therefore, one may infer that even when Al Māturīdī relates the exegetical opinions of others scholars, he does not simply list all the transmitted interpretations. Rather, he includes only the interpretations that, according to his assessment, are factual and correct. This highlights the element of critiquing and analysis in his exegesis via the study of the appearances of a given word in other Qur’ānic contexts and the use of intellect; a practice that recurs in his Qur’ānic exegesis. Additionally, it exhibits that Al Māturīdī is fixed in his stance against *tashbīḥ* because these interpretations legitimate, remotely some may argue, the possibility of anthropomorphic interpretations of the verses, which Al Māturīdī denounces.

The application of intellect becomes more palpable when Al Māturīdī begins to layout his *modus operandi*. He states, “…and we attest that his (God) actions cannot be similar to those of others…For it is impossible for anything to be similar, in any way, to God…”\(^{585}\) and then expounds further, “…because there are no finite qualities in him as there are no infinite qualities in what others may falsely think is similar to him…”\(^{586}\) He rules out the possibility of any similarity between God and His creation by establishing a rational principle that the infinite nature of God does not and cannot allow it. No other early exegete forwarded such a rational and central exegetical maxim in their work. Is it this the

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\(^{584}\) Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Tabarī narrated that the meaning of *istiwā’* is *irtafa’a*, which is to rise above.

\(^{585}\) Māturīdī,*Ta’wilat Ahlu Sunnah*, vol. 1, 52-53.

\(^{586}\) Ibid.
first time that Al Māturīdī has formulated exegetical principles? In concept, it is not because he devised formulas in his commentary on the *yad* verses to deny any similarities. However, it is a new principle substantiated by a new argument and original proofs.

This is also evidence of the cohesion in his conceptual framework in his exegesis. One cannot help but notice a symbiotic relationship between Al Māturīdī’s keenness on disproving the claims of *tashbih* and the exploration of the meanings of the attributes expressions in the verses. Despite the fact Al Māturīdī does not overtly discuss the theological debate on the attributes, it continues to linger in his mind and influence his analysis process. Consistently, Al Māturīdī ensures that *tashbih*, as a theological possibility, is ruled out then he commences the exegetical discussion of the attributes. This is what makes him one of the earliest scholars to discuss thoroughly the theological dimensions in Qur’anic exegesis in the Sunni world, in his time, while maintaining a well-balanced fusion between both disciplines. In the same sequence, the above statement proves beyond doubt that Al Māturīdī believes that *’aql* has a fundamental role in the correct understanding of Islamic theology and Qur’ānic exegesis. Accordingly, he develops a conceptual framework for the interpretation of the divine attributes and utterances related to them. He suggests, “…One: to confirm and describe God as he has been described in the revealed book (Qur’ān) and we cognize that God is not similar, in the action that he mentioned, to anyone besides him…”

From the very first point, Al Māturīdī preserves the right of the exegetes, predecessors and successors to not to delve into detailed explanation of the divine attributes and verses related to them. Al Māturīdī validates *tafwīd* as a method of exegesis and by doing this he respects the legacy of the early exegetes. Thus, Al Māturīdī was not monolithic in his exegesis and he recognised the possibility of more than one valid opinion. This in itself is a

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587 Ibid.
major contribution to the field because it advocates that the truth does not necessarily have to be in one autocratic opinion and testifies to his objectivity. Thus, Al Māturīdī dispels the tendency, which continues to overwhelm theological and exegetical circles that one must be in one camp or in the other. This was an important development at a stage when Muslim intellectuals were divided into various schools and some of them were adversarial in their relationships.\textsuperscript{588} At the same time, he restricts the authority of ‘\textit{aql} as the sole source of correct knowledge about God, His attributes and the world by reaffirming that the attributes of God are sought from the revealed sources. In this statement, Al Māturīdī establishes one of the key differences between the application of ‘\textit{aql} in his methodology and that of the Mu’tazilites to whom ‘\textit{aql} is the absolute authority.

The second method he proposes is “…that there are (in the verse of the Qur’ān), expressions that aim at abbreviating the meanings of the speech upon which the complete comprehension of the statement rests…”\textsuperscript{589} In simpler terms, Al Māturīdī is underlining that in some verses not every utterance is intended for itself and therefore should not be explained word by word. Rather, it could be a marker that points to another implied meaning. He provides multiple examples to clarify it further and one of them is verse 24 of chapter Al Mā’īdah:\textsuperscript{590} quoting some members of the tribe of Israel addressing Moses, “…Go you and your Lord and fight you two…” Al Māturīdī comments “…For example, his (God’s) statement…means go (with the power) of your God…as it is known that he fights by (the power of) his Lord and this is how it should be understood…”\textsuperscript{591} The example Al Māturīdī cites cannot be disputed by any exegete. They all consent the

\textsuperscript{588} Abū Zahra, \textit{Tārīkh Al Madhāhib Al Islāmiyyah}.
\textsuperscript{589} Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah}, vol. 1, 52-53.
\textsuperscript{590} The entire verse reads, “they said: ‘O Mūsa (Moses)! we shall never enter it as long as they are there. so Go You and Your Lord and fight You two, we are sitting Right here.’”. It refers to a statement of the people of Israel in which they addressed Moses when he gave them the command to enter the holy land of Palestine and combat the Amalekites. For further information, see the explanation of the verse in \textit{Al Qurṭūbī}, \textit{Al Jāmi‘ Li Aḥkām Al Qur’ān}; Ibn Kathīr, \textit{Tafsīr Al Qur’ān Al Adhīm}; Tabarī, \textit{Jāmi‘ Al Bayān Fi Ta’wil Al Qur’ān}.
\textsuperscript{591} Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah}, vol. 1, 52-53.
conjunction “and” is not used in its primary sense; rather it is used as a marker to express the phrase “by the power of.” Repeatedly, Al Māturīḍī resorts to Qur’ānic evidence that cannot be disputed to substantiate his interpretations.

In his commentary on verse 2 of chapter Al Ra’d, Al Māturīḍī demonstrates his tactful ability to marry perfectly between ‘aql and naql. The verse reads, “Allah is he who raised the heavens without any pillars that you can see. Then, he istawā on the ‘arsh…” Al Māturīḍī states, “…As witnessed in real life, creatures are not similar to each other in all aspects.592 Rather they are similar in some common aspect…Hence they all became described as akin because of some similarities and common forms…”593 Al Māturīḍī capitalises on this real-life observation, which is, in essence, rational and given in the minds of all people to discredit the claim of resemblance to God, then he reinforces this meaning by quoting the last phrase in verse 11 of chapter Al Shūrā, “…there is nothing like unto him (God), and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer.” Thus, he marries pleasantly between the intellect and revelation. Al Māturīḍī aims at proving that ‘aql and naql do not oppose each other in Islamic theology, which indicates he regards both as solid grounds for founding opinions and drawing conclusions. Returning to the exegetical discussion, Al Māturīḍī concludes, “…This indicates that God denies any modality that could allude to any similarity or identicalness for he is different from his creation from all aspects…”594

In other words, Al Māturīḍī is arguing that since all the similarities between all the creatures, in essence, are partial and not complete and since God belies any similarity between Him and His creation, then God is negating, in an absolute sense, the very notion of similarity between Him and His creation. Conspicuously, this deduction affected the

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592 The translation may seem verbose since the word “identical “conveys the meaning succinctly. However, Māturīḍī used this long phrase more than once and, to be faithful to the original text, it was translated as it is.


594 Ibid.
exegetical framework Al Māturīdī applies in his commentary on the divine attributes verses and which has not been proposed or explained by any other Muslim exegete before him. Another pivotal finding that should not be overlooked is that, in the above commentary, Al Māturīdī introduces Aristotle’s syllogism in Qur’ānic exegesis. He applies two propositions, the first about the nature of similarity among creation and the second is a Qur’ānic statement to arrive at a conclusion that the very concept of similarity between God and creation cannot and does not exist. Thus, he is the first exegete to use syllogism in Qur’ānic verses.

As a result, Al Māturīdī confutes the association of the notion of place with istiwā’ because this only applies in the case of creatures and not the creator. Consequently, he interprets istiwā’, in the context of verse 2 of chapter Al Ra’d, to mean to govern and have complete control.595 He states, “…One cannot understand from it (istiwā’) the affirmation of the notion of a place rather what is understood is the establishment of the omnitude of his authority and power and will. For that, one should not understand from its association with God the notion of place…”596 Al Māturīdī is the first scholar to discuss openly the notion of place and its relationship with istiwā’ and God in his exegesis. Even Tabarī, whose commentary is very comprehensive in comparison to the other early exegetes, does not raise it at all. Al Māturīdī is also the first Sunni exegete to explain istiwā’ as istawlā “to govern and have complete control.” Tabarī lists istawlā as one of the sound lexical meanings of istiwā’ in Arabic, but he does not associate it with the verses or attributes of God. Does this mean Al Māturīdī refuses the other interpretations that Tabarī promotes? Does he offer any rebuttal to the opinion that interprets istiwā’ as irtafa’a “to rise”? How does he interpret the utterance ‘arsh, which is associated with istiwā’ in six of the nine verses?

596 Ibid.
The answers to these questions are found in Al Māturīdī’s commentary on verse 5 of chapter Ṭahā: “the most beneficent (Allah) istawā on the ‘arsh...” All the other exegetes, save Muqātil, have no commentary on the verse. In his exegesis on it, Al Māturīdī contributes to the discussion that he began on chapter Al Ra’d about the possibility of associating God with a place. He delineates further the reasons why, in his opinion, it is false and commences by considering all possibilities. He states, “…the statement that confirms that God is on the ‘arsh,\textsuperscript{597} which is a place, in his self...gives rise to the following (possibilities), God is enclosed within it or he fits in it completely or he is bigger than it...”\textsuperscript{598} Al Māturīdī raises the three inescapable scenarios, which are associated with the notion of makān (place) that the proponents of this opinion must consider and resolve, then he continues to illustrate the reasons it cannot be correct. He explains that if one is to consider the first scenario then it would suggest God is limited in terms of space and can be smaller than His creation. By extension, this would logically allow God to be bound by the dimension of time as is the case with the dimension of space. This belief is repudiated by all Muslim scholars and is considered blasphemous by the consensus of the Muslim community.\textsuperscript{599} In the second scenario, any increase in the size of the throne, Al Māturīdī explains, would diminish the size of God, which would lead to a limitation of God as in the first scenario. The third scenario leads to the same conclusion as well and further implies the inability of God to create what suits Him, which is a fault that no human king would commit.\textsuperscript{600} Al Māturīdī consummates his discussion by denoting that such an interpretation

\textsuperscript{597} The proponents of this opinion interpret ‘arsh to mean an actual throne. Māturīdī does not agree with this interpretation and his discussion of it will be covered in the subsequent paragraphs.

\textsuperscript{598} Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah, vol. 3, 284.

\textsuperscript{599} I. Bājūrī, Sharḥ Jawharat Al Tawḥīd (Damascus: 1971); Bazdawi, Usūl Al Deen; Ibn Taymiyyah, Majmū’ Fatāwa Shaikh Al Islām Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah; M. Māturīdī and F. Kholeif, Kitāb Al-Tawhīd (Beirut: Dar al Mashriq, 1982).

\textsuperscript{600} Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah, vol. 3, 284.
would lead to the partition of God with some parts of Him fitting in the ‘arsh and other parts do not.\footnote{Ibid.} No exegete, before Al Māturīdī, opens such a debate in his work.

Once more, Al Māturīdī uses syllogism in constructing his argument against the aforementioned opinion. Indirectly, he applies conditional syllogism in the debate proposing that, if the association of a place with God would lead to limiting or assimilating Him to His creation, then such an interpretation is flawed. The application of syllogism is one of Al Māturīdī’s innovations, which marks his independence in thought and openness to progressive methods that would enrich the discipline even if it is not traditional.

According to Fakhruddīn Al Rāzī and Zamakhsharī, who are in today’s Muslim academic eye, the pioneers of theological exegesis in the Sunni school are in fact the beneficiaries and not the originators of the use of intellect in Qur’ānic exegesis. Thus, by disproving the validity of associating the notion of place with God, Al Māturīdī dismisses the interpretation of istiwā’ as irtafa’a (to rise). He dispenses another ground that testifies to the erroneousness of this opinion, which is the theme of the verse and general context that precedes and follows it. Al Māturīdī explains the theme of the verse is to express the greatness and loftiness of God. The verse\footnote{Verse four of chapter Ṭaḥa: “a Revelation from Him (Allah) who has created the earth and High heavens”.
} that precedes the verse of istiwā’ describes God as the creator of the heavens and the earth, and the verse\footnote{Verse six of chapter Ṭaḥa: “to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth, and all that is between them, and all that is under the soil.”
} that follows it describes the perfect dominion and infinite ability of God. Hence, Al Māturīdī argues, “…irtifa’ (rising above) to sit in a high place, does not denote honour, eminence or the characteristics of greatness and exaltation because sitting on a roof or living in the mountains does not, in itself, warrant one eminence…”\footnote{Māturīdī,\textit{Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah}, vol. 3, 284.}
In addition, Al Māturīdī insinuates a new angle to the exegetical process that no exegete before him, at least overly, instructs. He accentuates that, in his view, any interpretation that does not reinforce the greatness and loftiness of God is incorrect because all attributes of God must be praiseworthy and exalting. He espouses the core principles of the belief of God in Islam, as the perfect being, in his exegesis, and advocates that it affects understanding the intentions behind the Qur’ānic expressions. Resultantly, the objective of speaking about *istiwā*’ in the Qur’ān is, “…to glorify God…”605 by stating that the ‘*arsh*, the greatest of all creations, belongs to God and ownership of great things and the ability to fashion them testifies to God’s greatness.606

Within the course of discussing his commentary in chapter Ṭāha, Al Māturīdī manifests an aptitude in diverting the argument of his opponents to benefit and support his interpretation. He argues, “…and it is possible for this (interpretation, which states that God has risen above the ‘*arsh*, throne) to negate the attribution of a place (to God)…”607 then explains how this could be true, “…for it (‘*arsh*, throne) is the highest place in the understanding of the creatures and the minds cannot comprehend what is beyond it…”608 He concludes, “…hence, he (God) pointed to it so it would be known that he is above the concept of place and is above any type of dependence…”609 Skilfully, Al Māturīdī segments the others’ argument and then verifies his principal opinion through it, which is that God is beyond the concept of place. No other exegete before Al Māturīdī displays such ability in their Qur’ānic exegesis.

Al Māturīdī provides perspectives into the meaning of ‘*arsh* that are unprecedented. The only exegete who addresses the description of ‘*arsh*, in the context of the verses of divine

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605 Ibid.
606 Ibid.
607 Ibid.
608 Ibid.
609 Ibid.
attributes, is Ibn Abī Ḥātim. He relates three exegetical narrations, from Ibn Abbās, Sa’d Al Ţā’ī (d. unknown) and Wahb Ibn Munbih (d. 732 CE). The narration from Ibn Abbās explains it is given such a title because of its height. The other two narrations describe the essence of the ‘arsh, but differ in it. Sa’d Al Ţā’ī advises it is created from red ruby, while the narration from Wahb Ibn Munbih claims it is created from light and no further information is offered. On the other hand, Al Māturīdī preserves opinions that have not been mentioned or recorded in any other exegetical book. He informs that some scholars interpreted ‘arsh as the creation of humans, some as the establishment of resurrection, some as kingship and lastly some interpreted it as the throne of the king. Furthermore, he provides the evidence for the first two opinions, but not for the last two. However, Al Māturīdī does not acquaint the reader with the names of the holders of these opinions. He neither discusses them thoroughly, as he did in reference to the various opinions on istiwā’, nor does he express his opinion about them.

Al Māturīdī progresses in his opinion as he navigates from one verse to the other. Continually, he reassesses his commentary and at times modifies it. This is another distinguishing factor that demarcates his methodology in the exegesis of the divine attributes verses from other exegetes who are static in their commentary. This quality manifests in his commentary on the other attributes as well, as demonstrated earlier. This factor is evincing in Al Māturīdī’s commentary on verse 4 of chapter Al Sajdah. He explains, “…Here we mention a point that we did not mention earlier, which is…closer to the truth, that this is a topic and an utterance that God, the most high, did not permit the

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610 Al Mizzi, Tahdhib Al Kamāl Fi Asmāʾ Al Rijāl.
611 Dhahabi, Siyar A’lam Al Nubala’.
612 Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Tafsir Ibn Abī Ḥātim.
613 Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah, 5.
614 The proponents of the first opinion supported their claim by a narration from Ibn Abbās that states humans were created on the seventh day, because they are liable for their actions and the objective behind the creation of the universe. As for the proponents of the second opinion, they supported their view by the fact that without resurrection the creation of the world would be nonsensical.
minds and intellects to comprehend completely…” The reference Al Māturīdī is making is to the exegesis of *istiwā*. He explicates that verse 59 of chapter Al Furqān articulates this fact: “He who created the heavens and the earth and all that is between, in six days, and made *istiwā* on the ‘arsh: Allah Most gracious: ask about Him the one who is well acquainted with him.” Al Māturīdī elucidates that, if this notion was completely comprehensible by the human intellect, the messenger of God would have been the first to understand and explain it, but since God “…commanded him to ask about it (an expert) then this proves that this matter cannot be known or understood by intellect alone; rather it could be known through the revelation sources…” This statement discloses that Al Māturīdī does not classify any of the aforementioned opinions to be the absolute truth; rather he attempts to discover or get close to it. He attests that his opinion, like any other opinion, is falsifiable, which bespeaks his objectivity and intellectual integrity. Moreover, Al Māturīdī’s commentary corroborates that he applies a thematic tactic when explaining the divine attributes verses and maintains that in some instances they may influence the interpretation of other related verses, such as the case between the verse in chapter Al Furqān and the other verses that refer to *istiwā*.

Al Māturīdī’s exegesis of the verses of *istiwā* proves to be the most comprehensive of all early attributes related commentary. Al Māturīdī interprets *istiwā* to various word level meanings: (1) to direct or focus one’s attention, actions or will towards something or someone; (2) to complete and to perfect; and (3) to have complete dominion and control. At the same time, he does not believe *istiwā* possesses a single correct meaning that all exegetes must believe and advocate. He openly validates the practice of *tafwīḍ* and comes to the conclusion that intellect alone is not able to exclusively understand the concept of *istiwā* and ‘arsh, but this does not stop him from exploring all the possible interpretations.

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615 Māturīdī, *Taʾwilāt Ahlu Sunnah*, vol. 4, 84.
616 Ibid.
that he can elicit from the verses. He progresses in constructing the basis of his interpretations and exerts all efforts in developing them. Despite the fact Al Māturīdī is not autocratic in his commentary; he stands strongly against the anthropomorphic interpretation of *istiwā’*. He designates a substantial part of his commentary to debunking such opinions, in which he applies narrative and rational evidence. Al Māturīdī’s opposition to anthropomorphic interpretations stems from his stance of the notion of *tashbih*, which the Sunni theological schools, traditional and contemporary, oppose and also from the lack of persuasive evidence that may credit it. Epistemologically, Al Māturīdī relies consistently on the lexicon of the Arabic language, the clear verses in the Qur’ān and intellect. He organises his evidence in a hierarchy that commences with *naql* then *‘aql*. He is always keen on searching and presenting internal evidence from within the Qur’ān, in the form of verses and exegetical opinions, before resorting to intellectual arguments. Nonetheless, he rarely develops an opinion without rational elements. Al Māturīdī merges between both in a manner that makes it difficult for one to see how they can conflict, one of many contributions he gifts to exegetical academia in this work. He adheres to the methodology he implemented in the commentary on the previous attributes, yet he develops it further by the introduction of new exegetical maxims, thought-provoking arguments and the employment of the some forms of Aristotelian syllogism. He displays a high level of objectivity in his study of the potential meanings for *istiwā’* and maintains high proficiency in his analysis of the verses and study of the opinion and evidence of other exegetes.

3.4 Conclusion

As far as the attributes of *yad*, ‘*ayn* and *istiwā’* are concerned, this study testifies for the great contributions Al Māturīdī offers to the Qur’ānic exegesis discipline. His exegesis has
proven to be unique from all other traditional and contemporary Sunni exegeses on the level of content, methodology, theological debate and epistemology.

At the content level, Al Māturīdī is very thorough in his study of the verses and attributes. He addresses all the necessary issues related to the theological aspects of the verses and does not leave the reader with the need to consult additional exegetical sources to capture all necessary information about the topic, which is a major deficiency in the other early Sunni exegeses that were studied. Clarity of information is another great quality in his commentary. Mostly, Al Māturīdī is succinct in his expressions and organises information in an easy to digest style that leaves little room for misunderstanding his interpretation. The ratio of theological analysis in his work is very well balanced with the overall content of the exegesis, which protects the integrity of his work as exegetical and not a theological book, a fundamental quality that the best of Sunni exegetes before him failed to achieve.

Thus, Al Māturīdī begets a new genre of Qur’ānic exegesis in Sunni literature: theological exegesis. In addition, he enriches the Qur’ānic exegesis discipline with a wealth of new knowledge, thoughts and arguments that even the exegetes that came after him failed to capture.

In the sphere of methodology, Al Māturīdī appears to be the first exegete who follows a clear methodology in his study of the divine attributes verses. He is very consistent in his application of the instruments that he believes are best for exegesis, such as the consistent use of other verses to explain controversial elements. He formulates exegetical principles based on the style of expression in the Qurʾān and then constantly implements them. He emphasises the context of verses in exegesis and is always conscious of it in his analysis. He maintains a general thematic approach to the analysis of verses without compromising

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the distinct nature of each verse and how it affects the interpretation. One of the most important elements in his methodology is the employment of reason and intellect in the process of determining the meanings of the verses, from the various types of reasoning to the syllogism of Aristotle, which is a first in the Sunni exegetical community.

As far as the theological debate is concerned, Al Māturīdī appears to be aware of all the contemporary arguments of his time and the evidence that each side uses to support their views. He indirectly raises their arguments in his commentary and then responds to it in an efficient yet comprehensive manner. He focuses particularly on uprooting the notion of *tashbih* and dedicates substantial efforts to dispel all the anthropomorphic interpretations. He ensures he demonstrates that it has no substance or grounds in any attributes related verse. At the same time, he remains open to all possible interpretations and does not shut the gate of correctness in the face of others. He recognises the legitimacy of *tafwīḍ*, which traditional Sunni scholars prefer, and at the same time he accepts and uses *ta’wil*, which is favoured by progressive Sunni theological scholars and Mu’tazilites. It is important to note that he does not allow this debate to overwhelm the nature of his work, which is exegetical, par excellence.

On the level of epistemology, Al Māturīdī’s Qur’ānic exegesis marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of Sunni exegesis. Al Māturīdī stands between the traditional Sunni school and the Mu’tazilite school, which for centuries attempted to discredit each other’s principles. He agrees with the Sunni school and recognises revelation as the fundamental source of knowledge and truth about God and His attributes but departs from it by legitimising reason and the wealth of knowledge that one may obtain through employing it. At the same time, he departs from the Mu’tazilites because he does not believe intellect is the criterion that determines the validity of the knowledge that the sacred texts convey about God and His attributes. He confirms the authority of revelation and its superiority
over intellect and always gives it precedence. However, he permits intellect to be the guide to navigate through the controversial elements in the verses and allows it to be the shield that reinforces and protects the correct understanding and interpretation of the verses. Al Māturīdī demonstrates there is no conflict between ’aql and naql in the area of the divine attributes and reconciles between them. He synthesises between the Qur’ān and reason in his creation of theological exegesis and bridges the traditional and conservative with the progressive. As a result, he liberates himself from the censorship of the radicals in both schools and explores all the potential meanings of the divine attributes verses without conflicting with revelation or reason. Therefore, Al Māturīdī contributes greatly to Sunni theological exegesis, plays an influential role in founding an innovative methodology in Sunni exegesis and reshapes the epistemology of knowledge in Qur’ānic exegesis as far as the study and belief in the nature and attributes of God is concerned.
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the findings

The major objective of this study was to investigate and critically appraise Al Māturīdī’s exegesis book and evaluate whether he has contributed to theological exegesis in Sunni literature as far as the nature and the attributes of God are concerned. The main hypothesis of the study was that Al Māturīdī played a fundamental role in the development of theological exegesis in Sunni literature and provided important contributions to it through interpretation of the divine attributes verses.

Al Māturīdī lived in Samarqand, in the centre of Asia, which was an area that had strong relations with many civilisations that surrounded them such as the Byzantium, Sassanid and Chinese civilisations. This exposure to various cultures and ideologies enriched the region and opened the door for Muslims to interact with cultures they had not known in the Arabian Peninsula and Middle East. During the reign the Samanid kings, particularly in the ninth and tenth centuries, the period in which Al Māturīdī lived, intellectual life prospered in Samarqand in secular, cultural and religious disciplines. The policies the Samanid dynasty adopted from sponsoring many intellectuals, philosophers, poets and literature writers to study and research to constructing public and private libraries with titles in various languages, particularly 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. This established the fact that Al Māturīdī’s knowledge was not confined to the traditional teachings of Islam. In addition, the environment of diversity and freedom would have influenced Al Māturīdī’s perceptions and writing in the Islamic disciplines particularly his understanding and teaching of the interpretation of the Qur’ān.

618 Shākir, Al Tārīkh Al Islāmi; Vambery, Tārīkh Bukhāra Mundhu Al Qidam Ḥattâ Al ‘Aṣr Al Ḥādir; Narkhashī, Tārīkh Bukhāra.
The era when Al Māturīdī was born and grew up was very pivotal and influential as far as the evolution of Islamic sciences is concerned. Many disciplines were still in their developing stages. This granted Al Māturīdī a rare opportunity to engage in the development process of the various disciplines, particularly theology and Qur’ānic exegesis, and contribute to them on foundational and content levels. The emergence of polarising schools, such as the Mu’tazilites, as an intellectual force that challenges the foundations and teachings of the traditional theological schools and the rigidness of the conservatives to prohibit any changes to the educational and analytical approaches to the study of the Islamic creed encouraged Al Māturīdī to engage in a thorough study, debate and analysis of the divine texts, the Qur’ān and hadith, to search for evidence to refute the unorthodox force of the former and the radical interpretations and rigidness of the latter. This influenced Al Māturīdī to reflect innovatively on the meaning of the verses of the Qur’ān and seek new answers and solutions.

In general, 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 ideologies of non-Muslims and the Muslim schools and sects that lived in his region Al Māturīdī was born 25 to 27 years before the birth of the renowned Abū Ḥasan Al Ash’arī who founded the famous Sunni Ash’arī theological school.619 Abū Ḥasan did not develop his theological school until he reached the age of 40. Thus, Al Māturīdī founded his Sunni theological school to debate and establishes the tenets of the Sunni creed in a dialectical framework in the face of the Mu’tazilites, philosophers and non-Muslim movements long before Al Ash’arī. Consequently, Al Māturīdī’s contributions in the fields of theology and then theological exegesis preceded any other established Sunni school or scholar. The titles Al Māturīdī authored in the various fields of Islamic theological and his principles of

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619 Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahlu Sunnah.
Islamic jurisprudence and Qur’ānic exegesis became one of the main references to the academic circles of his time and subsequent generations.

As far the evolution of Qur’ānic exegesis is concerned, Al Māturīdī was a contemporary of Ṭabarī, who is one of the most renowned Sunni exegetes and the first to write and compile a comprehensive book of Qur’ānic exegesis that combined the work of the early traditional exegetes. Therefore, Al Māturīdī lived during the evolving stage of Qur’ānic exegesis and equally wrote a complete and comprehensive *tafsīr*, a fact that points to a major early contribution to the field. Muslim scholars in their presentation of the history of the various regional schools of Qur’ānic exegesis and their role in the development of the science and its principles and methods overlooked the role of the school of Central Asia. This explains the lack of mention of Al Māturīdī’s works in the literature of scholars. It was overshadowed along with the other academic developments of the region. The remoteness of Al Māturīdī’s geographical location from the main schools of Qur’ānic exegesis in the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq neither deprived him from important exegetical information nor diminished his ability to engage in exegetical debate.

Al Māturīdī developed his own definition of the notion of *tafsīr* as one of the imperative notions in Qur’ānic exegesis and did not simply imitate the definitions of earlier scholars. His definition was very accurate and factual to the extent that it contained all the elements that later scholars of the Qur’ān consented to be fundamental to the definition of *tafsīr*. Al Māturīdī did not confine the science of Qur’ānic exegesis to the notion of *tafsīr*. Rather, he embedded within the science the concept of *ta’wil* as well. He believed it is one of the foundational concepts in the science, but is not the only one, and completeness of Qur’ānic exegesis cannot take place without both. Then he developed his own definition of the notion of *ta’wil* as well. He included it at the beginning of his title and implemented it in his methodology.
This marks the rational element within Al Māturīdī’s exegesis, a subject worthy of a separate study. The definitions of *tafsīr* and *taʿwīl* that Al Māturīdī formulated indicate he believed that Qur’ānic exegesis should be broken into two types: exegesis by narration and exegesis by reason. This classification was introduced later in the evolution of Qur’ānic exegesis and then it became widely endorsed and accepted. Thus, Al Māturīdī is from the early scholars that paved the path to the acceptance of exegesis by reason as one of the main categories of Qur’ānic exegesis.

As far as studying Al Māturīdī’s exegetical commentaries on the divine attributes of *yad*, ‘*ayn* and *istiwā’* are concerned, many characteristics emerge. Thoroughness is one of the main characteristics that distinguish Al Māturīdī’s exegesis from the exegetical works of other scholars. He does not abbreviate his work at the expense of the explanation of ideas that he wants to convey. He presents his commentary with sufficient explanation that enables the reader to have complete comprehension of his words. He is consistent in his commentary on the various verses that relate to the same attribute. He avoids repetition unless it is required by the nature of the verse or concept that he is explaining. He attempts to address the meanings of every verse correctly and does not refer the reader to the explanation of other verses unless it is completely identical to a verse he already explained. His consistency is an exceptional quality in his work when compared to the other early traditional Sunni exegetes. Al Māturīdī always aims at establishing clarity in his theological arguments and commentary.

Al Māturīdī’s discussion of the anthropomorphic expressions in the verses is clear on the levels of meanings he believes they convey and the thought process that led him to these meanings. Many of the traditional exegetes that commented briefly on this issue were very vague in their words to the extent that their statements could have multiple opposing meanings. Al Māturīdī opens his exegesis to theological commentary, debate and
discussion as an important component in the understanding of the verse. All other exegetes whose work was examined either avoid it completely, which is the dominant trend in most of their titles, or comment on it very briefly. Al Māturīḍī does not hold back from highlighting its presence in the verse and discussing it. He founds the genre of theological exegesis in the Sunni literature of Qur’ānic exegesis because no other early exegete discusses or analyses the theological dimension in the meanings of the verses before him or in a profound and systematic manner similar to him. He does not raise theological issues as part of a contemporary discussion of a matter that relates to the verses. Rather, he applies the exegetical principles the traditional would normally apply in discovering the various possible meanings of the verses to discover the possible theological meanings that one may infer from the verses related to the attributes of God. This is one of the most important characteristics of Al Māturīḍī’s work. He founds the theological exegesis genre that it is concerned with what one can understand from the verses that relate to God’s attributes using exegetical instruments and tools, rather than simply mentioning in his exegesis book what some theologians have said about a particular attribute. In the first case, one is practising exegesis, while in the second one is basically narrating what others have said about a theological element that relates to the subject matter of the verse and does not involve any exegetical process.

As far as epistemology is concerned, Al Māturīḍī’s commentary reveals he believes that the Qur’ān is the most trusted and accurate reference that an exegete needs to consult to understand the meanings of the attributes of God and the anthropomorphic expressions in the verses. Thus, Al Māturīḍī often constructs his exegesis on a Qur’ānic source before contemplating the use of other sources. Al Māturīḍī legitimates the use of reason and intellect in Qur’ānic exegesis. He is the first Sunni scholar to permit if not encourage the application of ‘aql in Qur’ānic commentary. Therefore, Al Māturīḍī holds it in great
esteem and views it as a trusted source of production and knowledge. Hence, he uses it continuously in his commentary.

Al Māturīdī’s use of ‘aql, despite the fact he gives to it a very significant role in his commentary, remains non-autonomous. He does not build his discussion on it alone without first providing a Qur’ānic source, unless there are none. Therefore, the hierarchy in Al Māturīdī’s epistemology places ‘aql second to naql. Al Māturīdī applies various types of reasoning, such as inductive, deductive and comparative, in his interpretations and explorations of the meanings of some of the attributes of God. In addition, one witnesses in his exegesis the application of the syllogism of Aristotle, particularly in his commentary on the verses that relate to the attribute of istiwā’. This indicates he read some of Aristotle’s works, which most likely were translated and circulated in the academic circles and public libraries of Samarqand. In turn, it proves Al Māturīdī is a progressive person that did not see the study of Greek philosophy and application of it as a deviation from Islamic academic methods in understanding the Qur’ān and attributes of God. The frequent use of ‘aql and naql in Al Māturīdī’s commentary indicates he believes there is a symbiotic relationship between them. He synthesises between ‘aql and naql, and demonstrates how the application of both enriches the discipline of exegesis and does not diminish it. Al Māturīdī is the first Sunni scholar to validate such a synthesis and apply it. In addition, he places great emphasis on the Arabic language as an acceptable source to explore the various meanings of utterances, phrases in expressions in the exegesis of the Qur’ān and interpretation of the anthropomorphic expressions. Nonetheless, the role of Arabic in his epistemology remains secondary to the Qur’ān and intellect.

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620 Comparative reasoning helps to establish the importance of something by comparing it against another thing. For further information see, M. Vince, “Reasoning in Every Day Life,” http://dai.fmph.uniba.sk/courses/ICS/examples/paper-vince.pdf.
On the methodology level, Al Māturīḍī uses traditional methods in his explanations of the divine attributes verses. One of his most preferred methods is to use other verses to explain the divine attributes verses. He does not apply it only within the scope of a specific attribute, rather he use it across the various attributes. For instance, in his exploration of the various meanings of the attribute of ‘ayn, he quotes some of the verses that discuss the attribute of yad. He emphasises the role of context in explaining verses and anthropomorphic expressions in them. He does not seek to understand the meaning of a single utterance separate from the context of the phrase and/or verse. In addition, he keeps in mind the context of the theme of the verses that surround the utterance.

Al Māturīḍī introduces in his methodology the use of formation of exegetical principles. The exegetical principles he formulates are mainly for the purpose of theological exegesis. They relate mainly to the parameters of the meaning of utterances when they are annexed to God and His attributes. The formulation of such maxims is unique to Al Māturīḍī because no other exegete, as far as the study demonstrated, formulated such maxims in relation to exegesis in general or in relation to theological exegesis and the interpretation of the divine attributes meanings. The role of the maxims was not limited to help guide the exegete on how best to interpret the verses of the divine attributes, but it also simplified this complicated and controversial area in exegesis and theology to the common reader. Al Māturīḍī’s exegetical commentary points to the use of a conceptual framework that he specifically set up for the purpose of explaining divine attributes verses. For instance, Al Māturīḍī emphasises that interpretation of any of the attributes of God that does not reinforce the perfection of God is incorrect because God can only be perfect. Al Māturīḍī’s efforts in this regard are unprecedented because all the other titles written by earlier exegetes did not even attempt to properly explain the meaning of the attributes in the verses let alone develop a framework for this task. Consequently, Al Māturīḍī does not
accept the notion of *tashbīh* in the nature and attributes of God that some schools advocated. He establishes that it cannot be factual through various evidence sought from the Qur’ān and intellect. As a result, he opposes it in his commentary on every attribute and does not accept any interpretation that may lead to or imply it overtly, covertly or tacitly.

In principle, Al Māturīdī recognises the concept of *tafwiḍ*, the most commonly practiced concept by early Sunni scholars, and permits its use in explanations of the attributes of God, albeit he rarely uses it. He states it is not possible for the Muslim scholar or the human mind to comprehend conclusively all the attributes of God without the aid of revelation. However, his approval of *tafwiḍ* does not hinder him from attempting to deduce the meanings of the attributes of God in the verses. Thus, Al Māturīdī does not see that the use of *tafwiḍ* conflicts with the use of *taʾwīl* in Qur’ānic exegesis. The acceptance of the former, as demonstrated in his commentary, does not negate the permissibility of engaging in the latter. This is a unique position that no other early Sunni exegete has articulated or practised in their commentary.

Al Māturīdī liberates the meanings in the verses and does not aim at restricting it to a set definition. He probes the potential theological interpretations in every verse and lists it. This is one of the vivid characteristics that distinguishes his work in Qur’ānic exegesis in general and classifies it as a theological exegesis genre because his focus is on all the possible theological meanings that a given verse may contain in relation to God. His primary concern is not explaining or defining the meaning of the attribute in the Qur’ān in general. He seeks to understand every anthropomorphic expression within the context of its relevant verse and does not force the understanding that he discovers in the context of one verse to interfere with all the possible meanings that another verse may provide.
Al Māturīdī’s exegesis separates from the work of the other traditional exegetes by the fact that its content consists overwhelmingly of his personal commentary on the verses rather than the transmission of statements of early scholars. He is the only Sunni exegete at his time to break free from the traditional method of limiting or dominating the exegetical work with what other scholars said rather than what the exegete personally thinks the verses mean. In other words, Al Māturīdī’s exegesis marks a milestone in shifting from tafsīr bil ma’thūr (exegesis by narration) to tafsīr bi’l ra’y (exegesis by reason). The small percentage of exegetical narrations that Al Māturīdī included in his exegesis was subjugated to his critical assessment and study. He rarely mentions the names of the scholars that advocated these opinions. One of the possible reasons for withholding the names is to keep the focus on analysing the content of the opinion rather than accepting it based on the prominence of the scholar that proposed it. Throughout his exegesis of the verses that relate to the attributes of God, Al Māturīdī remained faithful to the definition of ta’wil he formulated in the introduction of his book. He treated all opinions as possible interpretations of the anthropomorphic expressions unless it collided with the fundamental Muslim belief in the perfection of God or implied resemblance of God to His creation, which violates the other fundamental Muslim belief in God as unique from all creation. Al Māturīdī keeps a calm tone in his discussion of the various interpretations. He maintains a high level of objectivity in his handling of the opinions of others even when he disagrees with them. He does not turn his exegesis into a platform to personally or derogatorily attack other schools or scholars.

As far as the meanings of the attributes are concerned, Al Māturīdī proposes various interpretations of yad when associated with God: (1) bounties; (2) distinction in creation; (3) before or in front of; (4) respect; (5) obedience of the Prophet; (6) divine aid; (7) victory; (8) recompense; (9) hand of the Prophet; and (10) ownership. These meanings
vary depending on the context of the verse in which they are used. These interpretations illustrate that he views \textit{yad} as an allegoric expression that God uses to highlight various meanings rather than a disparate attribute. Therefore, Al Māturīdī is the first Sunni scholar to discuss the meanings of the \textit{yad} of God thoroughly and present novel yet well-built interpretations of it.

In relation to the attributes of \textit{‘ayn}, Al Māturīdī validates a number of interpretations of it when it is annexed to God: (1) the care and protection of God; (2) the instructions and teachings of God; (3) the victory of God; and (4) the aid of God. He does not recognise \textit{‘ayn} as a new attribute of God. Rather, he sees it as an idiomatic expression that expresses other attributes of God, such as care and protection, or other actions of God, such as a victory and aid.

Al Māturīdī interprets \textit{istiwā}’ to various word level meanings: (1) to direct or focus one’s attention, actions or will towards something or someone; (2) to complete and to perfect; and (3) to have complete dominion and control. Nonetheless, he does not believe all exegetes must believe and advocate the meanings he listed for \textit{istiwā}’ and openly validates the practice of \textit{tafwīḍ} in relation to the notions of \textit{istiwā}’ and \textit{‘arsh}. Nevertheless, he stands strongly against the anthropomorphic interpretations of \textit{istiwā}’ of to rise, sit or settle because it implies God can be defined dimensionally and possesses physical mass.

**Contributions of this study**

This study established that Al Māturīdī contributed immensely to Qur’ānic exegesis, particularly in relation to interpretation of the verses that relate to the attributes of God. He is the first Sunni exegete to lay the foundations for the theological exegesis genre at a time when traditional exegesis was dominant. He is the first Sunni exegete to legitimate reason and intellect as a trusted source of understanding in Qur’ānic exegesis and applies it within...
his commentary. He is the first Sunni exegete to synthesise between revelation and reason, and demonstrate that they do not contradict one another; rather they reinforce one another in the context of understanding the verses that relate to the attributes of God.

**Directions for further research**

This dissertation mainly concentrated on analysing and critiquing the exegetical commentary of Al Māturīdī in relation to the nature and attributes of God. It established his innovative methods in interpreting the verses of the divine attributes and explaining the anthropomorphic expressions and his unprecedented paradigm in reconciling ‘aql and naql in the sphere of Qur’ānic exegesis. In spite of its in-depth analysis, it was limited to investigating the most controversial attributes and anthropomorphic expressions. It would be beneficial to extend the study to other tenets in the Islamic creed. Does Al Māturīdī address the notions of Divine Decree, īmān (belief), divine messages and messengers, the actions of humans, the concepts of reward and punishment, and many other theological concepts in his exegesis? Does he contribute differently to the theological debate about them and how? In turn, this prompts the need for comprehensive research into Al Māturīdī’s methodology in his entire exegesis and its characteristics and nuances. Equally, a study that examines the extent of the influence of Greek philosophy on his exegesis would be of great significance to the field.
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